

# Consultant Handbook



**Fall 2020**

**Writing Center • University of Pittsburgh**

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# Understanding Your Responsibilities as a Consultant

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Welcome to the Writing Center. We are happy to have you on staff! Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all of our tutoring will be taking place remotely. We encourage the use of WCONLINE for tutorials; the instructions for getting started are below. You should be prepared to receive and respond to written documents in PDF form, in Microsoft Word Online, and in Google docs. It will be helpful for you to have some understanding of how to give feedback in all of these different formats. Consultants can download Adobe Acrobat, which allows them to comment on pdfs (highlight text, add comments, etc.). Contact Pitt IT for the latest updates: <https://www.technology.pitt.edu/>.



You can find resources for tutoring and a schedule of meetings and Writing Center events on our website at [writingcenter.pitt.edu](http://writingcenter.pitt.edu). Once you are in the website, look for the “Information for Tutors” link, which is at the bottom of every page, and click on it.

We provide some guidelines to tutoring below, but if you are a new consultant, we suggest you browse the *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* and some of the titles we’ve added under “Tutoring Resources” at the end of this handbook. A link to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Bedford Guide* is provided below. It provides a quick overview of effective tutoring practices and the philosophies that inform those practices.

## **Administrative Information and Responsibilities**

**Writing Center Hours of Operation.** We work with students by appointment as well as on a drop-in basis. Our hours are published on our website each term. We discourage working with students outside of scheduled hours. If you have free time on your schedule, we expect you to be available for a drop-in appointment which will happen even in the online environment. You should could your screen open during your scheduled hours for announcement of a drop-in.

Students are allowed to make two appointments/week. In order to make a walk-in appointment, students will have to contact Sandy directly.

You're expected to tutor students during the time you're at the Writing Center or work on professional development.

**Summer hours.** During Summer Term, the Writing Center operates on a reduced schedule and with a significantly smaller number of consultants -- usually three graduate students. Typically, we don't hire part-time faculty in the summer, nor do we have staff meetings. We may, instead, ask consultants to help us with special projects.

**Your Contact information.** Every term, we will ask you to fill out a 3x5" card with your contact information. During AY 2020-21, you'll fill out an online form and return it to Sandy. If your contact information changes in any way over the term, please let Sandy know. If you are an undergraduate, make sure we have your permanent address as well as your local address.

**E-mail and Slack.** Please check your e-mail at least once a day during the week and tell us if your e-mail address changes. We also use Slack, which we have found to be one of the most efficient and effective ways for all of us to communicate. Shortly after the semester begins, you will be sent an invitation to join. Slack allows for direct messaging, general group messages and focus group messages. Here's a [helpful video](#) to watch that can help you to become accustomed to it. Please check Slack at least once a week.

**Meetings.** While we don't have a staff meeting every week, those that we do have are mandatory for all consultants (including peer interns and tutors). They are part of your contractual obligation. Information about meetings while we are remote will be forthcoming in a memo and subsequently published on our meetings calendar under "Information for Tutors." We have so far successfully argued to keep Consultant contact hours at 10 per week by saying that consultants also attend meetings and engage in some professional development regularly.

**Setting Up Your Schedule.** When you are assigned to work in the Writing Center, you will be asked to fill out a form indicating twenty hours per week when you are available to work at the Center. From these, you will be assigned a ten-hour schedule that combines one-on-one consultant work and regular appointments with CT and WT students.

Students fill out an intake form when they schedule their appointments. Sandy will help you register for WCOonline and show you how to check your schedule so that you can see what students expect to work on. She will set up the online scheduler with your hours, which will be the same every week.

You are responsible for telling Sandy about any changes that need to be made to the scheduler, for example, if a student with a standing appointment stops coming or if your availability to students changes for any other reason.

We expect you to keep your hours, to show up on time, and to finish appointments on time. A lot of people are inconvenienced if you don't.

**Absence and making up time.** Faculty consultants and peer interns may miss up to 5 hours of consulting time a term without making that time up. If a religious holiday falls on a day when a

consultant would normally work, that time may also be missed without having to make it up. All other time must be made up, as close as possible to the time when it was missed. Make sure that your CT and WT students get the time they are entitled to. Sandy can help you determine how much time you have missed and made up. Your make-up time needs to be added to the online scheduler so that you can actually get appointments during this time.

The Writers' Café and outreach events are acceptable ways to make up time you have already missed.

If you know that you are going to miss some of your hours at the Writing Center in advance (for a conference, for example), try to trade hours with another consultant; if this isn't possible, you can ask someone who has worked here in the last year to cover your hours. If neither option is possible, make sure you cancel all your appointments with Sandy. In addition, please let Geeta know, in writing, as soon as possible.

In case of illness or family emergency, email Sandy during regular working hours and let her know that you won't be available.

If you have not missed any time and you facilitate a Writers' Café, International Café, or outreach event, you may take yourself out of the schedule for 2 hours to compensate for the time. Tell Geeta and Sandy what you are doing ahead of time so that we don't have to cancel all your appointments.

**Advertise your expertise!** WCOonline allows you to share your areas of expertise with students (science writing, engineering, English as a second language, poetry, fiction, professional writing, etc.). We are always grateful when consultants are willing to make themselves experts in areas for which we have demand. Sandy can usually tell you what kinds of expertise students are looking for. You can email Sandy the areas you are interested in advertising to students, and she will post them for you.

**Respect administrative staff.** Although this should not need to be stated, we expect you to treat Sandy courteously at all times and with respect for the demands of her position. Please do not ask her to manipulate your schedule to avoid unwanted appointments or complain that you have too many appointments.

We won't have **work study students** this year, but when they do return, please make sure to introduce yourself and learn their names.

**Professional Development and Service.** We do not expect you to be an expert on issues of usage, conventions, process, and so on when you arrive. We do, however, expect you to work at gaining more knowledge in these areas while you are here. Professional development is part of the job. You might identify a couple of issues to work on for yourself each term. You may wish to begin with the things that you feel uneasy about (how exactly a person identifies passive voice, for example). If you don't know how to answer a question, it's better to look it up with a student than

to make up an answer you're not sure about. You are also helping them learn how to find answers for themselves when they are not in the Center.

**Service** is important to the Writing Center. In our evaluations of consultants and peer tutors, we give greater priority to those who contribute to the Center by advancing our knowledge; contributing to the national conversation about writing centers; supporting the work of others, or developing or advancing our programs, practices, reputation, or connections with students or other areas of the University.

**End of Year Letter.** It would be helpful if, at the end of the year, you wrote up a brief self-evaluation for the directors in which you describe your contributions to the Writing Center, the professional goals you've achieved, and your future plans for your work in the Writing Center. If you feel your contribution has been unrecognized, the self-evaluation is a chance to rectify this and will also help you clarify your work in the Writing Center for future job applications and your teaching portfolio.

## **Working with Students**

Your work will consist of one-on-one consultations with student writers and several hours of work with **Composition Tutorial (CT) and Workshop Tutorial (WT) students** (more info. below). We encourage you to get into the habit of referring to students and affiliates who come to the Writing Center as "writers" rather than "tutees" for example or "our students" or even "our clients." We want them to feel ownership over their assignments and their writing. We also want them to begin to see themselves in those terms too, as "writers" who are ultimately responsible for the shape and nature of their written work.

You may be asked to be a **Faculty Mentor** to a peer intern as they develop their tutoring skills and work on their research projects. Faculty Mentors are usually assigned according to schedule compatibility with interns. Mentors meet with their assigned peer intern 30 mins./week. These thirty minutes will be deducted from your normal 10-hour schedule. (See section below on **Faculty Mentors and Peer Tutors**, p. 13)

You may count some preparation for regular sessions (reading a longer paper in advance, for example) as part of your ten-hour commitment. For this, you could block out a half an hour reading time before the scheduled consultation (or more if necessary). Be sure to explain as much in the record.

**Other activities.** We need tutors to be involved with all our activities: Writers' Café, International Café, outreach events, social media, the newsletter, and more. Please let Geeta and Angie know if you want to work on one of these efforts or if you have an idea for how the Writing Center can support student writers. We are happy to talk about new ideas, and we are willing to make reasonable accommodation in your schedule to allow for other work.

**Avoiding the Proofreading Trap.** Please discourage requests for proofreading as much as possible. We clearly state on our website that we do not provide proofreading services, but

students who are unfamiliar with our policies, may still assume that we are here to copyedit and polish their papers before they hand them in. It is important not to summarily dismiss student who come in and ask you to edit or proofread their papers; most of the time, when a consultant explains how we work, the student is very happy to participate in the session. Here is our rationale and some helpful language for responding to such requests  
[:https://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/about-center/mission](https://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/about-center/mission)

**Proofreading for English Language Learners.** Please be aware that avoiding the proofreading trap is more complex in relation to the writing of English language learners; however, there are still strategies that can allow them to take a more active role in that stage of the writing process. Coordinator of ESL Composition, Marylou Gramm, offers this [important advice](#) for working with ESL students.

**Proofreading, Editing, and Tutoring Services for Hire:** Each term, the names and phone numbers of those willing to edit for pay are collected; you can contact Sandy for a copy of the list and refer your students who need extra help and are willing/able to pay an hourly wage for it, to these professional editors, many of whom work in our Center now or have worked there in the past.

If a student you're working with in the Writing Center asks that you do additional editing or tutoring work for pay, refer that student to the list. In order to avoid any misunderstandings or a conflict of interest, it is probably best if you refer that student to someone else (either on the list or in the Writing Center) rather than working with them yourself.

**Other Limits of Help.** Although your job is, of course, to help students with their writing, there are reasonable limits as to the kind and amount of help you can provide. You are not expected, for instance, to be familiar with the specific requirements of individual instructors, courses, or departments. Such information, if pertinent, is normally provided by the student.

**Please do not discuss grades with students.** Please refrain from any evaluation of a student's work in terms of a grade, even a pass/fail grade. Although some students might like you to, you should also refrain from making judgments about the appropriateness of assignments and/or teachers' remarks on papers. First-year students especially need to learn how to communicate with their professors. If they are complaining about a professor, you can take the opportunity to encourage them to communicate directly with their professor and perhaps help them come up with some language for that. You will be teaching them a valuable and empowering skill that they can employ throughout their college career.

If you come across a situation that troubles you (e.g., a highly problematic assignment or comment), you can always refer it to Geeta or Angie.

**Your safety and comfort.** If an interaction with a student unsettles you for any reason, excuse yourself from the appointment and speak to the director of the Writing Center immediately. You can use language like this: "I need to excuse myself from our session, but I will have someone follow up with you as soon as possible." Then, contact Geeta and Sandy for assistance.

**Student's Privacy.** Please protect students' private information. If you want to throw away a document that includes a student's personal information, shred the document. If you leave a note in a teacher's mailbox in which you discuss a student's work or grade, use a campus envelope. Do not discuss students with others outside the Writing Center, and don't discuss students with other staff members in public areas where you may be overheard or share their writing in any way without their permission. Do not discuss students or their writing on social media, not even obliquely.

**Confidentiality.** Our files are confidential. We do not make written reports to teachers other than teachers of WT students (more information on these reports under **Workshop Tutorial**, below). If a CT student is struggling, you may communicate that with the SC teacher.

**When/If someone complains about you.** If a student or a faculty member complains to the director or associate director about a consultant, our first step is generally to ask that person to talk with the consultant directly to try to resolve whatever misunderstandings or problems have come up. When this happens, please deal with these issues in a way that is professional and not defensive. Realize how difficult it is for a student to raise a concern with a consultant.

**Record Keeping.** Be sure to leave time at the end of the tutorial (usually five minutes) for both you and the student to complete the necessary forms. The student will have an evaluation to complete and you will complete a brief online report for the session. If there's time, you can even ask the student to help you fill out the online report as a way of reiterating what you worked on together in that session. PLEASE NOTE: Students will not be able to give you feedback (on their evaluation form) UNTIL you fill out your end-of-session report. Your finished report will activate the evaluation form.

Please complete your report on the day you meet with the student—preferably immediately afterward. These reports help us compile records on how students are using the Center, and they represent our collective work department and university wide. Your records can also provide valuable information to the next consultant who works with that student writer. **You must complete all your reports for sessions each week.**

**Student Evaluations.** Sandy keeps the data from your students' evaluation forms and can give you a summary for a whole term (percentages and comments) if you want it for your teaching portfolio. Please give her several days' notice.

**We do not sign papers for students to prove that they have visited us. Sandy can send the student a sheet explaining this. Be kind to the students if they tell you they need you to sign a paper. It's the teacher's misunderstanding, and they have placed the student in an awkward position because of it.**

**Carefully edit your written communication with teachers and others.** Please carefully proofread everything you send out as part of your Writing Center work, whether it is an e-mail message, a hand-written note, or a more formal document. We sometimes hear from teachers who have received correspondence from consultants with sentence-level errors in it. It is an annoying fact of life that people judge teachers in an English department more harshly for allowing such



errors to persist in their writing and that English departments hold Writing Center faculty to an even higher standard. Please do what you can to ensure that we don't get calls from faculty who say, for example, "I'm concerned about the comma splices in my CT students' writing, and I just found two comma splices in a note from a CT consultant."

*As a tutor you're responsible to yourself, to the writers with whom you work, to your tutor colleagues, to your writing center director or equivalent, to your writing center itself, to your school, and even to the writing center field. Your contact in any single session can have an impact on these various interested parties. For instance, showing up late to your tutoring shift can affect your own standing in the eyes of your director and of the writer signed up to meet with you, your colleagues' opinion of you, and your writing center's reputation. As a tutor, your responsible conduct has a ripple effect, demonstrating to all parties with a stake in the matter that the work you do is meaningful (The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring 44).*

## **WOnline (synchronous tutoring) and E-tutoring (asynchronous tutoring)**

Sandy has uploaded part of a paper to one of your appointments. Please use this week to become familiar with the platform. If you're doing asynchronous tutoring, i.e. downloading the paper and using Microsoft Word to mark it up, use a timer to make sure you're not going over time.

Please update Microsoft Office on your home computer (if you can; some computers will be too old): <https://www.technology.pitt.edu/software/microsoft-home-use-software-faculty-and-staff>

If you don't know how to use the comments function or track changes in MS Word, now is a great time to learn: <http://digitalcommunications.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2017/02/10/how-to-use-track-changes-in-word/>

(Pitt has a license for LinkedIn Learning, but there's a lot of material to wade through. Google is a good resource for answers to tech questions; they are usually quick to find and easy to understand).

Remember to download Adobe Acrobat, which will allow you to work with pdfs.

Read about synchronous tutoring (using audio, text chat, and WOnline) here: <https://help.mywconline.com/index.php?id=46https://help.mywconline.com/index.php?id=46>.

**E-tutoring** is asynchronous, which simply means downloading the student's file and using track changes and commenting in MS word. Following directions on our website, a student attaches their file at the bottom of their appointment form. The tutor then downloads it, makes changes, and uploads it to the intake form at the end of the appointment.

If you follow the directions in the intake form, you'll be able to upload the file after you've worked on it. Here's how:

- After making changes to file, save it, preferably under the same name in a place where you can find it.
- Go to the bottom of the intake form. There are three buttons there:
  - CLOSE WINDOW
  - EDIT APPOINTMENT
  - CANCEL APPOINTMENT
- Choose EDIT APPOINTMENT. Upload the saved document. Make sure to go to NOTIFY CLIENT and choose YES & ATTACH.

## Best Practices:

- For both synchronous and asynchronous tutoring **SET A TIMER for 25 MINUTES**. If necessary remind the student that appointments are 25 minutes each.
- Make sure you have water and snacks nearby.
- After the appointment ends, get up and stretch. Look away from the screen. If you have a longer break, leave the computer on in case a walk in shows up on your schedule, but try to do something away from the keyboard or screen.
- To avoid line editing or proofreading, treat the paper as you would when sitting with a student: read the first few pages and look for patterns.
- For international students, you'll need to model correct sentences, but don't get into the habit of changing every sentence. Highlight sentences that need help; use the note function to ask questions
- write up suggestions at the end of the paper, if you get through the whole thing or the patterns are clear
- Have online resources available to recommend Merriam Webster dictionary online and Purdue OWL, for example.
- It is recommended that you keep the schedule open on your browser during the time you're expected to work and refresh the page every half hour or so; students can sign up for appointments at any time.

## Workshop Tutorial

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In Spring 2009, because of changing student admission standards, the Composition program planned to eliminate the six-credit Intensive Workshop in Composition course (previously known as Basic Reading and Writing).

In order to offer support to those students who would now take Workshop in Composition but may not be completely prepared for it, we developed the two-credit course Workshop Tutorial. Peer tutors do not work with WT or CT students.

WT students meet with their tutors for one hour a week. They may generate text during appointment, and tutors may talk to them about strategies for being a good student as well as writing issues. Getting students to “attend regularly” during remote operations may be a challenge. Please contact your WT or CT student as early as possible. Introduce yourself and reiterate your expectations. You can send them a formal questionnaire about their technology and working conditions or you can ask them in an email if they anticipate any challenges to meeting with you or getting their work done this term. STAY IN TOUCH, maybe more so than you would in an ordinary semester.



**Meet with Your Students Every Week.** Your WT students are paying for the two credits they get from CT, and you should not more cancel their sessions any more than you’d cancel a class you’re teaching. If you have to miss a session because of illness or some other legitimate reason, it is important that you make up the missed time with your students. Do not ask your students if they want to make it up; just make it up. Do not let students leave early just because they say they have nothing to work on: find something to work on.

**Follow up with Students Who Don't Attend WT.** When students don't show up for WT, call and/or e-mail them immediately to remind them that they must keep or cancel appointments. Contact the WC teachers and if relevant, our contact at Academic Support Services for Student Athletes (ASSSA) and report that the students are missing sessions. (Our current ASSSA contact is Mandy Mahramas, [amm50@pitt.edu](mailto:amm50@pitt.edu)). You can also let Angie know of any trouble you are experiencing with students in WT.

**Communicate with Workshop in Composition teachers and ASSSA.** Please email a copy of your WOnline report to the WC teacher and our contact at ASSSA. It is very easy to do that from the online form. Sandy can help you with this if you have questions. Some WC teachers will email with you a lot; you won’t hear much from others. Send the reports either way. **See page 11 for a table that compares WT and CT.**

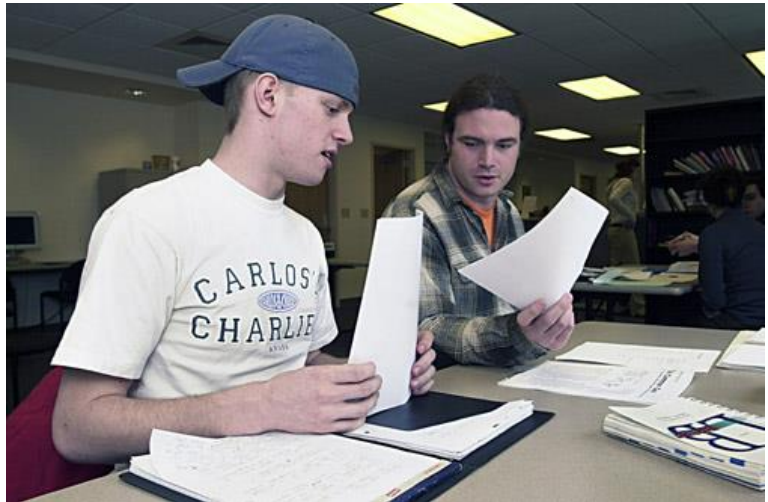
## Composition Tutorial

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In August 2003, the course formerly known as General Writing Intensive was re-named Composition Tutorial (CT). Because CT is a credit-bearing course, peer tutors do not work with CT students.

CT is a one-credit course that students are placed into on the basis of either their summer placement essay or their in-class placement essay assigned by their Seminar in Composition (SC) teacher. CT is taken concurrently with

Seminar in Composition and the assignments that students write for SC provide the material for your work with the students in CT.



Students are placed into CT because they need extra support in sentence- and paragraph-level issues in their writing. Sometimes those issues may have to do with coherence and development, while other times they may have to do with understanding and using conventions in appropriate ways. CT and SC are meant to be complementary learning experiences for the student. Consultants don't usually spend a lot of time discussing with CT students the texts that they are reading for SC, but you may find that a student sometimes needs to have that kind of conversation with you in order to develop an argument. Similarly, we do not expect that CT is the only place where students get help with the sentence- and paragraph-level aspects of their writing: these issues should also be taken up in the Seminar in Composition classroom.

**Meet with Your Students Every Week.** Your CT students are paying for the one credit they get from CT, and you should not cancel their sessions any more than you'd cancel a class you're teaching. If you have to miss a session because of illness or some other legitimate reason, it is important that you make up the missed time with your students. Do not ask your students if they want to make it up; just make it up. Do not send students away after a minute or two if they claim they have nothing to work on in a given week.

**Follow up with Students Who Don't Attend CT.** When students don't show up for CT, call and/or e-mail them immediately to remind them that they must keep or cancel their appointments, or they will lose their standing appointment. If you don't hear back from students, ask Sandy to check to make sure they are still registered for CT and SC. If a student stops coming to CT and doesn't respond to email, let Sandy know so that she can take them off the schedule.

**If asked to, update SC teachers on Student Progress.** We mostly don't communicate with SC teachers about their students, but if someone insists, it is ok to send your WOnline reports.

**TABLE COMPARING WORKSHOP TUTORIAL AND COMPOSITION TUTORIAL**

<b>Workshop Tutorial</b>	<b>Composition Tutorial</b>
2 credits for 1 hour a week	1 credit for 30 minutes a week
Two consultants may share a student, though we try to schedule one hour with one consultant.	One consultant works with each CT student.
In addition to helping students work on understanding assignments, understanding texts, editing, and proofreading, consultant may invite students to generate text or talk with students about “studenting” skills.	Consultants are more likely to work with students on addressing the assignment and sentence- and paragraph-level issues.
Consultants report to WC teachers (and ASSSA, if relevant) weekly by using the email function built into the WOnline reports.	SC teachers are notified that their students are taking CT, but we do not typically report beyond that memo.
It is up to the consultant to request and review a portfolio at the end of the term, if the consultant feels like it would be helpful or useful for the student.	Consultants need to be able to say with confidence that their CT student has or has not met the requirements for the course. If collecting a portfolio is necessary for you to be able to do this, ask your student to give you one by the Friday of the last week of classes. You may ask CT students to submit portfolios to you electronically if you wish. If you want to get a second and third opinion on any folder at the end-of-term meeting, you can print out a hard copy. One exception: if you are failing a student because he or she is still having significant problems with sentence- and paragraph-level issues, it would be useful for us to have a writing sample on file, just in case of a grade appeal.
Before our end-of-term meeting, consultants complete forms that go to the WC teachers and offer your report on how the student did in WT. WC teacher or End-of-Term Review determines whether the student gets a Satisfactory or No Credit grade in WT.	Consultant decides whether the CT student has earned a Satisfactory or No Credit grade on the basis of written work and attendance. Consultants complete a CT grade roster before our end-of-term meeting and turn it in to Sandy at that time.

## Faculty Mentors to Peer Interns and Tutors

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Our peer tutoring program began its present incarnation in 2000. The program is an important part of our educational mission as a university-based Writing Center. The peer tutoring program offers us the opportunity to work closely over the long term with undergrads who are deeply interested in writing and teaching. The mentoring, support, and teaching that we do with the peer tutors—as with grad student consultants—is part of the work of the Writing Center. While some consultants may be asked to work closely with the peer tutors (observing and being observed, being interviewed, working on conference papers), every consultant in the Writing Center is responsible for supporting the peer tutors' work by treating the peer tutors with collegiality.



Our peer tutors have contributed in significant ways to the culture and effectiveness of the Writing Center. They have a unique perspective on the work we do here, and their experience tends to be intense and short (they graduate, after all). Please do what you can to ensure that each peer tutor has a rewarding experience in the Writing Center and is invited to grow intellectually as a result of the time they offer us.

**Peer tutors.** Students who want to become peer tutors are required to take Tutoring for Peer Writers, EngCmp 1210 which is offered every fall. (Please note that the course was not offered this fall under the Flex@Pitt program). After students take EngCmp 1210, students may apply to become peer interns. Interns get three credits, and they tutor four hours a week, meet with mentors for an hour a week, attend regular meetings, read further scholarship on writing center theory, and either substantially revise their research paper from the course or draft a new research paper. After the internship, peer tutors may apply to work in the Writing Center for up to eleven hours a week (ten hours of tutoring, one-hour meeting) at an hourly rate that exceeds minimum wage.

**Guidelines for mentoring a peer tutor.** Students in the peer tutoring class will visit the Center to be tutored as they work on their own papers. We also ask tutors to allow the students in the peer tutoring class to interview them, observe them, and ask questions of them. This is an important part of their learning process. At the end of the fall term, some of the students will feel prepared to start co-tutoring or working with a student in your presence with your support.

Each spring term, we invite some experienced faculty tutors to mentor the new group of peer interns. We match peer interns and mentors who are working at the same times so that it is easy for you to conference with each other, observe each other, and co-tutor. Peer interns will be more independent in their tutoring, but they will still need your help to create a rich learning

environment that supports the intellectual work they are doing as new tutors. They will also be working on research papers that they will present to the staff, and they will have standing appointments with you to get help with these papers. Please take these sessions seriously. Students may give you the draft to read ahead of time, in which case you may mark time in the book to read and respond to the drafts. Feel free to block out a slot on the two schedules when you want to confer with the intern you are working with. The intern should feel free to do the same when he or she wants to confer.

If you are a faculty mentor, it will be your responsibility to:

- meet with the peer intern regularly to develop and work on a research paper due at the end of term and to discuss tutoring.
- observe tutorials.
- allow the intern to sit in on tutorials with you, especially at the beginning of the semester, when we are not very busy.
- invite the peer intern to co-tutor with you, especially early in the term



## **Effective Tutoring Practices**

**Students' Right to their Own Language:** It is one of the hardships of operating in a pandemic that we cannot meet in person to engage the important discussions about linguistic justice that are circulating through our English department and nationwide, and asking for more of your time and presence on Zoom (especially as we all adjust to Flex@Pitt) seems like asking too much.

All of us, though, can put some time and effort into thinking critically about our practices as tutors critically and reflecting on what we can do now and in the future to protect the rights of BIPOC students whose written language may challenge conventional notions of acceptable academic writing. Our tutoring philosophy has always been to put the student first: to listen to them, to identify the type of help they want, and to not “fix” or “correct” their writing in a way that may erase their identity and impose yours.

To this end, we encourage everyone to ask questions that encourage students, especially first-year students, to take ownership of their assignments and find their place in the university. We have added some resources to our “Suggested Readings” page at the end of this document to inspire and stimulate your thinking. Please feel free to suggest other readings.

***“Writing Center work is based on the belief that writers need to do their writing, not their tutors” (The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring 25).***

***“The student, not the tutor, should “own” the paper and take responsibility for it. The tutor should take a secondary role, serving mainly to keep the student focused on their own writing. A student who comes to the writing center and passively receives knowledge from a tutor will not be any closer to his own paper than [they] were when [they] walked in” (Jeff Brooks, “Minimalist Tutoring” 129)***

- First be aware that you don't have to know the answer to every grammar or writing issue that may arise. It can be empowering to invite a student to help you find an answer: in the process, you will be showing them how to use a handbook, a style guide, or dictionary, or how to search the internet in productive ways. These will be useful strategies for any student to know for any course they take.
- Take some time for friendly exchange at the beginning of the session to help the writer feel comfortable and to get a sense of what they want to work on in the session before you determine what they need to work on
- Invite them to read the paper aloud or offer to read it aloud yourself. If the paper is too long for that, just read a section.
- If it seems like there's too much to work with for a 25 minute session, be transparent about this by saying something like, “I don't think we'll be able to get to all of this in this session, so let's prioritize: what do you think is most important to address in the next 20 mins?”

Let them know they can always make another appointment (within limits).

- Try to be patient and skim the WHOLE paper before you make judgements about what needs to be addressed (students will be limited to 10-page submission). As the editors of the *Longman Guide* state: “you don’t want to get hung up early on when an even bigger challenge awaits closer to the middle or end” (26).
- To encourage conversation about the paper, ask open-ended questions rather than close-ended ones. (“Tell me why you decided to put a comma here?” Rather than: “does this comma look right to you here?”)
- Give the writer time to think. It is desirable to have some silence in the session where a writer is mulling over a question or even doing some writing during the session. If you are working with English language learners, they will need extra time to process the question.
- For sentence level errors focus on a pattern of error rather than going through line-by-line and fixing everyone. (Again, try to get the whole picture before you get hung up on local issues.)
- It is very difficult not to want to “fix” a paper from beginning to end, as this will make you and the student writer really happy. But keep in mind that ultimately you want to teach the writer strategies for reading, revising, and editing their own work and for becoming more confident, and independent writers.
- You may not always feel like you got as much done as you wanted to get done but just having a discussion with someone about their writing is usually extremely helpful in and of itself.

***“In the writing center, we have the luxury of time that the classroom teacher does not have. We can spend that time talking and listening, always focusing on the paper at hand. [A] primary value of the writing center tutor to the student is as a living human body who is willing to sit patiently and help the student spend time with their paper. This alone is more than most teachers can do, and will likely do as much to improve the paper as a hurried proofreader can” (Jeff Brooks, “Minimalist Tutoring” 129)***

**TABLE COMPARING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EDITING AND TUTORING**

<u><b>Editing</b></u>	<u><b>Tutoring</b></u>
Focus on the text	Focus on the writer’s development and establish rapport
Take ownership of the text	Make sure the writer takes ownership
Proofread	Start with higher-order concerns and worry about corrections last
Give Advice	Ask questions
Read Silently	Ask the writer to read aloud
Look mainly for things to improve	Comment on things that are working well
Work with an ideal text in mind	Trust the writer’s idea of a text
Make corrections on the page	Keep hands off and let writers make corrections; help them learn correctness
Tell writers what to do	Ask them their plans for revision

## **Tutoring Resources:**

**[The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors \(1\).pdf](#)**

**(The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring is useful but not available on online.)**

### **Linguistic Justice:**

David Kelly University of Baltimore, Writing Services Coordinator. Keynote address for MAWCA Summer 2020 Virtual Conference on Anti-Racist Writing Pedagogy:

<https://youtu.be/4WmJcC4KEIY>

“Errors, Mistakes and Rhetorical Choices,” by David Kelly

<https://bmetwritingcenters.wordpress.com/david/>

### **Anti-Racist Writing TutorNetwork:**

<https://groups.google.com/g/antiracistwritingtutors>

For more reading and information, feel free to access and add to this document:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/14p34GrYbIGHe3eAdgSyeBCuabjRNWKV4j\\_HH0wJNqoA/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14p34GrYbIGHe3eAdgSyeBCuabjRNWKV4j_HH0wJNqoA/edit?usp=sharing)

<https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/demand-for-black-linguistic-justice>

[Inventing the University by David Bartholomae.pdf](#)

### **Tutor Collaboration:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Dc02CCal02TRVuopvbkQh1xn-vT0ThqZtoHHpEXbOBY/edit>

### **Working with English Language Learners:**

**[Reassessing the Proofreading Trap \(1\).pdf](#)**

**[Cultural Conflicts in the Writing Center Expectations and Assumptions of ESL Students by Muriel Harris.pdf](#)**

### **Disability Studies:**

**[Informed Practices Destabilizing Institutional Barriers in the Writing Center.pdf](#)**