Tutor Handbook
Academic Year 2012-2013

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1. Introduction

The Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) QEP Peer Tutor Handbook of the QEP Writing Studio offers a comprehensive introduction and guide to the professional role and expectations of new graduate and peer undergraduate tutors including selection, training, and evaluative criteria. It articulates professional, practical, and ethical standards that are based on writing center pedagogy developed in the context of writing centers nationwide. The handbook is intended to introduce some fundamental principles, policies, and procedures of the QEP Writing Studio to new graduate tutors and peer graduate tutors and to staff members who support the goals and institutional mission of the QEP Writing Studio.

Members of the QEP Writing Studio will have questions about the role and responsibilities as peer or graduate tutors. The QEP Writing Studio Handbook and the Peer Tutor Handbook will lay the foundation for these and provide valuable philosophical and institutional contexts for the daily practices of peer tutoring.

In addition, the Tutor Handbook is a living document that is responsive to the challenges of working with a diverse group of students. Students who visit the QEP Writing Studio will benefit from the conversations about and implementation of writing process, assignment expectations, and instructor feedback provided by a trained and resourceful staff of tutors and administrators.

Tutors in the QEP Writing Studio will work primarily with GE 102/103 students who are required to visit the studio as a part of a planned comprehensive pedagogical strategy. They will work in the context of writing assignments that have been developed to provide both experience and expertise in academic writing. In addition to working one-on-one with students in a face-to-face or online environment, tutors will participate in onsite research about working with students. They will provide support for academic writing workshops sponsored by the Writing Studio, as well as for the assessment work conducted in the QEP Writing Studio.

Everyone who has worked in a Writing Center such as the QEP Writing Studio will affirm the idea that the only way to develop as a tutor or staff member is to begin. The skills of tutoring are honed through experience; the confidence of tutors will grow with successful conferences and interactions with clients. The central activity of tutoring is supported with thoughtful preparation, and with the study of scholarly articles, essays, tutor-oriented blogs and listservs. This handbook is intended to help tutors prepare for their work in the writing center.

2. Philosophy of the QEP Writing Studio

The QEP Writing Studio has been established in response to the need to create and sustain a collaborative student-centered culture of academic writing in the context of ECSU’s QEP. The QEP Writing Studio is committed to working with writers in the context of academic writing assignments, providing critical support for students who are making the transition to academic writing.

Based on best practices, the QEP Writing Studio advocates that tutors address global concerns before local concerns in responding to student writing. It's usually best to focus on global concerns:
organization, understanding of the assignment, cohesiveness of the central idea, and so on, especially in the initial stages of the writing process. Once the text has been revised, it makes more sense to zero in on local or “lower order” concerns like punctuation, grammar, and syntax. In this way, tutoring supports writing process pedagogy through distinct drafting and revising stages. However, following a writing and revising process is also what many beginning students need to learn and experience in academic writing. Sometimes a student will show up wanting nothing but information on how to correct his/her errors as a form of revising. In these cases tutors work with the student's immediate concerns, but explore higher order concerns that may be present.

Stephen North sums up the philosophy we hold here at the QEP Writing Studio 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” (“The Idea of a Writing Center” 50)

Like other Writing Centers, the long term goal of the QEP Writing Studio is to produce better writers, in the context of writing and revising specific academic writing assignments. 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. As students write beyond 102 and 103, they will use their experience with writing process and distinct expectations of genre and discipline to see writing as more than “information” or “self-expression.” 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 come from students learning from us how to be writers, not from us doing their work for them.

Therefore, the developing academic 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, through tutors work in the QEP Writing Studio their educational experience will be enhanced. Tutors will learn more about their 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.

3. Peer Tutoring in Context

In an effective writing center the tutor and the learner are truly collaborators, peers involved in a give and take, a communal struggle to make meaning, to clarify, to communicate. The kind of collaborative learning that marks effective peer tutoring programs is a very basic act of sharing, one that often extends well-beyond completing a particular academic exercise. In fact, peer tutoring and other kinds of collaborative learning gather power in proportion to the degree of cooperative involvement in the endeavor. Collaborative learning becomes a kind of joint
investment, a mutual fund that has many potential yields to both tutor and learner. In the best peer tutoring, the distinction between tutor and learner is often blurred. Richard Behm articulates this well: “I know I have experienced this many times when tutoring -- moments when in our discussion about a piece of writing I have learned as much or more than the student, either, about myself, about my writing, or about writing in general” ("Ethical Issues in Peer Tutoring: A Defense of Collaborative Learning” 6).

Peer tutoring is a well-articulated practice supported by research on collaborative learning. It represents the formal and relatively large scale institutionalization of collaborative learning into the pedagogical structures of higher education, most specifically into the teaching of writing.

Every day, many students with diverse academic preparations and interests visit their university’s Writing Center. They may be required by their instructors to “work” with a tutor, but the majority of students visit the Writing Center because they want to talk to someone about their paper. Students realize the value of talking with a more experienced student who is not their instructor. The tutor’s role is to create a “Socratic” dialogue which draws on students’ own strengths and insights. They may draw on the resources offered by Writing Center pedagogy and the learning resources offered by the Center itself. When not directly working with students, tutors are expected to create Learning Resources based on their growing experience and expertise.

The Graduate and peer undergraduate tutors hired in the QEP Writing Studio have recent experience with being a successful student at the university, meeting the challenges of working many hours, studying for several different courses, and writing successfully in many different contexts: quizzes and exams, analytical, argumentative and research papers, oral presentations, and other informal and formal writing contexts. This experience creates a valuable context for beginning students who are new to the process of “doing school” and who will need to develop reflective reading and writing practices demanded by their classes.

Many tutors joining the 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 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 philosophy of the QEP Writing Studio and in the handbook, we hope to train you to become experienced and accomplished writing center tutor-consultants.

Every one joining the QEP Writing Studio Staff this year has proven himself or herself to be a good writer. Your job at the QEP 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 of the 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.
As articulated by Nancy Annett, “Peer tutors are an important asset to any college or university. They provide student writers with a different context in which to work on their writing, a context unlike the traditional classroom. In the collaborative writing center, tutors should not only distribute writing information to their tutees, but they should also accrue knowledge from those same interactions. Effective peer tutors bring certain elements to the tutorial, including knowledge of writing discourse and an understanding of the conditions that are necessary for collaboration. And though there are many constraints placed on the collaborating environment, from institutional burdens to worries about ethics, the capable peer tutor can find a way to surmount them. Other spheres where writing tutors may want to excel are in writing commentary and in utilizing technology. Lastly, peer tutors should strive to remember that collaboration is more than just theory and doctrines -- it is a learning technique that provides a benefit to real people throughout our society” (“Collaboration and the Peer Tutor: Characteristics, Constraints, and Ethical Considerations in the Writing Center”).

4. QEP Writing Tutors Training and Evaluation

All tutors are expected to participate in training and professionalization activities which include both theory and practice. This is an ongoing process which begins with initial training in the context of a course on Rhetoric and Composition (English 316), and is sustained by ongoing engagement with scholarly essays and research and with reflective practices including observations, tutor logs, qualitative and quantitative research.

The study of Rhetoric and Composition will prepare students to work in the QEP Writing Studio at ECSU and to conduct undergraduate research. It will prepare students for graduate studies, for English Education, and for teaching/tutoring writing as a Teaching Assistant. The study of this field will present a significant history of the formation and development of English departments and the continuing significance of applying theories to practices. In addition to conducting scholarly research and site-research (in writing classrooms and at the Writing Studio), students will prepare proposals to present at Writing Center Conferences and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (from Gavaskar 316 syllabus, Appendix I).

All tutors will be conversant with The Norton Book of Composition Studies, a compilation of landmark essays in the field, and with The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors.

Through this long history evaluating and teaching undergraduates on college campuses, the field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies has been at the forefront of research about teaching writing to increasingly diverse bodies of students. With roots in classical rhetoric, composition studies have successively focused on the pedagogies of teaching, understanding multi-literacies, discipline-centered writing, multi-media composition and public writing. This growth and development has been supported by active research, vital publications, and national organizations and by the experiences of a large number of undergraduate and graduate students.
in writing classrooms, writing centers, and peer writing groups (from Gavaskar 316 syllabus Appendix I).

**The Selection and Evaluation Process**

*English 316: Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition* offered every Fall semester will invite students in the fields of English and English Education who have sophomore status. During the course, students will observe tutoring practices in the QEP Writing Studio and study the field of Rhetoric and Composition in practice. Students with successful portfolios will have the opportunity to work as peer tutors.

Further, ECSU graduates in the field of English and of Education will be invited to serve as graduate tutors based on a portfolio consisting of a personal statement, a writing sample, letters of reference, and a grammar comprehension test. Short-listed candidates will be selected through an interview process. Selected candidates will undergo training based on the model provided by English 316. The first semester of their appointment will also serve as a probationary period.

All tutors are sustained by mentoring relationships with designated QEP faculty, and evaluated three times in the academic semester. Evaluations of tutors are based on the following criteria:

1. Consistency with regards to and commitment to the QEP Writing Studio Schedule
2. Prompt attention to required paperwork, and follow ups
3. Demonstration of best practices in the field of Rhetoric and Composition in the context of tutoring, workshops, and other appropriate venues.
4. Self-reflective documents based on such topics in tutoring as working with reluctant and non-communicative students; working with organization issues; working with research and evaluating sources; developing professional relationships with student clients and others.
5. Commitment to professionalization in the field by developing workshops, submitting proposals, and conducting onsite research.
6. Ethical practices as outlined in the QEP Writing Studio Tutor Handbook. Instances of academic dishonesty include working with students outside of the QEP Writing Studio; writing or revising papers for students; dating students who visit the QEP Writing Studio; focusing on grades rather than the development of student writers; and discussing faculty in unethical ways. These actions will lead to immediate termination.
7. Maintaining good standing as a student. Peer tutors are expected to maintain at least a 3.0 GPA and to model good practices for Writing Studio clients.

The QEP Writing Studio Director will maintain evaluative portfolios on all tutors. Progress is expected on tutor evaluations which are conducted 3 times a semester. Renewal of tutors will be based on this portfolio as well as on reflective and professionalization documents submitted by tutors.
We intend the QEP Writing Studio to be a professionalization opportunity for ECSU graduates and undergraduates and will provide recommendations and references for tutors pursuing graduate studies and employment opportunities.

5. **Job Description: Graduate and Peer Tutors One-to-One and Online Consultations**

Graduate and Peer Tutors in the QEP Writing Studio are responsible primarily for working one-to-one with writers who come to the Writing Studio to discuss writing projects, or who schedule online sessions. In these roles, tutors should be polite, interested, and helpful, and should keep careful records of each session via session logs. Additionally, the job involves answering the phone, making appointments, conducting class visits, participating in committee service, attending meetings and workshops, and completing other tasks for the QEP Writing Studio under the direction of the administrators.

6. **Guidelines for Writing Tutors**

1. All writers and especially writers new to ECSU need supportive, sympathetic, and collaborative readers who have experience with the kinds of reading and writing processes that make successful students. It is important that tutors establish and maintain rapport with writers who come to use our services. We should always be courteous to them and engage in their work. Finding something concrete about the writing to appreciate, and asking lots of questions about the writing, the assignment, and the assessment rubric draws and builds on student knowledge.

2. As evidenced by scholarly essays and discussed in national tutor blogs like the *Dangling Modifier*, each tutoring session is an opportunity to create interactions that allow writers to retain authority over their texts; writers learn better when they make changes and address issues in their writing themselves. A demonstrable example is that tutors do not take student papers away from their possession, write on their papers, or read papers in isolation. Writers make all changes to their writing and make decisions about changes. Tutors can help them with the process of arriving at those decisions.

3. The focus of the tutoring session is the writer and not the text, or the grade for the text. The goal for tutoring sessions is improvement based on the writer’s growth and reflection. This means remembering that the goal as a tutor might be different from that of the client. The tutor cannot and shouldn’t “fix” a client’s paper; rather, tutors should work with the client to try to understand what his or her core strengths and weaknesses are and how those can improve the writing at hand.

4. We approach each session with the underlying assumption that writing is a process with identifiable stages (invention, drafting, revision, editing). We work with writers to help them at any stage of this process. Higher-order concerns (such as discovering a focus, using the appropriate tone of voice, finding the best organization and structure, and
developing ideas) precede other lower-order concerns (such as sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, usage). While each step of the process has a place in the tutoring session, tutors should be aware of where the client is so that you can help him or her develop that step and move beyond it.

7. Responsibilities

Attendance and Engagement:

All tutors, graduate and undergraduate, must arrive for work on time, preferably 5 minutes before their scheduled time so they can familiarize themselves with students who are scheduled to come, and gather the appropriate materials. Being late is unprofessional and presents the Writing Studio in a poor light. Being late encourages students to be late, causes sessions to run over, and wastes precious resources. It is important that you are consistent so that the tutoring sessions can operate smoothly for student clients and for your colleagues who may feel pressured to take on your client instead of focusing on their own students and appointed work.

If you do not have a scheduled client, please spend your time productively as assigned by the Writing Studio Director or Writing Specialist. We have a lot of housekeeping, assessment, and research projects and you will be assigned some of these tasks on a regular basis. Working on your own schoolwork, and “hanging out” when you are not scheduled at the QEP Writing Studio is not acceptable practice.

Consequently, we can't tolerate staff who fail to show up or show up late. If there is an unavoidable emergency, you will need to contact us before your scheduled time. For all the reasons listed above, repeated lateness will lead to termination.

Forms & Timesheets

In addition to entering your hours on Accutrak, you will submit your hours on Banner in a timely fashion (tutors are paid on a bi-weekly cycle).

You are responsible for entering and submitting the proper hours on time, otherwise you won’t get paid (we will not enter hours for you after the deadline).

You also need to sign in and out of Accutrak at the front desk for every shift you work. Any discrepancies will result in a loss of hours (we cannot pay you if we cannot prove that you were here via the timesheets).

Training and Professionalization Activities:

Weekly Staff Meetings, development of learning resources, creating workshops and website materials, developing reflective documents for your portfolio as assigned, working on committees, and submitting proposals and research documents are activities that train and professionalize tutors.
In addition, we will be discussing scholarly essays related to topics relevant to our tutoring, research, and assessment work during our staff meetings.

**Online Tutoring**

It is our responsibility to provide an online tutoring environment that provides the same support as a face-to-face consultation. We will be utilizing software that helps us to accomplish this goal.

The training for this software, roles and expectations, will take place in the first week of the semester.

**Accutrak**

Accutrak is our online scheduling and reporting system. Visit [http://www.accutrack.org/](http://www.accutrack.org/) to become familiar with the system. You need to be fluent with this simple and intuitive program so you can show clients how to use it (ask any experienced staff member for help at any time).

Encourage all clients to sign up on their own and make their own appointments. The first time they come in, you can show them how to sign up (it only takes a minute to sign up). From then on, we do not want to tie up our few computers and our busy staff with signing up clients when this is something they should learn to ‘own’ on their own (just like their writing).

**Tutoring session forms**, both face-to-face and online will need to be completed at the end of the tutoring session. **Do not wait to fill in your tutoring form and to email the form to the instructor.** Immediacy of experience will ensure accuracy.

Tutors should also maintain a record of their hours on Accutrak for the purposes of generating and maintaining records on a semester and yearly basis.

Within Accutrak’s web-based scheduling and archiving platform, we’ve included a prompt asking consultants to answer a few open-ended questions designed to have us look back at each session with a student and to look forward to future consulting sessions. The questions push consultants to talk about two things after each session: how they “went about working” with the student and how the consultant might deal with a similar situation in the future. We hope that, in this process, consultants’ understandings, perceptions, concerns, and questions are made conscious and documented. These materials help administrators determine such activities as what common concerns are articulated by our student clients and what methods are used.

Your sessions are 30 minutes long. You should make time to read a client’s session reports before s/he comes in and have time to write a careful report after you end the session. **A log must be written for every single session** you have…even if a client leaves after a few minutes. If they don’t show up at all, mark it as a no-show and enter it on Accutrak.
**Answering Phones and Working the Front Desk**

Make sure to **cover the phones and help out any visitors who arrive**. You all need to know how to work at the front desk, as the “face” of the QEP Writing Studio. Your actions reflect on the administrators. This entails answering phones, transferring calls, swiping folks in/out, and interacting with First Year Writing faculty, etc.

Always keep an eye on the front desk area. Don’t get caught up in socializing/studying, especially if you are on duty.

**Collaborating with Fellow Tutors**

**Pull your fellow consultants into sessions** on occasion or when you need another writer’s opinion. Before working with a student, see if anyone has written conference reports about sessions with that writer.

**Keep the Writing Center Clean**

It is important that we maintain a clean and professional environment. This means no food and drink, no scraps of paper, no wrappers, no empty water bottles and other forms of trash.

Be sure to tidy up the space after your shift, putting chairs back, replacing reference materials and filing all paperwork.

**Creating a Friendly and Professional Atmosphere**

We will strive to provide a student-centered and friendly environment. Be sure to smile and welcome each student who comes in, and answer any questions students may have in a professional manner. **Be attentive to all students entering** the Writing Center, especially those who appear shy and self-conscious when first walking in. Many students who come to the Writing Center initially do so tentatively and with trepidation. Always be sensitive to this. If you ever see a student just sitting alone up front, you need to go up to him or her and ask if you can be of any help.

When students who are not clients come to the Writing Center asking to use the stapler or needing a piece of tape, indulge them. (This will happen frequently.) But you have to draw the line at dispensing materials like pencils, pens, or paper as we have to preserve our resources.

The QEP Writing Studio tutors draw from the best of the University’s undergraduates and graduates. As tutors you are role models and must conduct yourself in a professional manner. This includes dress and deportment, including tone of voice. Do not talk loudly on the cell phone, play music, or otherwise create a distraction for people who are working. Be respectful of instructors and administrators. Introduce yourself, and ask if you can be of assistance. Be sure to direct any concerns to the QEP Writing Studio Director or the Writing Specialist.
Reporting Problems

As with other Writing Centers, the QEP Writing Studio will run smoothly because of the great clients and staff. But as with any office, sometimes awkward or problematic things happen. You might find yourself working with a “difficult client.” You might suspect that a client is making numerous appointments with you because he or she has a crush on you. A personality conflict might arise among two or more staff members.

When anything like this happens, do not keep this information to yourself: go to the QEP Writing Studio Director or Writing Specialist right away.

Interacting with Faculty

Graduate and undergraduate tutors are not expected to resolve any problems with faculty; direct any concerned faculty to the administrators.

For example, if a professor comes into the Writing Center and accuses you or another tutor of something problematic (not teaching grammar appropriately, not catching student errors, writing a student’s paper, etc.), don’t engage in an argument with the professor. Instead, direct the professor to the Director or Writing Specialist.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Like all ECSU departments and programs, the QEP Writing Studio is subject to all University policies against discrimination, discrimination-related harassment, and sexual harassment. You must know your rights and obligations; read the appropriate section in the Student Handbook. The policy is too detailed to reiterate here, but it will be discussed in staff meetings from time to time.

8. Tips and Strategies for Conducting Sessions

As discussed in the St.Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors, tutoring sessions typically have 3 stages: the pre-textual, textual, and post-textual. In the pre-textual stage, the agenda for the session is mutually established. In the textual stage tutor and student spend some time focusing on various aspects of the writing. In the shorter post-textual stage, student and tutor discuss what they have accomplished in the session and articulate further steps for the writing being discussed. In addition, the following tips will be helpful.

Introduce Yourself

Always introduce yourself to the client right away. If you have trouble pronouncing the client’s name, ask him or her to pronounce it for you, several times if necessary, until you can say their name correctly. If it helps, go ahead and write down the client’s name phonetically so that you can remember. Clients will see how much respect you have for them, and it will do much to establish an immediate rapport. It’s essential to be on a comfortable, first-name basis.
A Bit of Small Talk, if It Doesn’t Feel Forced

Sometimes it helps to talk about anything but writing for the first minute or so. This can help some students feel more relaxed. You don’t have to do this if it feels awkward or false, of course. Whether you’re chatty by nature, or have more of a “let’s-get-down-to-business” personality, you need to be true to your own personality. Just always try to be aware of how your approach might have positive and negative effects on certain students.

…and yet, Always Stay on Track

While it can be important to have free flowing conversations with clients—this is supposed to be fun, after all—be wary of wasting the session with talk unrelated to the task at hand. Many times writers will feel reluctant to dive into the assignment. And sometimes Writing Counselors will feel reluctant to get to work tutoring! This often results in two people having a great time chatting about anything but the writing task. It’s your job to keep the session focused on the client’s needs as a writer.

5 Important Questions

Be sure you have the answers to these questions before you get too far into the session, for the client’s answers can dramatically alter the nature of your conversation:

1. What is the course?
2. What is the assignment/do we have it in our files?
3. When is the assignment due?
4. What specific tasks or requirements, if any, have been issued by the professor?
5. What would the client like to accomplish during this session?

See It in Writing

Ask the student to see a copy of the assignment. While the student’s interpretation of the assignment is important, they may not have spent as much time with the instructions and requirements as they should have. A discussion of the assignment is helpful at any stage of the writing process, but be sure to direct any questions and clarifications the student may have back to the instructor. This way you will be modeling the expected interaction between students and instructors. Do not offer to be the go-between as we try to keep the instructional space of classroom and tutoring separate.

First, Get the Big Picture—Don’t Miss the Forest for the Trees

Ideally (exceptions will be discussed below), you should focus on global concerns first, then, if there’s time remaining, shift to local concerns. Global, or “higher order” concerns, pertain to the big picture: what’s the main topic or thesis? How is the text organized? Has the writer effectively anticipated the intended audience? Are the arguments sound, or lacking in evidence? Such issues have to be addressed before moving on to local, lower order concerns, which involve grammar, usage, style, syntax, punctuation, and so forth.
Lower Order Concerns and Reading Out Loud

There will be times when you and the client will look at local concerns in the text. Ask the writer to read the text aloud and you might be amazed at how many errors they are able to spot on their own. Also, try to get the writer to pay attention to wherever he or she hesitates during the course of her reading.

It does indeed make sense to help writers proofread their work. Just make sure that you and the client are working together to help identify errors.

Don’t Get Stuck in a Rut: Avoid Burn-Out

Do whatever you can to make the sessions a little bit different from each other. Experiment with a “high risk/high yield” approach to consulting; try new techniques. Sit someplace else. Work outside of your comfort zone. Use a handbook a lot if you haven’t done much of that. If you do use Writing Center sources extensively in your tutorials, spend a session using nothing at all. Vary your approach, experiment, and do anything to keep this activity interesting, not predictable.

What Writing Tutoring Isn’t

It’s not giving false praise. Nor is it trashing a writer’s work. It’s not simply detecting and correcting errors. It’s not playing the role of therapist. It’s not taking ownership away from the writer. It’s not having all the answers.

Resist the Temptation to Correct Every Error

Many times you’ll take one look at the client’s paper and immediately see a bunch of errors staring up at you. And you will want to start circling and correcting and explaining them right away.

Try not to do this if you haven’t yet considered some of the global concerns. If you spend half an hour correcting a page or two of prose, only to discover at the end of the session that the entire text has to be completely rewritten, you’ve wasted a session.

Also, you will feel more in control of a session when you understand the direction of the paper and writer; otherwise, you can get lost in the many layers of errors and order to futilely attack them.

An Argument’s 4 Main Ingredients

Remember the 4 key parts to most academic arguments:

- A claim (must be arguable; “people need freedom” isn’t really a claim)
- Definition of terms (you can’t assume your usage of the word “freedom” is obvious: define your abstract terms & concepts precisely)
- Evidence (without it, all you have are opinions)
- Anticipation of counter-arguments (shows you know that other opposing claims exist, and you’ve considered them)

**Brush Up on Your Grammar: Review the Handbooks/Online Resources Regularly**

Almost everyone is bad at explaining the logic of grammar. So take out a few minutes every week to **pick up a handbook and read** up on anything: participial phrases, semicolons, transitive vs. intransitive verbs, etc. You’re not supposed to have all this stuff memorized. But you should continually refer to information in a handbook the way you refer to a dictionary: frequently, and without reservation. And with so much of this reference info online, if you know where to find it and can **direct students there**, you can maximize face-to-face time to cover other issues.

**You’re Not an Expert—You’re a Guide, a Facilitator, a Peer**

Don’t ever begin to think of yourself as the Grammar Expert or the Writing Guru. You are a collaborator, one with more writing experience than the client, but a collaborator nonetheless. A good way to reinforce this is to get up during a session, grab a handbook, and spend some time looking up answers with the client.

**Don’t Gossip about the Faculty!**

If a client comes to you and starts venting about their Professor or the class, resist the temptation to join in. Such venting is unproductive to our work. We must model working with all professors with the goal of learning in mind. During conversations about coursework and assignments with clients on Writing Studio premises, you must maintain a professional attitude.

**Grades**

We understand that many clients solely focus on paper grades, but you cannot join that discussion and must explain (or ask our help to explain) that grades are reflective of criteria established and that is what the tutoring session can focus on.

**Take Dictation, Record What Clients Say**

Get clients to talk about their ideas, what they want to convey in their essays. When they do this, **write down what they say**. Convert their spoken words into writing. Then read back to them what they said. Oftentimes, with a little tinkering, you can use their words to come up with thesis statements, or even lengthier passages to be used in their essays.

Often you’ll read back to them what they've said, and they’ll be surprised at how articulate it is.

Along those lines, make sure you and the client always have a pen and paper ready for each session. The client should have a **pen in hand** or the **laptop in front** of her so she knows she is the one **who owns the paper** and will be doing the bulk of the session work.
Read an Article from our Collection of Essays Every Week

It’s essential to keep abreast of articles on Writing Center pedagogy. Most weeks the staff will be given a short “homework assignment,” where each member should use half an hour of their time to read an article in the Writing Lab Newsletter or some other publication. Even if you aren’t assigned to read a particular essay, you should already be looking through the various books and newsletters located in the Studio and on our computer archives.

Don’t ever make the mistake of thinking that you already know pretty much everything you need to know about this line of work. There’s always another insight or perspective you can learn from.

Stick to these Strategies during Online Tutoring

If you look back at the advice and tips supplied above, you’ll find that most, if not all, can be achieved in an e-tutoring session as well. It might just take a little creativity.

Some Common Session Issues/Mistakes

You do not have to “get through” the whole paper in one session, rather you need to model time management. Before you start your session, plan together on how you will use that time to cover your agreed-upon goals for the session.

If the client is quiet/reluctant, you do not need to ‘win them over’ or impress them by talking/lecturing too much. You can work to find ways to explain that they need to be engaged since it’s their own writing and only they can truly re-work/strengthen it. You should be listening and asking questions more than anything.

You don’t need to address every error, and you don’t need to pretend they’re not there. Research has shown if you find or focus on a pattern of errors, the client will walk away with a better grasp on a few things (as opposed to being overwhelmed by many things). Also, if you know there are errors you couldn’t cover in the session, you should let them know that they need to find the time to correct those based on the patterns you found or they need to have another session. Writing and rewriting takes time, usually more time than they think.

Don’t ever give in and fix someone’s paper. This is unethical and it sets off a bad chain reaction where they then expect (and tell others to expect) this type of service every time they come in. You may think you are helping, but you are hurting way more.

If you encounter something you don’t understand/know or can’t explain, do not ignore it. If it logically can be dealt with later, say that and try to get back to it. Or, ask questions of the staff, look it up with the client, and show them how you attempt to figure things out. You are not a robot with all the answers.

(Suggestions and descriptions draw from the following sources: The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors, Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood ed.; Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for
9. The Ethics of Tutoring.

1. Focus on Student: The QEP Writing Studio staff will focus on the student as a writer and the writing they are working on, rather than the grade, the instructor, or the assignment.

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.

2. Professional Courtesy: The QEP Writing Studio Staff will treat each ECSU student with professional courtesy and empathy and create a collaborative conversation rather than instructing students on what to do, or what they would do if it was their paper. To this end, they will not significantly edit the student’s writing. They may help the student to identify “trademark errors” and teach them how to edit, using an example or two.

Tutors should not get angry and frustrated with writers who get angry or frustrated. You will meet writers who resent having to come to the QEP Writing Studio. 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.

3. Not Doing Students' Work for Them: They will not in any way, shape, or form, do the students’ work for them, or write any part of the paper. In fact, they will encourage students to take ownership of their writing and academic writing goals and to develop
writing processes that are successful for them. Tutors and staff will strive to know the students as writers and to make suggestions for them.

4. *Maintaining Professional Relationships with Students:* All interactions between students and tutors will occur in the context of Writing Studio sessions be they online or face-to-face. Tutors should not work with students on their own time, or encourage students to send them papers via email. They will maintain professional interactions with students and refrain from “dating” students who are their clients.

5. *Netiquette and Timely Communication:* The Writing Studio will communicate with instructors about sessions or assignments in a professional and timely manner. They will follow the netiquette of subject line, proper address and appropriate identification. All reports should be written in complete and grammatically-correct fashion. Requests for information may be made through the Director or Writing Specialist.

6. *Full and Honest Disclosure about Tutoring Sessions:* Tutors will maintain detailed and up-to-date accounts of all sessions, being honest about successes and challenges.

7. *Use of Student Writing:* The QEP Writing Studio will not use student writing for any purposes without their express and informed consent. This relates to student examples of assignments, as well as essays used for research and professional presentation purposes.

10. *Other Helpful Resources*

**Talking Points for Class Tours of the QEP Writing**

Great success has resulted from Faculty bringing their classes to the QEP Writing Studio for short tours/introductions to the WC. It’s best when a few WCers can give these presentations.

Here are some talking points you shouldn’t miss when giving one of these 10-15 minute tours (I’ll add some comments after each point, and you should get comfortable putting things in your own words, too):

- **We’re here to help all writers at any stage in their writing process** (whether they just got the assignment, or if they think it’s ‘finished’; we work primarily with freshmen enrolled in GE 102/103 as a required feature of the QEP, from planning all the way to grammar)

- We’ve got an **online scheduling system** where they can sign up and view the schedule/make appointments anytime and from anywhere (you might end the tour by having a few folks sign up right then and there)
• We’re here to help you with your writing; we’ll work together with you. We’re not allowed to write or fix your paper for you. We can help you learn how to proofread and fix your own errors. (At all times try to avoid saying, ‘We don’t do this…’ or ‘We can’t do that…’); sadly, many people only then hear what we don’t do. Focus on what we can do.

• Our staff is comprised of highly trained and recruited undergraduates and grad students who know what it’s like to be students here. (We are guides, not experts, and we can help you become a stronger writer, but the effort and work has to come from you because the words and ideas are your own).

• Please make appointments early. If you were given 3 weeks to write a paper, it’s probably supposed to take you that long to organize, write, and revise it. Most folks benefit from at least two sessions for each paper. We will try to help you even if you come in just a few hours before something is due, but you simply might not have enough time to even make revisions and print out a new copy. We cannot rush through things just because you didn’t give us time to help.

• We have live online sessions and etutoring sessions. Explain them briefly…

• Along those lines, keep in mind that we get booked up quickly, so don’t wait til the last minute to sign up for a session. (We do take walk-in clients if we have someone free, but we strongly suggest you make an appointment.)

• The space was designed for you to bring/use your own laptop. The computers in the QEP Writing Studio are for workshops, QEP testing, and use of resources that will support your work in 102 and 103. We don’t have computers or printers for general use.

• We have many print resources you can come in and use any time (you can’t take them with you), and we can guide you to many extensive/helpful online resources (stemming from our website or even just Google) you can access from any computer, especially for grammar, MLA/APA formatting, etc.

• In addition to scheduled sessions, you are welcome to walk-in. It may happen that we have a tutor who is free to help you. No food, cellphone calls…it’s an academic space.

• Your instructor will know you came here as you will register yourself with Accutrak.

• We know many of you will want your grammar checked, and we’ll do that, but we also will want to make sure the ideas are clear and organized so we don’t end up helping you with an error-free paper that doesn’t fulfill the assignment.

• Please bring any assignments/drafts/notes you may have, and please carefully read over any feedback from your professor.

• You may work with someone who’s taken the class or read the text you’re writing about, or you may work with someone unfamiliar with your content. Either way, research and experience has shown both ways can really help you.
• Always field **questions** *(find us if you need help answering)*, especially at the end, and tell them to find you or a director if they have any further questions.

**The Pre-textual, Textual, and Post-Texual Stages of the Tutoring Session.**

This resource can also be found as “Consulting in Three Acts”  
http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/centers/iws/writingcenter/consultants/threeacts.stj

**The Pre-Textual Stage: The Beginning or Opening of a Session**

Beginning a session with a student is often the most difficult part of any session because the tutor and student must confront context, discuss expectations, and negotiate an attainable goal for a session. Frequently students come to you just after a class or from work, so they may not necessarily be in a tutoring mindset. Breaking the ice or updating can help you get a sense of where the student is coming from in a number of ways. Like any relationship, you can express investment in the student by soliciting insights from her/him, but at the same time, you need to do that with a sense of your own personal and professional boundaries as well as the student’s.

Besides context, the student and you need to move from establishing rapport to having a clear sense of expectations, and this discussion turns the session quickly towards attaining a goal or an outcome from the session. Most frequently students come with the expectation of resolving every lower-order concern with a paper in one session (a.k.a. editing a paper for every sentence-level error). As writing consultants, we often want to deal with the writing process in a broader sense and focus on higher-order, conceptual, and argumentation issues. Ultimately, you and your students must come to an understanding that you cannot:

1. suggest topics to address or write their papers
2. resolve every writing issue in a single session
3. evaluate their papers
4. work without their active participation in the session
5. proofread or edit their papers
6. interpret reading for them

At the same time, students need to know we can:

1. support their growth as writers in all aspects of the writing process
2. use each session to advance their semester-long goals of becoming better writers
3. offer techniques for self-assessing their writing (what they do well, what they need to work on)
4. help them assess and become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as writers
5. focus sessions on concrete, specific goals and/or addressing their weaknesses
6. provide a range of strategies and resources for developing a plan for writing, revising and editing papers
7. help them learn the necessary skills to read texts better or to develop questions for classroom discussion or conferences with teachers
As you will notice below, talk about expectations for and limitations of tutoring parallels a first meeting with the student, and reinforcement about what we can and cannot do as consultants and as a writing center is sometimes critical work. Once in a while, this talk of managing expectations can produce conflict because what you can give the student is not necessarily the support the student wants. Still, these expectations are a benchmark so that students get consistent and fair treatment across the board from all consultants. To put it another way, we want to assure students, faculty, and administration that the tutoring experience is relatively similar from one tutor to another. For example, agreeing to proofread or evaluate a paper puts other consultants and students in an awkward, inequitable position because they are not being treated the same. On the other hand, if students come to the center knowing that requests for proofreading or evaluation are redirected to learning strategies for proofreading or directed self-evaluation, they not only are getting a shared, common experience, but also are growing their agency as writers.

Related to this discussion of expectations is the task of goal-setting for sessions. This talk is also a delicate negotiation. Asking a student, “what can I do for you today?” can put a tutor in the position of saying, “Well, actually I can’t do that. . . .” However, posing the question, “what would you like to learn today?” sounds both artificial and like an offshoot of a Microsoft commercial. One technique that some use is to have the student do some quick self-assessment in relation to the text (assuming the session will be paper-driven):

1. What is the assignment? What are you working on?
2. When is this paper due?
3. What are you arguing? What do you want to say?
4. What are you doing well? What do you need to work on?
5. Among these things (the well, and the not so well), what would you prefer to focus on today?

The trick in this situation is to break down umbrella terms and phrases. For example, if a student needs to work on grammar, ask her what she means or ask the student what “grammar-problems” her professors have told her about. If the session is going to focus on “local” concerns, you’ll avoid conflict by getting the student to identify what aspect they want to learn ahead of time. Sometimes students will not have the insider’s language to specifically identify the exact problem they need to know; in such cases, use one of the strategies discussed in handouts. Since our center meets with students on a regular, weekly basis, the student and you can also build from prior sessions.

Ultimately, you both need to negotiate some goal that is “do-able” in the time available and a goal that leaves the student knowing more about the writing process than before she met with you.

*The Textual Stage: The Middle or the Real Action*

Once you have settled on a goal for the session, the student and you have any number of ways to
proceed. The important thing to keep in mind is to achieve learning through practice and application. In later sections of this handbook, we have a number of techniques to assist you with planning sessions, conferences focused on building argument, revision sessions and the like. Across all techniques, a philosophy (or pedagogy) centered on student-driven, student-centered learning dominates, and we also emphasize a non-directive approach to building knowledge. At minimum, this mindset means students own the session and their paper. To facilitate such interaction, sit side-by-side and keep the paper in front of the student. Also, have him or her write down his/her own changes and notes, and write your own notes on a separate piece of paper. Once you hold a paper or begin writing on the student’s text, you have subtly shifted ownership of the session and paper to you. If you sit across a table from the student, you’ve created a symbolic and literal gulf between you and student; rather than collaborate on learning, the separation of space connotes a power differential (the “expert,” the “knowledge-keeper” vs. the “novice,” the “knowledge seeker”). In contrast, sitting alongside each other enables you and the student to share the paper, to read it together, to dialog over aspects of concern.

A “teaching with practice” pedagogy generally involves learning what students know and do not know, assisting them to discover/learn what they need to know, having them apply this knowledge to the given area of concern, and assessing whether they have acquired that knowledge (do they get it?). Assessing students’ knowledge involves asking questions geared toward them disclosing what they know: for example, in a session on paragraphing, a tutor might ask, “What are body paragraphs?” or “What function does a body paragraph serve?” or “What does a reader expect to find in a body paragraph?” Depending on the student’s response, a tutor can fill in gaps, “Typically a body paragraph does. . . .” or a tutor can turn to a writer’s reference text, juxtaposing strong and weak paragraphs. The elements of a strong paragraph--coherence, unity, and focus--can come to light and be modeled. Once the student has this base of knowledge, she and you can turn to her paper, have her self-diagnose with your assistance, notice patterns of problems, and move to another paragraph for application.

Connected with the physical set-up of sessions and the general pedagogic approach, dialogue during sessions needs to disrupt usual teaching power dynamics and encourage collaboration. Since we are not teachers in the usual classroom sense, we must be vigilant to not become evaluative or directive to students who work with us. Though at times we may sound passive or like amateur therapists, turning directive statements (e.g., “This sentence isn’t clear to me.”) to non-directive questions (e.g., “Would you tell me what you’re trying to say in this sentence? How is what you said different from what you wrote?”) upends the power embedded in “telling students what to do” and redirects our talk toward empowering students to rethink and acquire agency over their own voice and writing. At the same time complete orthodoxy on either end of the directive/non-directive continuum is not reasonable; consultants will sometimes need to adjust their styles to compensate for student learning needs, but we must, in any situation, be self-reflexive about our choices and solicit feedback from students, fellow consultants and the Writing Center director.

The Post-textual Stage: The End
The closing of a session is the most likely slighted, yet most critical stage of a session. Saving some time at the end of a session allows the student and you to summarize what you have dealt with during the session, assess what you/she/he have learned, and develop a plan for the next session. Like our pedagogy during the earlier parts of the session, students’ insights are extremely important: we can get a sense of what they now know that they did not know prior to coming to the session; we get an idea of what learning techniques work; we get insight on what students want to do in future sessions. Moreover, the student walks away with a clear awareness of what she accomplished and what she wants to deal with in the future.

Works Cited
