Overview:
In the spirit of structuring this project in preparation for a paper worth of a conference or a journal publication, everyone in the class will participate in a peer review. This means that you will evaluate one paper from another team and three or four classmates will review your team’s paper. Reviews should be critical and constructive. Think about how your comments can be used to improve the paper. Complete your peer review and then return it to the TA, who will send it back to the authors. You will improve your paper based on the reviewers’ comments.

What Is Peer Review?
In general terms, “peer review” is the act of having other writers read what you have written and respond in terms of its effectiveness. The readers will identify the document’s strengths and weaknesses, and then suggest strategies for revisions before production occurs. Peer review is often an informal process with all types of writing, at any stage of the development of a publication, and with all levels of writers. A formal process adds credibility and validation of scholarship.

Peer Review Guidelines:
As a peer-review reader, you will have an opportunity to practice your critical reading skills while simultaneously helping the author(s) write a better, more readable document. It is important to note that the writing—not the writer(s)—is being evaluated. Peer review should not focus exclusively on what is wrong or what needs to be improved. Authors benefit from knowing what they have done well. Being positive at the outset assures that a constructive critique is not necessarily all bad, thus providing balanced feedback on the document. Responses need to be backed with specific comments to give the author something to think about and work on. The most helpful comments identify a problem area, explain why it is a problem, and suggest one or more ways to improve it.

Reviewers need to critique the document and respond to the author on three levels:
1. At the global level—evaluate the big picture (main idea, overall structure, validity of content)
2. At the paragraph level—respond to the ways the author moves you through the document (transitions between paragraphs, cohesiveness of ideas, sentence structure, etc.)
3. Finally, at the sentence (line-editing) level—respond to issues of word choice, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and author’s professional writing skills

Although global issues should be the reviewer’s first priority, sentence-level problems can distract reviewers from focusing on the ideas being discussed. Read the paper through once, making notes to yourself and the author as you work through any difficult sentences, grammatical errors, or structural problems (incomplete or wordy sentences, imprecise language, misspellings, use of jargon, etc.).

The second time you read the paper, ignore any sentence-level issues, and pay close attention to what the author is trying to say. You are encouraged to write or make electronic comments on
the paper and note any questions you may have along the way. Remember, your responses as a reader are wanted. After this second reading, complete a short (1-2 page) write-up discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and your suggestions for improvement.

One of your jobs as reviewer is to identify whether the author is writing at a professional level and where the author needs to concentrate any revision work (global, paragraph, or sentence). Fine-tuning sentences should take place only after major structural changes are made.

To make comments on the paper, I recommend one of two methods: 1) print out the paper, make comments by hand, and scan the document into pdf format, or 2) make electronic comments using the comments function in Acrobat. Whichever method you choose, send the marked-up paper and your summative write-up to the TA, which will keep the identity of the reviewer “blind” from the authors.