

Suggestions for Writing Center Tutors (page 1 of 6)

By Dr. Karen Petit

General Guidelines

1. If you need to miss a tutoring appointment with a student, please call both the student (if possible) and the Writing Center.
2. Please encourage the students whom you are tutoring to bring printed copies of their papers to tutoring sessions.
3. Try to focus on a single task for each tutoring session. If a paper needs a lot of work, the student should plan on at least two tutoring sessions.
4. Your responsibility is to help students, not to write papers for students.
5. The student being tutored should be in control of the paper. He or she (not you) should hold a pen or a pencil and write down corrections. Your comments should be phrased as suggestions that the student can incorporate (or not) into the finished paper.
6. When illustrating a principle on a computer, let the student sit in front of the computer and use the keyboard while you direct the student.
7. If a student comments in a negative way about a course or a professor, do not agree with the student. You need to project yourself as a professional representative of the Community College of Rhode Island.
8. Information about the person whom you are tutoring needs to be kept confidential.

The Beginning of a Tutoring Session

1. Have each student sign in on the “sign-in” form.
2. If a student is receiving tutoring help, fill out one of the “Consultation Forms.” The intent of having paperwork about the people who come into the Writing Center is so that we can track progress, as well as to keep track of the numbers of students who come in for help. We also need to know the types of help that large numbers of students are receiving so that we can plan workshops and other appropriate activities.
3. At the beginning of each tutoring session, establish a rapport with the student.
 - a. Say “hi” and introduce yourself.
 - b. You may want to state or otherwise show that you also are a student.
 - c. You may want to comment on how you have other people review your writing, such as during peer reviews in one of your classes.
4. Each student’s needs should be assessed near the beginning of a session.
 - a. Ask if the student has come to the Writing Center previously. If the answer is “yes,” there probably will be a file with some information about the student’s past tutoring sessions.
 - b. Check to see if the student has a referral form, which may have some specific areas checked off.
 - c. Find out what the student wants to focus on today. The student may have specific questions or problem areas that he/she wants to discuss.

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- d. Ask when a paper is due. If a student only has ten minutes of available time, you may want to focus on a specific problem area (such as punctuation or how to spot and revise run-ons), rather than on trying to revise a whole essay.
- e. Find out what the assigned topic is. The student may have a copy of the assignment and/or a syllabus for the course.
- f. The student may have more than one draft and/or some prewriting that could help with revision ideas.
- g. Ask about any comments or suggestions that the student's professor might have made. These comments may have been conveyed at a conference, on a draft of a current paper, on previous drafts of a paper, on other papers, or on a referral form.
- h. If the student's paper needs a lot of work, explain that two or more tutoring sessions are needed. If the student cannot come back for a second session, you should focus the available time on the most important area(s) of revision.

The Body of a Tutoring Session

1. If the student needs help coming up with ideas, a variety of prewriting techniques can be illustrated; however, you may want to start with brainstorming, asking questions, and outlining.
2. When you ask questions, the student needs to write down his/her answers.
3. The student also should be encouraged to ask questions. For example, you can ask, "Do you have any questions?" as a method of finishing one section of a tutoring session.
4. Remember that you are helping the student, not writing the paper for the student.
5. Try to focus on what can be accomplished in the available time slot. If necessary, remind the student that he/she can come back and get more help with the same or with different papers during an additional session.
6. Be patient when waiting for a student to answer questions, to invent ideas, or to choose from different options. After you have waited for the student to answer, wait some more. While waiting, you might want to observe the student. If he or she is thinking, you do not want to interrupt this process by rushing in too quickly with an answer or with another question.
7. Do not suggest a grade for the student's paper.
8. The student should stay in control of the paper.
 - a. The paper should be situated in front of the student.
 - b. During brainstorming, revising, and other activities, the student should hold the pen or pencil, write down ideas, and make corrections. (You may want to tell students that they should be able to read their own handwriting better than they could read yours.)
 - c. Have the student read the paper aloud. There are several reasons for this activity. One obvious reason is that you need to read the paper yourself (or listen to the paper being read) so that you can assess the paper's strengths and weaknesses. Also, if the student reads the paper and you listen, the student will be keeping more control over the paper. Finally, many students can find some of their own errors when they read a paper aloud.

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Whenever the student pauses or has problems reading something, you can encourage the student to fix the error or to put a question mark in that spot of the paper. After the paper has been read, you will have some specific areas to focus on.

- d. If the student does not want to read the paper, you can read it aloud. Try to have the student listen to the essay and put question marks in places that sound funny, that the student no longer likes, or that otherwise need revision.
9. How to help a student to revise a paper:
- a. After the paper has been read, begin with at least one positive comment.
 - b. If the student is finding some of his/her own errors while reading the paper, you may want to comment on this accomplishment.
 - c. Ask questions about specific sections of the paper.
 - d. Suggest two or more ways of revising something in the paper. The student then can choose the best option.
 - e. Model corrections by making one correction and then finding a similar error that the student will try to correct.
 - f. If at all possible, global (larger area) concerns should be focused on first. Here are some questions that can be used during a session to help a student focus on global concerns:
 1. Does the paper fulfill the requirements of the assignment?
 2. Is the paper long enough?
 3. Is the paper written on one of the assigned topics?
 4. Does the paper include all of the required parts?
 5. Is the correct format being used? (Here are some formatting components that might be required: double spacing, black ink, a regular--not italic or Gothic--font, a title, course, writer's name, professor's name, date, intended audience, business letter format for letters, headings for reports, in-text citations, and a Works Cited or Reference page.)
 6. If the paper is a research paper, does it have the required number and kinds of sources? Does it use the required documentation system (MLA, APA, Chicago, Turabian, CSE . . .)?
 7. Is there a clear structure? Can the arrangement of ideas be improved?
 8. Is the organization logical?
 9. Are the thesis and topic sentences directly and clearly stated? If not, are the key ideas indirectly stated and obvious to the reader?
 10. Do the topic sentences directly connect to the thesis?
 11. Do the details directly connect to and support the topic sentences?
 12. Are the ideas within the sentences smoothly connected together?
 13. Are the ideas well developed? (For example, body paragraphs in essays should have at least 5 sentences.)
 14. Are there any errors in logic?

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- g. Once the larger areas of the paper are set, then the local (smaller) areas of the paper can be revised. Here are some typical problem areas that can be watched for and revised:
1. a lack of variety in sentence structures
 2. mixed/confusing sentence structures
 3. fragments
 4. run-ons
 5. punctuation errors
 6. verb tense errors and/or a lack of consistency in verb tenses (Note: wherever possible, the present tense should be used.)
 7. subject/verb agreement errors
 8. pronoun errors or a lack of clarity in the use of pronouns
 9. point of view errors
 10. parallel structure errors
 11. incorrect use of articles
 12. omission of words needed for clarity
 13. incorrect or unclear word choices
 14. spelling errors
 15. capitalization
 16. plurals and apostrophes
 17. repetitious wording or phrasing
 18. anything that does not make sense or that can be read in more than one way

The Conclusion of a Tutoring Session

1. Ask if the student wants to make an appointment for another session.
2. The student can sign up for another appointment in the appointment book.
3. You or the student can fill out a "Consultation Form" so that The Writing Center will have a record of what was accomplished during the tutoring session. If possible, please have the student sign the form.
4. Ask if the student needs to give his/her professor a "Progress Report" form.
5. A departure time should be filled in on the "Sign-in Form."
6. Ask if there are any questions.

Examples of Questions

Questions can help a tutor to establish rapport with a student, to determine how much time is available for a tutoring session, to assess what aspects of revision are the most important ones, and to show a student that a tutoring session is collaborative in nature--the student should maintain control of the paper and contribute to its revision. Here are some examples of questions:

1. How many courses are you taking?
2. How are your classes going?

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3. What would you like to work on today?
4. What is the assignment (a paragraph, an essay, a summary, a research paper, etc.)?
5. Do you have any handouts or class notes that describe the assignment?
6. How long should your paper be?
7. When is your paper due?
8. Do you have a draft of your paper?
9. Did your professor suggest any areas that we should work on first?
10. Could you read your essay out loud?
11. How can this idea be connected better to a thesis (or to the previous sentence, etc.)
12. Has your professor gone over thesis statements?
13. What do you really want to say here?
14. Can you add an example from your own experience?
15. What other details can you supply?
16. Here is a run-on. How does your textbook define run-ons? (If the student's textbook is not available, there are other grammar texts in the Writing Center.)
17. Does your textbook show how to revise run-ons?
18. How can we look up run-ons in this grammar textbook?
19. Here are two ways to revise the run-on in your paper. Which one do you like the best?
20. Here is another run-on. How would you fix it?
21. I don't understand this phrase, example, metaphor, sentence, etc. Can you explain what you're trying to say here?
22. Do you need to include information or quotations from an article, a book, the Internet, or another source?
23. Did you get this information from a book, from the Internet, or from another source?
24. Are these your own words, or did you use some of the words from your book, Internet . . . ?
25. Do you have the source (book, article, etc.) with you?
26. Is there a Works Cited (or Reference page) entry to match this in-text citation?
27. Does your professor want you to use the MLA, APA, or another system?
28. When can you bring back a revised version of your essay with the new ideas added in?
29. What would you like to focus on during our next appointment?
30. Do you have any questions?

Examples of Activities:

Here are some examples of activities that can be done during tutoring sessions:

1. Ask questions.
2. Answer questions.
3. Help a student to find an answer to a question in a textbook or on a website.
4. Check the wording of an assignment.

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5. Outline the main ideas of a paper by using a handout, by writing in the margins of the paper, or by writing a formal outline on a piece of paper.
6. Look up information in textbooks or online. There are a variety of textbooks in the Writing Center. Many of these textbooks are intended to be kept in the Writing Center and used as reference texts by patrons of the Writing Center. Please check with the coordinator or director of the Writing Center before loaning out any textbooks to students. The CCRI library also has some textbooks, some of which can be checked out of the library.
7. Help to apply rules (from a textbook, a website, or a handout) to a specific paper or situation.
8. Have the student write down ideas, revisions, questions, and other types of comments.
9. Show the student how to check and correct grammar and spelling errors in Microsoft Word.
10. Show a website with helpful information and/or online quizzes about one of the student's problems.
11. If a student arrives early or brings a friend, the student and/or friend can use one of the Writing Center's computers to check e-mail, to do online quizzes, and/or to conduct research.
12. Tell students about upcoming Writing Center workshops.
13. Copies of the Writing Center handouts can be given to people who visit the Writing Center.

Helpful Resources:

Calvin College. [KnightCite](http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite). <<http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite>>.

Capital Community College. [Index to Guide to Grammar and Writing and Principles of Composition](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index2.htm) <<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index2.htm>>.

The Community College of Rhode Island's Web site: <http://www.ccri.edu/writingcenter/>
Gillespie, Paula and Neal Lerner. [The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring](#). 2nd ed. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004.

Hacker, Diana. [Research and Documentation Online](#).

<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/resdoc/humanities/english.htm>>.

The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA). <<http://writingcenters.org>>.

Pennsylvania State University. [The Penn State Undergraduate Writing Center Handbook for Peer Tutors in Writing](http://www.psu.edu/dept/cew/writingcenter/handbook.htm). <<http://www.psu.edu/dept/cew/writingcenter/handbook.htm>>.

Purdue University. [The Writing Lab Newsletter](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/wln). <<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/wln>>.

Ryan, Leigh and Lisa Zimmerelli. [The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors](#). 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Shaughnessy, Mina. [Errors and Expectations](#). New York: Oxford UP, 1979.

University of Richmond's Writing Center. "Training for Tough Tutorials."

<<http://writing2.richmond.edu/training/tough/index.html>>.