UNT DALLAS WRITING CENTER FACULTY FAQ

- **Who can use the Writing Center?**
The Writing Center serves all members of the UNT Dallas community: currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and faculty. We work with papers, assignments, and projects from all disciplines and can help with any stage of the writing process.

- **Who works in the Writing Center?**
Our staff consists of two full-time tutors and a growing number of graduate and undergraduate students. Our full-time tutors have Ph.D's, have both taught writing courses at the college and university level, and have two or more years of tutoring experience. To be selected as a peer tutor, all students must be (a) recommended by a professor, (b) meet strict G.P.A. and grade requirements, (c) pass several levels of writing tests and diagnostics, and (d) receive intensive training on how to tutor students in writing. Both our professional and student tutors receive consistent training even after the selection process is complete.

- **Will I know if one of my students uses the Writing Center?**
Yes. If you request that students bring proof that they have visited the Writing Center, we will provide you with information about their sessions. Students must notify the tutors when they come in for an appointment their professor has requested proof of visit. If this occurs, the tutors will email the notes from the session to the student. It is the students' responsibility to pass that information on to you.

- **My students are working on a group project. Can the whole group come in for an appointment?**
Yes. Students may make a group appointment if they are working on a group assignment. In fact, we prefer that all group members come to the Writing Center during a group appointment. Most groups divide up the writing assignment, and each student writes a small portion of the paper. If only one student comes in for help on the assignment, we can only focus on that student's portion of the assignment. When the whole group comes in, we can look at the paper as whole and check for smooth transitions and clarity as a collective group, and the tutors can also discuss grammar issues with individual writers. This approach also forces all students to engage during the sessions and actively participate in the revision process instead of having one student do all of the work.

- **Can students bring in non-course work (creative writing, personal statements, applications, etc.)?**
Yes. We highly encourage students to bring in non-course work such as creative writing because it helps them embrace a positive culture of writing. We also help students with resumes, cover letters, essays for graduate school, personal statements, and oral presentations. Our tutors love seeing this kind of work because it allows them to think outside-the-box and challenge students on a deeper level.
What happens during a Writing Center consultation/appointment?

Whether helping with brainstorming, forming a thesis, adding support and citations, restructuring, or proofreading, we take the same non-directive and Socratic approach. Every session lasts about 40-45 minutes and starts with lots of questions from the tutor about the assignment, the due date, the students' intentions (what the writer thinks he or she is trying to say), and the students' concerns. This "interview" stage helps us begin setting an agenda for the session and helps us know what to focus on as we work through the assignment with students.

We like to have students read their drafts out loud. This helps writers hear when the words on the paper don't fully match the intentions in their head and can help them pick up on small grammar or spelling issues. Afterwards, the tutor explains what he or she learned from the paper and identifies areas that need to be addressed. Unless a student identifies a specific concern up front--say, transitions or punctuation--we work with the big picture first: does the paper fulfill the assignment (assuming the student fully understands the assignment and explains it to the tutor)? Does it have a thesis or main point that establishes a clear direction for the rest of the paper? Most students state that their main concern is making sure that their paper "makes sense" or "flows well," so we address those higher-order concerns first. From there, we move on to development, organization, clarity, grammar, and documentation.

Before the session ends, the tutor reviews the topics that were discussed during the session to make sure that students understand their problem areas and are aware of the corrections that we suggest should be made. We also like to close the session by suggesting additional revisions and what other steps the students can take to make the paper better. We always encourage students to come back to the center after they have made revisions so that the paper is as polished as possible.

Can I require my whole class to bring their papers to the Writing Center?

Please don't! We appreciate your concern for having as many of your students as possible get assistance, but we find from experience that when an entire class is required to see us, most will wait until the last minute (around midterms and finals) when we are fully booked and can't help all of them. Others will come without any serious intention of revising their work and just come to verify that they have fulfilled the requirement. Under such circumstances, the sessions tend not to be very productive, and students will rarely make the suggested revisions before turning their assignments in.

Many of my students are terrible proofreaders. Can I suggest that they bring their papers to the Writing Center for proofreading?

Yes, as long as they understand that we won't edit or proofread their papers for them (they won't learn anything that way). Instead, we help them learn how to recognize and correct their errors. The best way to provide instruction in grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, etc., is in the context of reading and discussing the writing that students bring to us. Our goal is to help students identify error patterns in their work so they can start to identify and correct them on their own.

For particularly long papers (usually anything over 5 pages), we do not provide line-by-line editing for the entire paper, and we may not be able to get through the entire paper in one session. If this happens, we'll advise students to make the revisions and make another appointment to finish going over the rest of the paper.
I have students who desperately need help with writing. Can I require them to visit the Writing Center?

We strongly advise against it; studies show that requiring students to use the Writing Center often backfires. If students are not ready to seek help or are not open to receiving help, they will not be receptive or engaged during sessions. They will also be less likely to make any of the suggested revisions. Promoting the Writing Center and the services that we offer to the entire class is a better alternative and will make it easier to personally encourage individual students when needed.

Can the Writing Center help students who are struggling because English is not their native language?

Yes, we often work with ESL/ELL students. However, it's important to understand that ESL/ELL students have different needs than native speakers. Although we try to explain the rules and quirks of the language, our staff is not specialized in ESL/ELL instruction. Furthermore, adequately covering all of the rules and quirks would require more than just the 40-45 minutes we allot to each student appointment. Another consideration is that we will not rewrite their sentences or correct every error for them. Instead, we work to identify patterns of errors and help the student understand how to avoid repeating these same errors.

Writing in a second language can be a difficult and frustrating process that requires persistent practice outside the Writing Center in order to begin applying lessons learned during tutoring sessions. If students show interest, we will direct them to resources we have available that can assist them with this practice, and we encourage you to do the same. Although immediate results may not be evident, most of the ESL/ELL students who come to see us repeatedly and work hard between sessions gradually make progress and will see improvement in their writing and speaking skills over time.

I've sometimes had students visit the Writing Center and still turn in poorly written papers. How do you explain that?

We're the first ones to acknowledge that not every session is successful. A number of factors can limit the amount of progress in a given session. A prevalent one is what we call the "So what?" paper. Oftentimes, students who visit the center have "thinking" problems rather than "writing" problems. Most students understand the formal requirements of a typical academic paper, but they don't fully understand (or care about) the material, which leaves them thinking something along the lines of "so what? Why is any of this important?" When this happens, we employ several techniques to prod a student's thinking, but we avoid forming concepts for them because this could be considered plagiarism. If our techniques do not yield positive results, we suggest that students talk to their professors.

Another frequent obstacle we encounter is the student who arrives the night before OR hours before the assignment is due, and after some evaluation, we discover that the paper has more problems that we can address in 40-45 minutes. Our tutors have to set an agenda and make quick decisions about the most pressing problem[s]. We try to focus on higher-order concerns first, and if time permits, we then address some of the lower-order concerns like grammar. We try to avoid "taking over the paper" and "fixing it" for the students because we know that students will not learn this way. We do, however, break down concepts, provide examples, and point out as many of the lower-order concerns as possible without writing on a student's paper.
We cannot and do not guarantee that students will have perfect or nearly perfect papers after they visit us, especially if they only come in one time. However, if students follow the revision process and bring in a single piece of writing over a period of time, the chances that their paper will have the least amount of errors possible increase. Think of the Writing Center as a place where students can get an objective response to their work, not a one stop “fix-it shop.” Our main goal is to keep students moving through the writing and revision processes, asking the right kind of leading questions, and providing strategies to help them take their writing to the next level. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with each student.

- **How do I know that the Writing Center's evaluation of a student's paper won't contradict mine?**
  
  Furthermore, do tutors in the Writing Center discuss grades with students?

Although there are times when we might focus on different areas of a paper, our tutors are trained to avoid evaluating student work. Our job is to provide students with an honest reaction to their work from a perspective of an uninformed but interested reader. Instead of evaluating students' work as "good" or "bad," we try to describe where we get lost, where we have questions, or when we need more information to fulfill the expectations of a general reader. We try to help them see where their intentions match their words on the page and the criteria of the assignment. While we try to be encouraging by responding enthusiastically to students' ideas and efforts, we also tell students that their professors will read their work a different level of expectations since they are the experts in the class and set the grade criteria. If students have questions about their grades, we direct them to their professors. One of our favorite sayings in the Writing Center is that students are responsible for the papers they turn in, and their instructors are responsible for evaluating them.