updated Spring 2022

The Beren Writing Center believes that the best writing comes from a writerôs engagement with other writers. We provideæ

sign up via our online scheduling program. Students can sign up for a maximum of three

scholarship. We typically have 3-5 staff meetings per semester with variable times and options for remote attendance.

When you arrive in the Writing Center, check the online schedule at www.yu.edu/writing-centers/beren to see if you have new appointments. If you donôt have any scheduled appointments, you might be asked to do administrative work ð preparation of materials for training, help with advertising, planning for meetings, scheduling appointments, answering the phone, etc.

If you have an appointment with a student, and she does not arrive within 5 minutes of the session, you should access her appointment details online and call her at the number sheôs provided. If a student does not arrive after ten minutes, she is considered a no-show and we mark her appointment as missed in the schedule. Keep in mind that after a student is a no-show twice, she will no longer be able to make any appointments for the remainder of the semester.

If you have an appointment and your student does arrive, you will ask her to complete an anonymous post-session evaluation form at the end of your session and leave the form in the suggestions folder on the wall outside the Writing Center. Reassure the student that her feedback is confidential and that it helps the writing center function better.

Another important task at the end of each appointment is to complete a ñ ò online. To complete a client report form, click on the appointment slot. A new window that contains the scheduling details of your appointment should open in your browser. In the new window you will see a section labeled ñAdministrator Only.ò This section gives you the option to check a box if the appointment is missed or to add or review a client report form. To add a client report form for a completed session, click on the link that reads ñAdd New.ò

You are responsible for keeping track of all of your hours worked, whether for tutoring, training, or just covering the Center. After a shift ends or after a staff meeting, you will record your hours online at yu.edu/kronos.

The relationship of a tutor to a student can seem a bit ambiguous, in part because you are students as well as tutors. In addition, a tutorôs professional role is a friendly one ð helping, supporting, and encouraging. When you are working in the Writing Center, you must keep your relationship with students professional at all times. It is important to keep a bit of distance between your student clients and yourself to avoid any situation in which there might be even the appearance of impropriety. If you need to contact a student because she is late for or continually misses appointments, send her an email. We do not meet with students for tutoring

outside of our scheduled Writing Center hours, and we never write papers for our students.

Also, writing tutors must avoid evaluating student writing, either positively or negatively. Avoid suggesting what grade you think the student will deserve or making overall judgments about the quality of the work. It is the teacherôs job to evaluate the studentôs writing, and writing tutors do not want to interfere with the teaching process. It is acceptable to acknowledge and describe specific areas of improvement (e.g. ñYour thesis is much more specific than it was before our discussion.ò), but it is not acceptable to offer overall evaluations (e.g. ñThis paper is excellentò).

While we all have emergencies, it is important to remember that your work in the Writing Center is your job. Please only miss work because you are ill or have other emergency circumstances. Studying for midterms, dinner with friends, or meetings with your professors do not qualify as acceptable reasons to miss work.

The majority of students we see at the Writing Center come with drafts. Most come wanting the tutor to ñsee if a paper flowsò and tell them what needs to be done to improve it. It is important for the tutor to resist simply showing the student where the paper needs work.

Many tutors like to have students briefly describe what they have written before actually reading any of the draft. Doing so gets students talking about their writing, and when they talk about their papers, students who just want their papers ñfixedò often discover for themselves where the paperôs problems are. In addition, there can be a discrepancy ð sometimes a huge one ð between what the student she has written and what she has written. Many students are more articulate about their ideas when they speak than on the written page, and therefore a quick interview can frequently tell you what the student really wanted to say. The tutor, working as a mirror, can also point out problem areas she hears in a studentôs description by saying, for example: ñIt sounds to me like you havenôt found a clear focus yet. Can you tell me exactly what your thesis is or point it out in your paper?ò

The ñBasic Guidelines to Conferences on Draftsò outlines some useful strategies for getting students involved in reading the draft. One not mentioned there, however, is reading the paper out loud to the student, or having the student read it out loud to you. Students can often hear problems in their writing that they cannot see. Occasionally, a useful outcome of the student reading aloud is a discrepancy between what she says and what she has written. Often, the way the student reads the paper is how she intended to write it.

Time permitting, it is preferred to have the student read the entire draft to you before offering any suggestions or comments. If the student finds errors herself that she wants to correct, allow her to do so as she reads, and refrain from offering corrections or suggestions while the student is reading. If the draft is very long and you are concerned that you may not have time to hear the entire essay read aloud, you may ask the student to read aloud the introduction, summarize her

main points, and read aloud her conclusion. Additionally, at the beginning of the session, you may ask the studentôs permission to make notations on her draft of important passages to which to return later. Asking permission is important to the Writing Center dynamic because it allows

It is generally a good idea to ask the student to describe the writing assignment and to explain to you what the assignment involves. In the process of explaining the assignment, the student is likely to realize what (if anything) she does not understand about the assignment. For instance, she may not know certain terms, or what exactly the instructor means by ñbe specific,ò ñliterary analysis,ò ñclear thesis,ò ñreasoned defense,ò or ñcoherent argument.ò A discussion of what the student is being asked to do can lead easily into a conversation about how the student might begin to think about answering the question posed by the assignment, where she wants the essay to go, or what material will be crucial to her argument. If she has brought in a full draft, such a discussion can point out how she could best revise what she has already written.

It is possible that you and the student may discover that the assignment itself is unclear. If you think you can help the student make sense of an assignment, do so, but if you are unclear about what the assignment calls for, encourage the student to check with her instructor about what is wanted. In these cases, you should help the student formulate questions about specific points of confusion. It is also important that you not appear critical of the instructor. For instance, you might observe, ñIt is not clear to me whether you must answer all these questions or if these are only suggested points you might want to take up. Why donôt you ask your instructor?ò You can then discuss several ways of working on the assignment, anticipating different ways the assignment might be clarified by the instructor. Never critique an instructor or his or her assignment to the student. If the student is particularly frustrated with an instructor, it may be healthy to allow her to vent a bit, but avoid participating in a ñteachingÒ if you come across assignments that are e

3. How does this assignment fit into the context of the course? Is the student expected to use the course content and materials? How? Should she use outside sourp If so, what kind?
4. What skills or procedures does the student need to produce her writing? 5. What kind of text is she expected to produce? A summary? Position paper? Literary analysis? Short story? Lab report?
6. Can the student find a model of a sucMul response to this type of assignment?
7. How long should the text be?
8. What are the deadlines for writing the various drafts of the text? Where can the student get feedM Will there be time for peer review? Does the teacMp want to see a draft for comments?

helping them recognize what they may only intuit, work out hunches, trace interesting leads, rearrange what they do know, and raise chains of questions to answer. Tutors often find these sessions exhilarating, but they can also be a bit bewildering. Sometimes a student experiences the ñlight bulb effectò and leaves the Writing Center clearly feeling confident and ready to write; other times, especially with more reticent students, the session may seem to have accomplished relatively little, perhaps only a trickle of ideas. Though less dramatic, this achievement can be as important as the ñlight bulb effectò because the student leaves feeling at last enabled to write, and may have learned something valuable about the early stages of the writing process. Unless that student returns to work with you again, however, it is difficult for the tutor of an ñideas conferenceò to know the quality of the final paper or essay.

Students writing research papers sometimes come to the Writing Center looking for ways to turn a mound of data or a mountain of note-cards into a paper. Many of the students we see working on their senior theses visit the Writing Center at this stage in the writing process, and you can encourage them to sign up with a regular tutor if they havenôt already done so. These students generally need help organizing and focusing their material, and discovering what it is they want to say about all the information theyôve amassed. A good place to begin with such a conference is to encourage the student to articulate what her research is about, what she wants her paper to accomplish, and what ideas she has for her thesis.

For the student who has become engrossed in collecting data, reading, and note-taking, the chance to set those materials aside and talk about what interests her in her topic, her findings, and her reactions to her readings, allows her to enter her subject areaôs scholarly dialogue. It is common for students to feel overwhelmed and silenced by what they have been reading and

Students do not often bring graded papers to the Writing Center, but when they do it is generally because they have not been able to understand an instructorôs comments. Please begin by encouraging the student to talk over her paper, or perhaps, a draft of her next paper, with her professor. You can help a student a lot by preparing her to have an articulate discussion about her writing with an instructor.

If the student is still interested in your comments, consider your task to interpret, and thereby clarify, the professorôs comments. You might begin by asking about the assignment from the student. It can also be useful to ask the student how well she thought she had done on the paper when she handed it in ð were there parts that she felt uneasy about? You may also want to inquire about how she actually wrote the paper. These sorts of questions will help the student become more aware of her own writing process, and lead to her hearing from you other strategies for producing her next paper.

Tutors generally have a fairly easy time understanding comments on a graded paper, and largely find they only have to elaborate on an abbreviated remark (i.e. ñawk.,ò ñunconvincing,ò ñevidence needed,ò ñsequence probs.ò). What we strive for here is to teach the student to understand these comments so that she can spot these problems in subsequent papers. As in a draft conference, you may also want to negotiate with the student to focus on one of the important or recurring problems and to discuss how to avoid this problem in future papers.

Sometimes, but not very often, a student comes to the Writing Center with a graded paper because she thinks she has been unfairly graded. Even if you agree that a grade is particularly harsh, nothing will be gained by siding with the student in complaints against the instructor. Instead, you might say something like, ñyes, I can see that you feel a óDô is a low grade; you ought to discuss the paper with your professor so that you can find out more specifically what her concerns are with what youôve written. Sheôll be in the best position to let you know what she expects in your next papers. If youôre still uncertain about her criticism after you meet with her, feel free to come back and discuss with me the feedback she gave you.ò Most often, when a student is upset about a graded paper, a misunderstanding between the student and the instructor ð about the assignment, about grading criteria, etc. ð has occurred. If you truly think that a paper has been evaluated unfairly, or that an instructorôs comments are abrasive or belittling, you may ask if you can make a copy of the paper and comments (if you can do so without alarming the student) and then talk with Gina Grimaldi about the problem.

Usually, if the student can stop obsessing about the grade received, all sorts of fruitful writing issues can be discussed by the two of you: issues of audience, argument, and organization, and strategies for approaching the next paper.

Tutors can coach a student about problems with grammar and style and teach proofreading

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Experienced writing teachers are often able to diagnose problems in a studentôs essay very quickly. While that may seem like magic, in fact, theyôve internalized a scale of concerns that begins with the global and moves toward the local, and they know students need to begin to revise by addressing global problems first. The most global concern is ; after that comes , then , and finally .

Experienced writing teachers and tutors also know that student essays often have predictable patterns of problems. The following chart, adapted from Kerry Walkôs ñTypes of Problematic Papers,ò outlines a few types of problematic essays, most of which have trouble with the

Falls into two main types, in which (1) the claims are based on a misreading or preconception; (2) the claims are sound but unsubstantiated; any evidence is insufficiently analyzed.	Unpersuasive papers play fast and loose with evidence and/or fail to analyze the evidence sufficiently, i.e., connect it to the claim.	Prompt the writer to re examine both claims and evidence by asking: Whereôs the evidence to support each claim? How do you account for counter-evidence? How can you analyze the evidence so that the reader sees what you see?
Usually exhibits the symptoms of one or more of the above paper types, but also has hard to-read sentences, often either highly abstract or simplistic.	Conceptual problems are compounded by problems with style and audience. The contorted writers believe that academic writing is inflated; the simplistic writers have little experience writing in an academic context.	Ask the contorted writers to listen to their draft aloud and work to make written sentences as clear as spoken ones. Help the simplistic writers pattern their sentences after good models.

An exciting resource at the Beren Writing Center is the addition of an ESL specialist to our tutoring staff. If you believe a student would benefit from ESL-specific tutoring, guide her in accessing the ESL schedule that is available via the drop

looking together at the clientôs writing, respond first to the content, organization, argument, and relevance to the instructorôs assignment. It is unproductive to work first with grammatical errors in sentences that might disappear once the student better understands the conventions of argument. Pay special attention to what the students want to say in their writing. It is acceptable to challenge them and ask them questions to strengthen their argument, but avoid taking over the argument. Sometimes ESL

to talk to one another in English.

have to teach the student these few grammatical or rhetorical concepts instead of tackling every problem one by one.

ESL issues are among the most challenging for writing tutors, but working with students whose first language is not English can be one of the most rewarding of tutoring experiences. If you keep these approaches to teaching in mind when you are working with ESL students, you can make the task less daunting.