

# Fostering interdisciplinary exchanges through peer feedback to improve academic writing skills

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# Focus



Completing a PhD requires students to meet growing demands in terms of professionalisation:

Sharing knowledge  
Collaboration  
Acquisition of expertise



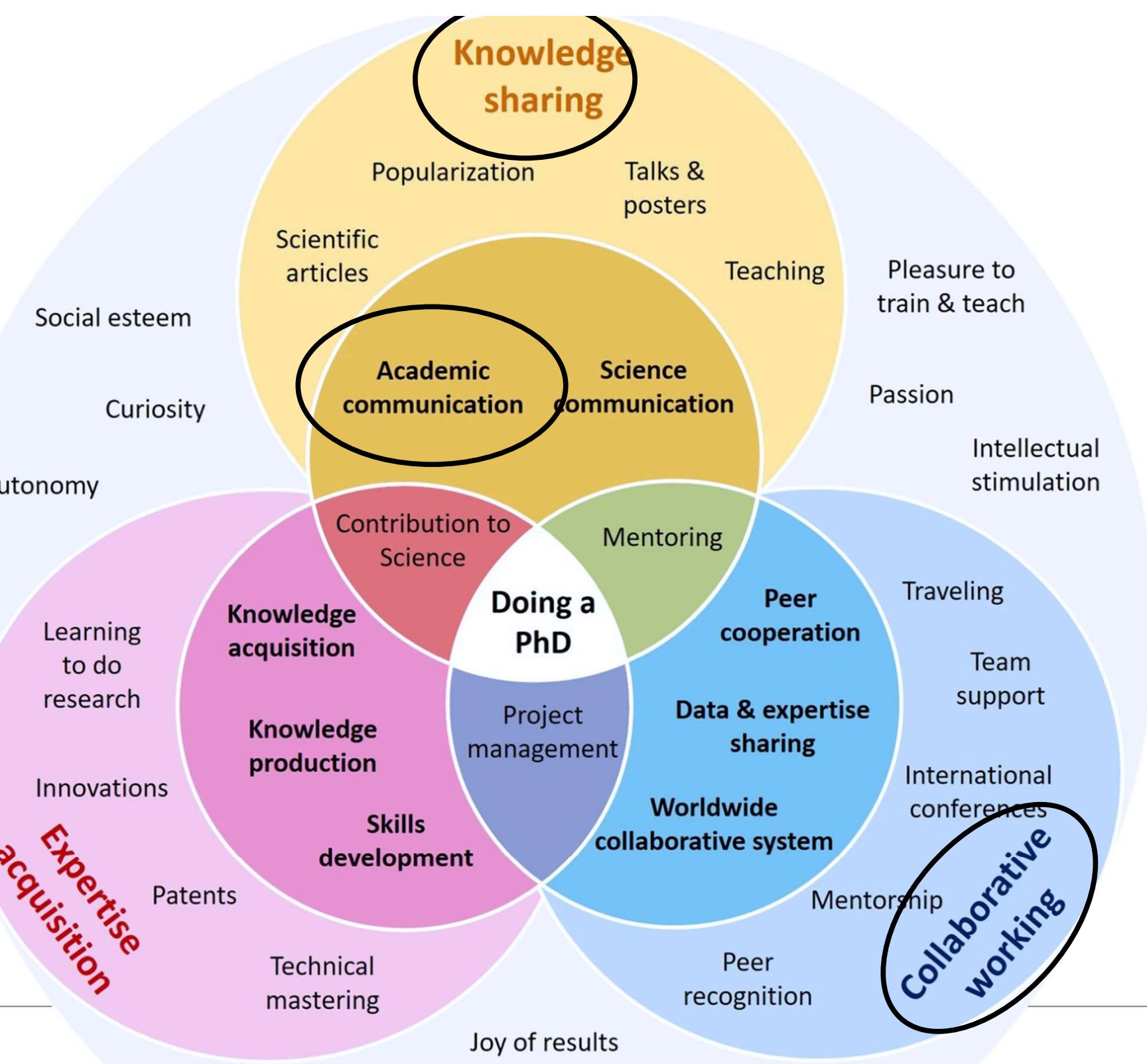
PhD students are expected to integrate into the culture of the academic community:

Contribution  
Belonging  
Support

(Berry et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2018; Hazell et al., 2020; Lau and Pretorius, 2019; Milicev et al., 2021)



(Berry et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2018; Hazell et al., 2020; Lau and Pretorius, 2019; Milicev et al., 2021)





# Academic writing




Academic writing is the formal communication of research and ideas in a specific discipline, in accordance with established conventions for contributing to and engaging with knowledge in the field (Hyland 2004, Swales 1990)

# Two teaching approaches are used (Guerin and Aitchison, 2023)


- Academic writing groups:
  - are popular (Tremblay et al. 2022): “Thésez-vous” in Canada, “Long Night of Writing” at the University of Luxembourg
  - help students avoid the usual distractions (Guerin and Aitchison, 2023)
- Critiquing groups in which doctoral students read and comment on written work by other students




# Why engage in peer feedback?



To develop self-reflection on academic writing and more broadly on the field in general: “peer feedback fosters a **deeper understanding of academic writing criteria, promotes self-reflection, and enhances critical and analytical skills**” (Boillos, 2024; Davis, 2014; Kostopoulou and O’Dwyer, 2021; Osman et al., 2022).



To adopt a critical approach to one’s own texts: developing critical thinking by reading peers’ texts can help one adopt a critical approach to one’s own writing (Rollinson, 2005)



To develop self-confidence by seeing the strengths and weaknesses of peers when it comes to the practice of writing (Kondo and Takatsuka 2009: 2)

# Why use peer feedback?



“[to] enhance the sense of audience” (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Tsui & Ng, 2000)

“[to raise] awareness through reading peers’ writings” (Tsui & Ng, 2000)

To receive questions from actual readers (Kondo and Takatsuka 2009:2)

To propose ideas in a less risky way (Kondo and Takatsuka 2009: 2)

To develop self-confidence by seeing the strengths and weaknesses of peers when it comes to the practice of writing (Kondo and Takatsuka 2009: 2)



# Research



## Postulate

Feedback from multiple sources

- is a way of broadening opportunities for regulation suited to a variety of learner profiles (Mottez et al.)

- strengthens emotional ties within a group (Wei and Liu, 2024) and a sense of belonging to the academic community (Gao and Chen 2024)

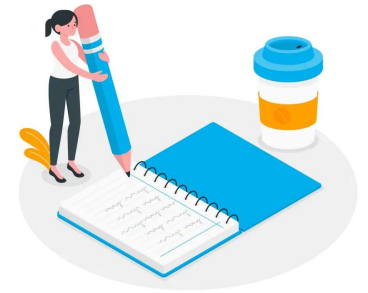


## Research question

What impact do interdisciplinarity and multilingualism have on peer proofreading?

What are the benefits and limitations AI support in the peer feedback process?

# Methodology



## Questionnaires over four periods

- Post-course feedback from PhD students at the University of Luxembourg enrolled on a writing course including peer feedback (2017-2022)
- Comparative study between writing schemes in Luxembourg and Canada for doctoral students (2023-2024)
- Post-course feedback from PhD students from Luxembourg enrolled on a writing course including peer feedback (2024-2025)
- Post-course work on AI feedback (2025)

## Quantitative measures

- Sense of Scientific Community Scale (18 items,  $\omega=.94$ )
  - Belonging ( $\omega=.92$ )
  - Influence ( $\omega=.91$ )
  - Support ( $\omega=.97$ )
  - Five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“definitely”).

(Vincent et al., accepted; Vincent et al., 2023)

# Peer feedback: two reviewers per text

## **Regular sessions (once every two weeks)**

- One six-page text
- Six pages from a chosen genre (article, thesis extract, etc.) in FR or EN
- Text sent to peers via OneDrive
- In groups: oral explanations following written remarks shared via OneDrive



## **Intensive course (two and a half days)**

- Documents sent before the course: summary of thesis topic (half page)
- 50-min. writing period: Pomodoro technique
- Text sent to peers via OneDrive in FR or EN
- In groups: oral explanations following written remarks

# Schedule for the writing seminar

## Day 1

9.00 Introduction and ice-breaker

9.30 Research topic

10.30 Break

10.45 Rewriting

11.45 Comments among peers

12.30 Lunch

13.30 Walk and discussion

14.30 Peer review

15.00 Feedback in pairs

16.00 Rewriting

## Day 2

9.00 Summary of the first day

9.30 Authorial stance

10.45 Break

11.00 Rewriting

12.30 Lunch

13.30 Walk and discussion

14.30 Review in groups of three

15.45 Feedback in groups of three

16.30 Rewriting

## Day 3

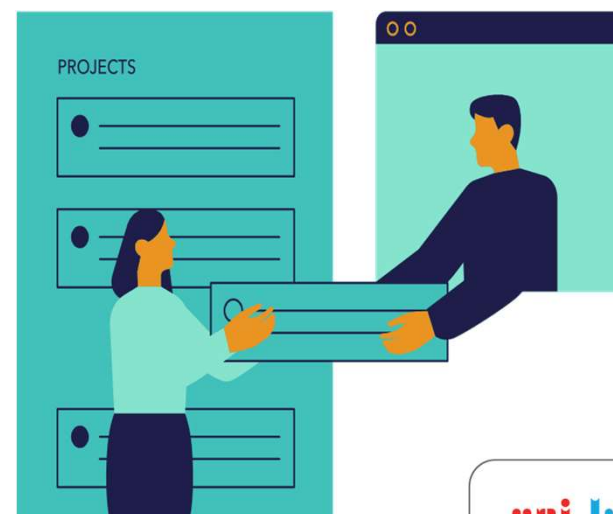
8.45 Organising your PhD

9.30 Writing phase

10.30 Break

10.45 Peer review

11.30 Conclusion of the workshop



“Reviewing is both a privilege and responsibility”  
(Benos, Kirk & Hall 2003)





# Guide to giving feedback

- offering comments rather than direct editing (Shulgina et al., 2024a)
- detailed guidance on feedback-giving strategies, which encompasses emphasising the importance of addressing advanced issues in academic writing (Gao et al., 2019)
- presenting a diverse range of feedback types that form a coherent logical structure (Lu et al., 2021)
- exemplary peer feedback is vital in illustrating the ideal form of constructive criticism (Costley et al., 2023; Shulgina et al., 2024b)
- prioritising quality over quantity (Shulgina et al., 2024b)
- attending to the manner in which feedback is delivered (Lu et al., 2023; Yallop et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020)
- interpersonal concerns frequently emerge in non-anonymous contexts (e.g. Xue et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022)

# INTERACT WITH YOUR PEERS

Categories									Explanations	
Category	Explanation	General	Page	Comment	Extract	Local		Page	Comment	Extract
Assessment	Respond to the author, judge, react	This is not a clear thesis statement.				This word does not make sense.				
Clarification	Question, explain	Could you explain your idea in more detail?				What do you mean by that?				
Suggestion	Guide, advise, collaborate	Your argument should be more progressive.				You should write that sentence differently.				
Adjustment	Propose alternatives	Change the order of your arguments. Order				Replace “x” with “y”. Grammar Spelling Expression Structure	Addition			
							Deletion			
							Replacement			
							Inversion			
									Spelling	
									Expression	
									Structure	
Respond to the author										Respond to the author
Off-subject										Sent twice by mistake, sorry.

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- **exemplary peer feedback is vital in illustrating the ideal form of constructive criticism (Costley et al., 2023; Shulgina et al., 2024b)**
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# Review by non-specialists

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Assessment (local)	<p>“I would say that it is flawed... often <math>\neq</math> always”</p> <p>“that has never been found... are you that pessimistic?”</p> <p>Local: “lack of chronological markers”</p> <p>“try to avoid a succession of consequences”</p>
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Clarification	<p>“references...? And they sold “re-packaged” debt to other banks, meaning that the risks were difficult to understand, as well as investment funds, didn’t they?”</p> <p>“prior definition?” / “definitions?” / “why?” / “author?” / “between whom?”</p>
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## Review by specialists

Assessment (general)	<p>“Very good plan. I very much like the way you introduce the complexity linked to the notion of integration.”</p> <p>“fundamental rights ≠ procedural guarantees”</p> <p>“Just one author? Diversify!”</p>
Suggestion	<p>“Maybe the question of bankability is conditional on risk?”</p> <p>“explain the link between the individual and criminal sensitivity”</p> <p>“I have given you some suggestions. As you are a specialist in your subject, I will leave you to judge what you think is best to keep. Good luck”</p>
Clarification	<p>“He was not the only one to develop this principle; Montesquieu was already thinking about it, and Beccaria focused on it in detail in his work <i>Deidelitti e delle pene</i> in 1764. F. used the expression “nullum poem sine lese” for the first time.</p> <p>“Why is that? For European criminal law?”</p>



# Guide to giving feedback

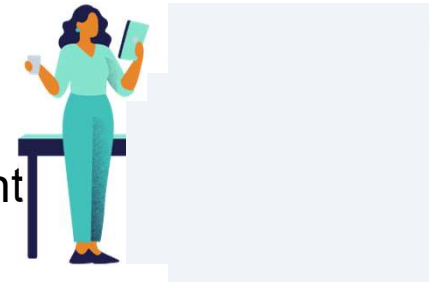
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# Learning to write a text for a reader



**Communication:**  
recognition of a  
stimulus

**Speaker:**  
must make the point  
interesting



**Hearer:**  
interprets the  
message and  
evaluates its  
relevance

**Hearer's reward:**  
cognitive gain  
(Moeschler and  
Reboul, 1994)



- feelings play a role in a student's motivation to regulate their work (Girardet, 2021; Rowe et al., 2014)
- a certain degree of emotional discomfort could encourage regulation of learning (Molloy et al., 2013)
- Reflection on the **well-being** of students in higher education. Well-being does not mean shielding students from all negative emotions at any cost.

# Results of questionnaires



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# First questionnaire (2022)

# First questionnaire: long-term impact of peer feedback

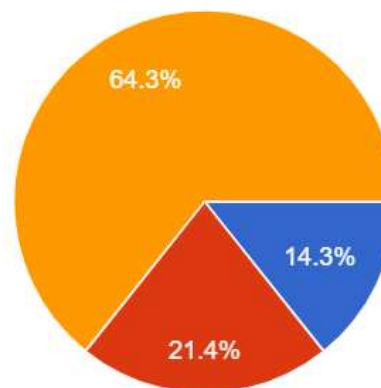
- Role of several reviewers:
  - I had never had an article reviewed before this workshop but now I'm "immune" to the process :-) I remember that the first time I took it quite badly as one or two people were very critical.
- Positive impact on interdisciplinary group and different age ranges (Lu & Law 2012)
  - What I particularly liked was the fact that during this course, the reviewers came from other disciplines, so they weren't just conditioned to our specific sub-sub-field. That made the feedback very refreshing.
  - It's not always easy to receive feedback from someone who is not an expert in your field. But it is important to learn to adapt, listen and discuss.
  - The view of a novice – a non-specialist – can be unnerving. But I would say that when it comes to the substance, peer feedback is very important. And in terms of form, the same reasoning applies, to help make the text more readable.



# Improving written work through peer feedback

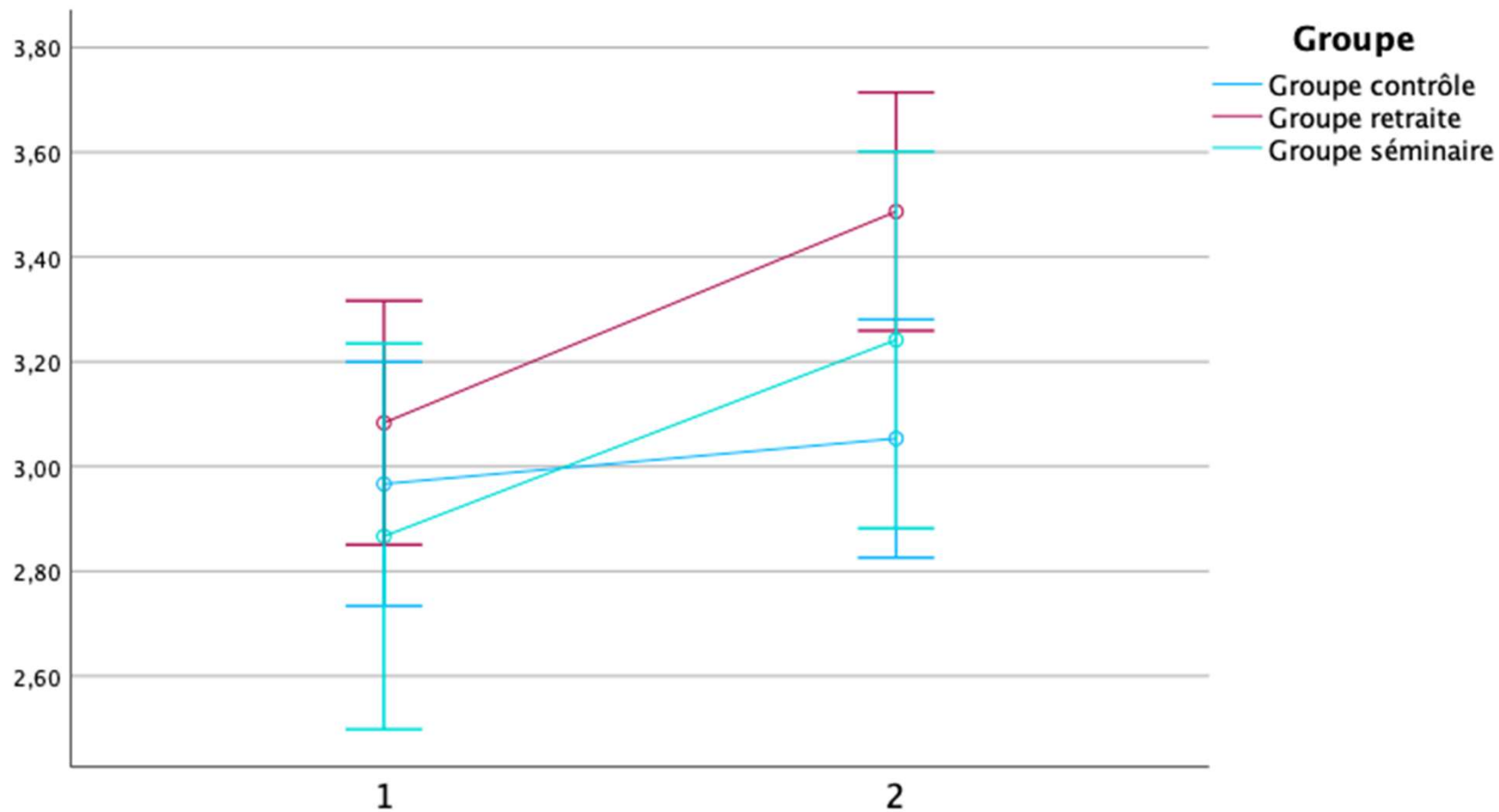
More learned about writing through the process of reviewing than through the comments received (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Lundstrom, Baker 2009)

When it comes to peer reviewing, I learnt more... (2022 questionnaire)



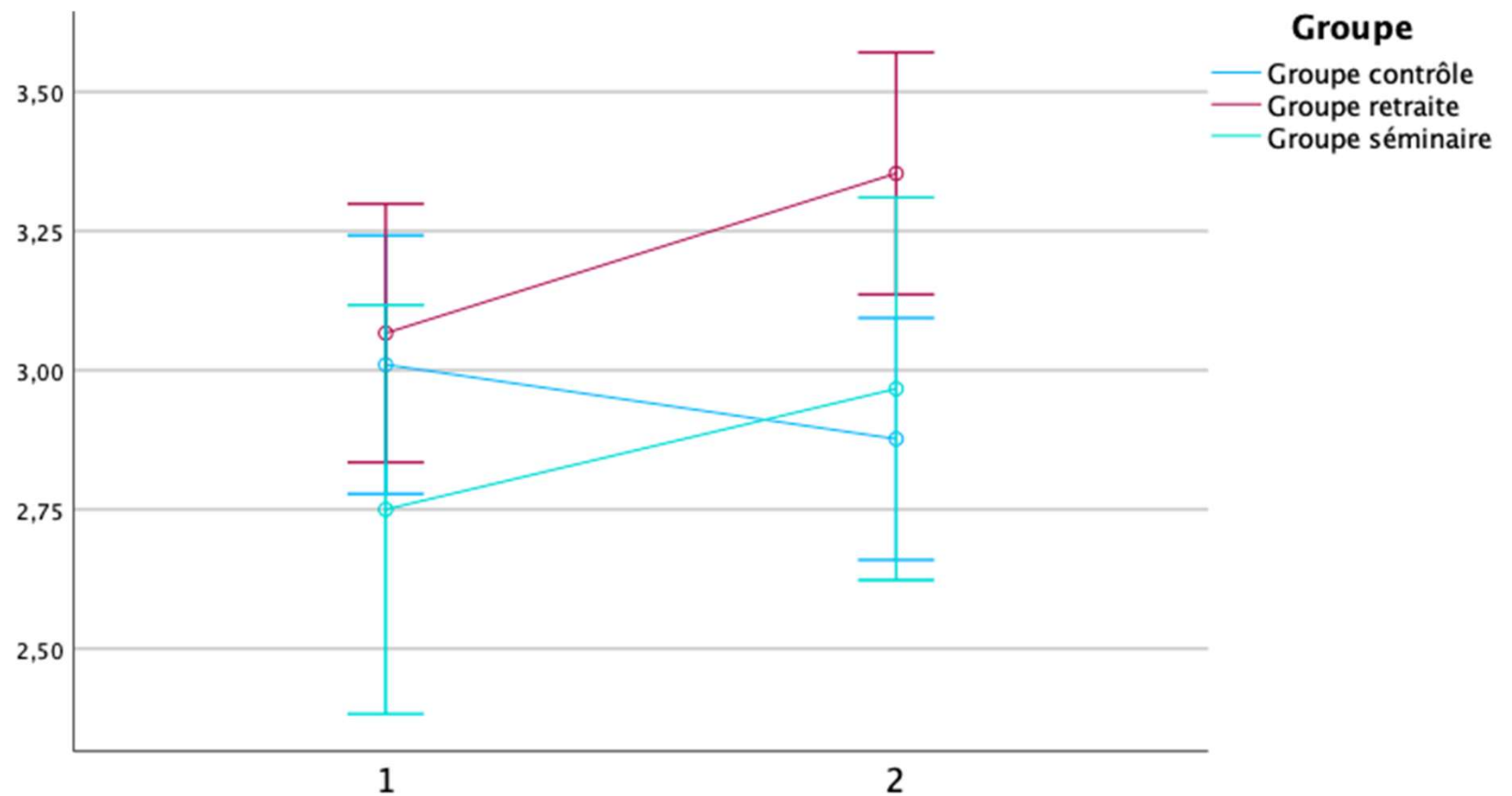
- by writing comments on my peers' work
- by receiving comments on my own work
- both to the same degree
- I don't know

# Second questionnaire (2023-24)



Feeling of belonging to the scientific community

(Vincent, Lejot 2025)



Feeling of influencing the scientific community

(Vincent, Lejot 2025)

## Second questionnaire: well-being



**Strengthening the sense of belonging to an academic community:** Furthermore, the collaborative nature of peer feedback encourages a sense of academic community and belonging within the learning environment, which can positively impact students' motivation and engagement in the writing process (Geithner and Pollastro, 2016; Yallop et al., 2021).



Improving well-being: **Activities** (walking in the fresh air, yoga, team sports, puzzles, board games, etc., Stevenson, 2020; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2020) are beneficial not only for mental and physical health but also for social well-being (Wiebe et al., 2023)



Well-being is achieved by participating in a retreat, which helps improve mental health and the feeling of belonging to the academic community, whereas taking part in a seminar only improves the sense of belonging to the academic community (Vincent, Lejot 2025)



# Third questionnaire (2025)

## Third questionnaire: summary

Aspects selected more than seven times in articles:

Rank the following  
**disadvantages of peer  
feedback** by order of  
importance:

- 6 Students' deficiency in providing constructive feedback,
- 2 Interpersonal concerns, Ineffective grouping of peers,
- 1 Inadequate feedback literacy,
- 1 Ineffective grouping of peers.

## Third questionnaire: summary

- 6 Students' deficiency in providing constructive feedback,  
“A discussion about one of my texts, and the fact that we come back to the **perennial question of the utility of art**, the definition of art, etc. --> in short, that **non-specialist researchers on the topic end up repeating the same tropes as soon as we move away from their areas of expertise**”
- 2 Interpersonal concerns, Ineffective grouping of peers,
- 1 Inadequate feedback literacy,
- 1 Ineffective grouping of peers.



## Third questionnaire: summary

Aspects selected more than seven times in articles:

Rank the following  
**benefits of peer  
feedback** by order of  
importance:

- 4 Constructing academic community,
- 3 Improving writing quality,
- 2 Promoting self-reflection,
- 1 Strengthening confidence in academic writing.



## Third questionnaire: summary

- Constructing academic community

**It** [peer reviewing] increased the sense of legitimacy, of belonging to a community (especially given the vulnerable situation of doctoral students), and boosted confidence in writing abilities.

A **trusted group**. Appreciation for my writing lecturer for my Master's. And flexibility in my approach to the process and the issues.



## Third questionnaire: summary

- Improving writing quality,

Having an **external perspective** helped me understand the gaps that were not clear in my writing so that I could **add additional sections** to make it clearer.

Rather than deleting and rewriting, I **added transitional passages.**

Aiming for a written style with shorter, more direct sentences, and avoiding unnecessary words or sentences.

Having **an external perspective** helped me understand what I needed to simplify in my writing.

All the sessions were interesting in that they **illustrated different aspects in our own and others' texts.**

## Third questionnaire: summary



### - Promoting self-reflection

There was an aspect that particularly struck me, which **occurred several times**. It was the **diversity of the feedback** that was made, **not just related to the discipline** but also a question of style and progress through the thesis. And realising that in practice there is no single magic formula, and that it is also possible to find one's own voice in writing, as we all do in our choice of subject.

Taking into account **all the comments** and **related reflections** to develop a **simpler, more fluid writing style**

**It helped me understand** that I was trying to write in a way that was too literary, whereas **the aim of academic writing** is to keep it simple and direct



## Third questionnaire: summary

### - Strengthening confidence in academic writing

It reassured me as it was something I had been very worried about, and I realised that there was nothing to fear in **others' comments** but plenty to learn (they were especially useful for upcoming conferences/articles).

**Working together** with a colleague (now also a friend) who works in a field that is quite frankly incomprehensible for me, which I know requires **huge intellectual skill but also a writing style that is much simpler and more straightforward**.

Because that confirms the idea that there are several ways of doing science but also several ways of writing scientific articles!

Freedom, definitely (because of the chance to meet and receive **feedback from other doctoral students**) and the ability to reflect on one's own writing. Even a sense of **well-being**.



# Research question

What impact do interdisciplinarity and multilingualism have on peer proofreading?

What are the benefits and limitations AI support in the peer feedback process?

# Testimonials



In any case thank you for this course, which I think is the only one of its kind here at the university, in terms of its thematic focus and the way it is taught.



It was a real pleasure to participate (several times) in these intensive writing and peer reviewing courses. I would strongly advise all doctoral students to participate!

>>> Moreover, because seminars help doctoral students to understand the conventions for academic writing, these schemes are much more effective than retreats for developing their identity as researchers within the academic community (Sletto et al., 2020)

# An approach adapted to AI



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# How to create an effective prompt



## **Reflection on a comparison between AI and the latest peer review of a 500-word text + comments from Copilot:**

You are a PhD student in applied linguistics. Write a concise summary (no more than 200 words) aimed at a panel of academic researchers who are not specialists in your subfield. The topic is: the potential of generative AI for developing academic writing skills



Role

You are a PhD student in applied linguistics.

Audience

Aimed at a panel of academic researchers who are not specialists in your subfield

Format

Write a concise summary (no more than 200 words)

Topic

The topic is: the potential of generative AI for developing academic writing skills

**Do you believe that artificial intelligence can replace peer feedback?**

Yes, I think so



Yes, I already use this approach but it is very different from peer feedback – the two are complementary



Yes, I already use this approach and it works very well for improving my texts



No, feedback from a fellow doctoral student is completely different from what artificial intelligence can offer



No, I don't want to put my texts into artificial intelligence systems



# Comparison AI and peerfeedback

## **Benefits of AI**

Structure of the comments of AI (original text, problem, suggestion)

Detailed comments: grammar, sense of the words

## **Drawbacks of AI**

AI as a substitute for the author's voice

## **Benefits of peers**

Collaborative peer reflection (questions of the peer)

Global vision on the text with peers

Different perspectives through multiple feedback

**Drawbacks for both :** Lack of expert comments





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