

**THE WRITING CENTER STAFF HANDBOOK
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
2004-2005 Academic Year**

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Writing Center Philosophy and Purpose

Purpose

At the Colorado State University Writing Center, our primary purpose is to serve writers at any stage in the writing process. We will help any member of the larger CSU community (CSU faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and, as our resources will allow, people who live in the greater Fort Collins area) to learn more about writing.¹ Our primary audience, however, is the student body at CSU, and between 30% and 40% of the students who use our writing center are first-year students here.

In the Writing Center Tutorial Program (WCT), we work regularly with writers to prepare them for COCC150. These writers are often English Language Learners (ELL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) students at CSU, or they may be native English speakers who for one reason or another need more time to work on their writing skills to prepare for a university level composition class. Writers enrolled in these tutorials are asked to meet for one hour a week in the Writing Center with a regular tutor at a regular time; they are asked to attend their scheduled sessions as if they were a class.

We offer and ask a lot for the writers in our WCT Program. Therefore, we must all be prepared to teach these tutorials as effectively and compassionately as possible. You are given flexibility in the WCT syllabus so that you can be as creative and innovative as needed to make the tutorial as helpful as possible for your tutees. At the same time, we hope to offer—through the guidance of Writing Center directors and also your fellow tutors—as much mutual support and structure as you need to feel confident and sure of your choices.

Philosophy

Stephen North sums up the philosophy we hold here at the CSU Writing Center when he says that “. . . in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction. In axiom form it goes like this: Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing.”

So, in short, our job at the CSU Writing Center is to produce better writers, not (necessarily) just better writing. The axiom does not mean that we ignore writing, however. What it means is that we focus on teaching writers how to make their own writing better, on giving them the skills they need to improve on their own. Thus we focus on writers and use tutoring techniques that guide them to the point where they can better rely on their own judgments and writerly habits of mind. From this emphasis, writing—the actual texts these writers produce—will improve, and the improvement will

¹ We are currently in the preliminary stages of planning a Community Literacy Center (CLC), and in time we hope to more formally perform outreach to the entire Fort Collins community. We envision tutor-consultants at the CSU-CLC teaching concepts of audience awareness and analysis of genre, form, context, and process to community members who wish to write to government officials, to develop small business proposals, to appeal court decisions, fines, and levies, or who simply wish to improve any aspect of their writing in the workplace or for themselves.

come from students learning from us how to be writers, not from us doing their work for them.

Therefore, our follow-up axiom goes like this: The writer is the center of the tutoring session, not the tutor or the text. In our tutorial sessions with writers, we strive to let the writer talk more than we do, and to have her or him direct the conversation, hold the pen, and identify areas of question or concern. The writer makes the changes on the page, not us. Thus, by and large, the writer is the focus of our attention during a tutorial not the text itself.

Additionally, we hope that through your work in the CSU Writing Center your own educational experience will be enhanced. You should learn more about your own processes of writing as well as gain facility in analyzing assignments, determining rhetorical contexts, and responding to a number of academic and non-academic writing situations.

Writing Center Ethos

Many of you joining our staff this year are people who have had lots of experience in editing and composing, or who are used to helping friends and family members with their writing by correcting sentence-level errors in their prose for them. The work we will ask you to do in our writing center is different, although it will draw on the same set of skills. By keeping in mind the larger goals of a tutorial, as embodied in the axioms on the previous page, we hope to train you to become the best set of writing center tutor-consultants we have yet had.

Every one of you who is joining the CSU Writing Center Staff this year has proven himself or herself to be a good writer. Your job at the CSU Writing Center, however, is not to write for our clients. Your job is to help *other* writers become fluent, capable, and confident writers—just like you. We are not here to be writing gurus or know-it-alls. In fact, one our goals is to establish a sense of peerness between yourselves and your tutees. You might think of yourself as a coach or consultant in writing center work, rather than as an editor. This way, tutoring can be the best tutoring opportunity for you and the best learning opportunity for our writers.

Writing Center Services

Our services are outlined on the CSU Writing Center web page (<http://writing.colostate.edu>) as well as in the bookmarks and flyers we routinely hand out to all faculty and graduate teaching assistants. Since our overarching goal is to help writers at any stage of the writing process, we promise to help writers confidentially work on the following:

- Brainstorming and prewriting.

- Development of thesis statements or claims and support for thesis statements or claims.
- Improving clarity and cohesion.
- Researching: Finding a topic and choosing search terms, conducting searches (on the Web and in the library catalogue), evaluating sources, note taking and research log recording, integrating material into texts, writing correct citations.
- Working on online drafting and revising.
- Proofreading: Learning how to find and correct errors in punctuation, usage, and grammar.

We offer computer-assisted learning and feedback:

- We respond to writing sent to us via the Online Writing Center at <http://writing.colostate.edu>.
- We respond to questions about writing sent to our email at [http://writing@colostate.edu](mailto:writing@colostate.edu).
- We have computers on hand so writers can write and revise online.

In addition to explaining the services we offer, we try to very clearly explain that there are a number of services we will not supply. Alas, there are some things we will not do:

- Proofread and edit for writers—though we are happy to help them do this better on their own
- Discuss a teacher or paper's potential or given grade

We also provide a number of services to instructors on campus. In addition to offering thousands of pages of help in our [Resources for Writers and Teachers](#) via the Online Writing Center, through our Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, we meet with faculty and discuss designing writing guides, help sheets, and instructional units to meet the specific needs of individual classes.

Who We Serve

The Writing Center currently serves two main types of writers: walk-ins and scheduled tutees.

In the Writing Center Tutorial Program, we work with writers during regularly scheduled sessions to prepare them for university level writing classes. These writers are often ESL students at CSU, or they may be native English speakers who for one reason or another need more time to work on their writing skills to prepare for writing classes at

CSU. Writers enrolled in these tutorials receive no credit for the tutorial; however, they meet for one hour a week in the Writing Center with a regular tutor at a regular time. In short, they are asked to treat their tutorial sessions as a class. We ask a lot of them and provide a lot for them.

Therefore, we must all be prepared to teach these tutorials as effectively and compassionately as possible. You are given flexibility in the Writing Center Tutorial syllabus so that you can be as creative and innovative as needed to make the tutorial as helpful as possible for your tutees. At the same time, we hope to offer—through the guidance of Writing Center directors and also your fellow tutors—as much mutual support and structure as you need to feel confident and sure of your choices.

The Writing Center also works with those who are referred to the Center. Some will drop in for a single visit; others will establish regular appointments. Writers may be referred by a professor, friend, or classmate, or they may refer themselves. We also accept writing for comment via email. You may respond to these by return email to the writer or by arranging to meet the writer for a face-to-face session. We receive a range of essay types by email and many writers also use email for general questions or for help in getting started with an essay.

According to the latest full count of people who use the Writing Center, around 60% of the students who walk in to the Writing Center are coming to work on a COCC150 assignment and approximately 22% of the writers who come to the Writing Center are not native speakers/writers of English. Those who are not coming to work on COCC150 assignments include undergraduates or graduates in any major, students with letters of application for scholarships, occupational therapy school, graduate school, medical school, or vet school, and students preparing resumes for employment.

Tutor Duties and Responsibilities

Be On Time and On Task

The Writing Center hours are Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. in the Writing Center (Eddy 6) and Sunday and Wednesday nights from 6 p.m. - 9 p.m. in Morgan Library. You may request to work 1-10 hours a week.

Covering Shifts

Each of you should find at least two tutoring buddies, people who can cover your hours should you fall sick or need to change your schedule. It is *your responsibility* to contact your “tutoring buddy” (your substitute) if you cannot make your tutoring hours. If your absence means you will need to reschedule a regularly scheduled session the Writing Center Tutorial Program, make sure you contact your tutee(s) as soon as possible. In general, you are absolutely expected to cover the hours for which you sign up at the beginning of the semester.

Meeting and Greeting Writers

It is imperative that you greet anyone who walks through our door in a timely and friendly manner. We want our writers to feel welcome and acknowledged from the start. This may be challenging during particularly busy times, but greeting our writers is the first impression they get of us—we want it to be a great one.

Professional Conduct

The Writing Center is like a business space. Please maintain usual professional courtesies:

- When the phone rings, answer it. You do not need to give your name, but you should let the caller know s/he has reached the Writing Center (e.g. “Thank you for calling the CSU Writing Center. How may I help you?”) Avoid making personal phone calls to keep our lines open.
- Keep your work area neat.
- Keep any confidential material you learn confidential.
- Replace books, folders, and other reference materials in their proper places so the next tutor can find what s/he needs.
- Wear professional attire (avoid sloppy, revealing or tight clothing).
- Do not use the Writing Center as a place to “hang out” after (or during) hours.
- Be especially professional in conversations you have among yourselves in the Writing Center outside of consultations. For example, do not discuss the writers with whom you are working in any disparaging tones while we have other writers visiting and using our services.

What to Do with “Down Time”

As you'll discover, some weeks are much busier than others for walk-in traffic. There will be periods when you have no one present to help. During those times, you might attend to other Writing Center duties. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Fine-tuning the Online Writing Center pages. This includes checking for typos and dead links, writing abstract for pages that point to a resource but do not describe the resource, developing new material from your experiences as a consultant.
- Rewriting some of the handouts on file in the Writing Center. Generate some new examples for grammar worksheets; look over and invent some new assignments for RST curricula.
- Preparing for your Writing Center Tutorial sessions.
- Increasing your knowledge of the scholarship on Writing Center theory and practice. This includes working on newsletter articles based on your experiences, reading current articles on tutoring and writing centers then writing summaries and abstracts of those articles for fellow tutors, and perhaps doing some in-house research on Writing Center client needs, and Writing Center community outreach.

- Pitching in with administrative chores when requested to do so. These will include general housekeeping, making sure files and other odds and ends that may arise in the paperwork involved with the Writing Center are up to date, and all chores essential to Writing Center funding and quality and reach of our services.

Opening and Closing

You may be given a key to the Writing Center. Because the door can only be locked or opened with a key from the outside, prop the door open during hours and make sure it is set to lock when the door is closed. Keep the door open at all times while the Writing Center is open.

Also, please note that there are two doors to Eddy 6; only unlock and open the door nearest to Eddy 4.

Keep Careful and Accurate Records: Administrative and Pedagogical Record Keeping

Apply a strong work ethic to any paperwork you may encounter involving the Writing Center. Careful records help other tutors consult, and they help the Writing Center demonstrate that the funding received is a good investment. Therefore, make sure that everyone who uses our services signs in and fills out a Preview Sheet. Be sure to fill in your comments on the Preview Sheet, initial it, and file it after each tutoring session.

The Preview Sheet also serves a pedagogical purpose. It asks questions that will give you a starting point for getting to know the writer you will be tutoring. After each tutoring session, you should take a few minutes to type up relevant notes. These should include a synopsis of relevant information about the paper discussed, topics you covered, topics for which you recommended a return visit to the writer, summaries of what was achieved in the session and agreed upon between you and the writer. These pedagogical notes will prove useful should the writer return. They'll be especially useful should the writer return at time when you are off duty or your buddy is filling in for you.

One important caveat: Write these notes with the writer you are helping in mind as the audience. You or another tutor may want to show the notes to the writer to refresh their memory about a prior session. Just as your verbal and written comments to the writer should be Socratic and should work to lead the writer to self-discovery, so too should these notes be merely descriptive of what transpired and what was agreed upon. If you have a negative or judgmental observation to make about the writer that is important for future tutoring, make that in a separate communication. For example, if you think the writer might be learning disabled, but you did not find a way to effectively raise that issue in your session, do not include the observation in the pedagogical summary. The writer might see that summary in a later session and take offense at the supposition.

What to Do if You Teach Courses

Please do not schedule conferences with your students in the Writing Center or during your Writing Center hours. If one of your students should happen by while you are on duty in the Writing Center, refer them to another tutor. If you are the only tutor on duty, and you are not tutoring another student, try to have your student reschedule with you for a conference time if the paper in question is from your class. If the student cannot reschedule, we trust your judgment in doing a consultation. However, let your student know that should any other writer drop in, that person will have precedence and your consultation with your student will have to end at that time. It can be continued during your office hours or by appointment outside Writing Center hours.

Assessment

You will be observed while tutoring by the Writing Center Director or the Associate Director and/or your peers. The Director or Associate Director will meet with you after each observation to discuss the observation. Observation forms then go to the Director of Composition and into your graduate student file. Our goal in the observations is not to “make you feel bad” or inferior but to strengthen you as a tutor and to strengthen the Writing Center as a whole.

Outreach and Development

At the start of each semester, you will be asked to give Writing Center promotional presentations in the classes of faculty and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who request them. The promotions are an opportunity for faculty and students to learn about our services and to put a face to the Writing Center. It is important that you are confident in your knowledge about the Writing Center when you present and that you take time to answer any questions. It is also important that you use professional presentation skills so that students are engaged with your presentation. You will be given Writing Center bookmarks to hand out at these promotions.

Writing Center tutors also will be responsible for attending Practicum meetings throughout the semester that will be lead by one or all of the directors. In these sessions, we will discuss topics that pertain to the most successful running of the Writing Center and consultations therein—e.g., more ways to help ESL students—and address problems/concerns/issues during meetings. If you have an item you would like to be placed on a Practicum agenda, please email the Director, Associate or Assistant Director.

The Writing Center Tutorial Program: Specifics

Purpose and Expectations of the Program

All students entering the university (with the exception of certain transfer credits) are required to take the Composition Placement Examination. This exam determines in which of our writing classes a writer should be enrolled. The currently required composition courses are COCC130 (Academic Writing) and/or COCC150 (College Composition).

Writers who do not place directly into COCC130 or COCC150 are enrolled in our Writing Center Tutorial Program (WCT). These writers are often English Language Learners (ELL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) students at CSU, or they may be native English speakers who, for one reason or another, need more time preparing for a university level composition course.

Students in the WCT program are asked to treat their regularly scheduled sessions as if they were a class; they are asked, in effect, to dedicate roughly the equivalent of two-three credit hours per week of class and study time as preparation for entering COCC150. Students are asked to purchase a course packet, they are asked to write six major writing assignments, and they are asked to complete reading assignments and writing exercises along the way. However, students do not receive university credit for the tutorial and do not get graded traditionally.

No matter what else your student is doing, s/he should be reading and writing all semester for your scheduled sessions. You are strongly encouraged to work with your tutorial writers on assignments for other classes in which they are enrolled as well. But remember, we are not just concerned with the number of essays a student writes. The emphasis is on quality, not quantity. And, of course, quality varies for each writer. One of the keys to writers' success comes from them being able to see genuine growth in their writing and gaining greater confidence as writers—two outcomes that are rare in the previous scholastic writing experiences of many of our WCT writers. Thus as you plan and work with the Writing Center Tutorial Syllabus, stay focused on this question: “How will I foster confidence and accomplishment in my student through our tutorial?”

The WCT Syllabus: A Guide to Individualized Instruction in Writing*

In order to meet our purpose of preparing WCT writers for university level classes, we provide tutors in the WCT program with a syllabus of activities and assignments for the semester. At the outset of your meetings, you and your tutee need to read, discuss, and sign the Writing Center Tutorial Policy Statement. This is a contract that clearly states the requirements for a writer to successfully complete the tutorial and then be recommended for a university level composition course (usually COCC130; in some cases, COCC150).

The WCT syllabus lays out the goals of the tutorial as well as specific session-by-session activities and goals. It contains guidelines for the six significant writing assignments for you and your tutee to accomplish during your meetings. It also contains worksheets and activities in the Writing Center Tutorial Resource Packet.

The WCT Resource Packet*

All of the tutors and tutees in the WCT program will be given a copy of the Resource Packet. (Copies of the Resource Packet also will be on hand in the Writing Center, so all staff members will have access to it.) The copies tutees receive differ from the copies the tutors receive:

- The tutees' copy acts as a guide of assignments for tutees.
- The tutors' copy acts as a supplement to the WCT syllabus. The materials include both a sequence of assignments and advice about when and how to deviate from or add to the sequence. The Resource Packet focuses on helping you help your tutorial writers develop critical reading skills, writing fluency, and understanding what it means to write for a purpose and a specific audience. It contains prewriting activities, journal assignments, sample essays, peer review/workshop sheets, and some resource handouts.

WCT Assessment

At mid-term and at the end of the semester, you will complete a portfolio evaluation for each of the regularly scheduled tutees with whom you work. These evaluations should include the same comments and guidelines you use when you offer assessment and evaluation to your writer. At the end of the semester, you'll meet with the Director, Associate or Assistant Director to decide whether the writer is ready to enroll in a composition class and which class s/he should take.

Make Yourself a Resource to Your WCT Writers

Because many WCT writers may lack confidence in their skills or since they are not receiving university credit for the tutorial, you may find that they are hesitant to attend their scheduled sessions. One way to enforce the importance and effectiveness of the program is to keep in touch with your tutorial writers. Exchange contact information at the start of your sessions so tutees can reach you by email or office phone (you are not advised to give out personal phone numbers or addresses). If a tutee misses a session, call her or him immediately and leave a message. Follow your message up with an email. Offer to reschedule and give times that are good for you. If you cannot make a session, contact your tutee immediately. Follow through with any messages you might have left for him or her and make direct contact so you can reschedule the session. You may also have your buddy cover your session, but remember, you are the one responsible for your WCT.

Chances are your tutorial writers may also have weak study skills and organizational skills. Early in the semester ask them to bring their syllabi from their other courses. You can use these to help you plan your due dates and assignment sequences. Map out with them on a calendar when they have major assignments and exams. Look at their reading load. Offer to help them plan a worksheet that will give them a way to budget their time. Doing so will signal to them that you care about their other course work and realize how busy they are. But perhaps most important, it will give students a starting structure around which they can organize their academic year.

As the semester progresses, share tips for organizing homework, how to get reading done in time, and how to plan paper drafting in a non-writing class. Also offer strategies for doing essay exams and other on-the-fly writing tasks they may face. In short, another question to ask is: "How can I integrate study skills and time management tips that will help my student be successful in all her (or his) classes?"

*The WCT Syllabus and Resource Packet were compiled by Brian Fallon with help from Wendy Gough.

Guidelines for Online Tutoring

We receive upwards of 50 papers via our online submission option each semester. Responding to drafts this way is different than face-to-face consultations. As with any context, you will need to adjust your tutoring skills to meet the expectations of an online submission.

Each online draft will be submitted with a query sheet that details the context of the writer's assignment for you as well as what the writer's main concerns about the text are. You should consult this sheet at the start of each online draft consultation to help orient yourself with the writer's purpose, audience and focus. We are not experts in all forms of writing but can help others learn to assess the norms of their contexts and audiences. Whenever possible, respond using the context offered on the cover sheet. If not enough contextual information is available, offer strategies for assessing the context better (e.g., audience-analysis, seeking out the professor, or offering a face-to-face appointment in the Writing Center).

The Purpose of Commenting

Responding to online drafts is not an opportunity to write other people's papers for them. It can seem more challenging to respond to texts online, but remember that we are here to guide not "fix." We want to provide another voice of response to writing—a voice of honest reaction to ideas, structure and style. To do so, phrase comments as "I" statements, constantly reminding the writer that this is one reader's reaction (e.g., "I'm confused by this. Can you clarify its connection to your claim?").

Our goal is not to prescribe solutions but to help writers see writing as a process of making choices based on their rhetorical situations. **Do not feel that you have comment on everything of concern in the paper. It is most effective to choose the top one to three issues that will improve the paper most on the global level and emphasize these to the writer.** But, in doing so, try to offer more than a single suggestion for making improvements, explain any assumptions you make in them, and offer options based on possible interpretations of the writer's intention (e.g., "If you are seeking to do X, then you might do Y. On the other hand, if you are seeking to do A, then you might do B."). Another way to help writers make choices is to ask questions and pose options depending on the possible answers.

Think ahead and beyond the single text in your comments. Try to provide the writer with strategies/explanations that might be extended beyond the particular paper (e.g., explaining a useful hierarchy for revision, encouraging a vocabulary for self-assessment, offering resources available on the Web, etc.).

As with face-to-face sessions, do not provide or contribute to negative comments about the teacher, her or his comments on the paper or the assignment. **NEVER discuss grades.**

Ownership

Keep the ownership of the text with the writer; *do not* change or edit sentences for her or him. Insert your feedback via the Comment Feature in Word or use italics, boldface, or another color or type of font to distinguish your writing from the original text. Ultimately, remind writers that your comments constitute “advice” that only they can judge whether to enact or not.

Address Writer Concerns

Be sure to read the query sheet closely so that you can respond to the text with the writer’s concerns in mind. But while we begin with a writer’s concerns, we have to set priorities based on what we value and know about writing as well. Do not feel honor-bound to answer only the questions writers pose; rather, offer reasons for re-focusing their attention by explaining what we know about successful revision practices. When applicable, show how application of those ideas will help address both the writer’s concerns and the issue you have raised.

Examine a Writer’s Process

Although we can’t infer process from a text, remind writers that intervening into the process might be the best way to deal with the text at hand. Whenever appropriate, offer suggestions about successful processes (e.g., peer response, ways to “re-see” the paper, invention strategies for development, etc.) rather than only text-based comments. Or suggest a “real time” appointment (this can be done face-to-face or over the Net) to discuss process concerns that the paper seems to elicit.

Using and Pointing to References

The reference modules and linking capabilities on the Web are some of our strongest resources. Whenever relevant, suggest resources for further work, and use resources as development for your explanations or options when you do not know the answer to a question. You might also indicate where, how, or why you have accessed a resource to model good practice for the writer. This way, writers can remember what you did and try the same on their own.

The “Rule-Bending” Principle (with thanks to the University of Wyoming Writing Center)

The philosophical approach of the Writing Center has always been based on a student-centered model or a Socratic method of dialogue. This inductive approach assumes the students can do the work; they can answer their own questions, solve their own problems, and learn through self-discovery. Principles of good writing are developed from the students rather than given to them.

However, with some students and some types of writing, this basic approach needs to be altered at times to be more effective in a tutoring setting. Many students do not have some of the basic principles just waiting to be drawn out of them. These might include ELL/ESL students, weaker native writers, and non-academic writers, so sometimes a more direct, didactic approach is called for; in short, we sometimes need to bend the rules. Be aware that each session in which you engage is its own context—a context you will need to analyze as a tutor to determine the writer’s needs. Always back up a didactic moment with an opportunity that asks students to apply and use the principal in question. By bending the rule at the right moments and not making it a habit, you can preserve our central teaching philosophy.

A Helpful Guide (but not one set in stone) to Determine When to “Bend the Rules”

Good Academic Writers	Average Academic Writers	Weaker Academic Writers
<p>Good sense of essay structure; good command of conventions for usage and punctuation; can usually develop a good voice in the essay after a draft or two; comfortable with academic conventions such as handling sources and integrating the personal with objective.</p>	<p>Can usually write competent personal essays, but may struggle with academic forms; struggle to find a non-didactic voice in academic writing in the beginning; moderate problems with usage, often a pattern of error caused by misunderstanding a rule; often show initial confusion with academic conventions.</p>	<p>Often cannot structure an essay with any consistent cohesion; may have trouble with conventions of usage and punctuation, sometimes caused by ELL/ESL or LD roots; written voice may sound hesitant, shy even; academic conventions need to be introduced slowly; consistent problems often need to be addressed more than once with moderate didactic means.</p>

Ten General Principles for Writing Consultants

- 1.** Our goal is to help writers become better writers through our work with individual pieces of their writing.
- 2.** We cannot address every issue or problem in an essay. In each consultation, we must help writers set priorities based upon where they are in the writing process. Setting these priorities will reflect what we value in writing as well as what we know about the contextual demands of the particular writer's assignment, audience, purpose, and academic discipline.
- 3.** All writers work differently; they follow different habits of mind and have different ways of inventing, drafting, and revising prose. Therefore, we need to assess every writer and each piece of writing with an eye toward helping writers discover which habits and ways will work best for them. This assessment means looking beyond the writers' texts and asking them about their assignments, purposes, and current struggles with writing.
- 4.** A consultation is most successful when the writer discovers a way to improve the essay. Your role as a tutor is to question, to respond, to offer choices, and to encourage—not to evaluate nor to prescribe solutions (i.e. saying “Get rid of the second paragraph and write a stronger conclusion” won't help the writer make effective choices in the future). We are neither their teachers nor their editors. We are their coaches in self-discovery and self-definition of themselves as writers.
- 5.** Our most dangerous occupational hazard is rewriting other people's papers for them. There is always a fine line between fair collaboration and unfair influence; when you find yourself jotting down notes for the writer (notes they aren't dictating), or imposing your ideas on someone else's paper, you've gone too far. Keep the pen or keyboard and mouse in the writer's hands—not in yours.
- 6.** When working in the Writing Center, our particular positions as consultants prohibit inducing or contributing to negative comments about assignment design or about any teacher comments that appear on a paper. A student may feel the need to complain and we will keep all information confidential, but you should not evaluate or second-guess the teacher. **NEVER talk about grades.**
- 7.** Our greatest opportunity to help writers is in providing another voice of response to their writing, a voice of honest reaction first to their ideas and thoughts, then to their structure and organization, and finally to their prose style and sentences. Always read for meaning first.
- 8.** We teach writing as a process while keeping the product in mind. Our goal, however, is not to produce a perfect text by micromanaging and commenting; instead, it is to intervene in the process with intelligence and compassion, and in so doing to help writers better understand their own processes and the skills needed to perfect their own writing

products. We want to build writers up and not embarrass them about mistakes they may have made.

9. We need to readily admit when we do not know the answer to someone's question and pride ourselves on the ability to find the answers in handbooks, dictionaries, online sources and from other writers. In doing so, we model effective problem solving and provide the opportunity for writers to later remember how to do so on their own.

10. Any writing that represents the Writing Center—handouts, correspondence, e-mail to our tutorial writers, and so on—should be models of good prose. For example, correspondence with professors must be well written, precise, complete, and legible.

To Do and Not To Do: Tips for Successful Writing Center Conferences

Essential Do's

* **Be friendly and greet everyone who comes in in a timely manner—even if you're working with another student.** Make sure each writer fills out a Preview Sheet. Use the student's name and be sure to introduce yourself at the start of your consultation.

* **Ask students what type of help they need when they come in or at the start of your session.** Often they will respond that they want help with “the whole thing” or ask you to just “look it over and see what you think.” Tell them you'll need more information to be of assistance. Help them articulate with more detail why they are in the Writing Center.

* **Ask questions about what the writer checked on the Preview Sheet.** Whether it be about the assignment, the audience, the purpose, the content, the development, the transitions, or the thesis, have the writer explain what he or she wants to work on and why.

* **Ask for a copy of the assignment.** If the student doesn't have a handout from the instructor, have the student write out what she or he thinks the assignment is. Clarifying the writer's purpose will help both you and the writer as you go through your session.

* **Help writers to establish their priorities.** Find out what their biggest concern is and then guide them in how to improve it via discussion. Accommodate the writers' concerns first before any that you notice. Very often, you can address their concern by addressing yours as well. For example, if their concern is that the paper doesn't “flow,” your observation that they aren't quite meeting the assignment's purpose can become a good conduit through which to address the flow issue.

* **Focus on the larger issues.** If a student wants to talk about comma splices, you might discuss those briefly then explore global issues like purpose, focus, or

development. Many errors in punctuation and usage clear up when a writer has better control over larger issues.

* **Direct your suggestions to the appropriate stage of the writing process.** If a student doesn't have a topic yet, you might begin with an authority list or some other form of prewriting. If a draft is complete but needs reorganizing, suggest ways to approach organizing—outlining, cutting/pasting. However, be sympathetic and realistic about a writer's deadlines and how much time is left before the paper is due. If the paper needs more work than time allows, let the writer know the range of changes (with emphasis on the most important ones) and discuss what s/he can realistically do in that time.

* **Work from a writing sample whenever you can.** If students come in with no writing, get them to write for twenty minutes or so and work from that sample. Or, if someone is stuck, use an online chat program to discuss the paper; email the writer a copy of the discussion log so he or she can use it as a starting place for further brainstorming and drafting.

* **Remember to look for strengths as well as weaknesses.** Give sincere praise; we all benefit from knowing what is working well in our writing. Moreover, pointing out and discussing strengths as well as weakness is an effective way to show writers how to improve their weaknesses (e.g. “We both agree that the focus is strong in paragraph 3. Can we talk about how you could use some of the strategies you used there to strengthen paragraph 6?”)

* **Generally, limit a consultation to a half-hour session with walk-ins.** Learning to focus a session on one or two particulars and scheduling later appointments or follow-up visits is best. Much depends on how far along a paper is, what type of help a writer needs, and how many people are waiting for help. On very busy days (likely around mid-term and the end of each semester), meetings may need to be reduced to 15-20 minutes. Be sure to use your exit strategies gracefully at all times, however. We do not want anyone to feel cut off.

* **Offer to become a scribe.** Sometimes your context may warrant letting a student dictate to you. You might take notes on a computer and print them out for the writer. But when the writer says something really good, hand them the pen or keyboard and say, excitedly, “That was really good; write that down so you don't forget it.” This reinforces that students own their papers and may help get them writing on their own.

* **Learn to like bad writing.** This means learning to be able to see past obvious weaknesses to what is genuinely interesting and smart in a piece. Bad writing is, for almost every writer, a necessary passage on the way to good writing; thus, bad writing is a valuable and unavoidable part of writing.

* **Learn to celebrate failure.** Many writers struggle because they are trying something new. Very often you'll suggest an exercise or approach that won't work. However, had

the writer not made the attempt, no one would have known how the approach would go. Writers, through trying and not succeeding, will learn more about writing and themselves as writers. They will learn better how their minds work and what strategies work for them. Failure, when learning comes from it, is worth celebrating and building upon.

Major Do Not's

- * **Do not tell students what grade you would give a paper or if you think it's "good" or "okay."** Your role is to describe a writer's strengths and weaknesses and to offer them a variety of strategies and exercises that will help them build on strengths and strengthen their weaknesses.
- * **Do not discuss a grade a student received on an essay.** If a student is upset about a grade, encourage her or him to talk with the instructor. If students try to put you on the spot, don't let them. Look past the grade and help students read and understand the margin and end comments that may be on the paper.
- * **If a student brings back a paper you helped with but it didn't get a good grade, don't let the student make you feel guilty.** Your job is to help students become better writers; it is not to help them write their way to higher grades.
- * **Do not proofread for a student.** If a student says he can't spell and can't find misspelled words, ask him to point to words he is unsure of. If he says they all look wrong, send him to one of the directors. Let students know that while we do not proofread, we will help them learn to be better proofreaders by discussing examples of mechanical problems that appear in their own prose and by using reference guides. The latter particularly helps give students independent means to solve problems in the future.
- * **Do not feel the need to read the whole essay,** especially longer ones. Instead, ask the writer to say what the paper is doing. That is, have her tell you what the paper is about, what she wants it to do, where she wants it to go, and how she planned on getting there. In short, ask her to give you a verbal outline of the paper first. Then read selective portions as needed.
- * **Do not let a writer monopolize your time.** Make sure you set a deadline for when the session will end. At five minutes to that time, give a warning and work to wrap things up; this will leave you and the writer time to schedule another meeting, and time for the writer to set some priorities for revision based on your discussion. Again, always use your exit strategies gracefully.
- * **Do not get angry and frustrated with writers who get angry or frustrated.** You will meet writers who resent having received a recommendation to come to the Writing Center. Try to defuse their anger first, before even beginning to look at their writing. If you go directly into the writing problem, without defusing the frustration, you may offer

good and patient advice that gets rudely rebuffed. That will frustrate you and make you angry, and you'll have to fight not to show it. It's best, then, to try to avoid putting yourself in such an untenable position. You are responsible for working to make the tone and tenor of the session productive.

Tips and Strategies for Working with Students for Whom English is a Second Language

Avoid generalizations in the term “ESL writers” since no two writers (ELL or ESL) are alike. Instruction should always be tailored to the needs of the individual writer. (This also holds for writers with learning disabilities.)

Remember that confusion in a text due to a language barrier does not indicate “bad ideas.” Many writers just need help clarifying what they are trying to say.

Be aware that different cultures have different patterns or models of how discourse is organized and what makes for good and bad writing. These are often transferred into the student's English prose and show up to Americans as errors of focus, coherence, development, organization and so on. Often the logical pattern of organizing discourse will be different for the non-native speaking student than the native speaking student. Some preferred rhetorical modes or patterns in other cultures to be aware of are the following (acknowledge that the patterns listed here may or may not be useful as characterizations of any individual student's pattern of language use):

- English: direct, linear; clear linkage between points and main idea; development through example and illustration; use of topic sentences.
- Romance: flexible linearity; similar to English but more digression allowed.
- Asian: digression, various viewpoints, circularity; topic sentence often at end; main thesis often at end; emphasis on the big picture and setting context; devaluation of individual opinion.
- Semitic/Arab: parallelism; connection between paragraphs and ideas through various kinds of linkage: synonymous (balance of thought), synthetic (connection of two ideas), anathetic (contrast), and climactic (completion at the end); lots of coordinating elements.

Please Note: Additional ESL and ELL resources are available via the Online Writing Center's (<http://writing.colostate.edu>) “Links for Teachers...” folder. There is a lot of good information there, so please check it out.

Generally there are two kinds of prose in the world's languages in terms of Reader-Writer Responsibility:

- High context or writer-based: the reader is responsible for developing the relationship or linkage between ideas (most non-English languages), and

can assume the reader has a shared understanding of the ideas' details and meanings.

- Low context or reader-based: the writer is responsible for developing the relationships and fleshing out ideas (English and N. European languages). It becomes the writer's job to provide greater detail, interpretation, and context for ideas. [Thanks to Ricci & Aldrich, UCD]

Generally there are two types of ESL students who come to the Writing Center:

- Those with major ESL errors who need of a significant amount of help proofreading; often they have longer papers as well. These students we usually refer to the professional ESL editors (give them names of people to contact).
- Those with some command of English; usually the major things are okay, but they still need help with some recurring problem(s). These students we can usually help and give some strategies for problem-solving in the future.

What to Do to Help with Sentence Level Errors

Apply the Two-Page Exercise. After asking students about their concerns for the paper, read the first two pages and simply underline any place where there is an error (e.g., missing article, wrong verb tense, etc.). Then, identify any patterns of error, and teach the student how to correct for the patterns first, using examples from the first page (use handouts, explanations, teaching aids, and handbooks to help with this). Have the student fix the errors on the second page under your guidance. After reviewing the second page, turn the student loose on the rest of the paper. They can either bring it back later to check over or they can fix what they can and take it to an ESL professional editor. [Thanks to Ginny DeHerdt, CSU]

Some Samples of Non-Native Writing

1. Hmong

It's tell what kinds of animals that we treat badly. The equipment that we use to treat this animals. This issue also hope that someday the creature of human and other animals are live peacefully on earth so this animal doesn't have to suffering terrible death the pain in which they suffering.

2. Spanish

I am not agree with this idea.

I'm feel sorry to know this thing, but unfornutale is true, we have the dominion over all kinds of animals and little by little we have killed them, sometimes for bussiness, other times like food, and right now some of them are exteneted.

3. Somali

To my point of view, I disagree the idea of making free the animals in order to remain their wild live. first of all, as the man kind, other animals need to be developed and get all their wants; such as meadicin, shelter and food which they don't make themselves to my experiance.

4. Korean

I am agree with what the article say because if we are not care about the animals, they got wild animals from zoos because the got make foot, hand and everything for what they need.

5. Chinese

The above passage is saying that we should not use the animals to do the experiment. Because animals do has feeling and they do has right just like us. There will be a time the population human increase to a stay which the foods we produce is not enough to feed ourself. If we stop to exploit the disease which is unknown to us to the animals, the disease will human ?

Some Common Symptoms of Learning Disabilities

A. Reversed letters

1. b for d, p for q : "dig" for "big"
- 2.

Reversed adjacent letters: "form" for "from" "clam" for "calm"

A. Confusion of similar sounding consonants:

/d/ for /t/, /p/ for /d/, /f/ for /th/, /m/ for /n/, /f/ for /v/

- * "attentance"
- * "imposder"
- * "tranver"
- * "assenble"

C. Confusion of similar words

1. "hot" for "what"
2. "where" for "there"
3. "who" for "how"

D. Omission of syllables/letters

1. "coarly" for "coarsely"
2. "psychitrist" for "psychiatrist"
3. "contempary" for "contemporary"
4. "obvovous" for "obvious"
5. "peole" for "people"
6. "equiment" for "equipment"

E. Addition of syllables/letters

1. "occasionalally" for "occasionally"
2. "symiphony" for "symphony"

F. Combinations of errors

1. "paricutaly" for "particularly"
2. "ovbise" for "obvious"
3. "relizse" for "realize"
4. "electric" for "electric"

Sample Assignment Sheet and Student Paper for Training Exercise:

Smithers
COCC 150
Fall 2002

Homework: Write a one-to-two page key-point summary of and response to George Will's essay "Dropping the SAT?" Be sure to include the main points of the essay in your summary, and respond with more than a gut reaction; consider doing some interpretation and analysis in your response too.

Key Point Summary

This type of summary will have all the same features as a main point summary, but also include the reasons and evidence (key points) the author uses to support the text's main idea. This type of summary would also use direct quotes of key words, phrases, or sentences from the text. This summary is used when it is necessary for the summary writer to fully explain an author's idea to the reader. The key point summary involves a full accounting and complete representation of the author's entire set of ideas. One reason to use this sort of summary would be if the writer intended to respond to the author's argument using an agree/disagree response model. In such a case, there may be some of the author's ideas that the writer agrees with, but others with which the writer disagrees.

[from <http://writing.colostate.edu>]

J. Schumacher

September 6, 2002
COCC 150
Section 1002

CALL AND RESPONSE TO THE SAT

In his essay "Dropping the Sat?" which is posted on the Affirmative Action and Diversity Project's Website, George Will considers the proposal by some that schools stop using student's SAT scores when choosing which students to admit. Mr. Will explains that at most prominent schools in America, the SAT is a key factor in determining college admissions. Will argues that the SAT is an important school in predicting the ability of prospective students to perform in college and, therefore, should continue to be a factor in college admissions.

Mr. Will discusses the origins of the SAT, considers the SAT's affect on campus diversity, challenges the validity of some of the common arguments against using the SAT test, and says he believes the SAT to be really necessary. Mr. Will concludes that the SAT is still necessary because we need "some generally accepted means of making millions of annual assessments...roughly predictive of ability to perform well in particular colleges (2). I think he's wrong.

I thought Will's essay really stunk. I took the SAT and did really poorly just because I was tired when I took it. I wasn't really trying. Now I am, and the SAT doesn't measure my new motivation. Not at all.

Buddy Form

For each hour you work in the Writing Center, you need to indicate who your replacement is for that hour in case you will be unable to make it in. If you cannot make it in, **it is your responsibility to contact this person and then to phone the Writing Center to let us know who will be coming that day.** This system works best when you give your buddy as much advance notice as possible. Try to avoid last minute phone calls. Remember to also contact your WCT writers if you will be missing a shift for which they are scheduled to meet you. If you switch a buddy for a certain time, make sure you update this Buddy Form; also let the directors know that you've made a change in your Buddy Form.

Return the completed part of this form to the Assistant Director, and keep the bottom part for your records.

Consultant Copy

Consultant's Name: _____

Hours	Buddy's Name	Buddy's Email Address	Home Phone	Work Phone

Changes and Updates:

Writing Center Copy

Tutor's Name: _____

Hours	Buddy's Name	Buddy's Email Address	Home Phone	Work Phone

Changes and Updates:

Writing Center Agreement Contract

Statement of Agreement to Abide by the Guidelines and Principles in the Colorado State University's Writing Center Staff Handbook

It is very important that you read and understand the Writing Center Staff Handbook. If you have any questions, please ask one of the directors. After doing so, complete the following (no later than September 7, 2004), and give it to the one of the directors to place in your Writing Center personnel file:

I, _____, have read and understand the Writing Center Staff Handbook and agree to follow its provisions while I serve as a tutor in the Colorado State University Writing Center.

Signature: _____

Name (printed): _____