

## Peer review in an exchange environment between South Africa and Sweden

**Prof. Roddy Fox**, Department of Geography, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa 6140,  
Tel: +2746 6038722, Email: [r.fox@ru.ac.za](mailto:r.fox@ru.ac.za)

**Level** post-graduate

**Group size** 12-16

### Technology requirements

VLE has to be stable with a friendly upload/download interface.

### Skills required

Co-ordinator needs experience of moderating and tact in editing the peer reviews. Learners need uploading and downloading skills.

### Rationale

It was important for exchange students to examine the grading systems and institutional cultures of the countries and institutions they were to visit. Prior to their physical exchange it was possible to have each learner's work peer reviewed by both a 'local' and 'foreign' student since roughly equal numbers of South African and Swedish students were sitting a virtual course in Research Philosophy and Methodology.

### Teaching method

Preparing a draft literature review for peer review was part of the formative and summative assessment in the Research Philosophy and Methodology course. The literature review was developed following two sets of learning activities. The first was a sequence of exercises introducing knowledge and value claims through engagement with actual examples. The second involved examining the functions of a literature review through critical reading of exemplars. A 1000 word draft literature review for their own research programme was then prepared and submitted via the VLE. The course co-ordinator then e-mailed each of these to pairs of peer reviewers, one South African and one Swedish. The peer reviewers did not know whose work they were receiving and were provided with supporting documentation concerning the grading systems in the two countries and at the two institutions concerned. Within 24 hours the peer reviewers mailed their completed assessment schedules back to the course co-ordinator for moderation. Edited peer reviews were then uploaded into the VLE. Feedback from the peer reviewers was also solicited as part of reflection concerning their own literature review.

### Benefits

The process forced the staff involved in the exchange to make explicit the bases of their grading systems. Criterion based assessment was then adopted as a common assessment platform.

### Pitfalls

Operationally this involves e-mailing large numbers of anonymous documents (32) to a prepared schedule of reviewers. The reviewers' assessment schedules then need to be downloaded and edited before the comments were finally uploaded. This is a lot of work for one person to undertake in roughly 48 hours. It was very difficult to find any material explaining national grading systems in a way that could be made accessible to inexperienced assessors!

### **Evidence of effectiveness**

Learner reflection showed that the activity of peer reviewing someone else's work facilitated self-criticism. The process also clearly enhanced appreciation of different institutional cultures.

### **Advice to others**

Activity needs to be done after the group has built up a good level of rapport and has already become skilled in interacting with the VLE.

### **References**

Fox, R.C. (2007) 'Gowin's Knowledge Vee and the Integration of Philosophy and Methodology: a Case Study.' *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 31 (2) p269-284