THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA WRITING CENTER TUTOR'S GUIDE

The most important goal of the Writing Center is to develop strong writers with positive attitudes toward writing. Like the Rhetoric Department, we emphasize **content and meaning over grammar and mechanics.** The Writing Center reaches and teaches over four thousand undergraduate and graduate students each year. Our tutors provide intensive and holistic instruction, building a mentoring relationship with students that is based on reciprocity, mutual respect, and a collaborative spirit.

The Writing Center presently offers **three programs**: the **Enrollment Program**, the **Appointment Program,** and **Online Feedback.** Details about each can be found at our web site: <u>writingcenter.uiowa.edu</u>.

- The **Enrollment Program** is a regular weekly meeting with one of our tutors and requires a semester-long commitment. It has been up and running for over 40 years. Starting about two weeks before the start of the semester, students can register for this program by filling out an online registration form accessed through our website. The Enrollment Program typically fills quickly and we usually have a long waiting list by the first day of classes. All enrollment tutoring takes place in 110 EPB, Mondays to Thursdays between 9:30 and 3:30.

- Our **Appointment Program**, which started in 2000, offers help with writing on an "as needed" basis. Students can make, cancel and modify appointments using our online schedule. Appointments are held in the Writing Center and at our satellite centers (Blank Honors Center, Wild Bill's in North Hall, the CDE Multipurpose Room 2980 UCC, the Library Learning Commons and the Jacobson Athletic Center). Appointments are available throughout the day and from 6-8 pm from Monday to Thursday, and on Friday from 12-2. Being Fall 2017, we also began offering **Spanish writing appointments** in 121 Phillips Hall.

- **Online Feedback** provides written comments and suggestions on work submitted to our online tutoring system. Students upload drafts and details of the assignment along with specific questions they would like addressed. Submissions are limited to one per week during busy times and no more than 15 pages per draft. We try to respond within 48 hours.

Because we see such a large number of students, we ask students who already have a spot in the Enrollment Program not to make additional appointments or use our online system. We also discourage students from making appointments and submitting to the online system in the same week. Students should be encouraged to choose whichever of the three programs best fits their particular needs.

Meeting the Needs of Writing Center Students

The first few minutes of an appointment, or the first session or two with a student in the Enrollment Program, is usually devoted to getting to know the student and finding out more about his or her needs as a writer and a student. Tutors and students talk about the particular issues or problems with writing the student would like to address in the appointment or in their meetings over the course of the semester.

Most students who make their own appointments arrive at the Writing Center with clearly defined needs and concerns and a particular writing assignment. However, students in the Enrollment Program do not always have assignments, particularly at the beginning of the semester. In this case, we have a series of invitations that can be used as prompts to get the student writing and give the tutor a feel for the student's writing style. Invitations give students an opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills and discuss their writing history while allowing the tutor assess the student's needs as a writer.

Note about second language writers: Students are supposed to be "Rhetoric-Ready" and have completed their ESL writing and reading requirements before using the Writing Center. If you are having a lot of difficulty communicating with a student because of his/her lack of English fluency, please tell Carol. It's possible the student is not eligible to use Writing Center services or, if taking Rhetoric, was enrolled by mistake.

The Writing Center principles for working with each student are **individualization of work** according to the student's particular situation and **negotiation with the student** so that students feel engaged, in control of the writing process and inspired. The overarching goal of the Writing Center is to help each student become a better writer, reader and critical thinker.

ENROLLMENT PROGRAM

All Enrollment students receive a copy of the following attendance policy in the email scheduling their appointments, and occasional reminders if they cancel appointments. Tutors should be familiar with these policies and review them at the first meeting.

> Enrolling means that you have reserved a time to meet each week with the same instructor. You are expected attend every session whether or not you are working on a piece of writing. When you don't have writing to bring, we'll still be able to help you with ideas for assignments, research strategies, and general writing skills. Please plan to attend all your weekly sessions! This is our most popular program and we have a long waiting list. If you find that you cannot commit to a meeting every week, or become too busy to keep this obligation, please cancel your enrollment to make your spot available for another student.

> We have the following policies:
> - If you need to miss a session, you MUST e-mail the writing center at writing-center@uiowa.edu to let us know.
> - If you cancel more than three sessions during the semester, we will offer your time to another student.
> - If you are learning English as a second language you must have completed all required ESL courses to be eligible for Writing Center services and this program.
> - If you are offered a regular weekly meeting you should NOT also make appointments using our online schedule. Please leave these free for students who do not have a spot in our regular weekly program.

Your First Meeting

Introduce yourself and have a brief getting-to-know-you conversation. Explain a bit about the typical Writing Center semester. If the student's schedule of paper deadlines allows, she might respond to invitations for the first few sessions in order for you to get to know her and her writing. Then you can negotiate an individualized, mutually agreed-upon program that may involve working on assignments from Rhetoric or other courses or writing about readings that you and the student choose. You can also chat about the student's goals, but often much of what a student wants and perceives is revealed in writing; after your introductory conversation, if the student does not have pressing assignments, ask her respond to an appropriate first "invitation to write."

Invitations

The initial series of invitations are writing assignments carefully constructed by Lou Kelly, UI Writing Center director for 25 years. However, many other invitations, including some that focus on public issues and

others that elicit analysis, argumentation, or creative writing, have been written by Writing Center tutors. New invitations are frequently added by tutors. Tell the director if you have ideas for new invitations. The most commonly used invitations are located on the front counter and on the writing center web site under Resources. More are located in the filing cabinet behind the front desk. We also have invitations to analyze images and paintings. If the student has assignments that are due right away or strongly expresses a desire to skip invitations to discuss course work, it is OK to do so. **However, this should not mean that students can skip their Writing Center hours when no paper is due. Students who cancel appointments, because they have no assignments to work on, should be encouraged to make appointments as needed or use online tutoring instead of the Enrollment Program.**

Your choice of invitations depends on whether a student has attended the Writing Center before and under what conditions. If a student has not attended the Writing Center before, offer the **"Invitation to Talk on Paper," "Self-as-Writer,"** or **"Welcome to the Writing Center."** Second language writers can respond to **Self-as-Writer II,** which encourages them to explore their first language writing as well and how it is both similar to and different from writing in English. If a student is returning to the Writing Center, offer **"Invitation to Returning Students,"** located on the front counter.

Depending on the student's needs, interests, and academic situation, the rest of the semester is devoted to:

- emphasizing the initial phases of academic writing for course papers, and working on brainstorming, constructing thesis statements, organization, development, and coherence;
- helping the student understand the importance of revision, and teaching revising, editing, and proofreading skills;
- presenting techniques for writing summaries, analyses, and critiques of texts;
- assisting with personal writing projects and encouraging creativity;
- engaging in any spin-off activities upon which the student and tutor agree.

Individualizing Reading/Writing Instruction

Reading

In your leisure and academic reading, be on the lookout for essays/articles/stories that may interest particular WC students with whom you are working. This work can become part of the program you design with the student. Anthologies, readers, and recent magazines are located on or near the RESOURCE shelves. The *Daily Iowan, The NYT,* and other newspapers are free and available with the swipe of a student ID in the machines located at the main entrance to EPB.

Writing

In reading your students' informal writing and responses to invitations, be alert to issues or experiences that need clarification, expansion, and elaboration, or that simply arouse your curiosity. Perhaps you yourself want to know more about topics that students raise and what students think about them. A paragraph, sentence, or even just a phrase can inspire a "tell-me-more question" that serves as the next "invitation" and results in a future essay in which students make important discoveries. When assisting with course work, **make sure you have a copy of the assignment** (the course policy statement/syllabus is helpful for establishing a context) and have the student read and interpret it and then brainstorm approaches and options. Have the student "teach" you something about the concepts taught in the course. Before plunging in and reading and critiquing the student's draft, **slow down** and ask students about their writing processes and what they perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of their drafts—what they still need to change or attend to. It's helpful to **have students read their writing aloud** so they themselves can notice and locate problems in logic, phrasing, grammar, etc. In an unfamiliar discipline, ask the student to provide models of

good writing from journals in that field that you can examine together. Be careful about doing too much of the talking, thinking, and writing for students. The more engaged and active they are in the tutoring and writing processes, the more they verbalize their ideas and plans, the more they will learn.

<u>Editing and Proofreading</u>

For the first few sessions or so, depending on the student's degree of fluency and development of ideas, your comments and questions might mainly address content and meaning—requesting expansion, clarification, reorganization or other kinds of "global" revisions. Once you have seen more of the student's work, you can more systematically address "local" problems and patterns of error. You might begin with one or two error types at a time (you can choose the one that most interferes with communication, or the one that is most common or easiest to address) and have the student proofread her work for that error. The student should do as much of the error-identification and correction as possible. She won't learn much by having you edit her entire paper for her. One strategy is to make a copy of the student's writing and make corrections on one copy while the student corrects the other, and then compare results. Making check marks in the margin beside a line that contains a problem is also helpful. The goal is to work towards constructing a guide of patterns of errors that the student needs to work on.

For resources that help with issues of style, grammar, and documentation, consult the Purdue Owl: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/.

Note: The fact that a student is eager to look for mistakes does not necessarily mean you should leap into proofreading. It may, in fact, mean you should not—until the student has worked on clarifying and developing ideas and/or constructing stronger arguments.

Writing for Academic Success

Rhetoric 1010: Writing for Academic Success is a non-credit tutorial usually taken by Rhetoric and, occasionally, Interpretation of Literature students who have been referred by their academic advisors. During summer orientation and fall advising meetings, advisors assess students for writing apprehension or lack of high school writing experience and tell them about the tutorial and how to register. Registering for Writing for Academic Success simply guarantees the student a spot in the Writing Center's Enrollment Program; we reserve 48 slots for Writing for Academic Success students in the fall and 24 in the spring. The tutorial appears as a "course" on the student's class schedule, but tutors work with these students in the same way as any other enrollment student, helping them interpret assignments, brainstorm, research, plan, organize, draft, revise, and edit their papers. The course is "graded" as attended (R) for students who attend most of the twice-a week sessions, or not attended (W) for students who drop out, but fail to formally withdraw from the tutorial.

If you are working with Writing for Academic Success students you'll have two students each hour. On the first day, both students will arrive at the start of the hour. Sometimes students are a little confused about the program, or think it is a regular course, or even think their academic advisors told them they "have to" be in the program. You can explain the program and its benefits, as well as the attendance policies (the same as for enrollment students), and direct any student who decides to "drop" the course to the coordinator who will cancel their appointments. Then you can discuss with your students whether they would like work together for the whole 50 minute period twice a week, or to meet with you separately for 25 minutes each. Let the coordinator know what you decide.

APPOINTMENT STUDENTS

Tutors use a lot of the same tutoring strategies with appointment and enrollment students, but the pace is often a lot faster than in enrollment tutoring. Prioritizing is key. You won't be able to read through a long paper in only 30 minutes. Ask students what concerns them most about their paper. With what parts or aspects of the paper do they need the most help? What do they want you to look or listen for as you or they read the paper?

THE ONLINE SCHEDULES

We use WCONLINE, an online scheduling software program to manage appointments. Tutors need to log in to the system to view appointments and write reports. If you haven't done this before, go to our website here, click on "Make an Appointment" and then click "Register for an Account." Once you've registered, **activate** your account through the link sent to your email. Then you can log in and see the schedule.

We have three online schedules, one for the **Enrollment Program**, one for the **Appointments Program** (writing in English), and a third for **Spanish writing** appointments. The Appointments Program schedule is the default schedule. To find the Enrollment or Spanish Writing schedule, choose it at login, or from the drop-down menu at the top of the appointment schedule. The Enrollment Schedule is only visible to tutors, not students, as we don't want them modifying these meetings.

To view the appointment details, click on it. You then see the assignment details and the student's concerns, and by clicking on the students' name, you can get to a few demographic details too (major, year of study, language…) (see Figures 1 and 2 below) After each appointment, you should write a short report about the session. Click on the "Add New" link in the bottom left of the window to open the report form. In a paragraph or less, describe what you worked on with the student and anything noteworthy about the session (e.g. "We worked on a Rhetoric assignment to map the controversy over the electoral system. The student was distracted by the logistics of the Electoral College, especially since each state has different rules. I encouraged the student to focus on one aspect of the controversy.")

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Cancelled or missed appointments

Students who use the Appointments Program can cancel their own appointments, but the system will not allow them to do this if it is less than an hour before the starting time. Enrollment students cannot modify their appointments and must contact us by phone or email to cancel or change their time. (See Figure 4).

To record a missed (no-show) appointment, check the box in the "Admin Options" section called "Missed" (See Figure 5), and then "SAVE CHANGES" at the bottom. This action will send an email to the student reminding him/her that an appointment was missed. **Do not click "Missed" for an enrollment student who has arranged an absence in advance – we'll cancel the appointment for** Keep track of your enrollment students' missed and cancelled appointments. If they miss more than three in total, or two in a row without notice, advise them to switch to the Appointment or Online Feedback programs, and tell the Director/Coordinator, who can help you decide whether the student should be removed from Enrollment. **Do not remove students from the Enrollment Program without discussing it with a Director or Coordinator first.**

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Online Tutoring

You should do online tutoring whenever you have a cancellation or a no-show. Your Writing Center hours should be spent, as much as possible, doing Writing Center work, regardless of whether you have a student, and there's usually online tutoring to do.

Tutors with 6.6 hours per semester have **an additional weekly requirement of 0.6 hours** per week of online tutoring. This works out as about one short 2-3 page paper a week or one longer 5-6 page paper every two weeks. Tutors with 13.2 hours should spend 1.2 hours a week doing online tutoring. Do your online tutoring consistently throughout the semester to avoid accumulating hours of work that we will happily ask you to do in the last few weeks of the semester when we (and you) are the busiest. If you really dislike online tutoring and would rather do more face-to-face work, let us know.

When you respond to an online paper, keep in mind that your interaction with the student is meant to be roughly equivalent to an enrollment session. You are not obliged to find and correct each and every error— this kind of feedback will probably not teach the student anything. You should expect to spend about 50 minutes reading, analyzing, and responding to a 4-5 page paper. To avoid getting bogged down in details or confused by something that become clear later, read the whole paper through a couple of times before you begin commenting. Then focus first on issues of content, assignment fulfillment, organization, purpose, and other "big picture" issues rather than primarily on issues of grammar and mechanics. If an essay has a significant number of technical mistakes, don't correct each one. A more productive approach is to identify a few representative examples of the kinds of mistakes the writer makes (e.g., sentence fragments, tense problems), suggest corrections, and then make a general statement prompting the student to search out similar errors in the essay. You can use highlighting or change the font colors to draw the student's attention to repeated errors.

You can tailor the format of your response to best meet the needs of the student. Pay attention to the students' feedback requests on the submission form. One approach that works well is to identify three issues to address, or areas to improve, in a commenting letter you insert at the beginning of the paper (e.g.,

argument / thesis statement, using quotes or incorporating evidence, the elements of a strong conclusion). Then make more specific comments in the margins of the essay itself which point out smaller errors or problems which don't require a detailed explanation, or to ask for clarification or elaboration. **Do not use track changes as it's too easy for a student to simply accept all changes without learning from the revision process. Instead, use Word's commenting feature.** Your goal is to teach your students the strategies that strong writers use, and how to recognize and correct errors, not correct mistakes for them.

No matter how you format your response, it's helpful to always do the following:

- Introduce yourself at the beginning of your commenting letter to establish rapport.

- Begin your comments with positive feedback on the essay's strengths. Be honest.

- Close your response with an invitation to the student to submit a revised draft if they'd like additional feedback (or, in some cases, assure the student that the draft is really very well-polished and encourage them to get final proofreading help from a friend).

TUTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Hours and Absences

As part of your financial aid package, you will be teaching in the Writing Center 1/6 time for 6.6 hours, 1/4 time for 10 hours, or 1/2 time for 13.2 hours. **You are expected to be present in the Center for your scheduled hours, even if your student has cancelled,** to be available for walk-ins or help cover for tutors who are absent due to illness. **Whenever possible, you should be working on Writing Center tasks.** There's almost always online tutoring and there are often other ways you can help out. Check with the directors or coordinators if you have free time.

If you are suddenly ill, call us at 335-0188, or email Carol and Deirdre. If you know you have a conflict on a particular day, let us know and look for a substitute tutor. You are responsible for finding your own substitutes, **but cc the Writing Center on all requests for subs and responses to those requests.** Please also check the schedule to make sure any switches or substitutes are correct.

Meetings

You are expected to attend a meeting on the first day of the semester to discuss policies and procedures. You are also encouraged to participate in the Fall Midnight Madness event (the Tuesday before Thanksgiving break), the Spring Undergraduate Write-In (the penultimate week of classes), and end-of-the-semester readings from *Voices*, the anthology of student and tutor writing.

Mentoring New Tutors

We may ask you to allow a new tutor or Writing Fellow to observe your tutoring sessions (with your students' permission). You may, if you feel comfortable, invite the new tutor or Fellow to participate in the session and, if there's time, to talk about their observations and the tutoring process afterwards. We learn best from each other – your guidance and mentoring are very much appreciated.

Ambiance and Comportment

If your students are busy writing and you find yourself with free time, you can read past issues of our in-house anthology *Voices* online and/or familiarize yourself with the invitations and other readings. You can also consult materials about composition and writing center issues on the Writing Center resource shelves. You might eavesdrop inconspicuously on other teachers' writing conferences. It is also helpful to sit in on tutoring sessions (with the permission of both tutor and student). Talking quietly with other WC teachers about tutoring writing is usually appropriate (of course, use discretion so as not to violate a student's

privacy), but be considerate of other people who are working in the room.

Cell phone use: Please keep your phone in your bag during tutoring sessions, and use the hallway if you have to take or make a long call.

Your Relationship with Your Students and Their Teachers

Your role as a Writing Center tutor is to support both the center students <u>and</u> their teachers of Rhetoric or other courses. If you perceive a conflict developing between a student and her teacher (for example, if the student is dissatisfied with a teacher's comments or grades), <u>please avoid taking sides or exacerbating the student's negative feelings</u>. Instead, do what you can to help the student maintain a positive attitude toward the course and the teacher. It is your job to help students understand that what their teachers want is probably both reasonable and attainable, and then to utilize creatively the Writing Center's pedagogy to help students achieve the goals of the course.

Admittedly, this responsibility is both a rhetorical and academic challenge, but it is one that must be met in order to avoid counterproductive interpersonal or inter/intradepartmental dynamics. In particularly difficult situations, consult the Writing Center directors. Many Writing Center tutors find it helpful to meet with the classroom teacher to discuss ways of working with the student. Including the student in such meetings is also an option if the student has indicated that she is comfortable with the teacher knowing about her Writing Center use.

Refreshments

Food and beverages are permitted in limited quantities in the Writing Center, but please dispose of your garbage and recycling. Also, if you get something on your table, wipe it up.

Housekeeping and Paperwork

1. **CHECK IN WITH THE DESK COORDINATOR** at the beginning of your shift to see if any of your enrollment students have canceled. If you are tutoring appointments, **check WCOnline to learn who your students are and what they are working on**.

2. **INVITATIONS:** If you see that we are running low on a particular invitation, copy 10 more from a clean copy. Never use the last one. If you can't find a clean copy, let the Writing Center directors know or download one from the web site.

3. **ATTENDANCE:** Students are expected to adhere to our attendance and cancellation policies. Make sure enrolled students receive a copy from the front desk. You are responsible for helping to hold them to the policies, for example by emailing them about their intentions if they have failed to show up for an appointment. Tell one of the directors or coordinators if one of your students has dropped out or has not attended three sessions. That way we can assign you another student from our long waiting list.

4. **EXTRA CREDIT POLICY:** Because our services are in such high demand, it is our policy to not sign extra credit slips for Writing Center attendance. If a student asks you to sign anything "proving" that he or she visited the Center, please decline politely and give the student a copy of the policy, which we keep on front counter (N.B.: this policy effectively functions as proof, which most students get). If possible, get the instructor's name so a Director or Coordinator can contact the instructor to further explain the policy.

5. **STUDENT EVALUATIONS:** All Writing Center enrollment students should complete an evaluation at the end of the semester. They should turn the evaluations in at the front desk. Feel free to copy your evaluations for your own personal files. These are very helpful when the Writing Center director writes letters of recommendation.

RESOURCES

Voices from the Writing Center

Toward the end of the semester, we will put out calls for submissions to our anthology, *Voices From the Writing Center*. Consider this an opportunity for students to polish their work for a more public audience. Look for particularly insightful and/or well-written invitation responses, essays, papers, stories, or poems. Students are invited to read their work at the *Voices* reading at the end of the semester. Past issues of *Voices* are online.

Research Projects on Writing and Conferencing

If, in order to answer your own questions about writing or writing pedagogy, you are considering audio or videotaping a conference (yours or another tutor's), or having students fill out questionnaires or surveys, please consult with the Writing Center director, who will discuss your project with you and, if necessary, help you write up the design and purpose of your project for approval.

Computers

For Writing Center students and teachers, we have 2Macs and 7 PCs which share a printer. If the computers are occupied, students can also work in the Instructional Technology Center (ITC) computer cluster directly above the Writing Center in 210 EPB. Tell the coordinator about serious computer or printer problems; s/he will contact **Dianne Jones (335-1693),** our technical support person.

Photocopier

The photocopier is for copying invitations, student writing, and materials for the seminar/practicum. Please refrain from personal use.

Texts and Tutors

Books, journals, dictionaries, rhetoric readers, research and usage manuals, and many other materials that help in the teaching of writing are available for your perusal on the bookshelves on the east (back) wall and behind the front desks. Please don't remove these materials from the Writing Center without permission from the center's director or without filling out a borrower's card at the front desk.

Experienced Writing Center tutors themselves are among the best resources. If you are confused or have a question about center procedures or about working with particular students, don't hesitate to ask the directors, coordinators, or experienced tutors. (Also, don't neglect the expertise of our undergraduate Writing Center tutors—they also have a great deal of experience!) Remember that **the directors and coordinators see it as part of their job** to help you troubleshoot issues in your teaching and strategize with you on improving your skills as a tutor, so don't hesitate to ask for advice or feedback.