

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 writing center visitor, please call not only the writing center but also the student whom you're tutoring (if possible).
2. Your responsibility is to help students, not to write papers for students.
3. Try to focus on a single task for each tutoring session. If a paper needs a lot of work, a writing center visitor can come into the writing center for two or more tutoring sessions.
4. The student being tutored should be in control of the paper. He or she can hold onto a pen or a pencil and write down corrections. While using pencils can be easier because revisions can then be revised multiple times, some students actually prefer to use red pens and highlighters.
5. Your comments should be phrased as suggestions that a student can choose to incorporate (or not to incorporate) into his/her finished paper.
6. When illustrating a principle on a computer, you can let the student sit in front of the computer and use the keyboard while you explain what should be done.
7. If a student comments in a negative way about a course or a professor, do not agree with the student. You need to present yourself as a professional employee 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. Each student should be signed in via Starfish or on a "sign-in" form.
2. If a student is often receiving tutoring help, one of the "Consultation Forms" can be filled out. The intent of having paperwork about writing center visitors is so that we can track progress. We also need to know the kinds of help that large numbers of students are receiving, so we can plan workshops and other 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 that you also are a student.
4. Each student's needs should be assessed near the beginning of a session.
 - a. Find out what the student wants to focus on for the tutoring session. The student may have specific questions, problems, or needs. He/she may also have been referred to the writing center by a faculty member.
 - b. Ask when a paper or a project is due. If a student only has ten minutes of available time, you may want to focus on a specific problem area (such as how to spot and revise run-ons), rather than on trying to revise everything in the entire essay.
 - c. Find out what the assigned topic is. The student may have a copy of the assignment and/or a syllabus for the course.
 - d. Ask about any comments or suggestions that the student's professor or classmates might have made. These comments may have been conveyed at a conference, during peer reviews, on a draft of a paper, on previous drafts of papers, or on a referral form.

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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. Writing center visitors often have more than one draft and/or some prewriting that can help with the revision process.
3. Asking reporter's questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how) can be helpful. For example, ask "who" or "what" plus the topic and have the student finish the question(s), as well as answering the question(s).
4. When you ask questions, the student needs to write down his/her answers.
5. Remember that you are helping the student, not writing the paper for the student.
6. Try to focus on what can be accomplished in the available time slot.
7. Working with a student's paper on a laptop is often very time-consuming. Paper versions of a student's essay can more easily be read, analyzed, commented on, and revised.
8. 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.
9. The student should be encouraged to ask questions.
10. The student should stay in control of the paper.
 - a. The paper should be situated in front of the writing center visitor, or two separate copies of the same paper can be looked at by the tutor and the student.
 - b. During brainstorming, revising, and other activities, the student should hold a 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 can 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 out loud.
11. Do not suggest a grade for a paper or say something like "It's great." To give a writing center visitor some positive commentary, you can say something specific about the paper, such as "I like how this example supports the topic sentence in your second paragraph."
12. Whenever a 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.
13. If a student does not want to read his/her paper, you can read it out loud. The student can then listen to the essay and put question marks in places that sound funny or need revision.
14. If a paper needs a lot of work, you can explain that two or more tutoring sessions are really 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.

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15. How to help a student to revise a paper:

- a. After the paper has been read, begin with at least one positive comment, such as:
 1. "I like the title, introduction, conclusion, and/or another section of your paper."
 2. "The use of a government source for your research paper is logical for the topic."
 3. "It's nice that your paper has a separate paragraph to answer each of the professor's questions."
 4. "I like how you noticed some of the errors in your paper."
- b. Ask questions about specific sections of the paper.
- c. Suggest two or more ways of revising something in the paper. The student then can help with the revision process by choosing one of the options.
- d. Model corrections by making one correction and then finding a similar error that the student can try to correct.
- e. 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. Did the professor want you to do research?
 4. 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, the course, writer's name, professor's name, date, intended audience, a separate title page, a running head, business letter format for letters, headings and/or subheadings, in-text citations, and a Works Cited, Reference, or Bibliography page.
 5. 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 . . .)?
 6. Is there a clear and logical organizational structure?
 7. Are the thesis and topic sentences directly and clearly stated? If not, are the key ideas indirectly stated and obvious to the reader?
 8. Do the topic sentences directly connect to the thesis?
 9. Do the details directly connect to and support the topic sentences?
 10. Are the ideas smoothly connected together with enough connections and transitions?
 11. Are the ideas well developed? (For example, body paragraphs in essays should have at least five sentences; well-developed paragraphs usually have over ten sentences.)
 12. Are there any errors in logic or content? (For example, does the paper say that the state of Providence is in a city in Rhode Island?)

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- f. Once the global areas of the paper are set, then the local (smaller) sections of the paper can be enhanced. Here are some typical problem areas that can be 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 and/or prepositions
 12. omission of words needed for clarity
 13. incorrect or unclear word choices
 14. spelling errors
 15. capitalization
 16. plurals and apostrophes
 17. too much repetition in the wording and/or content
 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 there are any questions.
2. Check to see if an appointment for more help is needed.
3. Ask if the student needs to give his/her professor a "Progress Report" form.
4. The student should be logged out of TutorTrac, and/or a departure time should be filled in on the "Sign-in Form."

Example Questions

Questions can help a tutor to establish rapport with a writing center visitor, 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 example questions:

1. How many courses are you taking?
2. How are your classes going?
3. What would you like to work on today?

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4. What is the assignment (a paragraph, an essay, a summary, a proposal, 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 better connected to a thesis (or to the previous sentence, etc.)
12. Does your professor want a thesis statement at the end of your first paragraph, or can the thesis be placed anywhere?
13. Can you add an example from your own experience?
14. What other details can you supply?
15. Here is a run-on. Does your textbook show how to revise run-ons? (If the student's textbook is not available, there are other grammar books in the writing center, as well as writing center handouts and online resources.)
16. Would you like to see some online resources to help with grammar, research, and/or another area?
17. Here are two ways to revise the run-on in your paper. Which one do you like the best?
18. Here is another run-on. How would you fix it?
19. I don't understand this phrase, example, metaphor, sentence, etc. What are you trying to say here?
20. Do you need to include information, quotations, paraphrases and/or summaries from an article, a library reference database article, a book, the Internet, and/or other sources?
21. Did you get this information from a book, from the Internet, or from another source?
22. Are these your own words, or did you use some of the words from your book, the Internet . . .?
23. Do you have the source (book, article, etc.) with you?
24. Is there a Works Cited (or Reference page) entry to match this in-text citation?
25. Does your professor want you to use the MLA, APA, Chicago, CSE, or another documentation system?
26. Do you have any questions?
27. When can you bring back a revised version of your essay with the new ideas added in?
28. Do you need an appointment for help with your next paper?

Example Activities

Here are some example 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. Improve a paper's organizational structure by helping a student to outline the main ideas of a paper. Different methods can be used, including a handout, informal outlining in the margins of a paper, or formal outlining by writing/typing the main ideas on paper and/or on a computer.
6. Look up information in textbooks or online. In the writing center, many textbooks are available and intended to be kept in the writing center to be used as reference books. Please check with the coordinator of the writing center before loaning out any of these textbooks to students. The CCRI library also has some textbooks, some of which can be checked out of the library.
7. Have a student write down ideas, revisions, questions, answers, and comments.
8. Show how to check correct grammar and spelling errors in Microsoft Word.
9. Show a website with information and/or online quizzes about one of the student's problem areas.
10. Tell writing center visitors about upcoming writing center workshops.
11. Copies of the writing center's handouts can be given out to students, faculty, and staff members.

Helpful Resources

Calvin College. *KnightCite*. www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite.

Capital Community College. "Index" for *Guide to Grammar and Writing and Principles of Composition*. <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index2.htm>.

Community College of Rhode Island. "Online Resources for the Writing Center."
www.ccri.edu/writingcenter/resources.

EasyBib. "Generate citations in MLA, APA & Chicago formats for your bibliography."
www.easybib.com.

"Free online English lessons & ESL/EFL resources." *englishpage.com*.
www.englishpage.com/index.html.

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Gillespie, Paula and Neal Lerner. *Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*, 2nd ed., Pearson/Longman, 2007.

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

Northeast Writing Centers Association. www.northeastwca.org/.

Purdue University. "OWLPurdue." *YouTube*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/user/OWLPurdue.

Purdue University. *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/purdueowlnews>.

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Shaughnessy, Mina. *Errors and Expectations*. Oxford UP, 1979.