

From the Page to the Stage and Back Again: Using the Folger Shakespeare Philosophy in the Composition Classroom

While peer review may never have been popular among students, the cause for said unpopularity seems to be shifting. Traditionally, peer review has been dismissed as a “waste of time.” More recently, however, the unpopularity of peer review has been marked by a different kind of reluctance. Students of the social networking generation, a group that thrives on collaboration, seem almost uncomfortable with assuming an authoritative, critical voice over their classmates’ work. In order to re-imagine peer review as a collaborative rather than a critical activity, I argue that we need to re-imagine our approach to composition itself. Too often, students view composition as an act of drollery. They actively attempt to discover “their” voice—usually one of deference and general statement—and write for an audience of one—the professor. Building on the work of Debra Hawhee, my paper attempts to demonstrate the benefits of returning to the rhetorical roots of composition. I argue that, by adapting the Folger Shakespeare Library’s performance-based approach to reading dramatic texts, and applying that approach to the composition classroom, student writing may be re-imagined as a performative text. In this approach, students would view papers as a performance to be delivered, and choose dramatic pauses, points for emphasis, cuts to be made and compositional voice based on notions of audience and subtext. By turning the composition classroom into a theatrical stage, writing becomes an externalized process, and peer review, like theater itself, becomes a more communal activity.