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### **The role of gender in the peer review process of formal writing**

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Traditionally, the assessment of student work has been the primary responsibility of a teacher or professor. However, the process of peer-review has truly taken hold in recent times as a method for others objectively evaluating a student's work. Teachers and professors often underestimate the value of peer-review, and there is a general belief that students are not as skilled as their teachers. While true in some regards, students that evaluate one another might assess different areas or angles that mentors might not. Feedback given by students might be more understood because of the similarity in age and shared classroom experiences. Recently, though, there has been a new development in the area of peer-review: the online peer-review process. A computerized system named SWoRD (Scaffolded Writing and Reviewing in the Discipline), which was developed at the University of Pittsburgh, allows students in any classroom to submit drafts for peer-review. The formatting is removed along with the students' names so that all papers look virtually identical. Those papers are then assigned to a peer-reviewer and the system provides a form for comments on items ranging from organization to conceptual depth. This new technology allows students to evaluate one another's work while taken some of the out-of-class burden off teachers. To date, there is little research on the impact of technology on the peer-review process. Other researchers have focused on the individual writer, his or her thought process, and other individual-centered aspects. My study, however, focuses on the concept and process of an electronic peer-review system. In particular, my study focused on the comments made during the peer review process of a lab report for a college-level physics course. The comments were examined to determine if causal links exist between gender and the types of comments entered during the peer review process. In the physics class, there were 44 students (20 male and 24 female) with ages ranging from 18 to 22. Each student submitted one draft for peer review to SWoRD, which then assigned each author an anonymous pseudonym and then all students reviewed another student's paper using the computerized system. With no author names or reviewer names, the comments were completely anonymous. Students reviewed and gave feedback on another's paper on elements ranging from the length of the purpose statement to a finalized and complete list of references.