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### **Peer Review Groups:**

Organizing a group of 4-5 peers for the purpose of mutual support, ideas, and critique is a good way to refine your own ideas within a community. This can be done at any stage in your graduate career and makes especially good sense as you begin preparing to write your thesis.

Here are some guidelines I suggest (based on my own experience) to make the group work:

1. Select those people you want in your group. Do not issue a general invitation for anyone to join. The reason is you want to have a small group of highly committed people in your group. Select those people you think are committed to working.

2. Don't just select your friends or people who you think are nice. Select hard-working people whose academic work/ideas you respect. It may work best for you to select those people whose work is closely linked to your own, but my own best experiences have been with groups that are interdisciplinary where our work may overlap in content a bit, but not closely.

3. Establish guidelines for continued membership and make them known at the first organizational meeting:

a. regular attendance is a must. While each person may need to miss once in awhile, the success of a peer-group rests on commitment to attend.

b. regular contribution is a must, both in terms of circulating work that one has written and in terms of offering criticisms, comments. The reason for this is you do not want to have anyone who is merely offering criticisms without also being in the rather vulnerable position of receiving criticism. This establishes an unhealthy dis-equilibrium AND some people will try to get away with it. In the other situation, you don't want someone who is silent and won't/can't offer concrete criticisms on each work that circulates.

c. I recommend meeting once every-other week. Weekly meetings can get onerous, but meeting less frequently than bi-weekly results in a serious loss of momentum.

d. Criticism/comments must be respectfully submitted.

e. Be willing to read writing in various stages of completion. The person submitting the piece should alert the readers where they need help.

f. Give the group a week to read your submission. Respect their schedules and avoid as much as possible submitting writings just one or two days before the meeting.

g. Keep meetings to a set amount of time. 1.5 hours seemed to work for my groups in the past. Meeting longer could become onerous and enthusiasm could wane. Meeting less is possible depending on the length of pieces submitted.

f. Allow only the minimal amount of chatting at the beginning. Get right to the task at hand. There are other times for you to socialize. Under no circumstances should the group ever allow complaining about anything to enter into the conversation. While I was a professor at Virginia Tech, I implemented the rule of no talking about university politics or administration in the meetings. The graduate student equivalent would be no complaining about professors, classes, exams, assignments, FST/GTU politics. Nip it in the bud if someone initiates it.

4. Decide among yourselves what would be of most help for each session: one person submitting a substantial piece (i.e. one chapter) OR two people submitting shorter sections of about 5-10 pages. Either approach is possible, although the latter is slightly more difficult to pull off, especially to ensure an equally fresh and energetic discussion for the second person.

Remember: receiving constructive criticism is the best gift you can receive when writing. It is all too often not given. It is even often not given by precisely those people who are supposed to, professors. So, be thankful to your group when they sincerely try to offer you suggestions for improvement.

The group also can function as a support group when the going gets tough. You may encourage one another to keep on writing. It is important that the group never gets pulled into mutual griping...whether that is griping about certain professors, the process of writing a thesis, grad. school...complaining and griping pulls the energy down. Don't get caught.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [dpryds@fst.edu](mailto:dpryds@fst.edu)  
Good Luck!