THE WRITER'S CENTER

COASTAL CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

TRAINING MANUAL

COASTAL CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PEDAGOGY + POLICIES

SESSION PROCEDURES

Use minimalist tutoring strategies.

Students often come to the Writer's Center for tutors to "fix" their papers, but that is not our goal. Our goal is for students to walk away with skills that will make them better writers in the future. For that to happen, we must resist the urge to edit papers and, instead, require that the students do all the work. Some students try to write down exactly what you say while some students don't want you to tell them exactly what to say. Avoid doing the work for the student. Use a different example than their paper, be vague, or tell them explicitly that you will not do the work for them since it's not your paper. Students should do the majority of the talking during a session, and you should focus on teaching students strategies that they can repeat on their own.

The student should be the only one making marks on the paper. This may be a hard habit to break, but it is especially important in a Writer's Center staffed by faculty because we need to minimize your position as an evaluator and emphasize your position as a facilitator. Keeping the draft in their hands keeps the authority over the writing in their hands as well.

We will not use red pens, red font, or the "track changes" function in Word. Students have too many negative associations with red pens and tend to connect them with grading.

Set a welcoming and friendly tone.

Our number one priority is to make students comfortable visiting the Writer's Center. Some students feel nervous about coming to us, especially for the first time, so our first order of business in any session should be to alleviate that anxiety as much as possible. The way we discuss student writing should be supportive and encouraging above all—the slightest boost to a student's confidence can have a tremendous impact on their growth mindset. Discourage self-deprecating comments like "I'm a terrible writer." Remind them that everyone has strengths and weaknesses.

Ask the student to read the paper aloud.

Do this by sections, either paragraphs at a time or in larger sections as appropriate. Ideally, we would read the entire paper over once before commenting, but there's not always time for that. If you feel like you need to scan ahead, you can do that.

Be sure to explain the logic of reading aloud. A listener can hear if something makes sense; they can't flip through the pages to look back at something, so it needs to make sense as they hear it. Readers can notice minor errors or inappropriate tone. Students will often catch many of their own grammatical and sentence-level errors on their own. Then we can focus on bigger issues. If a student is extremely reticent, you can offer to read it aloud.

Focus on higher order concerns.

Content: Draft follows assignment guidelines and includes appropriate and effective content according to those guidelines when available—if the prompt is not accessible, use your judgment to provide the best guidance possible. In these instances, be sure to qualify your statements so the student understands the limitations of your advice in the absence of a prompt.

- Thesis statement, main points, evidence, analysis, use of sources, etc.

Form: Draft is logically organized and includes structured and clear paragraphs.

- Organization of ideas within paragraphs and throughout the paper, topic and concluding sentences, source incorporation, etc.

Correctness: Draft follows formatting requirements, has minimal/no grammatical errors, and includes correct citations for the documentation style required.

- Citations, grammar, formatting, etc.

Choose desired outcomes.

Because our sessions are limited to 45-minutes, we must choose the most important revisions for students to make is important because, while we will encourage students to make additional appointments with us, this may be the only session they get with us before their papers are due. It's better to take your time to comment on the biggest issues than rush through the session to comment on every single error; your comments will lack quality and likely overwhelm the student if there are too many. Things to consider as you choose revision outcomes:

- **Where is the writer in the composing process?** If it is a very rough draft, then your focus should be on ideas. If it's a bit further, then look at the organization as well. Do not assume that this is the writer's only Writer's Center session since more will likely help if it is an early draft.

- **How much time remains before the paper is due?** If the paper is due in an hour, consider the amount of revisions the student will have time for. If more revisions are needed, suggest that the student ask for an extension or mention that more substantial revisions are needed but you are going to focus on what can most improve the paper in the amount of time the student has.

- **What is the length of the paper?** The number of pages you can get through in one session will depend on the stage of the paper. You likely won't be able to get through 10 pages, so make sure you explain this and make a plan with the student about what to focus on first. You may find that there is no need to read the entire paper and that the student can take your comments and apply them to the rest of it.

Take notes on what you'd like to revisit.

Avoid stopping the student mid-paragraph to address something; instead, mark reminders on the notepads located at each table. Feel free to give this paper to the student at the end of the session, but avoid doing any of their writing for them.

- In a video session, you may make these notes in the margins as reminders for the student and/or on your own scrap paper to remind you to revisit things later in the session.

- To avoid commenting on sentence-level issues in document feedback sessions, take notes about those issues on scrap paper. If you find that you have time to add those comments to the paper once you are finished commenting on higher-order concerns, you can go back and do that.

Teach the student a lesson.

After you identify the biggest problems in the student essay, focus on teaching the writer to improve rather than improving the paper. For example, maybe the student struggles with comma usage. Rather than commenting on every comma error, find a pattern, and teach the student a lesson in a comment. You can attach or link helpful handouts or web links in the document or give them physical copies of handouts in the Writer's Center and ask the student to identify similar errors in the rest of the essay.

Offer unqualified praise.

In document feedback appointments, make sure you offer unqualified praise to students because when students hear qualified praise, they often don't make the suggested revisions following that praise. For example, if a tutor said the following, then the student would focus on the praise and not revise where necessary: "The argument in your thesis statement is really clear, so great job getting that across to your readers! However, you should make sure that each of your main points are stated in your thesis statement as well."

Instead, only praise elements of the essay that don't also need critique. For example, "your topic sentences work really well; they make the main point in each paragraph really clear." Or if you're having trouble finding areas for unqualified praise, then try something more general such as, "You've chosen a really great topic for this assignment" or "It's clear that you're passionate about this topic, and that comes through in the Writing."

Function as a facilitator.

Actively Listen (video/seated sessions): Feed back to the student what you believe to be her message. You can do this during initial conversations, after hearing the thesis statement, after main point paragraphs, or at the end of the paper. This allows for clearer communication and for you and the student to be on the same page, and it prompts the student to expand on something if necessary. If you rephrase something the writer has said and the writer finds that to be incorrect, then she can correct those misunderstandings in the paper.

Respond as a reader: Comment on the student's paper as if you are a reader; you are either confused or following the student's ideas, you either have questions that need clarification or everything makes sense. Use "I" sentences such as "I'm confused here" or "To me, this means…" These statements will allow the student to understand how others perceive and understand the paper, and the student will know where and how to revise based on these comments.

Ask questions to improve clarity, detail, focus, or analysis: Two of the most important questions we ask students are "How does this idea connect to either the main point in the paragraph or the overall claim in the thesis statement?" and "So what?" Questions function as a way for students to make connections themselves or realize that they aren't making those connections clear for their readers.

Use silence (video/seated sessions): Students need time to think after tutors pose a question, and when tutors speak up too soon, students don't have that time, and you are creating their ideas by answering the question for them. Some students want the tutor to do more of the work than what's appropriate, so silence can be an indicator that students need to think and write for themselves, and tutors are just there to guide that process. *Make sure that the time talking moves quickly toward generating text and developing ideas on paper. Without ideas generated on paper, the student may not remember the conversation and will make less progress on the assignment.

End the session on time.

We need to be consistent with student expectations of our time and with how much they accomplish in that hour-long window. If you still have work to do on the paper and the time is up, they need to go work on what they got from that session and make an appointment to come back later. We require that students make revisions before coming for a second session on the same day, so students can't schedule back-to-back appointments. If a student really wants to work with you, you can certainly encourage them to make an appointment during the next time you are scheduled in the Writer's Center if it works with their schedule and deadlines, but also emphasize other tutors' expertise and capabilities.

Include marginal and global comments.

For document feedback and video appointments, both marginal and global comments are important. The global comment provides students with a global perspective of the tutor's idea-based revision suggestions while the marginal comments point to specific areas of revision within the essay. Studies have found that students tend to make the revisions in the margins more often than the ones suggested in the global comment. Because of this, tutors should limit marginal comments and make sure they reflect the global comment. Providing next steps in the global comment is a good way to get students to pay more attention to the global perspective since those steps should prioritize the problems students should address.

- Insert a textbox at the top of the student's paper to ensure that they read this comment first.
- Use a different color font (not red) to differentiate between your writing and the student's writing.
- Greet the student by name and introduce yourself by your first name to keep your feedback more casual and supportive.
- Start with positive reinforcement—look for the good first, and point it out. This builds students' confidence and shows them what they are doing well so that they can continue to do it. Suggestions: The student's understanding of the concepts, organization, passion, topic choice, etc. Write specific details about a strength or strengths that warrant praise. If nothing seems praiseworthy, brainstorm some generic positive reinforcement to keep in your toolbox.
- Provide a targeted amount of specific feedback about how the writing needs to develop from the higher-order and/or lower-order concern perspectives. Be sure to acknowledge any specific requests from the student's appointment form.
- If not done in the marginal comments, teach a lesson about one specific issue that, if addressed, would help the student to strengthen the writing. Time is obviously an issue in a 45-minute session, but do the best you can. Use existing websites or handouts when applicable.
- Include a series of specific and doable actions or next steps that the student can undertake in revision. Number these steps in order of importance.
- Arrange or ask for future tutoring sessions if needed.
- Close by signing off the appointment—thank the student for using our services, and provide a valediction.

OUTLINE: IN-PERSON AND VIDEO SESSIONS

- **Have you visited the Writer's Center before?** Make sure the student understands the purpose of the Writer's Center and perhaps outline what a typical session entails. Emphasize that your role is non-evaluative and that you are not an editor here to point out mistakes—that the student must be engaged in the session for best results. Tell them that we read papers aloud so that we can catch mistakes more easily and that you (the tutor) will make notes in the margins.

- **Can you explain your assignment to me?** May I see the instructions for your assignment? Ideally the student will have attached the prompt or we will have the prompt on Sharepoint, but the student should still explain the assignment as they understand it.
  - This will give the tutor an idea of desired learning outcomes of the assignment. We can focus the lesson a little more specifically.
  - This will help the tutor refocus if the student is off track.

- **Do you have any specific concerns about your draft that you would like us to focus on during our session?** I.e., how can we make the best use of our time? If the session is moving slowly, you may want to revisit this question halfway through to refocus. How can we make the best use of our time?
  - Keep in mind that students often say they are concerned with grammar because they aren't sure what they really want to work on. While we try to respect their concerns, we should be looking at higher order issues.

- **Would you please read your draft aloud to me?** Be sure to explain the logic of reading aloud. We're out of time. Here are the main ideas to work on as you revise, and here are some resources that you may find helpful. Tell the student you will attach your comments on her essay, and they should receive them in an email, but they will also be attached to their original appointment form on the schedule..

- **We will notify your instructor of your visit at the end of the week.** Client Report Forms are sent out before closing on the last day of each week so that instructors are aware of how we directed students, or instructors may offer extra credit for students completing a session.

- **Would you like to schedule another appointment?** Of course, this depends on how productive the session was and how much more help the student may need, but encourage students to come back to us. Appointments must be spaced at least an hour apart. If you feel comfortable with it, you can schedule the appointment for them, send them to the coordinator or work study, or suggest they call the WC if the session was remote.

For video appointments, you should have made minor, reminder comments in the margins, but this isn't always possible due to the nature of the session. Always make a global comment explaining how the student should move forward in her essay. This does not have be as extensive as the global comment in document feedback appointments since you have already discussed your suggested revisions steps with the student. If there was no draft to comment on during the session, create your own document to attach to the appointment form as your tutor comments with a summary of the session and suggested revision steps for the student. Attach your comments to the appointment form no later than 30 minutes after the time the appointment ends.

Be sure to complete post-session notes in the Client Report Form. The receptionist will contact you if you have not done so an hour past your session end time.

SESSION POLICIES

- Read the student comments in the appointment form to ensure that you pay attention to their specific requests as much as possible.

- Always read the assignment prompt. These are located in the binders in the Writer's Center and organized by instructor's last name. For video and document feedback appointments, the assignment prompt should be attached. If not, check the "Writer's Center Assignments" folder in the English Teams SharePoint. As a last resort, ask a coordinator to call the instructor for clarification (only if you feel it is absolutely necessary in order to provide sufficient feedback).

- Avoid criticizing another instructor's teaching style or assignment design. If the assignment prompt is unclear, encourage students to speak with, call, or email their instructor for clarification.

- Avoid commenting on what grade a student may earn on an assignment. Every instructor has different grading criteria, so we don't want to mislead students.

- Discourage tutees from contacting or visiting you in your capacity as an instructor (e.g., come by your office to finish a session, email you a document for feedback, or bypass the Writer's Center in any other way). Instead, direct students to schedule another appointment with the Writer's Center.

- Similarly, discourage students from meeting with you in the Writer's Center in your capacity as a tutor. This would undermine the non-evaluative nature of the tutor/tutee dynamic. If your students would like to conference with you about an assignment for your class, they should schedule an appointment with you in your office.
    - Sometimes be unavoidable for you to tutor your own students in the Writer's Center; just discourage them from seeking you out, specifically. If a student makes an appointment with their instructor and another tutor is available, the appointment will be moved to the other available tutor.

- If you absolutely have to be late to your scheduled time in the Writer's Center, please call or have the division secretary call the center to let us know. We may be able to switch tutors to an available one.

- The Writer's Center can be a great place to send students who have missed peer review sessions so they can get that additional feedback, but be sure they understand that tutors will not fill out peer review sheets for them—although a blank peer review sheet can certainly be a helpful framework to guide the session.

- If a student is in the research phase, encourage them to make a Research Coach appointment with the LRC and come back to us when they are ready to begin the writing process. However, we will not turn away students who want help specifically from us.

- We work on any type of writing including speeches, presentations, resumes, creative writing, math projects, etc. You may recommend that students visit our other services on campus such as the Career Center or the Communications Clinic, but still take the session with them, and help them to the best of your ability.

WCONLINE: APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING PLATFORM

Access

Sign into your MyCCCC portal and click on the Writer's Center icon. This will take you to the Writer's Center website. From there, if you click "Make an appointment," you will be directed to the WCOnline login page. Because WCOnline is integrated with Coastal's MyCCCC, when students click "Make an appointment," they will be taken to either the WCOnline registration page or directly to the schedule.

- **Username:** Your full Coastal email address
- **Password:** The password you created at registration

To access WCOnline directly, the URL is coastalcarolina.mywconline.com

Schedule Colors

- Black: unavailable time
- White: scheduled, available time
- Yellow: my appointment (as a client)
- Turquoise: walk-in appointments
- Royal Blue: in-person appointments
- Maroon: document feedback appointments
- Purple: video appointments

Emails

- When appointments are made, canceled, or modified, students receive an email unless “Email Client” is unchecked.
- To receive appointment emails as a tutor, notify an administrator so s/he can set that up for you.
- The receptionist will mark no-shows at 10 minutes after the scheduled appointment time, and the student will receive an email notification of this. A student is no show if they do not show up for an in-person appointment, if they do not attach their draft for a document feedback appointment, and if they do not show up for their video appointment.
- If you are working remotely, please notify the appropriate person when your student is two minutes late their video appointment, and they will be contacted.
- Students will receive the tutor comments file through email (make sure you choose “yes and attach”), and it will be available on the original appointment form for them.
- Instructors will be emailed copies of Client Report Forms at the end of each week. Students do not have access to these.
- Once a Client Report Form is saved, students will be emailed a link to a WC survey.