

**PEER REVIEW IN ONLINE  
AND BLENDED LEARNING  
ENVIRONMENTS**

**WORKSHOP RESOURCE**

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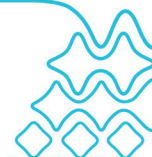
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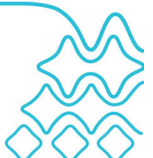
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Online copies of these resources will be available at  
<http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/peer-review/>



## Introducing this peer review project

Peer review is a process of making scholarly judgements about the quality of learning and teaching, and of focusing on scholarly professional learning. Many teachers are interested in formative feedback to improve their practices in online and blended learning environments, or are seeking peer review to provide evidence for performance and development reviews, promotion and teaching awards. The resources in this pack were created as part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded project that was focused on scholarly peer review in online and blended learning environments. The project extends and complements work done in related ALTC projects that have focused on peer review (Crisp et al, 2009; Harris et al, 2008a; Harris et al, 2008b; Wood et al, 2009). It aims to support a scholarly review process and elicit information in order to improve teaching practice as well as to provide evidence for recognition and reward of teaching.

We have worked towards a broad approach to using scholarly peer review as part of the evidence for improving and judging the quality of teaching and learning in blended learning environments, based on what and how students learn in these environments and on how teaching supports this learning. We see peer review in this context as complementing the information that can be provided by students, 'expert' reviewers/advisors and the teacher's scholarly reflection on practice.

The framework for peer review used in this project has been developed using four elements:

- The qualities of scholarly work (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997)
- The peer observation and review literature (Bell, 2005; Bernstein et al. 2006; Van Note Chism & Chism 2007; Bennett & Barp, 2008; Swinglehurst et al, 2006)
- The literature on good teaching (eg Biggs & Tang 2007; Ramsden 2003)
- Learning in online environments (Boud & Prosser, 2002; Laurillard 2002; Alexander & Golja 2007).

To date there have been many resources developed for peer review of face-to-face teaching and of teaching or course portfolios. Peer observation eg (Bell 2005) has also been widely used for face-to-face teaching, and is included in the process outlined here. In the online environment there has been a focus on peer review of learning objects see (Taylor & Richardson 2001) and online courses and course materials, which are the focus of another ALTC project (eg Wood et al, 2009). In this project, a scholarly framework has been developed that focuses on the relations between the teacher's goals for learning, the teaching strategies and learning activities that are planned and occur in practice, the student engagement, learning and other outcomes that arise and the ways that feedback is reflected on and used to improve.

As part of the focus for this project was on peer review of teaching for promotion and teaching awards, the framework and resources that have been developed emphasise the qualities of good, scholarly teaching that might form part of a case for recognition. A range of checklists and other resources for peer observation and review of elements of effective teaching performance in specific contexts can be found in the literature referred to above or in the reference list. Examples include Bell's (2005) resources for peer observation of face-to-face teaching and a guide to peer review of online teaching, based on Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles of good practice (John A Dutton e-Education Institute, 2010)



## Some benefits of peer review

1. **Obtaining feedback from a respected and experienced peer:** peer review can enable you to gain feedback from a peer who is experienced in your discipline area and/or in the teaching strategies you are using. Some project participants reported that peer feedback contributed to increased confidence and a reduced sense of isolation from discussing common issues.
2. **Improving the quality of teaching and student learning:** peer review can provide a different perspective on your teaching practices and your students' responses, to inform ways of improving students' learning experiences and outcomes.
3. **Complementing feedback provided by students:** while student feedback provides useful information on some aspects of teaching, peer review is more useful for aspects of teaching such as the design of a subject, currency of content or the extent to which a particular learning design is scholarly, innovative or exemplary in the discipline.
4. **Informing reflective practice:** preparing for peer review, participating as either a reviewer or reviewee and giving or receiving feedback can all inform new reflections about teaching. Some project participants commented that using a framework to plan the review triggered much critical thinking about their intentions and whether these were being realised. Others commented on the value of observing others' teaching for informing reflections about their own practice.
5. **Maintaining subject matter currency and relevance:** feedback from a peer who is an expert in the field can confirm subject currency or inform the subject with knowledge of specialist research or industry practice
6. **Sharing teaching and learning ideas:** being reviewed, or reviewing, provides opportunities for peer learning about teaching practices used in your own discipline or across disciplines. Peer review can be a rare opportunity to have an in-depth conversation about teaching in the discipline or about using particular blended learning strategies.
7. **Creating evidence of your teaching and students' learning for recognition and reward:** the outcomes of your peer reviews could be used to demonstrate the quality and scholarship of your teaching in blended learning environments for performance reviews, promotion and teaching award applications (if desired). Peer review can assist you to develop a case study of your practice as a tangible outcome that could be recognised as scholarship of teaching and learning and contribute to good practice in your discipline or institution.
8. **Recognition of your leadership in teaching and learning:** participating in peer review processes as a reviewer can provide evidence of scholarship in teaching and learning but also demonstrate your capacity to be a mentor and leader within your institution in this area.
9. **Developing and disseminating new knowledge and practices:** as well as the opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning in and develop your own knowledge, peer review may generate opportunities to collaborate with others on scholarly teaching and learning projects of common interest. Peer reviews may offer opportunities to disseminate innovative practices or adapt innovations from peers teaching in other disciplines or at other institutions.
10. **Communication and publication:** when peer review contributes to the development of new knowledge about teaching and learning, there may be opportunities for presentations or publications on teaching and learning.

(see Pelliccione et al, 2008)



## Principles for developing peer review in blended learning environments

There are some common principles of effective peer review of teaching that have been developed and confirmed across multiple contexts (see Harris et al, 2008a, 2008b). Some were confirmed relatively early in this project in relation to peer review in blended learning environments (see McKenzie, Pelliccione & Parker, 2008), while others emerged later in the process. These general principles include:

- ◆ Peer review processes need to allow for formative feedback to the teacher whose work is being reviewed, even when an intention is to provide evidence for promotion and other purposes.
- ◆ Teachers have a strong desire for choice and control over the peer review process, what is peer reviewed and how the evidence is used. For example for promotion, peer review might focus on a teaching innovation or a component of a blended learning environment that relates to a particular claim being made.
- ◆ Peer review should take into account the teachers' goals. These will include goals for student learning and choices of blended learning approach, as well as other goals.
- ◆ The institutional and subject/unit contexts need to be considered. Peer review should take into account the aspects of the context that might influence how teaching and learning occur, for example class size, the role of the teacher (eg co-ordinator, lecturer), the availability of particular technologies and forms of support, and the nature of the students (eg on-campus or distance).
- ◆ Briefing prior to the review and debriefing afterwards are required components of any peer review process. Formative processes should include guidance for participants in documenting and acting on review findings and engaging in further review.
- ◆ Professional development and training are needed for reviewers and reviewees to develop their awareness of how to observe and review teaching, what to look for, how to interpret and use peer review frameworks and protocols, and how to create effective reports.
- ◆ For summative reviews for recognition and reward, professional development and guidance are needed to assist those making judgements of teaching to interpret peer review reports.

Particular observations from this project related to the scholarly framework that was developed, the focus on peer review in blended learning environments and the nature of a 'peer' in reviews in blended learning environments.

- ◆ There is considerable value in having a broad scholarly framework for peer review that can be used flexibly in different contexts. A scholarly framework encourages reflection and connections between teaching goals, activities and outcomes. It supports the use of peer review as a form of evidence of scholarly teaching that can be used for a variety of purposes.
- ◆ Peer review needs to be carefully scoped in blended learning environments to enable parts of the teaching or subject/unit to be reviewed in the context of the whole. Scoping typically involves clarifying the focus for the review, sampling aspects of teaching to be considered and deciding on a viable time limit that balances the usefulness of the review with the time available. A minimum of half a day is usually required for briefing, review and debriefing of an aspect of teaching.
- ◆ The choice of peer reviewers for online and blended learning environments needs to take into account the purpose of the review. If feedback is sought on content or disciplinary learning outcomes, a useful peer would probably be someone from the same discipline. On the other hand, if feedback is sought on the design or use of particular aspects of a blended learning environment (for example use of online discussions in a large enrolment subject), a useful peer might be someone from any discipline who has experience of similar uses.





# Recommended protocol for formative peer review

The aim of formative or developmental peer review is to provide the reviewee with feedback on aspects of their teaching. Depending on your purpose of the review, the process may be more or less formal. The following five stages are recommended.

## 1. Preparing for the review

Preparation is important to enable a valid and insightful review to be conducted.

- ◆ The reviewee should inform students prior to the peer review, either in class or by posting the **Briefing Statement for Students** in the subject's online site
- ◆ The reviewee reflects on the aspects of teaching or the subject on which the review should focus. Ideally, this involves completing the short **Briefing Template** and sending it to the reviewer. Completing the template is recommended as it enables the reviewee to reflect and clarify their thoughts on the focus of the review.

## 2. Briefing

- ◆ The reviewee and reviewer have a pre-meeting discussion to discuss the review and to clarify the information on the Briefing Template if this has been provided.
- ◆ The reviewee and reviewer agree on the timing for the review and the reviewee gives the reviewer access to relevant materials including password access to any online sites.

## 3. The Reviewing Process

The reviewer reviews the components that have been selected. It will usually be necessary to sample from components such as subject materials, online discussions or other student work rather than reviewing all of them. Depending on what is being reviewed, reviewers may choose to:

- ◆ Review the material separately, taking notes in an electronic or paper copy of a **Peer Review Template**, making notes directing on the **Formative Summary Report Template**
- ◆ Conduct the review in parts, first gaining an overview then requesting additional materials or information from the reviewee. This can be useful for complex online activities
- ◆ If subject materials or online activities are being reviewed, conduct the review in a conversational way, noting points and asking questions during the process.

## 4. Debriefing and reporting

The reviewer and reviewee should meet to debrief as soon as possible after the planned review is completed. Prior to the debrief, the reviewee may choose to self review using a relevant template and bring this to the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is for the reviewee to receive constructive feedback that they can reflect on and use to improve. The meeting might include the following:

- ◆ Initial self-review comments by the reviewee
- ◆ Constructive feedback by the reviewer, responding to the reviewee's comments and describing they noticed in the review
- ◆ Discussion between the reviewer and reviewee about suggestions for improvement and next steps

## 5. Follow-up action

A formative review can be one step in an ongoing process. The review could be followed by:

- ◆ Completion of the **Formative Summary Report Template** to document the review and suggestions;
- ◆ Reflection by the reviewee and development of an action plan based on the review findings;
- ◆ A second round of peer reviewing following implementation of the action plan in a subsequent semester. The second peer review could be formative or summative, taking into account any changes that have been made; and
- ◆ A Reciprocal Review, in which the reviewer becomes the reviewee.



## Recommended protocol for summative peer review

The aim of a summative peer review is to provide evidence about the reviewee's teaching for performance reviews, applications for promotion or teaching awards and other situations that involve judgements about teaching. Summative reviews can be broadly or narrowly focused. A broad review might 'sample' across the reviewee's teaching in a subject and include visiting a face-to-face class and/or reviewing activities on an online site and reviewing materials such as the subject/unit outline, assessment tasks and examples of student work. A narrow review might focus on a particular component of teaching, such as a teaching innovation or particular student activities.

Four stages are involved in conducting a summative review.

### 1. Preparing for the review

Preparation is important to enable a valid and insightful review to be conducted.

- ◆ The reviewee should inform students prior to the peer review, either in class or by posting the **Briefing Statement for Students** in the subject's online site
- ◆ The reviewee reflects on the aspects of teaching or the subject on which the review should focus. Ideally, this involves completing the short **Briefing Template** and sending it to the reviewer. Completing the template is recommended as it enables the reviewee to reflect and clarify their thoughts on the focus of the review.

### 2. Briefing

- ◆ The reviewee and reviewer have a pre-meeting discussion to discuss the review and to clarify the information on the Briefing Template if this has been provided.
- ◆ The reviewee and reviewer agree on the timing for the review and the reviewee gives the reviewer access to relevant materials including password access to any online sites.

### 3. The Reviewing Process

The reviewer reviews the components that have been selected. It will usually be necessary to sample from components such as subject materials, online discussions or other student work rather than reviewing all of them. Depending on what is being reviewed, reviewers may choose to:

- ◆ Make notes in an electronic or paper copy of a **Peer Review Template** that contains the peer review framework and example criteria
- ◆ Use the framework and criteria listing sheet as a guide and make separate notes.
- ◆ Conduct the review in parts, first gaining an overview then requesting additional materials or information from the reviewee. This can be useful for reviews of complex online activities.

### 4. Debriefing and reporting.

The reviewer and reviewee should meet briefly after the planned review is completed, to enable them to discuss any issues that may have affected the teaching components that were reviewed. (There may be cases where issues outside the reviewee's control mean that it is not appropriate to complete the summative review.) As soon as possible following the discussion:

- ◆ The reviewer completes the **Summative Peer Review Report** form, based on the review evidence, and sends a copy to the reviewee.
- ◆ The reviewee completes their response to the review.
- ◆ The reviewer and reviewee arrange to sign a common completed copy. This might be achieved by scanning and emailing or electronic signature, depending on institutional requirements.
- ◆ Depending on institutional or local requirements, the reviewee might submit the full review with their application or performance review material, or extract quotes from the review to include with their application





# Briefing template: planning your review and briefing your reviewer

Planning and briefing your reviewer will help you to get the most out of the review process. This **Briefing Template** is a tool for helping you to plan your review and its focus and to communicate this successfully to your peer reviewer. It is best used in conjunction with responding to the questions for reviewees on a Peer review: Reviewee-reviewer template.

**Reviewee's name:**

## 1. How do you plan to use this review? (please tick whichever apply)

- For feedback and teaching improvement only (formative review)
- To provide evidence about teaching for:
  - Performance review
  - Promotion
  - Teaching citation/award
  - Other (e.g. salary supplementation)

If you wish to use the review to provide evidence about teaching, please provide your reviewer with a copy of any relevant criteria.

## 2. Subject and context for the Peer Review

Please provide the reviewer with a copy of your Subject Outline and briefly describe anything else that you think a peer reviewer needs to know about your teaching context in this subject.

## 3. What aspects of your teaching or the subject do you want this Peer Review to focus on?

*(Examples (please delete): Online activities, particularly their effectiveness for encouraging student participation and learning; The extent to which the subject encourages student creativity and inquiry, especially through the assignment and online collaboration groups.)*

What evidence will the peer reviewer need to consider in order to review these aspects?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Subject/unit outline .....        | <input type="checkbox"/> Subject notes or other materials .....    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face class(es) .....      | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment task descriptions .....        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online materials/activities ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> Examples of student assessment work ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other .....                       |  |

*If any aspects are components of an online site, please provide sufficient information to enable the reviewer to locate these components eg include names of relevant links.*

## 4. Please make any additional briefing comments that you think will be useful for the reviewer

*(For example, are there any particular issues that the reviewer should take into account)*

## 5. Please use the questions in column 2 Peer Review: Reviewee and Reviewer template to discuss specific aspects of the review with the reviewer.



# Peer review template: reviewee and reviewer

Name of reviewee:

Name of reviewer:

Subject/unit:

Date(s) of review:

Aspect of teaching or the subject chosen for this review:

Evidence reviewed (please tick and add details if relevant):

- Subject/unit outline.....
- Face-to-face class(es).....
- Online materials/activities .....

- Subject notes or other materials.....
- Assessment task descriptions .....
- Examples of student assessment work .....

Criteria with indicative review prompts	Pre-review questions for reviewee	Reviewer comments
<p><b>1. Clear goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Goals for students' learning are clear</li> <li>○ Goals are related to the needs of students and the role of the reviewed aspect(s) within the subject</li> <li>○ There is a clear rationale for the design of the subject/learning environment, including the chosen blend of learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>What are your intentions for student learning in this aspect of the subject/unit/teaching?</p> <p>Why have you designed this subject/aspect of the subject in the way that you have?</p>	
<p><b>2. Current and relevant preparation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Subject content is current, relevant and informed by research and/or current practice</li> <li>○ Teaching and learning practices are informed by scholarship and awareness of relevant innovations</li> </ul>	<p>How did you prepare for this aspect of the subject/teaching this time?</p>	

Criteria with indicative review prompts	Pre-review questions for reviewee	Reviewer comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparation takes students' previous knowledge and experience into account</li> <li>○ Learning resources and online sites are well structured and updated in a timely way.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>3. Appropriate and effectively used teaching and learning and assessment methods.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Learning and teaching methods and assessment are aligned with learning goals and objectives</li> <li>○ Students are encouraged to see the connections between the parts of the subject and the whole and to see how the whole subject relates to the broader field of study</li> <li>○ Students have opportunities to develop relevant 'generic' graduate attributes</li> <li>○ Students are encouraged to engage actively in learning</li> <li>○ Students have opportunities to interact, collaborate with and learn from others</li> <li>○ Student inquiry, creativity, problem solving and experimentation (relevant to the discipline) are encouraged</li> <li>○ There are appropriate levels of intellectual challenge and support for students</li> <li>○ Students have opportunities for choice and independent learning</li> </ul>	<p>Are there any particular methods or activities you would like the reviewer to focus on?</p> <p>Are there any issues that you would like feedback on?</p>	

Criteria with indicative review prompts	Pre-review questions for reviewee	Reviewer comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students have opportunities to relate what they are learning to broader contexts.</li> <li>○ Innovative or innovatively adapted methods are used appropriately to offer new opportunities for learning</li> <li>○ Methods offer flexibility to respond to students' experiences, understandings and needs and to changing situations</li> </ul>		
<p><b>4. Effective communication and interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Face-to-face and/or online explanations are clear</li> <li>○ Student interest and engagement are encouraged</li> <li>○ Teaching is responsive to students' understandings, ideas and progress in learning</li> <li>○ Students' communications and questions are responded to effectively and in a timely way</li> <li>○ Teaching encourages students to interact with others and discuss, compare, develop and challenge ideas</li> <li>○ Teaching encourages students to develop learning communities</li> <li>○ Assessment expectations, criteria and standards are clearly communicated to students</li> </ul>	<p>Are there any particular aspects of your communication that you would like feedback about?</p>	

Criteria with indicative review prompts	Pre-review questions for reviewee	Reviewer comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Feedback on students' learning is clear, effective and timely</li> <li>○ There is clear guidance for students on the structure of online and blended resources and the choices that are available</li> <li>○ There is effective co-ordination and communication with other staff teaching in the subject</li> </ul>		
<p><b>5. Important outcomes</b></p> <p><b>Student outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students have actively engaged in the subject/learning activities</li> <li>○ Students have achieved intended learning goals</li> <li>○ There is evidence of other important or unexpected learning achievements</li> </ul> <p><b>Other outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Learning innovations are effective in achieving their goals</li> <li>○ Innovations/methods have been adapted and used by colleagues/others</li> <li>○ Presentations of scholarly practice have been given to peers</li> <li>○ Scholarly publications have been produced and recognised by peers</li> </ul>	<p>Are there outcomes that you would like the reviewer to give feedback about?</p>	

Criteria with indicative review prompts	Pre-review questions for reviewee	Reviewer comments
<p><b>6. Reflection, review and improvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The teacher has learned from students and adapted teaching in response, during teaching and afterwards</li> <li>○ Reflection has been informed by a variety of sources such as student feedback, student learning, peers and relevant literature.</li> <li>○ Reflection and feedback have been acted on in order to improve teaching and learning</li> </ul>	<p>How has previous reflection and feedback informed this aspect of your teaching?</p>	

**Overall review comments:**



## Peer review summary report for developmental reviews

**Name of teacher reviewed:**

**Name of reviewer:**

**Subject and semester of review:**

**Date of report:**

**Aspect of teaching or the subject reviewed:**

Evidence reviewed: (Please tick and add detail if necessary)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Subject/unit outline .....       | <input type="checkbox"/> Subject notes or other materials.....     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face class(es).....      | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment task descriptions .....        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online materials/activities..... | <input type="checkbox"/> Examples of student assessment work ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other .....                      |  |

**Criteria for promotions, teaching awards or other relevant to this review:**

(Please note any specific criteria for which this review provides evidence.)

Criteria	Peer Reviewer's Feedback
<p><b>1. Clear goals</b></p> <p>For students' learning and the design of the subject/learning environment</p>	
<p><b>2. Current and relevant preparation</b></p> <p>Of content and teaching and learning practices, taking into account students' needs</p>	
<p><b>3. Appropriate and effectively used teaching and learning and assessment methods.</b></p> <p>Methods are aligned, provide opportunities for students to engage actively in learning and achieve high quality outcomes, are innovative and able to adapt to changing contexts</p>	



<p><b>4. Effective communication and interaction</b></p> <p>Including face-to-face and/or online communication, interaction with students and interaction between students</p>	
<p><b>5. Important outcomes</b></p> <p>Student engagement and learning outcomes</p> <p>Other outcomes may include evidence of innovation or scholarship of teaching and learning</p>	
<p><b>6. Reflection, review and improvement</b></p> <p>Learning from students and other sources, reflecting on evidence and using it to improve</p>	

**Reviewer’s overall summary:**

(Please comment on aspects of good practice that you have noted and make any constructive suggestions for improvement).

Reviewer’s Signature:

Date:

**Teacher’s response to the reviewer’s comments**

Please comment on the reviewer’s comments, summarising what you have learned about your teaching from this peer review.

Please comment on any changes that you intend to make in response to this review,

Teacher’s Signature:

Date:



## Peer review summary report for promotion or awards

**Name of teacher reviewed:**

**Name of reviewer:**

**Subject and semester of review:**

**Date of report:**

**Aspect of teaching or the subject reviewed:**

Evidence reviewed: (Please tick and add detail if necessary)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Subject/unit outline .....       | <input type="checkbox"/> Subject notes or other materials.....     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face class(es).....      | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment task descriptions .....        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online materials/activities..... | <input type="checkbox"/> Examples of student assessment work ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other .....                      |  |

**Criteria for Promotions, Teaching awards or other relevant to this Review:**

(Please note any specific criteria for which this review provides evidence.)

Criteria	Peer Reviewer's Feedback
<p><b>1. Clear goals</b></p> <p>For students' learning and the design of the subject/learning environment</p>	
<p><b>2. Current and relevant preparation</b></p> <p>Of content and teaching and learning practices, taking into account students' needs</p>	
<p><b>3. Appropriate and effectively used teaching and learning and assessment methods.</b></p> <p>Methods are aligned, provide opportunities for students to engage actively in learning and achieve high quality outcomes, are innovative and able to adapt to changing contexts</p>	
<p><b>4. Effective communication and interaction</b></p> <p>Including face-to-face and/or online communication, interaction with students and interaction between students</p>	



<p><b>5. Important outcomes</b></p> <p>Student engagement and learning outcomes</p> <p>Other outcomes may include evidence of innovation or scholarship of teaching and learning</p>	
<p><b>6. Reflection, review and improvement</b></p> <p>Learning from students and other sources, reflecting on evidence and using it to improve</p>	

**Reviewer’s overall summary**

Please provide any additional or overall comments on the aspects of teaching or the subject that you have reviewed.

Reviewer’s Signature:

Date:

**Teacher’s confirmation**

Please sign to confirmation that you have sighted this review and make any necessary explanatory comments.

Teacher’s Signature:

Date:



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