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Engaging Novice Writers in Online Collaborative Review through Peer-Review Circles

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Abstract

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this article presents online Peer-Review Circles (PRC) as an innovative and collaborative approach to academic writing, mainly proofreading and copy-editing processes. It aims to engage novice second language (L2) writers in online joint review and increase their understanding of pre-reviewing scholarly papers before submission. The authors had observed that a large number of doctoral students are still considered novice writers. Therefore, there was a need for a practical approach to improve their review skills and engage them in online PRC activities. Grounded in Monologue-Dialogue-Discussion (MDD) Circles (Manning & Jobbitt, 2018), this article extends its potential to be adopted and used beyond the classroom and mandatory ELT contexts. MDD requires three consecutive stages: 1) primary reviewer's monologue, 2) primary and secondary reviewer's dialogue, and 3) writer and the reviewers perform a group discussion. These activities will help the writers to look after the manuscripts simultaneously from a PRC perspective. We also developed peer review Feedback Questions (FQs) to guide the reviewers to perform meaningful discussions. The output of the PRCs will likely be an initial review or a pre-evaluation process to improve the manuscript quality, readability, and publishability.

Keywords: PRC; MDD; academic writing; FQs; metacognitive skill; and collaborative review

Introduction

Writing a scholarly paper has become a daunting task for novice writers across disciplines. We use the term “*novice*” to characterize the beginner writers who have not published any articles in top-tier national and international journals. In English language education, we have witnessed that many scholars have done significant research in the field. Still, they sometimes find it challenging to disseminate their research findings through the article publication. They also lack sufficient experience in drafting manuscripts, which impacts many rejections of domestic and

foreign journals. For example, in abstract writing alone, Nur et al.(2021) found that Indonesian authors still have difficulties using their meta-discourse markers (MMS) in constructing their abstracts. An article must go through the proofreading and copy-editing process before submitting it to the journal. This paper presents a practical approach to utilizing Peer-Review Circles (henceforth PRC) in an online collaborative review activity. It aims to improve the manuscript quality, readability, and publishability. The manuscript quality entails three essential criteria: 1) rigor, 2) originality, and 3) significance (Cook, 2019). Thus, the primary goal of readability investigations is to determine a piece of writing's comprehensibility (Zamanian & Heydari, 2012). A paper must be easy to follow and understand. It should also adhere to writing principles such as correctness (e.g., spelling, capitalization, grammar, citation styles, etc.) clarity (e.g., easily understood, unambiguous, sentence fragments, etc.). In addition, the texts must be courteous (e.g., politeness, avoid offending the readers), concise (e.g., redundancy, word choice, etc.), and coherent (e.g., sequence, logic, linking words, and consistent development of ideas).

The authors have observed that many doctoral students struggled to get their articles published in national and international accredited journals. Most of them could not afford native proofreading and professional copy-editing services. Thus, they even sent their manuscripts to journals without going through that process. Therefore, there is a need to build a collaborative writing culture to provide doctoral students with a supportive academic atmosphere where they can always get assistance from peers and other professionals. Under the scheme of doctoral supervision situated in a micro-reality context of postgraduate studies, it is also necessary to encourage and activate the students' autonomy to conduct an online PRC as a pre-evaluation process. It helps the writers receive valuable feedback from peers and pre-determine the fatal errors throughout the manuscript.

Moreover, there is a gap in the literature that no previous studies examined the adoption of PRC for online collaborative review, particularly in manuscript peer-review activity. For example, according to Zhao et al. (2014), their investigation focused on the students' asynchronous collaboration in an online peer-review group examining their participation, interaction, and social presence. In another report, the concept of PRC is similar to online literature circles proposed by Ferdiansyah et al. (2020), whose article provides pedagogical steps of literature circles to engage university students in the online intensive reading course. These two articles focus on the students' participation and engagement in classroom learning while the PRC can, beyond the classroom, facilitate online synchronous collaboration for multi-purpose education.

Online synchronous PRC has several advantages: 1) facilitate online collaborative peer review for novice writers, 2) improve the writers' review knowledge and skills, 3) obtain valuable pre-evaluation feedback from peers, 4) engage the writers' participation and autonomy in doing self-review. In addition, the output of this activity is an increase in the quality of writing and the availability of online collaboration spaces for novice writers in obtaining feedback and critiques from others. With this in mind, we can encourage the ELT researchers and novice writers to actively use the PRC to promote their online collaborative review, thereby producing a quality paper for publication.

What are peer-review circles?

In writing, peer review is another term for peer assessment that supports academic writing and writer's review skills. It carries Vygotsky's theory of social interaction in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). It has been evolved in many ways, such as the literature circle (see Ferdiansyah et al., 2020; Venegas, 2018), thesis circle (Rajagopal et al., 2021), collaborative discussion circle (Ahmadian

et al., 2021), and virtual peer review (Breuch, 2004). They all have similarities in practice that promote active collaboration in both offline and online contexts. In particular, Manning & Jobbitt (2018) coin that PRC consists of four stages: 1) setting up, 2) reading and analyzing the manuscript, 3) conducting multiple rounds of online synchronous MDD, and 4) reflecting. The meaning of the word "circles" is the activities carried out repeatedly by changing roles where everyone gets the same opportunity to contribute to the work through their active involvement in discussions. In other words, peer review is social interaction or collaborative learning that links the conversation and thought (Bruffee, 1984). He also stressed that students learn to describe the organizational structure of a peer's paper, paraphrase it, and suggested what the author might do to improve the work".

Literature, thesis, collaborative discussion, and virtual peer review circles have a similarity that carries the concept of collaborative learning. However, according to the learning context, they are packaged and modified through different pedagogical instructions. PRC in this essay is closely related to thesis circles (Rajagopal et al., 2018) that facilitate a writing group for doctoral students in creating an online collaborative review for their master thesis writing or any other relevant academic texts. Virtual peer review (Breuch, 2004) is another term for online PRC with several characteristics, shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The characteristic of virtual peer review (Adopted from Breuch, 2004, p. 50)

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Virtual peer review</i>
<i>Time</i>		
Synchronicity	Time varies from immediate to delayed response	The reviewers have the option of synchronous and asynchronous response
Durability	Written communication lasts a long time.	When conducted through technology, an author's writing and a reviewer's feedback are both "durable"; asynchronous messages and synchronous chats can be saved and transferred in their entirety.
Concurrency	Responses occur at roughly the same time.	The continued response is encouraged by virtual peer review.
Convenience	To some extent, time constraints are lifted.	Virtual peer review can be done on one's own time; extra time can be used for more in-depth reflection if necessary; reviewers must be motivated to work.
<i>Space</i>		
Special cues	Culture, social class, and sexual identity are no longer readily apparent.	By removing social cues, virtual peer reviewers are encouraged to concentrate on the task at hand.
Interpersonal presence	Interpersonal connections are frequently more challenging to establish online.	Virtual peer reviewers may shape interpersonal bonds overtime when working in a group setting.
Hyperpersonal presence	Intense connections that are stronger than in a face-to-face situation	Reviewers' online presence and interpersonal relationships may improve due to virtual peer review.
<i>Interaction</i>		
Text-based	Increased writing practice is fostered by online communication.	Virtual peer review encourages participants to respond to one another in writing, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Fixity	On the internet, written communication becomes "fixed."	2 Virtual peer review comments can be archived and saved to encourage the recall of peer suggestions and revisions.
Response structure	Front, intertextual, and end comments are all forms of online communication	2 Virtual peer review can be customized to provide summary comments, interpretive comments on specific quotes, or an overall conversation of an author's questions or problem areas.
Reach	Maintaining the accuracy of messages	Virtual peer reviewer statements are maintained in their entirety and can be distributed to multiple audiences.

Time, space, and interaction are the three main characteristics that can identify peer review remediation in an online environment. Virtual peer review is flexible because the reviewers can arrange and organize it at one's convenient time. They can increase the quality of online interaction in which the PRC can encourage them to respond to one another in writing synchronously via Zoom. The online PRC proposed in this article has also met these characteristics, and they can be used to describe the implementation of PRC in the online environment.

Online synchronous peer-review circles: a step-by-step guide

As shown in the following stages, we have adapted a research article's rhetorical model to fit the PRC concept. Arsyad et al. (2021) describe the adapted rhetorical model of a research article: 1) research article sections, and 2) the structural moves in every section. For example, in the abstract section, they coin five moves: introduction, objectives/ purpose of the study, methodological perspective, findings/ results, and conclusion. The rest of the sections are the introduction (three moves), methods (three moves), and results and discussion (six moves). In addition to this model, we develop a literature review section with three moves (introduction, main body of literature, and conclusion) as shown in Table 2 (see also Wee & Banister, 2015).

Table 2. Rhetorical model of the literature review section

Section	Structural Moves	Description
Literature Review (LR)	Move 1: Introduction	It contains statements of the comprehensive definition of the researched topic. It should cover the current issues, trends, and areas of concern in the field. However, the LR sequence carries the chronological history, research trends publications, thematic, and methodological approach.
	Move 2: Main body of literature	It contains the organization of the literature review that moves from the general viewpoints to the specific focus of the research. It explores the common themes in the literature and relates them to the current research topic.
	Move 3: Conclusion	It summarizes essential aspects of the current field or body of literature. It also concludes how the existing literature can fill the gaps and guide the study.

Stage 1: Setting up the group

The supervisor can mediate the implementation of online PRC through an online community of practice (see Anas, 2018; Kirschner & Lai, 2007). It is a professional community where all doctoral students can share the same interest in article writing. It is a professional community where all postgraduate students can share the same interest in article writing. One supervisor usually supervises three to five supervisees. The first step is setting up the PRC group

by assigning the supervisees to create a group of three or four. The supervisees must have already had a manuscript to review. Secondly, each writer shares the manuscript with others either in word or pdf versions. They also share the peer review feedback questions (FQs) containing guided questions that lead to meaningful discussions. They can use any video conferencing tools to facilitate the online meeting (e.g., Zoom or Google Meet). Also, the supervisors will need to explain how the FQs work to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation. Thirdly, the supervisor assigns the role of the group members: 1) Main Reviewer (MR), 2) Second Reviewer (SR), and 3) Reviewee (Rw). We could also add a Fourth Reviewer (FR), but it will affect the time allocation needed to complete one round of MDD. One circle of MDD requires each person to be the primary reviewer and change the role in turns.

Stage 2: Reading and analyzing the manuscript (15-20 minutes)

In one circle of MDD, the writer's role is two-folded: both as a reviewee and a reviewer. In this step, each reviewer reads the manuscript carefully and analyzes each section using the FQs. These activities will apply in each MDD round. For example, MDD round 1 focuses on reading and studying the title and abstract using the FQs. The FQs are linked and associated with the five moves of Arsyad et al.'s rhetorical model for the abstract section. In this stage, MR and SR will have the opportunity to look at the title and abstract very carefully. They read the snippets several times while focusing on the FQs to quickly figure out the critical point of the section. They can also take notes, highlight, comment, use the track changes feature in word (for doc), or use PDF editor or Mendeley to annotate the reviewed section. These activities are pivotal in that MR and SR can use the information to plan the feedback to the writers. These activities will last about 15-20 minutes, depending on each reviewer's metacognitive competence or thought processes. They must use these skills to conduct self-dialoguing with what they read.

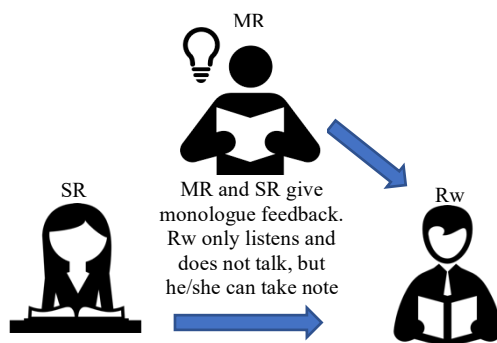


Figure 1. MDD circle 1: monologue by MR and SR

Stage 3: Conducting multiple rounds of MDD

The MDD circle consists of three stages: 1) Monologue, 2) dialogue and 3) discussion. In the monologue stage, MR and SR each presented the results of their analysis after reading the texts. Rw listened and did not respond, rebuttal, or object to what MR and SR said. After that, MR and SR had a dialogue to discuss their respective findings (see MDD circle 2). They exchange opinions and provide critical feedback on the texts they have read. Rw here is still in the stage of listening and observing what MR and RS discussed. While listening to the discussion, Rw can do note-taking to record essential things that he can clarify and ask later in circle 3.

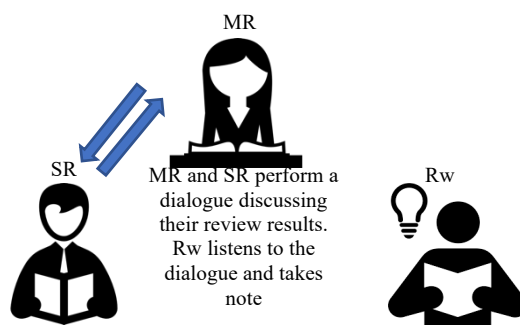


Figure 2. MDD circle 2: the dialogue between MR and SR

In one PRC episode for manuscript review, we can do MDD multiple times: 1) divide the MDD session into six rounds with various time allocations according to the review load of each MDD, 2) determine and agree on a schedule for the implementation of MDD, and 3) carry out MDD online according to the agreed schedule. We can adjust the number of MDD sessions and the time allocation needed to complete one PRC episode so that each group can organize and manage PRC activities in a way that is effective, flexible, and measurable. Sequentially, we set the MDD sessions as follows:

Round 1 (R1): This round focuses on reading, analyzing, and reviewing the *title* and *abstract* of the manuscript. It requires three phases where each person will play the role of MR, SR, and Rw in turn. Each stage consists of three steps. **Step 1 (monologue)**: After reading the texts, MR and SR prepared critical responses to FQs and presented them in monologue (*e.g.*, *What do you think about the abstract structure? Is there anything you want to change? Why? What about the language style and grammar?*). During the monologue by MR and SR, Rw listened to them carefully and took notes if necessary. Rw did not give any responses to the monologues. **Step 2 (dialogue)**: MR and SR performed a conversation discussing their review results. They shared ideas on constructing the texts robust, rigorous, and comprehensively. Again, Rw was listening to them and taking notes. **Step 3 (discussion)**: They all performed a group discussion after the monologue and dialogue sessions. In this step, Rw used the records to clarify the critical issues, ask questions, state objections, and even argue with the reviewers to defend his ideas. In stages 2 and 3 of this round, they changed roles and restarted the steps from the beginning. They did their part based on their positions. Round 1 was finished when they had completed all the stages and steps.

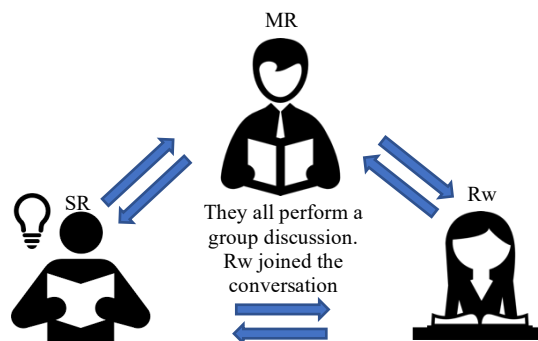


Figure 3. MDD circle 3: group discussion

Round 2 (R2) to 6 (R6) went through the same processes in R1 with different sections of the manuscript. The rest of the rounds particularly examined the background or introduction (R2), the literature review (R3), the methodology section (R4), the findings (R5), and the discussion and conclusion sections (R6). These rounds are flexible and adjustable in that the PRC organizer can reduce and add more sessions depending on the reviewers' agreement. They can also schedule the MDD rounds anytime they want and plan their review targets from the beginning to completion.

Stage 4: Reflecting

Conducting a PRC requires the reviewer's commitment and metacognitive competence to carry out the MDD rounds. According to (Manning & Jobbitt, 2018), there are two types of reflections: 1) immediate/ personal reflection and 2) delayed reflection. Immediate reflection allows the writers to reflect on their experiences during the PRC. It can be an oral and written reflection stating what they have learned and to do next after the PRC. At the end of the PRC, each writer can speak about following up on the review results. They can also criticize the PRC and suggest how to organize a better PRC in the future (*e.g., How to improve the online interaction quality? What areas they will need to improve?*). The writers can also take notes or annotate the manuscript about the written reflection. It aims to help them revise the manuscript in the future. They can also share their reflections on social media (*e.g., WhatsApp and Facebook*) or other special interest groups where other writers can learn from them. They can also write some suggestions and expectations (*e.g., How the PRC help them improve their paper quality? How do they want the PRC organized in the future? What feedback strategies best fit your need?*)

A virtual case study: an example of online peer review circles.

This section describes a virtual case study of how doctoral students conducted an online PRC through the Zoom synchronous communication platform. The students were working on a paper project to complete their postgraduate studies. We adopted the PRC as an online collaborative strategy to mediate the students' peer review activities. We assigned them to work in a group of three and had a little workshop on how they would work through the PRC. More importantly, we explained the moves in each manuscript section to help them figure out the FQs during the PRC (see Arsyad et al., 2021). The students (Noe, Sam, and Yura) conducted a PRC on the abstract written by Yura (Rw). Noe was the MR, and Sam was the SR (all the names are pseudonyms). The following MDD excerpts were from the Zoom PRC recording.

Stage 1: They created a WhatsApp group as an online communication platform during the PRC project. It was a space where they could communicate, do asynchronous discussions, and share documents. They agreed and decided to use the Zoom platform as the virtual room for the PRC. Stage 2: Yura (Rw) shared an abstract and FQs (see Table 3) with Noe (MR) and Sam (SR).

Table 3. Feedback Questions for the abstract review

Feedback Questions (FQs)	Your Feedback (comments, suggestions, critiques, etc.)
What do you think about the title? Is there anything you want to change? Why?	<i>MR and SR perform a monologue and a dialogue about the title.</i>
What about the abstract structure? Does it cover the moves of a good abstract?	<i>MR and SR perform a monologue and a dialogue about the abstract structure</i>

What do you think about grammar, word order, spelling, punctuation, discourse management, etc.?	<i>MR and SR perform a monologue and a dialogue about the grammatical errors (if any).</i>
Is the abstract complete, concrete, cohesive, coherent, and courteous?	<i>MR and SR perform a monologue and a dialogue about the principles of good writing.</i>
What about the keywords? Is there anything you want to suggest?	<i>MR and SR perform a monologue and a dialogue about the keywords</i>

MR and SR started reading the snippets and prepared their comments, suggestions, and critiques for the monologue and dialogue. They read them carefully and answered the FQs critically. Stage 3: they started MDD *Step 1* with the monologue by Noe and Sam. The PRC began with the reviewers' (Noe's and Sam's) monologue. During the monologue, they said:

- 1) *Noe said: Well, thank you, Ibu Yura, for sharing your abstract with us. I would start my talk by giving my comment on the title. I think the title is too long with 19 characters. You can consider rephrasing it by omitting the research location (the phrase "SMA 4 Makassar"). I think it is not necessary there. Besides that, you also need to be aware of using standard terms like Code-Switching and Code-Mixing. There should be a hyphen between the two words. Try to make it more concrete and clear. For example, consider using "the perception of second-grade students and teachers on code-switching and code-mixing" instead of the current one. Furthermore, I have several comments and suggestions about the abstract: 1) it should be reconstructed because the word counts exceed the standard. It counts 338 words, generally between 150-250 words in maximum, 2) some sentences were hard to follow due to discourse management (the logical fallacies and ambiguous sentence fragments), so rephrasing them will be necessary, 3) I also found some grammatical errors such as the use of the article, pluralism, and punctuation. Finally, I also have a suggestion for the keywords: you should link the keywords to the vital information in the report. Three keywords are not enough.*
- 2) *Sam said: Thank you for allowing me to look at your texts. I agree with Noe's views that the research place should not be in the title because there is a specific section for the research setting. It might be necessary to add a short introduction to the topic at the beginning of the abstract. In lines 5 to 9, I think it is unnecessary to explain the data collection procedures, just state what types of data collection you employed during the study. Consider following the suggested moves in (Arsyad et al., 2021). Overall, the information is complete, but you will need to improve its clarity, cohesion, and coherence.*

Noe (MR) expressed her critical views on the text by outlining the areas Yura will need to follow up on to improve her writing readability and quality. She highlighted several issues such as word counts, discourse management, and grammatical errors. She noticed these three issues in the draft and suggested some actions to Yura. On the other hand, Sam (SR) mainly identified some problems in the abstract structure as the critical points. He focused on the sequence in constructing an abstract by highlighting several issues such as clarity, cohesion, and coherence. In other words, he emphasized what should and should not be there. *Step 2* was the dialogue between MR and SR discussing their review results. Yura listened to their discussion and took notes to record some essential points. She also didn't interrupt the meeting until MR and SR finished the conversation. During the talk, they said:

- 3) *Noe said: I think I agree with you, Pak Sam, that she should omit unnecessary information to improve its clarity and coherence. The research place should not be in the title, as I mentioned previously.*
- 4) *Sam said: Yeah, you are right. It is typically an Indonesian writing style. I also agree with the revised title you suggested earlier, but I would prefer "the teachers' and students' perception on code-switching and code-mixing in the EFL classroom interaction."*
- 5) *Noe said: It sounds good and clear to me. I think I agree with that. So, She can describe the research place and context in the methodology section. I also made annotations on the text concerning the grammar errors.*
- 6) *Sam said: Oh yes, me too. I found some grammatical mistakes, and I have suggested corrections. You can have a look at them later. I will send back the text to you after this.*

The excerpts above represent a long conversation between MR and SR. They agreed on some points and suggested the subsequent actions. For example, Yura had to remove the name of the research place from the title because there is a separate section in the article that discusses research settings explicitly. Yura (Rw) listened to their conversation during the discussion without interruption. In *Step 3* (group discussion), Yura had the opportunity to clarify suggestions and comments submitted by reviewers. He could also reject the direction if there were errors in the review results. During the discussion, they said:

- 7) *Yura said: First of all, I would like to thank you both for your valuable comments and suggestions on my writing. I have to admit that I made many mistakes in my writing, so the criticism was valuable feedback that could help me revise and improve the draft. The suggested title is fantastic, and I think I will go with that. Also, the grammar review is excellent, and I just realized that I made many mistakes in using the article.*

Yura admitted that she made many mistakes in her writing, and she was well-informed by the reviewers' comments and suggestions. She also learned how to construct a good title for her paper. Although the texts contained many errors, Yura was very thankful for valuable feedback for her later revision. After going through a dialogue process with herself and considering comments and suggestions from reviewers, he finally agreed to the title proposal submitted by Noe. Thus, we can see how the PRC can facilitate collaborative review and provide significant benefits to improve the quality of writing, although it is still in its early stages. In circle one of R1, Yura played a role as a reviewee and changed the position to be an MR in circle two and SR in circle three. In this R1 alone, they share a lot of knowledge and essential information about writing draft articles. PRC is an academic activity that can help each participant improve their metacognitive abilities. This ability can enhance critical thinking skills and a person's ability to see and examine written and verbal information (Magno, 2010). Therefore, metacognitive instructions are essential to assist novice writers in increasing peer review interaction in L2 writing (Bui & Kong, 2019).

In R2 to R6 of MDD, we saw more complex discussions where the section under study requires a more profound dialogue process and critical thinking. For example, in R2, the reviewers spent more time analyzing the text in which the introduction section consists of 500 to 800 words. To grasp the idea, they need to read the texts several times, so the reviewers must be patient and concentrate on thorough analysis. A typical research manuscript can contain between 6000 to 8000 words, although some non-research articles contain less than 5000 words. With this in mind, carrying out a PRC for a manuscript review requires the reviewers' consistency and discipline to complete all the stages based on the MDD schedule.

Limitations and recommendations

Limitations

Carrying out a PRC for manuscript analysis has several limitations as follows:

1. The metacognitive skills of each reviewer are not the same, so it impacts the quality of comments and suggestions submitted during the review.
2. Not everyone has the same ability, capacity, and integrity in reviewing information, so sometimes, we find reviewers who are not severe in reading and tend to give superficial reviews.
3. The lack of understanding of some reviewers about the concept of scientific works and academic writing often triggers debate in discussions.
4. PRC for manuscript review cannot be done in one session, so it requires a solid commitment to complete the review process starting from R1 to R6, depending on the initial agreement on how many PRC rounds the participants agreed.

Recommendations

We recommend the following considerations in conducting the PRC in the future:

1. Conduct a workshop on developing metacognitive skills.
2. Building the writer's awareness of the importance of peer review in the pre-publication stage.
3. Split the MDD into several sessions as necessary when working on a manuscript review. The more sessions you create, the easier and lighter the work will be. Consequently, it will be time-consuming and take a more extended period to complete one set of PRC.
4. Set a PRC with less than five participants. The more participants you have in a PRC, the longer you need to complete one circle of MDD. We recommend involving three participants only for an effective PRC.

Conclusion

Online PRC through a computer-mediated collaborative review can facilitate novice writers to interact with one another in improving their writing quality, readability, and publishability. The quality of the review results through PRC activities is much influenced by the metacognitive abilities of the participants, where everyone has different critical thinking skills. However, the primary purpose of PRC is to provide a collaborative space for novice writers to conduct scientific studies and increase their awareness of the importance of a review process in writing a scientific article. Thus, novice writers learned to dialogue with their writing with the help of feedback from others to grow their critical thinking process naturally. In the future, the PRC should develop metacognitive instructions to promote meaning-making interactions among the reviewers. Bui & Kong (2019) asserted that metacognitive instructions encouraged the participants to provide more content-related and language-related feedback during the MDD interactions. This feedback can help them reflect on their writing errors and revise their essay much better in the future.

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