Overview

The most important goal of the Writing Center is to develop better writers with improved attitudes toward writing. Our pedagogy is in sync with that of the Rhetoric Department that sponsors us, emphasizing content and meaning over grammar and mechanics. The Writing Center reaches and teaches hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students each year. Our tutors provide intensive and holistic instruction, building a mentoring relationship with our students based on reciprocity, mutual respect, and collaborative spirit.

The Writing Center presently offers three programs: the Enrollment Program, requiring a twice-weekly semester-long commitment; the Appointment Program with sign-up hours available M-Th evenings and on Fridays; and E-Mail Tutoring accessed through our web site www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/ The Enrollment Program, which has been up and running for over 35 years. Our six-year old Appointment Program has a smaller staff and helps students with their writing on an “as needed” basis. Sign-up sheets are posted weekly on the bulletin board outside the Writing Center and in our 4 satellite centers (Blank Honors Center, Wild Bill’s in North Hall, Quad Rec Room, and 2nd Floor Main Library ITC. E-mail tutoring is also for students who need feedback less than once a week.

In order to maximize the number of students we serve, students who already have a slot in the Enrollment Program should not sign up for Appointment Hours or use E-Mail Tutoring. We also discourage Appointment students from using e-mail tutoring and vice versa. Students should be encouraged to choose one of the three programs according to which best suits their needs.

Meeting the Needs of Writing Center Students

The first session or two with a student in the Enrollment Program are usually devoted to finding out what the student’s needs are as a writer and a student. The tutor needs to find out what kinds of writing the student will be working on during the semester as well as the aspects of the writing process that it would be most valuable to focus on during the semester.

Sometimes, students arrive at the Writing Center with clearly defined needs and concerns, and the tutor can begin working with the student on actual writing projects for particular classes. Often, however, students will not have particular assignments to work on at the beginning of the term. In this case, using invitations such as “An invitation to write” can help you get a feel for the student as a writer. Invitations give students an opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills and discuss their writing history while giving the tutor a chance to assess what the student’s needs are as a writer.

Depending on the students’ needs, interests, and academic situations, the rest of the semester is devoted to:

- emphasizing the initial phases of academic writing for course papers, and working on brainstorming, constructing thesis statements, organization, development, and coherence;
- helping students understand the importance of revision and teaching them revising, editing, and proofreading skills;
- presenting techniques for writing summaries, analyses, and critiques of texts;
- assisting with personal writing projects and encouraging creativity;
- engaging in any spin-off activities that the student and teacher agree upon.

The Writing Center principles for developing a curriculum for each student are: individualization of work, according to the student’s particular situation; and negotiation with the student, so that students feel their needs are being met. At the same time, this curriculum plan needs to remain consistent with the Writing Center’s goal of assisting with the written product, but more important, improving the student’s strategies and processes as a writer.
Your First Meeting

Introduce yourself and have a brief getting-to-know-you conversation. Explain a bit about the typical Writing Center semester. If the student’s schedule of paper deadlines allows, she might respond to invitations for the first few sessions in order for you to get to know her and her writing. Then you would negotiate an individualized, mutually agreed-upon program that may involve working on assignments from Rhetoric or other courses or writing about readings that you and the student choose. You can also chat about the student’s goals, but much of what the student wants and perceives might be better revealed in writing; after your introductory conversation, if the student does not have pressing assignments, have her respond to an appropriate first "invitation to write."

Invitations

The initial series of invitations are writing assignments carefully constructed by Lou Kelly, UI Writing Center director for 25 years. However, many other invitations, including some that focus on public issues and others that elicit analysis, argumentation, or "creative writing," have been written by Writing Center tutors. Every year new invitations are added. Tell the director if you have ideas for new invitations. Most invitations are located in the file folders near the photocopier and on the writing center web page: www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/ We also have invitations to analyze images, paintings, and music. If the student has assignments that are due right away or strongly expresses a desire to skip invitations to discuss course work, it is OK to do so. However, this should not mean that students may regularly skip their Writing Center hours when no paper is due. Those students who are regularly absent, saying they have no assignments to work on, should probably use the Evening/Friday appointment hours or E-mail tutoring instead of the Enrollment Program.

Your choice of invitations depends on whether a student has attended the Writing Center before and under what conditions. If a student has not attended the Writing Center before, offer the "Invitation to Talk on Paper," “Self-as-Writer,” or "Welcome to the Writing Center." If a student is returning to the Writing Center, offer "Invitation to Returning Students" located at the desk.

Teaching 10:09 Students

Rhetoric 10:09, Individualized Instruction in Writing, is a 2-credit course a student with a verbal ACT of 11 or below (and therefore considered not ready for Rhetoric) takes in the Writing Center to prepare for 10:01. Occasionally, a 10:01 or 10:04 teacher recommends that an underprepared student in her class withdraw from 10:01 and enroll in 10:09. 10:09 students' experiences in the WC are more intensive than those of regular WC students, with more reading, homework assignments on the weekends, and a midterm evaluation. If you are asked to teach a 10:09 student in the Writing Center, think of it as an individualized 10:01 course without speeches and with more emphasis on the students’ personal connections to issues. If you have taught Rhetoric, you can adapt your own course materials to the student’s interest and level of development. If you yourself think that a 10:01 student with whom you are working in the WC is unprepared for 10:01 work, consult with the WC director and the 10:01 teacher. The student may be doing better than you think in 10:01, or may need to drop 10:01 and take an ESL course or 10:09. 10:09 can be added even if it is late in the semester.

INDIVIDUALIZING READING/Writing PROGRAMS

Reading

In your leisure and academic reading, be on the lookout for essays/articles/stories that may interest particular WC students with whom you are working. Such work can become part of the program you design with the
student. We have a selection of short pieces and thematic sequences, some of which have carefully
developed questions to go with them. They are located in the file folders by the photocopier. Anthologies,
readers, and recent magazines are located on or near the RESOURCE shelves. We also receive the Daily
Iowan located at the front desk and the New York Times located on the “credenza” by the door.

Writing
In reading your students' informal writing and responses to invitations, be alert to issues or experiences that
need clarification, expansion, and elaboration, or that simply arouse your curiosity. Perhaps you yourself
want to know more about topics that students raise and what students think about them. A paragraph,
sentence, or even just a phrase can inspire a "tell-me-more question" that serves as the next "invitation" and
results in a future essay in which students make important discoveries. When assisting with course work,
make sure you have a copy of the assignment (the course policy statement/syllabus is helpful for
establishing a context) and have the student read and interpret it and then brainstorm approaches and options.
Have the student “teach” you something about the concepts taught in the course. Before plunging in and
reading and critiquing the student’s draft, slow down and ask students about their writing processes and what
they perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of their drafts—what they still need to change or attend to.
It’s helpful to have students read their writing aloud so they themselves can notice and locate problems in
logic, phrasing, grammar, etc. In an unfamiliar discipline, ask the student to provide models of good writing
from journals in that field that you can examine together. Be careful about doing too much of the talking,
thinking, and writing for students. The more engaged and active they are in the tutoring and writing
processes, the more they verbalize their ideas and plans, the more they will learn.

Editing and Proofreading
For the first few sessions or so, depending on the student's degree of fluency and development of ideas, your
comments and questions might mainly address content and meaning -- requesting expansion, clarification,
reorganization or other kinds of "global" revisions. Once you have seen more of the student's work, you can
more systematically address “local” problems and patterns of error. You might begin with one or two error
types at a time (you can choose the one that most interferes with communication, or the one that is most
common or easiest to address) and have the student proofread her work for that error. The student should do
as much of the error-identification and correction as possible. She won’t learn much by having you edit her
entire paper for her. One strategy is to make a copy of the student's writing and make corrections on one
while the student corrects the other, and then compare results. Making check marks in the margin beside a
line that contains a problem is also helpful. You can work toward constructing a copyreading guide of
patterns that the student needs to work on.

In the files, you will find help sheets on specific language issues; for example, 1) conciseness and
2) the difference between paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting. For other issues of style, grammar, and
documentation, consult the Resources section of our website: http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/

Note: The fact that a student is eager to look for mistakes does not necessarily mean you should leap into
proofreading. It may, in fact, mean you should not—until the student has worked on clarifying and
developing ideas and/or constructing stronger arguments.

Email Tutoring
When you respond to an email paper, keep in mind that your interaction with the student is meant to be
roughly equivalent to an Evening/Friday appointment session. You are not obliged to find and correct each
and every error. A useful guideline is that a tutor should spend from 30 to 45 minutes reading, analyzing,
and responding to an email essay.
As you decide how to respond to an essay, keep in mind that the general approach to email tutoring should be similar to the approach to in-person tutoring. That is, focus primarily on issues of content, organization, purpose, and other “large scale” issues rather than dealing primarily with issues of grammar and mechanics. If an essay has a significant number of technical mistakes, don’t correct each one. A more productive approach is to identify a few representative examples of the kinds of mistakes the author makes (e.g., sentence fragments, tense problems), suggest possible corrections, and then make a general statement prompting the student to search out similar errors in the essay.

You can tailor the format of your response to best meet the needs of the student. One approach that often works well is to identify three general areas of the essay to comment on (e.g., thesis statement, transitions, and sentence variety) and write a brief summary of your observations and suggestions for each area. Then, embed a handful of more specific comments in the text of the essay itself to identify particular examples or to point out smaller issues that don’t require a detailed explanation. When doing this, it’s helpful to set your words off from the surrounding text by using brackets and/or different colored text.

No matter how you format your response, it’s helpful to include a few specific ingredients in your response. Always introduce yourself at the beginning of your response to establish a rapport with the student. Begin your comments with a bit of positive feedback on a strength of the essay. Finally, close your response with an invitation to the student to submit a revised draft if they’d like additional feedback.

**Appointment Tutoring**

The pace of appointment tutoring may be a lot faster than that of enrollment tutoring. You won’t be able to read through a long paper in only 30 minutes. Prioritizing is key. Ask students what concerns them most about their paper. What parts or aspects of the paper do they most need help with? What do they want you to look or listen for as you or they read the paper? Don’t forget to indicate on the form what kind of project the student brought in (Rhetoric paper, personal statement for dental school, dissertation in science education, etc).

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**A WRITING CENTER TEACHER’S RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Hours and Absences**

As part of your financial aid package, you will be teaching in the Writing Center 1/6 time for 6.6 hours, 1/4 time for 10 hours, or 1/2 time for 13.2 hours. See preference sheet on p. 11 for ways these hours can be distributed. Of course, you are expected to be present in the WC for your scheduled hours. If you are suddenly ill, inform the director and tell her or the desk person of your students’ next tasks. If you know you’ll be out of town at a certain time, tell the director and find a substitute tutor for yourself. You can leave a message in the notebook at the desk, offering to fill in for the person who takes your students or send an e-mail message to the Writing Center staff.

**Meetings**

Your attendance at one or more meetings at the beginning and/or middle of the semester to discuss policies and procedures is expected. You are also encouraged to attend end-of-the-semester readings from *Voices*, the anthology of student writing.

**Ambiance and Comportment**

If your students are busy writing and you find yourself with free time, new teachers should look at the folders of past students, read past issues of our in-house newsletter and anthology *Voices*, and/or familiarize yourselves with the invitations and other readings on file (the more analytical invitations, the "work" series, the "culture shock" series). You can also consult the materials about composition and writing center issues on the resource shelves. You might eavesdrop inconspicuously on other teachers' writing conferences. It is also helpful to sit in on student-teacher sessions (with the permission of both). Talking quietly with other WC teachers about teaching writing is usually appropriate (of course, use discretion when the student whose
writing you are discussing is in the room), but we need to control the amount of talking and the volume, just as we do in the library. Students are thinking and writing, and we want to show respect to them and their work, and set a good example.

The Writing Center should not be used as a lounge for socializing. If you are a veteran teacher and your students don't show up and/or you find yourself with extra time, ask the e-mail tutor if he needs help (See e-mail tutoring). If not, ask the director or the desk person if there is a task that needs to be done: for example, recycling, filing invitations, tidying the front desk, clearing computer desktops, making signs or announcements, organizing books, magazines, and journals, and helping with the web site. If no one is “running” the desk, that is also a good task to take up. Veteran tutors should think of these tasks as part of their job.

Your Relationship with Your Students and Their Teachers
Your role as a Writing Center teacher is to support both the center students and their teachers of Rhetoric or other courses. If you perceive a conflict developing between a student and her teacher (for example, if the student is dissatisfied with a teacher's comments or grades), please avoid taking sides or exacerbating the student's negative feelings. Instead, do what you can to help the student maintain a positive attitude toward the course and the teacher. It is your job to help the students understand that what their teachers want is probably both reasonable and attainable, and then to utilize creatively the Writing Center’s pedagogy to help students achieve the goals of the course.

Admittedly, this responsibility is both a rhetorical and academic challenge, but it is one that must be met in order to avoid counterproductive interpersonal or inter/intradepartmental dynamics. In particularly sticky situations, consult the Writing Center director. Many Writing Center tutors find it helpful to meet with the classroom teacher to discuss ways of working with the student. Including the student in such meetings is also an option if the student has indicated that she is comfortable with the teacher knowing about her Writing Center enrollment.

Refreshments
Food and beverages are permitted in limited quantities in the Writing Center, but please dispose of your garbage and recycle glass and aluminum.

Housekeeping and Paperwork
1. ALWAYS CHECK THE NOTEBOOK at the desk and the answering machine for messages about students canceling their appointments. Indicate in the notebook if one of your students has dropped out or has not attended three sessions without notifying you. That way we can assign you another student.

2. INVITATIONS: If you see that we are running low on a certain invitation, copy about 3 more from a clean copy. Never use the last one. If you can't find a clean copy, let the Writing Center director know or download one from the web site.

3. STUDENTS' FOLDERS: Use folders that the Writing Center provides or ask your students to provide their own writing folders, but remember that you are responsible for labeling them and returning them to your “cubby.” On the bottom right, include the student's name (first name first), the hour and day the student comes to the Writing Center (e.g. T/Th at 10:30), the current semester (e.g. Fall, 2006), and your name. It’s not necessary to have a folder for every student, for example, returning students who are working only on course assignments or theses.

4. ATTENDANCE: Remember to indicate your students' attendance on the sheet at the desk.

5. FINAL SUMMARIES: At the end of the semester, write a brief summary of your work on the backs of the students' enrollment cards. Include:
   a) the student's pattern of attendance;
b) what the student has worked on and accomplished, describing both successes and problems;
c) whether the student is likely to return to the Writing Center;
d) and a note about the areas you think the next teacher should emphasize, should the student return.

Old cards from the previous two semesters are stored in the large right desk drawer.

6. **STUDENT EVALUATIONS:** All Writing Center students should respond to “Writing Center Evaluation” as one of their last invitations. They should hand these evaluations to the desk person to put into a large folder. Feel free to copy your evaluations for your own personal files. These are very helpful when the Writing Center director writes letters of recommendation.

**RESOURCES**

**VOICES**

During the first two thirds of the semester, we will put out calls for submissions to our anthology. Consider this an opportunity for students to polish their work for a more public audience. Look for particularly insightful and/or well-written essays, papers, stories, or poems. When *Voices* is published, students may want to use one or two Writing Center sessions to write a response to one of the contributors. Students are invited to read their work at the *Voices* reading at the end of the semester. Past issues of *Voices* are in the blue binder on the top shelf of the mailboxes for you and your students to peruse and are also online.

**Research Projects on Writing and Conferencing**

If, in order to answer your own questions about writing or writing pedagogy, you are considering audio or videotaping a conference (yours or another teacher’s), or having students fill out questionnaires or surveys, please consult with the Writing Center director, who will discuss your project with you and, if necessary, help you write up the design and purpose of your project for approval.

**Computers**

For Writing Center students and teachers, we have 3 MACs and 7 PCs that share a printer. If the computers are occupied, they can also work in the Instructional Technology Center (ITC) computer cluster directly above the Writing Center in 210 EPB. Tell the Writing Center director or the staff in the Rhetoric office about serious computer or printer problems; they will contact Dianne Jones (335-1693), our technical support person.

**Photocopier**

The photocopier is for copying invitations, student writing, and materials for the seminar/practicum.

**Texts and Teachers**

Books, journals, dictionaries, rhetoric readers, research and usage manuals, and many other materials that help in the teaching of writing are available for your perusal on the bookshelves on the north (window) wall. Please don't remove these materials from the Writing Center without permission from the center’s director or without filling out a pink borrower's card at the front desk. Experienced Writing Center teachers themselves are among the best resources. If you are confused or have a question about center procedures or about working with particular students, don't hesitate to ask the Writing Center director or the experienced Writing Center teachers. Often the best teaching strategies and curricula are arrived at collaboratively.
Enrollment of New Students

When a new student comes in to enroll in the Writing Center or to inquire about how it operates, it is a good idea to give the following kind of introductory explanation of the Enrollment Program to prevent future confusion and dropping out. Generally, the returning Writing Center teachers will be the ones who sign up new students, but don’t let that stop you from becoming familiar with the task.

“Let me tell you what you can expect when you come to work in the Writing Center so that you are not surprised if what we do doesn't match what you expect us to do. First of all, we ask you to make a commitment to work on your writing by signing up for two fifty-minute class periods each week for the full semester, just as you would for a class. During each session, you will work with the same teacher, who may at first ask you to write in response to a group of questions called an "invitation." Using that initial writing as the context for discussion, the teacher will talk with you about your writing. Invitations enable you to describe yourself as a reader and writer, a helpful process for both you and your teacher. So, in those first few sessions, you may be working on writing suggested by your teacher unless you have an assignment that is due right away. After that, you and your teacher will talk about writing projects for your classes or personal purposes, and together you will devise a writing plan.”

Give students time to mull over these conditions; two hours a week is indeed a substantial commitment and should not be rushed into. If students are anxious or worried about being stigmatized for working in the Writing Center, you can reassure them that one in five Writing Center students is a graduate student and that some of the graduate student writing center tutors and TA’s use the center themselves. You can remind them that…

“The Writing Center is for any student, graduate or undergraduate, who is interested in improving their writing. You can think of the Writing Center as a resource. All of us, no matter what age, level of education, or writing experience, can use thoughtful responses to our writing. The Writing Center can help with individual papers and assignments, but the goal of the Writing Center is primarily to develop writers and improve their writing skills.”

If a student is anticipating needing help on only a few papers, it’s possible that the Appointment Program or E-mail tutoring would be more suitable. Likewise, if it seems that the student is mainly interested in help with concepts and content as well as papers for a particular course, you may also refer her to the Tutor Referral Service (335-0905, 172 IMU); or to New Dimensions in Learning (335-1288, 310 CALH). These services provide a list of available tutors for particular courses, and the students and tutors themselves make scheduling and payment arrangements. First generation college students do not have to pay for New Dimensions tutoring. The History Department, the College of Business, and the College of Engineering also have tutorial services for writing in those disciplines. See their web sites for more information.

If the student is amenable to the twice-a-week time commitment, have him/her fill out an enrollment card and sign up for a pair of hours. Enrollment hour options are MW or TTh at 9:30, 10:30, 11:30, 12:30, 1:30, and 2:30. Make sure the enrollment card is filled out completely. Every piece of information requested on the card is needed in order to serve the student properly and to compile accurate statistics. Also, give to the students the gray, wallet-sized calling cards with their hours and teachers’ names, reminding them to call the Writing Center or e-mail their tutor if they have to be absent, or if for some reason they must drop out. Tell them if they feel that sessions are no longer meeting their needs, they should just let us know. Our feelings will not be hurt. If students are absent two or three times without informing us by phone or e-mail, they will lose their time slot to the next person on the waiting list.
Non-native speakers of English/ESL Students

Non-native speakers of English who use the Writing Center’s services are either international students who have entered the University through Foreign Admissions or immigrant students who speak English as their second language, but have resided in the U.S. for many years and received a portion of their education here, for example, Vietnamese students who graduated from high school in Des Moines, Sioux City, Muscatine, or West Liberty. If a new student who wishes to enroll is a non-native speaker of English, you may have to ascertain, in a patient and friendly manner, whether or not she is eligible to work in the WC. The first step is to ascertain whether the student is undergraduate or graduate. More strict enrollment policies exist for undergraduates, who must be "Rhetoric Ready" or finished with the ESL courses for which they were held.

TOEFL Scores and the English Placement Exam: On the enrollment card, an international student writes her score on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). (Immigrant students who graduated from U.S. high schools are not required to take the TOEFL.) A chart of equivalencies of the old pencil and paper and new web-based tests is in the top drawer of the desk. Students with TOEFL scores below 530 are ordinarily held for Intensive English before they can enroll in a degree program or for the WC. Those with scores above 600 (all students in the MBA program, for example) are not held for anything and thus are eligible to enroll in the WC. Those with scores between 530 and 600 (on the pencil and paper exam, equivalent to about 200 to 250 on the computerized exam) are evaluated by Maureen Burke's staff in Linguistics/ESL, whose battery of tests, called the English Proficiency Exam, includes reading (an easy general vocabulary and comprehension test), writing (a half-hour essay), and speaking and listening (a ten-minute interview with two staff members). This evaluation often results in requiring that they take one or more of the following courses:

103:184 Conversation and Oral Skills
103:186 Grammar
103:188 Listening Comprehension
103:185 Pronunciation
103:187 Writing
103:189 Reading Skills
103:190 Writing (Graduate)

These ESL courses are required of both undergraduates and graduates who are held for them. Undergraduates must finish all the ESL courses for which they have been held and be “Rhetoric Ready” before enrolling in the Writing Center or receiving Appointment or E-mail help. Graduate students may be able to take ESL courses and Writing Center at the same time unless they are held for an Iowa Intensive English course (001-005) and/or ESL Writing 103:187.

At the beginning of every semester, the ESL program sends a list of new students held for ESL courses. When in doubt about a student’s eligibility, check the list. If you are still in doubt, the director or the desk person can call the ESL Program office (5-5630), preferably when the student has left the Writing Center. (Calling about their eligibility in their presence can be awkward.) A member of the ESL staff will ask you for the student's social security number. She will tell you what classes, if any, the student has been held for.

These situations may indicate that an international student, either graduate or undergraduate, may not be eligible to work in the WC:

- If the student is using an interpreter to help him/her sign up.
- If you and the student are having extreme difficulty understanding each other.
- If an undergraduate student indicates on the enrollment card that she was required to take, but has not taken, one or more of the six ESL courses listed above.
- If a graduate student indicates that she is required to take but hasn’t taken ESL writing.
- If a student is enrolled in any Iowa Intensive English (pre-ESL) courses 001-005.