

Reader Feedback Menu

by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff

Choose from among the following options.

1. **No response.** “Just listen please. I don’t want a response.” The process of sharing your piece with another person makes you more aware of your rhetorical choices.
2. **Pointing:** “Which words or phrases somehow stick with you? **Center of gravity:** “Which sections somehow seem important or resonant or generative?”
3. **Summary:** “Please summarize what you have heard.” **Sayback:** “Please say back to me in your own words what you hear me getting at in my piece.”
4. **“What is almost said?”** “What do you want to hear more about?”
5. **Reply.** “What are *your* thoughts about my topic? Now that you’ve heard what I have to say, what do *you* have to say?”
6. **Voice.** “How much voice do you hear in my writing? Is my language alive and human? Or is it dead, bureaucratic, unsayable?” “What kind of voices(s) do you hear in my writing? Timid? Confident? Sarcastic? Pleading?” or “What kind of person does my writing sound like? What side(s) of me come through in my writing?” “Do you trust the voice or person you hear in my writing?”
7. **Movies of the reader’s mind.** Ask readers to describe what’s going through their mind as they read your words. (This strategy is most useful for drafts that are already fairly well developed.)
8. **Metaphorical descriptions.** Ask readers to describe your writing using a metaphor. For example, if your writing was an item of clothing, what item of clothing would it be? How would you describe your writing in terms of weather, animals, colors, shapes, etc.?
9. **Believing:** “Try to believe everything I have written, even if you disagree or find it crazy. Give me more evidence and arguments to improve my case.” **Doubting:** “Try to doubt everything I have written, even if you love it. Find all the arguments that could be made against me. Pretend you hate my writing. What do you notice?”
10. **Skeleton feedback:** “Please lay out the reasoning you see in my paper: my main point, my subpoints, my supporting evidence, and my assumptions about my topic and about my audience.” **Descriptive outline:** “Please write *says* and *does* sentences for my whole paper and then for each paragraph or section.
11. **Criterion-based feedback.** Ask readers for their thoughts on specific criteria you are considering: “Does this sound too technical?” “Is this section too long?” “Am I responding appropriately to the essay prompt?”