Guidelines for reading/commenting on drafts

The purpose of sharing drafts is to give constructive feedback to help your classmates develop strong, well-written arguments. Do point out good things you see, but try to push each other as well. Don’t be shy about asking tough questions and pointing out weaknesses in the drafts, and try not to take such comments on your own work as a personal attack.

For each draft, write out answers to the questions on the back of this handout before class on Wednesday. Notice that these ask for some description or explanation; though this writing can be informal, it’s important to expand on your observations enough so that the writer can really understand what they have done well and what still needs work. (Comments like “Good introduction” or “Unclear thesis” don’t help very much.)

- Have a copy of your comments for each writer (hard copy, emailed, or shared electronically); this will help remind them of what you had to say.

- In addition, give me a copy of your comments. Use the dropbox in D2L, email them to me (as an attachment or just typed into the email), or bring an extra hard copy including your name (comments for all the drafts can be on the same page). These copies are for me so that I can give you credit for your commenting work. (This is part of your “ungraded work” grade.)

- Feel free to also write comments on the draft itself. If you do, make sure not to correct any errors you see (grammar, spelling, etc.); if you notice these, circle or otherwise flag them, but let the writer figure out the correction for him/herself.
Questions to Answer for Argument Drafts

1. Briefly state in your own words what the thesis of the paper is. If you find this hard to do, explain why.

2. Consider all aspects of the argument such as the evidence given, the logic, response to opposing views, ethos, and pathos. Choose one or two things that are the strongest aspects of the argument and describe what the writer has done well.

3. What would you say is the least successful aspect of the argument as it now stands? Describe what the writer could do to strengthen the argument.

   Knowing the sources, you can be especially helpful to the writer in pointing out contradictory ideas in the sources that have not been taken into account and/or useful material that the writer has not made use of.

Choose any two of the remaining questions to respond to:

4. How is the paper organized? Is this organization helpful or engaging for you as a reader? Is it an effective order for readers who don’t already agree with the position? Why (not)?

5. How well do the transitions work? Are they helpful for you as a reader? Note some examples of the most effective transitions and the least effective ones.

6. How well is source material (especially quotations) connected to the surrounding sentences? Note some examples of the most effective sentences and the least effective ones.

7. How effective are the introduction, conclusion, and title?

8. Are citations given when needed, and correct in format? Point out any problems.

9. Other observations or suggestions you have, or anything else the writer especially wanted feedback on.