

## **What is Calibrated Peer Review good for?**

Calibrated Peer Review (CPR) is an online, blind peer-review management software system that enables students to review and evaluate each others' writing. The software was developed in UCLA science programs as a way of including writing opportunities in large lecture classes that could not provide the resources for personalized grading by professors. Reasoning that their own professional writing was shaped by the peer-review process, the UCLA developers decided to introduce the peer review model to their undergraduates as a form of cultivating writing.

### **How it works:**

The degree of "peer" that a given student qualifies as depends on her "calibration" - i.e., the comparison of her evaluation of writing samples with the instructor's evaluation. The calibration process happens through students evaluating pre-developed models of writing (best, good, and poor) with instructor-provided rubrics; the CPR program then calibrates how closely students' evaluations fit with the instructor's. A student's goodness of fit with the instructor subsequently weights her evaluation scores in her reviewing of peers' writing.

### **An overview of potential benefits and challenges.**

#### **A. The usefulness of CPR for students appears to be:**

1. Students see models of best, good, and poor quality writing in connection with clear writing prompts and evaluation rubrics.
2. Students see examples of peer work in their class.
3. Students are able to engage in more practice in writing with feedback across their courses and college career than would otherwise be possible.
4. Students become gradually acculturated into the academy's intellectual milieu of peer review that emphasizes focusing on the quality of critical thinking expressed in writing rather than on interpersonal dynamics.

#### **B. Best types of assignments:**

1. are (low-stakes) formative rather than (high-stakes) summative in terms of their proportional weight in the overall course grade - i.e., they are intended primarily as feedback / learning opportunities about writing practices rather than the primary basis for the course grade.
2. are relatively short in their composition (1-4 pages / 250-1000 words).
3. have a clearly definable structure for content.
4. have clear stylistic parameters for errors (e.g., minimum standards, with definitions of error types), writing style (e.g., no passive voice, no use of first- or second-person, or alternatively (and defined beforehand) appropriate and inappropriate uses of passive voice, first- or second-person, and so on. For close attention to catching error types, parameters could be developed into several evaluation categories, such as punctuation, sentence fragments, citation correctness, and so on, each with its corresponding place in the evaluation rubric.
5. are explained beforehand in class (i.e., prompt, samples, and rubric are made available before students compose their own piece).

**C. The challenges of CPR for students appear to be:**

1. Students resist being required to write, especially if it is perceived as busy-work.
2. Students are skeptical about the usefulness of peer review.
3. Students resist unfamiliar technologies.

**D. The usefulness of CPR for instructors appears to be:**

1. More student practice of writing with less time spent grading it.
2. Incentive to sharpen assignments for writing practice (both samples of writing and clear rubrics).
3. Ability to identify more quickly which students need help with their writing.

**E. The challenges of CPR for instructors appear to be:**

1. Creating or selecting writing models and producing prompts that are well-coordinated with rubrics pose a startup cost.
2. Managing the CPR system is still work, though different and less intense than direct grading.
3. Becoming familiar with the software itself has a learning curve with associated costs.

**Current Status of CPR Access (January 25, 2010):**

UCLA has just released CPRv4, on which the CPR Authoring Manual is based. Version 4, however, requires hosting on campus servers. While that is being worked out at Pacific, CPRv3 is available for use on UCLA's servers (<http://cpr.molsci.ucla.edu/>). The authoring and user differences between the programs is small (some differences in font and better server library organization, for example) but the conceptual structure is the same. Assignments created for version 3 should be easily transferable to version 4 at a later time.