Cornell University

Writing Walk-In Service

Handbook

~~ Mary Gilliland

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The Knight Institute for
Writing in the Disciplines

Writing Walk-In Service

174 Rockefeller Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York

Mary Gilliland
Director
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mg24@cornell.edu

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Materials by Judy Pierpont for tutors of multilingual writers and ESL students on pages 34-36 and 38-45 should also bear her c. 2000 credit.

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Prologue

One-to-one conversation is ephemeral, but cumulative insight lasts:

> I see tutoring for the Walk-In Service as a dynamic space where the personal and the interpersonal coincide and feed one another….I can hear my tutoring voice clearly when I write, and this self-reflective ability has improved my writing significantly.
>
> The most important thing about being a new tutor is being able to follow your instincts. If you mentally construct how your session should go before you start, it could come toppling down as the writer defies your expectations. It's probably best to relax, give yourself time to become comfortable with the writer and with the paper. Evaluate the situation as best you can and conduct the session accordingly.
>
> Tutoring has been by far the most challenging and fulfilling and cathartic job I have ever had in my life. Believe it or not, few things give me as much pleasure as a really good session. It's as good as French toast with strawberry ice cream.
>
> I've learned that asking people questions is one of the best ways to teach and that what the writer has to say is much more important than what I have to say. I've learned a lot of patience, whether with time constraints, difficult or stubborn people, or my own limits (on both energy and knowledge). I've learned a lot about learning styles and how to cater to different kinds of learners. Some people can talk things out; others need to scribble on paper (I'm definitely the latter). Even though I don't consciously think about it that much, I at least attempt to change my style of tutoring to meet the person's needs.
>
> I think the hardest part of tutoring is acknowledging that you don't hold all the answers….Sometimes writers will come in with problems that you simply don't know how to solve. It's tempting to want to address every single little issue in the whole paper, and it's frustrating when you can't, but realizing that such an approach is simply not feasible for every writer is an important realization that, for me, came gradually with experience.
>
> To see so many different styles of writing, and to see some common mistakes and virtues, has given me a cleaner understanding of better writing. And as helpful as tutoring itself has been, the staff meetings are just as effective. For one hour, I have the privilege to meet with a group of talented tutors and learn about actual techniques of improving writing, rather than trying to rely only on critical instincts.

These words by Writing Walk-In Service tutors distill the essence of the enterprise. In this handbook you will find knowledge accumulated and refined over the course of fifteen years.

Tutoring is enjoyable and rewarding, as well as challenging and complex. The multiplicity of factors to be considered include your mood, your energy, the writer's

mood and energy, the assignment or project, your interest in the subject, the writer's interest in the subject, and both of your social interaction skills.

The Writing Walk-In Service is a resource for every writer on campus, serving university faculty, staff, and graduate students, as well as what the majority of sessions address: a range of undergraduate needs. Like that of most academic writing tutor programs, our approach is more Socratic than didactic. Socrates taught through conversation, asking questions. Tutors present writers with options—possibilities, choices. The person who visits for help is encouraged to be as active as possible so that composition or revision will be substantive rather than superficial.

You will tutor writers in states of extreme fear, of reasonable anxiety, of justified ecstasy, of arrogant over-confidence, and all the shades between. Excellent writers will bring you questions about style—that elusive and magnetic concept. Novice writers will bring you what seem like the same old questions. In either case, you do best to embrace beginner's mind. You may question your effectiveness on occasion, feel the need to reflect in a session report or bring as issue to staff meeting. But keep your sense of humor too. Most writers coming in to be tutored on this campus seem to have a genuine interest in improving their language skills beyond the essay at hand, which makes it a pleasure to guide them in the individualistic art of writing. That they are seeking such skills even though they may already be doing well exhibits a level of engagement and concern far beyond what you might expect. Whether you focus on getting started or on difficulties with organization, on an early draft or a revision that needs fine tuning, watching the growth of their initiative, confidence and enthusiasm about a difficult and sometimes painful process is a pleasure.

The Context

Cornell's Writing Walk-In Service opened in 1978. It hasn't as many distinguishing features as the Buddha, but it does have a few:

> We select tutors talented in both writing and interpersonal skills. The job is a paid professional appointment rather than a process of learning how to tutor in a course for academic credit.
>
> Although we primarily serve the student body of Cornell, we are open to the entire campus community: faculty, staff, and the occasional spouse or alum.
>
> We invite instructors to consult with tutors, either at scheduled Writing Walk-In Service hours, or by arranging for an Essay Response Consultation (ERC).
>
> We operate on a drop-in basis, not by appointment.
>
> We do not operate out of an English Department.
>
> We do not send reports to instructors or sign attendance forms.
>
> We do not give out handouts about writing techniques.

We are a decentralized Writing Walk-In Service, rather than a writing center, currently with four campus locations. We locate tutors where writers live and work, and have changed locales several times in response to demographic trends.

The Writing Walk-In Service is a program of the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, within the College of Arts and Sciences. Cornell is a prestigious research university comprised of both private and public colleges. As New York State's land-grant university, it has both a mission and a strong tradition of outreach and public service. There are many models for writing tutoring; ours has evolved in relation to the needs of our institution.

Four Principles for Tutoring

If text could be spherical instead of linear, these principles would be arranged in the shape of a mandala or a medicine wheel: each reverberates and modifies the other three. The four were summarized by the National Council of Teachers of English from reports and research about writing tutoring when it first became widespread on college campuses. They still mark 4 complementary directions for effective tutorials.

Establish and maintain rapport: In the tutoring business interactive skills are as important as knowledge. Body language and tone of voice can have as much impact as what you say. Chatting while writers fill out the top of the report form helps them feel welcome. They've reached a safe haven for writing where improvement can happen—which is not to say it's all going to feel cozy. But working with you may feel almost like a break from other stresses.

A conversational environment in which both people feel comfortable encourages focus, goal setting, and parsing the work into manageable steps. It includes listening, silences, and the expression of feelings. Less can be more. Explaining too much can be disheartening. Helping too much or too soon can detract from the session. To prevent a mid-point or end-of-session startle that the suggestions you've made are not the most relevant, gather as much information as possible from the writer as you start and as you go along. Be encouraging and point out existing strengths in the piece of writing, but avoid cheerleading—give only truthful praise. If some kind of personality clash or sensitive point arises, you can usually defuse the situation by redirecting attention back to the text, the writing that's being discussed.

Maintaining rapport enhances the chances that the writer of a competent essay that's missing a spark will light it. It extends from asking what the writer was trying to accomplish with the choice of a word—in hopes, say, that giving some thought to the effect of passive constructions in a humanities paper will prompt independent query into larger issues in prose—to listening a bit to the venting of problems with a choice of major or even a roommate. Having writers read aloud, mark the paper, and remember the final decision is theirs, are ways to foster ease and independence with writing and with you.

Let the writer do the work: At some point everyone must discover an individualized voice, which is an inherently solitary task. Yet tutors can help writers understand the power, placement, and purpose of sentence, paragraph, essay.

Tutors who collaborate as listeners and partners, who limit their evaluation, and who allow writers to talk, are those most likely to evoke substantive thought about and revision in writing. If you find you are taking too much responsibility for the session, ask

the writer for solutions. Remember that improvement is desirable in the piece of writing at hand but, more importantly, we're trying to help people we work with improve their ability to write.

Yet, with a piece written for a unique occasion, it can be appropriate to intervene in ways that tutors don't on academic papers. Reading a Cornell employee's report, for example, or a senior's personal statement for professional school, you many experience tension between wanting to help such writers develop the story they want to write and reminding (or informing) them about the audience's expectations. Tutors are not directive consultants, but neither are they indirect about essentials. Writers can't reflect on or make use of knowledge or experience they do not possess—such as tips for actively reading for ideas in essays or textbooks, or finding patterns of error in grammar.

Most often, though, tutoring returns the search for solutions to the one who asked for help. Helping people to shoulder their responsibilities strengthens them. Be a coach—attentive and caring, but largely on the sidelines. Two techniques for detaching from your (sometimes dangerous) good intentions are being realistically appreciative and ascertaining as much information as possible. Stop to ask questions. Use your confusion to respond. Set limits. One or two central issues tackled and dealt with? Let the rest go.

Among our locations' supplies is scrap paper—and it's a useful conduit between the writer's speech and hand, when you hear from the mouth just what the paper needs to say. 'Write that down!' Either or both of you can. And use scrap yourself as freely as you wish. It can help reduce your talk time and amplify the writer's. Jotting while you work can improve delivery of your feedback—and also be a take-home incentive for the writer's memory, planning and rewriting. When a mental question about writing arises at a later time when they're working alone, writers can model their inspiration on possibilities that you have offered.

Put Higher-order Concerns (HOCs) before Lower-order Concerns (LOCs): Writing Walk-In Service tutors pay closest attention to the articulation, development, and organization of ideas. HOCs include defining and developing a thesis, shaping a coherent argument, making strong use of evidence, and employing a consistent tone. Because change in any of these features is a major change in the piece of writing, it's sound to address them before (or instead of) moving on to LOCs, which include sentence-level issues such as syntax, diction, usage, grammar, punctuation. When the HOCs are working, a writer can often improve LOCs independently because of the stronger sense of purpose and confidence that ensues.

A tutoring session devoted to developing the introduction, or to making a central paragraph orderly, coherent, specifically exemplified, and concise, can go a long way toward firming up the HOCs. But bear in mind that the Walk-In Service has no rule of thumb that can't be bent. Sometimes one reaches an HOC via a close look at an LOC— principles of organizing a sentence may be transferable to organizing supporting points. And tutoring excellent writers can move the LOC category to the foreground; do help active interested stylists with their own line-editing!

Occasionally an HOC might encompass more than the text. Helping a student writer understand the assignment or formulate questions for the instructor in order to meet the expectations of an assignment is a higher-order concern. Homers are only hit by those who make it into the batting order.

Don't try to be an expert: Trust your aesthetic judgment. You may be minimally knowledgeable about the writer's field of study but principles of form and expression can

still be spotted even if the jargon is Greek to you. This handbook's later section, 'Subject Specific Writing', will give you pointers about expectations for writing in disciplines other than your own.

Sometimes the writer's expectations fall outside Walk-In Service parameters. Our homepage lets viewers know that tutors do not make corrections for writers at the sentence level, i.e., proofread. But not everyone goes on the Web before they visit the Service. Let such people know the WIS policy. The same goes for those who bring a lengthy essay or a thesis and expect you to read it in its entirety, or those with a paper due next day who expect a miracle. Particular questions can be addressed, but the request is beyond the capacity of a Service working on a drop-in basis.

Some visitors will expect you to be a grammar expert. If you are, that's fine. Answer the question. If you're not, that's one reason we keep a handbook and a dictionary at all of our locations. The writer can look it up, with your guidance if necessary, and thus become better at using writing references for next time.

Occasionally a tutor self-diagnoses a dread illness called grammar-policiosis. If you find that you are focusing principally on grammar in many tutorials, perhaps too many, perhaps as a way to save time because other writers are waiting, please take the following remedies: Remember that the tutor's priority is to help improve the writer's writing as much or more than the particular paper. Meet the writer at the level of his or her enthusiasm—if that's grammar, sail with it; if not, shift your focus. Ask what draft this is—if early, grammar may be less of an appropriate issue to work with.

Many writers want instant fixes, algorithms, rules. Alas, writing's too subjective. It's been said that good writing follows the rules, and great writing knows how to break them. Writing is a personal thing, but too many people take writing personally, as a reflection of their self-worth. You can convey that this doesn't have to be so. A draft that isn't working doesn't imply failure. Writing is a process.

The Writing Walk-In Service staff has a spectrum of experience about tutoring—sometimes because of numbers of semesters worked, sometimes because of enlightenment while tutoring. But these differences are not algorithms! More experienced tutors can learn from new tutors, and vice versa.

Why 'Writer'?

Word choice matters. The common term in the literature for students working with tutors is *tutee*. Indeed, you'll find it towards the end of this handbook in a few 'Reflections' written by past tutors. But think about how the person visiting your shift is or hopes to be a writer—either in terms of the pages in hand, or for a lifetime. The word *writer* deletes connotations of a passive recipient, connotes respect, equalizes the peer relationship that you engage in. *Writer* is a way of keeping the pen in the other person's hand, of empowering that pen, and thus of allowing ideas or choice of options to be that person's responsibility. You can begin to take the next *tutee* for granted in ways that you can't with the next *writer*. At the very least—and something to recall when you work (or play) with novice writers—the word creates an expectation of living up to potential, of an identity coming into being.

Each person coming to the Service has the resources, the raw materials, to improve their writing; your guiding hand helps them extract the goodness they are capable of. This word choice is part of our co-creation of a positive culture for writing on this campus. When you tutor a writer you engage, in a profound sense, in collaborative learning.

Why You?

You are one of a staff of graduate and undergraduate students from many fields of study, hired to serve as a responsive reader and to discuss questions about the writing process or about a particular piece of writing. That may be an academic paper at any stage of its composition. Or it may be business correspondence, creative writing, an elective project, parts of a master's thesis, a personal statement, a proposal, a report. You may also work with questions about self-confidence in writing, about critical reading in relations to writing, about analytic or imaginative thought. Topics discussed may range from audience, purpose, and voice to the clarity and quality of the prose on the page. Tutors themselves use the Writing Walk-In Service, especially with their most important writing projects (the month or two before senior honors theses are due, there's a spike). As tutors are exceptional writers, this choice bespeaks the quality of the Service.

Tutors range in academic age from sophomore to ABD, and represent the three divisions of academic disciplines at Cornell: humanities, social sciences, and sciences. For the occasional Walk-In visitor who questions your age or qualifications—or physical markers like gender, ethnicity, height—assertiveness about your status and authority is the best response. You have the right to be respected, to remove yourself from any situation that feels uncomfortable, to set limits, to be wrong, to claim ignorance, and to feel you are the same size as everyone else. You also have the rights to be listened to and to disagree. Above all, you have the right to breathe.

Tactics and timing of talking and listening change with tutoring experience, as does handling of limits and priorities—for example, acknowledging as worthwhile and successful a session that addresses the problems in one convoluted paragraph. Intuitions about how much feedback or new writing ideas a given individual can process also expands with experience.

Out of all the worthy applicants, many of whom were also qualified to tutor at the Writing Walk-In Service, you were hired—not only because of what you know and what you can do, but because of who you are.

An Outline of a Tutoring Session

The Writing Walk-In Service's pedagogical philosophy emerges most clearly in the practice of its tutors. This outline is meant to show how our principles of tutoring can work in real life. It's phrased as instructions, but naturally it's not meant to prescribe a fixed procedure: individual tutors and writers develop sessions between them, so that each session is more or less unique.

Remember that the session begins as soon as the writer sits down, not when you start giving advice. Even **BEFORE READING** the two of you begin exchanging information and shaping the session.

Introduce yourself: Some writers feel extremely nervous about using the Walk-In Service. Often seeing a nice smile, getting some eye-contact, and just learning their tutor's name help to put a writer at ease.

Ask questions about the paper: What's the topic? What's the purpose? Who is its audience? When is it due? How long should it be? How far along in the writing process is it?

Find out what the writer wants to work on: This can be trickier than it sounds. While sophisticated writers are often able to articulate just what they need, less experienced writers sometimes just have the sense that something is wrong. Take time to ask **open** questions: **What** kinds of problems does the writer normally have? **How** does the writer think the paper needs improvement? **Could** the essay be organized in a different way?

Set out limits: Tutors are not experts in all disciplinary fields and do not have to be. If you can't help the writer with some technical aspect of the paper, say so right off the bat. Similarly, if time constraints prevent you from addressing every one of a writer's concerns, let her know what the constraints are so that she can choose what to work on.

Outline the session: Letting the writer know how you'd like to proceed has two good effects. First, it shows him that you've been listening to what he's said so far and are giving thought to his concerns. Second, it allows him to intervene if the session you have in mind isn't what he has in mind.

The session continues **WHILE YOU READ**. In some cases tutors prefer to read through to the end of the paper, then talk about it. In other cases tutors prefer to discuss the paper as they read it. The guidelines below are good in either case.

Ask permission to write on the paper: Writers almost always say 'yes'. But they're also usually glad to be asked. Asking permission to mark it underscores the fact that the paper still belongs to its author.

Look for the problems the writer has described: This is particularly important if the writer's been vague about what areas of the paper need work. Try to find certain passages or features that typify what you think the problem is, so that you can read them back to the writer for confirmation.

AFTER READING, it's usually a good idea to pause and make sure you and the writer are on the same page before proceeding.

Confirm that you've been looking for the right problems: Repeat the issues the writer raised, and point to parts of the paper where you think those issues stand out. Let the writer direct you elsewhere if she thinks you got it wrong.

Suggest other possible focuses for the session: If the paper has flaws that the writer hasn't brought up, now is the time to point them out. Writers are often uncertain what their real problems are, or are embarrassed about bringing them up. Someone who "doesn't understand every last grammar rule," or "thinks her transitions could be smoother," may just be unwilling to say that she doesn't think she's making her argument very well. However, what to work on should always be the writer's decision.

Outline the session again: Now that you know what you're dealing with, you and the writer are in a much better position to decide how the session will go. It usually helps to lay out a full-but-not-too-detailed plan.

WORKING TOGETHER ON THE PAPER will probably occupy most of the session. Keep these points in mind while you do so.

Listen: Listening means not just paying attention when the writer is speaking, but also giving him time to speak. It's almost always best not to cut the writer off. Don't become so focused on your advice that you are inattentive to his interests and concerns.

Provide choices: If you can help it, don't just tell the writer what to do to solve his problems. Instead lay out strategies for dealing with them. Writing is about making choices, after all.

Don't use grammar as a crutch: Grammar is an excellent topic for tutorials. But some tutors with a highly developed grammatical sensibility are tempted merely to run through the paper correcting mistakes. Remember that your top priority is improving the writer's writing, not the paper at hand, and that you should allow the writer to direct the session.

Use open questions: Don't ask questions that require only a 'yes' or 'no' for an answer. Nothing shuts down conversation more quickly than "Yes, you're right." Questions that begin with 'What'or 'How' of 'Could' usually elicit the most response.

Don't be afraid of silence: Make sure that both you and the writer have time to stop and think. After you've asked a question, sometimes it's a good idea to count to ten in your head before offering a possible answer or moving on.

Rephrase, rephrase, rephrase: Much of your job as a tutor is to help the writer hear what she herself is saying. Try to repeat what she's told you back to her in different words. This allows her to refine her own ideas by determining how much what you've said agrees with what she thinks. By the same token, it often helps to ask the writer to repeat what she's just said in a new way.

THE END OF THE SESSION can prove as useful as the rest. Take it as an opportunity to review and plan ahead.

Summarize what you've done: Sometimes the major points of a session get lost in the mix. Either take the time yourself to mention what has been important about the work the two of you have done, or have the writer do it.

Have the writer make a plan: We've all had the experience of feeling great after a conversation about a paper, then sitting down to write and not being able to remember any of our good ideas. You can help the writer avoid this experience by having her describe to you exactly what the next steps in the writing process will be.

I. PRACTICALITIES, POLICIES, PROFESSIONALISM

1. Shift Coverage and Facilities

The Writing Walk-In Service is open during fall and spring terms of the academic year. We open on the Sunday following the second full week of classes, and close after the Tuesday evening shift of study week. We are closed during academic breaks, and reopen on the day that classes resume (i.e., report for work on the Wednesday after fall break, but do not on the Sunday following Thanksgiving).

When seeking another tutor to substitute on one of your shifts, kindly give your sub prospects two or three days' notice; avoid last-minute requests. Confirm the change with the tutor who has offered to substitute for you. If you are responsible for transporting records to or from that shift, confirm that the sub will do so.

We pride ourselves on 99% shift coverage every semester, but if you have an absolute last-minute emergency and can't find a sub, call the tutoring location and have them post a sign. Also call the Director to let her know, even if it's next day.

If the university officially closes because of a snowstorm, the Writing Walk-In Service is also closed.

Keep the door to the room partially or fully open; that lets writers know you are there.

Report any problems with the room you are working in to the service desk at the facility where it's located and to the Administrative Assistant at the Writing Workshop.

A handout distributed each semester describes the workings and responsibilities at each of the different campus Writing Walk-In Service locations.

After the service opens during the academic semester, and until it closes, it is a conflict of interest to take on additional writing tutoring for pay. Refer such requests to the list of Freelance Editors.

2. Getting Paid

When filing COLTS, please send an e-mail to the Administrative Assistant explaining any changes to your regular schedule of Walk-In shifts. When you've worked as a substitute include the date, who you subbed for, and how many hours it took; when someone's subbed for you, include the same information. For example: "I worked my regular hours, plus I subbed for Hermione at RPU on the evening of 9/9 – 3 hours."

Remember to fill in your hour for attending staff meetings.

3. Walk-In Service Rules of Thumb/Answers to FAQs

We do not pay overtime. So do not stay overtime. But be on time!

When pressed for time, i.e., when there's a line, limit the session to 20 minutes.

We suggest a 4 page limit if you're doing intense work on style or language patterns.

We do not work with lengthy writing projects such as theses or dissertations in their entirety. Give a referral to the Freelance Editors List.

Feel free to give out WIS bookmarks when you recommend that someone visit the Service again. Encourage writers to (next time) start their work as early as they can, to bring with them a copy of the paper on which a revision is based, and, especially in the case of First-year Writing Seminar students, to bring a copy of the assignment and the text on which it is based.

Do not sign instructors' requests that you verify a student's visit to the WIS. The Director will e-mail instructors who are curious about this policy if you give her their address.

Tread lightly, if at all, on the rare occasions when someone brings a take-home exam in. Style and language problems might be addressed, but not substance. You are free to excuse yourself from the tutorial if you'd rather not be involved with this type of assignment.

Students experiencing particularly severe difficulty with English as a second language can be referred to their advisor, their committee chair, or the dean of their college for advice about getting sustained and specialized assistance with language.

If a writer's work is on a laptop but you prefer to work on paper, state your preference. Before starting work on a laptop, have the writer make a duplicate first.

4. Proofreading Policy

In our publicity we say we do not edit. What this really means is that we do not proofread; we do not make corrections for writers; we are not a secretarial service. We don't line edit. Instead we look for patterns of error and work with writers on recognizing and correcting those patterns. **We do help active, interested writers with their line editing; we do work with capable writers on sentences and on style, just as we do on any other facet of their writing.**

Clear and courteous communications about our advertised policy ('We don't proofread or edit, but our tutors will help you with....') is important. Many visitors to the Walk-In Service ask for proofreading as a comfortable way of requesting help on a paper. It's a lot easier to tell your friends that you're taking your paper to be proofread than to tell them that you're taking it to be tutored. Don't just laugh wickedly or say that we don't do that. There are several ways to respond.

Find out what the writer means by 'proofreading': Gather more information. Let writers seeking help define their terms so that you understand the request.

Explain that tutors do work with patterns of error if the writer wants to actively participate and learn something.

Refer the writer elsewhere: If the piece of writing really needs proofreading, and proofreading is clearly what the writer wants, then turn to the current Freelance Editor list (usually located in the front of the binder where the xeroxes of WIS sessions are alphabetically filed) Make sure the list is current, as most listings from the previous year are obsolete. The same information is available on our website and at the Writing Workshop office.

5. Working Within Time Limits

All Writing Walk-In Service locations post the sign 'When the tutor is busy, consultations are limited to 20 minutes.' How do you accomplish something substantive with each writer, and still stay focused and keep moving? Here are some suggestions from our wells of wisdom:

Work on the grammar of the thesis statement, to combine attention to form and substance.

Ask what the writer wants to get out of the session.

Inform writers about the time limit when you begin to talk with them; this prevents buildup of anxiety and gives you permission not to read the entire paper closely.

If the paper is due next day, focus on an important element – one paragraph, or the structure.

Rather than thinking 'how can I fit 40 minutes worth into 20,' look at how worthwhile the 20 minutes can be: 20 minutes can be very productive.

Start your thinking from the standard that 20 minutes or more is what we offer; on busy shifts we just can't offer more.

You have the right to 2 minutes to fill out the 'Discussion' part of the report form before starting with the next person. During an especially busy shift, you might have the writer fill in some or all of that section. (This can be a good choice pedagogically even on a slow shift – use your intuition; a writer may remember the session content better if it's written down.)

If there's been a line waiting for tutoring, and still an hour of the shift to go, you can direct people to another Writing Walk-In Service location.

If you feel overwhelmed at any time, remember that tutors do not have to be experts. Tutors also gain knowledge as they go, and ability to work quickly with all genres and purposes of writing grows with each semester of your experience.

6. Referrals

… to the Writing Walk-In Service

Instructors are encouraged to refer students for specific features of writing they may be having difficulty with. A student from a First-year Writing Seminar, for example, may need a number of sessions on supporting reasoning and elaboration, or on transitions and paragraph structure. Some of our greatest success stories emerge from these cases. Referred students who have met with the Director have been informed about the nature of our service. They have been advised that sessions are most helpful when they can verbalize the specific area of writing that gives them questions or needs improvement. At times they are advised to work with a particular tutor or two for several sessions, but like anyone else who arrives they wait their turn if the shift is busy. You may occasionally need to review these procedures with a referred student.

… by the Writing Walk-In Service

As a Walk-In tutor, you are ideally placed to encounter the few students either severely under-prepared for college writing, or in need of language tutoring, who slipped through the cracks during first-year or transfer orientations. Contact info for either option can be found in the Referrals section.

If you work with a writer who is noticeably and disproportionately struggling in a First-year Writing Seminar, you can suggest that she schedule an appointment with the Director of the Writing Workshop to discuss transferring to the First-year Writing Seminar that is offered there. This 3-credit FWS is graded strictly S/U, has a smaller class size, and offers frequent conferences with the instructor.

If you work with a first-year seminar or transfer student who needs to improve ability in speaking, writing, and understanding English, suggest that he schedule an appointment with the Language Specialist in the Writing Workshop to discuss the ESL Peer Tutoring Program. In this non-credit program, tutor and student meet twice a week for one-hour sessions throughout the semester.

Be aware that you are not out to canvas for the above referrals! Spaces are very few and very limited. But your assessment and advice at the right moment can ease an individual's way into being able to play a more active role in their own education.

7. Staff Meetings

The Writing Walk-In Service staff are a talented bunch; this Handbook grew out of discussions and tutor presentations at our staff meetings. One of the benefits of your job is getting to know the other tutors. Meetings are fun, as well as serious business. You are paid for the meeting hour and required to attend. Certain writing topics need discussion at certain times of year because a majority of writers in those areas are seeking help then. A guest speaker might be invited; the Knight Institute employs a number of fine educators who are happy to attend,

take questions about the work they do, and ask questions about yours. An EARS team might visit to conduct a training session about communication and assertiveness. Or you may get to experience an actual tutorial, or verbally report on one, at a meeting that breaks up into triads of tutor, writer, observer.

Meeting topics do not run on a pre-planned schedule. Your input is most important. Your request for pursuit of a topic can power a discussion. And parts of some meetings are roundtable check-ins about how tutoring is going. You can learn an immense amount about the variety of tutoring styles, ways of dealing with issues of authority, different techniques for different writing situations, and other types of knowledge and insight from the smart, fascinating people you work alongside.

8. The Report Form

There are several purposes for the tutoring reports that you fill out for each session. As a written documentation of events, it is useful to the Director, who can note situations both successful and problematic, and trends overall and at particular Walk-In locations. The Director can also follow up with self-referrals who have consulted her and with instructors who have referred students with particular issues in writing.

The report is also useful for other tutors as a learning tool. The summary of discussion can be helpful when an individual writer returns for another session. Flipping through the completed records, tutors can discover others' approaches and tutoring styles.

Writing the session report, you have the opportunity not only to summarize the conversation but to reflect upon questions such as what went well, what areas of choice and action have the potential for change or improvement, what tutoring strategies you have mastered or innovated, what intuitions have proved invaluable.

Please Fill Out **ALL** Questions On This Form – Thank You!

Student: ____
(Please print) First Last

College: o AG o AAP o AS o ENG o HE o HO o ILR Other ______________________

Year: o Fr o So o Jr o Sr o Grad o Extra o Faculty o Staff o Other

Course: ________________________ Assignment: ________________________

Instructor: ______________________ Due Date: ________________________

Is this paper for a First-Year Writing Seminar? o Yes o No

Did your instructor recommend that you use the Walk-In Service? o Yes o No

Are you bilingual? ______ or multilingual? _______

What is your first language?____________________________

Is this your first time at the Walk-In Service this semester? o Yes o No

It's helpful to have the writer fill in the top of form before beginning.

Tutor:______________ Date: __________ Time: _________ Site: _________

Discussion: ____

First Paragraph: In two to four sentences describe session's substance and focus. This paragraph is typed into our database, so please keep your thoughts **concise**.

Second Paragraph: Optional. This is for any **specific detail** such as elaboration or reflections you might want to add.

Third Paragraph: Optional, and rare, this is for matters that should be brought to the Walk-In Service director's attention. If the matter is urgent, please email her.

Please remember to be **tactful**. These forms are occasionally read by outside experts. You should show respect for differences such as writing ability or expectations. Please use black pen and remember that others are reading these, so make your writing as legible as possible.

How long did you work with the writer (in minutes) ______________________

II. Reading and Writing

A tutor who worked with a student in a writing seminar reported, "She hadn't written anything yet, but we went over the short story that she was to write about and jointly analyzed it in relation to the prompt. This was a slow arduous process." It was also an hour well spent. A writer who doesn't understand the readings will have trouble writing her paper. You can't help develop a brainstorm or thesis until she re-reads the material—and does so, or better learns to do so, in an active analytic way.

This section examines connections between close reading and effective writing. Only a minority of your tutoring sessions will address reading per se, but the principles of involving the mind actively with a text can be as useful for a writer to apply to his own work as to course readings. For example, seeking language that makes claims and provides leads to what the paper wants to say, the writer can label sentences as analytical and observational in an assigned book, then proceed to similar dissection on her draft. Or a sophisticated writer beset by long-windedness or jargon might be guided through a published author's points of clarity—consistent narrative point of view, judicious semicolons, minimization of copulatives (words that join – as, is, and, seem…) as model or inspiration.

How? Why? What was the intent? What was the effect? The significance?—we are all implicitly analyzing in our choice of what's important. Drafts of many papers bog down retelling the plot. A writer who needs to minimize summary might be asked to jot down counter-examples in order to move the prose more quickly to critical points of interpretation. Questions like 'How do you know you think that?' or 'Can you show me how your idea is used in that context?' transfer authority to the writer you are working with.

To use quotes and summary effectively, it's important to pay attention to the language itself, rather than simply to its plot function. Attention to language becomes paramount in developing and honing a thesis—which a majority of your tutoring sessions may address.

This section ends with an examination of writer's block and some suggestions for overcoming it. Questions of confidence sometimes overlap or underlie questions of approach and technique. A writer fearful of putting words on paper can be encouraged to freewrite; gushing forth prose can overcome wanting each sentence to be perfect. Even someone in the mist of procrastination, rather than a genuine block, can feel relief to hear that resistance to writing occurs among the best writers, that composing does not always occur in orderly stages, and that those who opine they haven't the needed credibility to write can get all the credibility they need from their argument.

Thesis vs. Observation

Papers produced by beginning writers (especially FWS students) may lack a thesis. To more experienced writers this can seem profoundly counter-intuitive: what is the thesis if not the reason for the paper? Phrased more bluntly: how can these kids write so much

without making a point? Clearly in such cases there's some misunderstanding on the part of the student. When, additionally, the tutor doesn't understand what's behind the student's mistake, the resulting state of mutual incomprehension can be a real problem for a session. The root of such problems is usually confusion about the distinction between a *thesis* and an *observation*. Tutors should be ready to clear such confusion up.

Most students have been trained to place something called a "thesis statement" at the end of their first paragraph, but they haven't necessarily been taught what a thesis is. Their thesis statement often amounts to merely pointing out a feature of their subject; it amounts to an observation. An observation doesn't provide a paper with much forward momentum; "proving" it doesn't require anything more than pointing to it, and it won't engender any disagreement. A real thesis is the next step after making an observation; it is the conclusion of an argument based on observations. We might think of a thesis as the answer to the question "So what?" The student will find that making sense of her observations will require more than merely pointing to them. Furthermore, she will find that she has taken a position on those observations, a position from which she may agree or disagree with other accounts of them.

An example helps to make this difference clear to both tutors and students. Imagine an assignment about the childhood classic, *The Cat in the Hat*. A writer might point out that the cat wears a hat. This is an observation, something that can be found and observed in the text. To prove this point is quite simple: cite every page of the book. But it's clear that a paper taking "The cat wears a hat," as its theme will be singularly unrewarding for both reader and writer. So, on to the thesis. The writer has observed that the cat wears a hat. So what? Well, it turns out, after careful and close reading of the scene when those two crazy-haired guys pop out and run amuck in the house, that the cat wears a hat as visual and physical compensation for a Freudian shortcoming, and his entire invasion of the children's house was an attempt to assert his dominance and masculinity – further compensation for this shortcoming. The writer's account of his original observation has led to an interesting and rewarding paper, involving additional observations, argument, and even a theoretical framework imported from psychology. Understanding what a thesis is will ideally have a similar broadening effect on student papers.

Summary vs. Analysis

Here are two paragraphs about *The Scarlet Letter*. The first *summarizes*, whereas the second *analyzes*.

1. *In Nathaniel Hawthorne's* The Scarlet Letter*, a strict Puritan community shuns Hester Prynne as an adulteress. Her shame is public; she is forced to wear a large red letter A on her chest at all times. However, she is talented at embroidery and has contact with wealthy female clients. She even makes her 'A' look like a work of art with elaborate stitchwork. Hester eventually regains the community's respect, while the Reverend Dimmesdale, the father of her child, literally carves an 'A' in his flesh so that he too is marked by sin.*

2. *In* The Scarlet Letter, *Nathaniel Hawthorne explores the idea of guilt in Puritan society, proposing that an unacknowledged and isolating shame is its ultimate punishment. Although Hester Prynne is regarded as a sinner, she finally makes peace with her community. Prynne wears her shame publicly in the form of a scarlet letter 'A' and because of this symbol she and those around her can come to terms with her shame. A skilled embroiderer, Hester not only makes her living sewing for the wealthy women of her town, she is also able to make her sin truly her own by decorating her 'A' with elaborate stitchwork. By contrast, the father of Hester's child, Reverend Dimmesdale, hides his sin. Ultimately his secret alienates him from the community far more than Hester's letter does. He literally carves an 'A' into his flesh, and the strain of such a severe penance brings about his death.*

As a tutor, you should be on the look-out for writing like what's found in the first paragraph, where a student regurgitates the details of what he's read. Sometimes regurgitation is perfectly appropriate: asking students to summarize a technical article can be a good way of making them come to grips with what they're reading. However, doing real academic work is finally a matter of performing analysis. Few assignments require no analysis at all, and no professor will be impressed by an essay that just tells the story of *The Scarlet Letter*.

So what's the appeal of summary? Students are often intimidated by length requirement and, in an attempt to reach a six- or eight-page goal, will fill at least a page re-telling the piece. Unlike using sixteen-point font or three-inch margins, including lots of summary isn't necessarily an act of bad faith. Many students don't quite understand the difference between summary and analysis: those who do can be unsure about what proportion of their paper to devote to each.

It's not hard to understand why novice writers get confused. The point of most papers is analysis, but the details of a text are important. In fact, good analysis is impossible without a certain amount of summary. In the paragraphs above, note that the second makes use of most of the story that the first tells. The difference between the two is that while the paragraph of summary begins and ends with the story of Hester and Dimmesdale, the analytic paragraph subordinates that story to a point not obviously expressed in the text (see **Thesis vs. Observation**).

So, how do we help students move beyond summary into analysis?

Put down the paper and ask about the subject: Summary can feel like the safest thing to commit to the page: "How can I go wrong repeating exactly what the book said?" Students are often more adventurous and analytic out loud than in writing.

Remember that every writer is already analyzing on some level: Often the student only needs to articulate the analysis that lies behind her summary. Above, much of the analysis in the second paragraph is implicit in the choices the author of the first made about what parts of the story were important to include in her retelling.

Some students, having fathomed the difference between summary and analysis, use too little summary. Ignoring detail and nuance, these students produce papers that are abstract or oversimplified. If you read a paper like this, don't be afraid to ask its author to tell you the story he's writing about at length (or to walk you through the argument step-by-step, or to describe the data minutely, etc.). Through retelling, he might make connections of minor details to main argument. Hester's embroidery is not necessarily significant; the outlet it offered her is. Through conversation, a tutor can facilitate further thinking on the part of the writer.

Finally, different disciplines have different ideas of what constitutes analysis. Be familiar with the **Subject-Specific Writing** section of this handbook.

Structuring A Thesis

A student thesis often amounts to a mere list of ideas that will be important in the paper. This can be the case both for students who write solid but boring papers and for those who write brilliant but vague papers. In both cases, learning to impose some structure on the thesis statement can be a big step forward. One of the best ways to create structure is with cause and effect words. Teaching students to develop their theses using cause and effect words not only produces stronger and more interesting ideas, but can also lead to stronger and more interesting organization for their papers.

Consider the following **list-like thesis**:

> *"In Franz Kafka's The Trial, Josef K. is disenfranchised by the court, alienated from friends, family, and coworkers, and cut off from every part of his life. The defendant becomes just another part of the apparatus of the court."*

We can identify four points: 1)K. is disenfranchised; 2) K. is alienated; 3)K. is cut off from his own life; and 4) as a defendant, K. becomes part of the apparatus of the court. What is harder to identify is how these points are related to each other. 4) seems to be the conclusive point, coming as it does at the end. But how does 4) come about from the previous three points? And how do those three points interact with each other? The answers to questions like these will affect not only the meaning of the thesis statement, but also the organization of the ensuing paper.

A revision of the **thesis using cause and effect words** might look like this:

> *"In Franz Kafka's The Trial, Josef K. is cut off from every part of his life by the proceedings surrounding his trial. Thus he is disenfranchised by the court, as well as alienated from friends, family, and coworkers. As a result, the defendant becomes just another part of the apparatus of the court."*

It's now possible to see the structure of the ideas in question: 1) and 2) add up to 3), and 3) causes 4). This structure suggests an outline for the paper. The writer will illustrate the way K is severed from his own life by discussing his disenfranchisement and alienation. With this severance established, it only remains to be shown that its effect is to turn K. into a cog in the legal machine. Furthermore, with the structure in place, gaps in the writer's thinking become apparent, suggesting ways that the paper can expand. Are 1) and 2) all there is to 3), or is there some other element involved in cutting K. off

from his life? How exactly does being cut off from his life turn K. into a part of the apparatus of the court?

Active Reading

Sometimes when we read for pleasure we allow ourselves to be swept away. We end up paying more attention to the images the book calls to mind or to the feelings it evokes in us than to the words on the page. We experience what we are reading without really thinking about it. This kind of reading is *passive reading*. It's easy to read passively in academic contexts too. All of us have had the experience of reading a page in an article or textbook, only to reach the end and not really have any idea what we just read. Passive reading is fine if we're reading for pleasure, but in academic contexts our reading should be *active reading*.

Active reading takes place on several levels. It involves:

Paying close attention to the words a text uses: be aware of each pronoun's antecedent, know the definitions of technical terms or unusual words, and attend to the grammar of complicated sentences.

Understanding the ideas and argument a text presents: figure out what a text needs to establish to prove its point, make sure you can follow every step of any processes described, and notice where a text fails to produce everything it promises.

Bringing your own knowledge to bear on a text: ask where the text fits in with other literature on the same subject, evaluate its claims in light of what you believe to be true, and think about the circumstances in which you are reading it.

Clearly, our reading at each of these levels affects our reading at the others – it's impossible, for instance, to follow an argument if you can't parse the grammar it's presented in.

In the end, active reading is a habit acquired only by long practice. But a tutor might demonstrate or discuss the more academic alternative to the novice reader's indiscriminate use of yellow highlighter: sophisticated readers selectively underline in the text and write notes in the margins. Many people find that marking their books forces them to think about what they are reading. Selective underlining is particularly good: not only does it provide a memory aid; it also forces the reader to read important parts of the text again while underlining.

The following pages are an example of other note taking procedures: an index of important images, metaphors, themes etc. in Doctorow's *Book of Daniel*, with pages in the text where they occur. This active way to read a text prepares the reader for the eventual writing process from the very beginning.

A second page illustrates note taking with direct quotation followed by reader's commentary. These examples will be most useful for those interested in writing papers about literature, but the technique is applicable to the reading of any kind of writing.

self-referential 3,4
Phyllis — as sand-dune 4-5; 6;55-60,152
readers' thoughts - 6
Daniel of Bible - 6, 11 (as Jew)
on an unsympathetic character - 7, 14, 16
ideas & theories - 7, 31, 71
interpreting Dick and Liz - 8
Susan - 9, as moralist, 10; as starfish, 207
electricity - 11, 27, 32, 38, 48, 61, 67, 112, 115, 206, 224, 226, 289
Daniel's guilt - 13
Russian history - 15, 52-54
"Subjects to be taken up" - 16
aggressive address to reader - 22-23
simulation - 26
Paul and Rochelle - 29-43
guilt and innocence - 42, 77, 130, 148, 151, 213-14, 216, 224
interpreting "the mysterious and complicated" - 52
"A Note to the Reader" - 54
Bintel Brief - 64-66
Several Explanations - 68-77
images - 71
citizens and countries - 72-73
Drawing & Quartering - 73-74 (tortures) 108, 128-29 (punishment & class)
ironies - 75
the Lewins' house - 74
Susan's Letter, annotated - 77 ff. (see 82)
"you no longer exist." analyzed - 82
the old Marxist on "dialectical inevitability" - 87
fantasy & hidden reality - 87-88
buildings as metaphors - 88-89, 93-95, 136, 7, 205, 219
"centrism" - 93
Catcher in the Rye - 95
pastiche of ~~[illegible]~~ years - 95-96
the bomb - 96, 102
History & secrets - 101
television - 102, and bomb, 116, 139-40, 142,
Mindish - 104
woman hit by a car - 87-88, 108
Red Scare - 109, 117-18
capitalized earnestness - 110
pastiche of house - 113
confiscated books - 114-15
Red anti-comic strips - 114-15
Mark Twain - 118
on being Jewish - 119
planned moments - 120
journalism - bias - 121
Communist Party betrayal - 123
Daniel throws Paul - 130-31
Artie Sternlicht - 133-
pastiche of 60's - 135 - tenants - 136

"the cruel thing" of education - 16 T

"An Interesting Phenomenon" (23)

Sternlicht on rev. praxis - 137
Critique of New Left - 136-37
television - 139-40
freedom & prisons - 147-48
Artie on Amer. comm. - 150
Artie on guilt & innocence - 151

Dramatic allegory - 157
Salinger - 161
the Inertia Kid - 161-62, 170
TREASON - 167
clowning - 170
Poe - 177
mosquito pupae - 178
halloween - 179
bourgeois cartoons - 193
on the sentence vs. the crime - 201-02
VERDICT - 205
Daniel's development - 207
Susan as starfish - 207
Henry James - 210
the hidden Justice Dept report - 212
Jack Fein - 211-214
Fanny Ascher - 214-16
Signals and perspective - 218
Robert Lewin's explanation - 222
Mantra to electricity - 225-26
questions of legal system - 226
failure to make connections - 226-27
as complicity, as reform
the books on the Isaacsons - 227
"Innocence is complicity" - 227

Electricity & the electrocution - 295

Think about the positive emotional content or sources of reduction — especially in Daniel's case.

The Book of Daniel

the party after the verdict - 228
"True History of the Cold War" - 232 ff
Paul (father) as parody during visit - 246
Starfish - in zodiac, as unity - 250
Mailer and Lowell - 252
Daniel's resignation, pessimism 254-55
the Richard Burton spy movie - 262
the Berlin Wall as seam - 262
Theory of the Other Couple - 276-ff
Rochelle confronts Selig - 281
Daniel on Russian stabilization
and new level of guerilla action - 283) guilty
Repudiation of the theory of the other couple - 287

Sample of a reader's annotating a novel by making an index

Weinstein, Philip
A Cosmos No One Owns

"In theme and form these novels enact the invasion of the unknown into the precincts of the familiar, and they suggest that such acts of self-constitution produce a self-hood not sutured but splintered – a subjectivity inseparably fissured, a cosmos no one owns." (2)

This is the reaction of the subject in relation to the Real. Before, the Symbolic circulated around lack but lack of the Real enters and the subject position becomes that lack.

Weinstein A Cosmos

"This small scandal – the aleatory hallmark of all protracted writing – is what we seek to cover up as we revise." (4)

Weinstein suggests that this can be made productive. How does it apply to reading? Repetition and rereading to get what we missed. Retelling to get it all in a pleasing order. This defies the challenge of Absalom! Weinstein is correct. The problem of Absalom! is making the challenge of its reading, the challenge to coherence, the very products of our reading.

Writers' Block

It's important to draw a distinction between *having a hard time writing* and *writer's block*. The first may be the result of many things: poor time management, not understanding the expectations for the kind of writing that's called for, or plain distraction. These are all problems that originate outside the writer, and are relatively easy to deal with (e.g. talk to a tutor about how to manage time, talk to a professor about what's required for the assignment, or move to a quiet room). Writer's block is something wholly different; it springs from sources within you, and is accordingly harder to deal with.

A writer is blocked when he or she sits down to write and finds that the words just don't come – or if they do, they're not the words the writer meant, but feel like a miserable, mangled version of the original idea. Blockage comes about for a variety of reasons: most commonly it comes from a sense of fear – fear of writing poorly, fear of not attaining perfection - - but it can come from other causes too. Sometimes a writer who knows what he wants to say but feels morally or psychologically conflicted about saying it will experience a block.

These, and anxieties like them, tend to be the fundamental issues behind writer's block. If you want to be as uninhibited and block-free a writer as possible, or if you get blocked often, you should devote some time to thinking about where you stand in relation to these problems. But if, like most writers, you are working on a deadline, don't care about fundamental issues, and just want to get your work done, there are a few concrete things you can do. First, talk it out: find someone with whom you can talk about *both* your block *and* your assignment. Expressing your frustration about your difficulties can be just as important as going over your ideas. Second, change your situation: if you compose on a word processor, try writing longhand; if you always work at your desk, try going to the library. A change of scenery may get you out of a rut, and changing your instrument may help you to put your thoughts into words without the normal self-editing that accompanies writing. Finally, and most importantly, *keep writing*. When you're blocked, it's best just to get something down on paper. Even if it's not precisely what you want, you can come back to it and edit, which is a very different process than the kind of writing in a void that causes problems.

None of these methods is surefire. You may try them all without any success. If this happens, and you find yourself sitting and staring at a blank screen or a blank page and willing the words to come but they just won't until you feel like you're going to go crazy … then might be a good time to take a break. Go for a walk, go out to dinner, or even take a week off if you have that kind of time. Persistence is a vital part of dealing with writer's block, but so is knowing when to call it a day.

III. Working with Personal Statements

Personal Statements vs. Statements of Purpose

Admissions committees routinely ask for two different types of writing in applications: personal statements and statements of purpose. **Personal statements** are meant to paint a picture of the candidate. Committees use them to gauge level of interest in and commitment to a program, to decide whether the applicant's values and approach would be a good match with their organizations, and generally to get some idea of the person on whom they might bestow a valuable scholarship, job, or whatever. Keep in mind that there are different types of personal statements. Briefly, personal statements for Med School, Law School, and Transfer Applications tend to be similar to the types of essay written for undergraduate admissions committees. Application essays for prestigious scholarships are not very different, but refer to the appropriate section below for the particulars of those essays.

Many different types of organizations ask for personal statements. **Statements of Purpose**, by contrast, are usually required by academic or research institutions. They are expected to describe in fairly precise terms the type of work the candidate proposes to do at the school he is applying to, whether merely coursework or an extended independent research project. They should also briefly mention the candidate's relevant experience in his field, the reasons for his interest in this particular school, and what his ultimate professional or academic goals might be. The statement should not read like an annotated resume or like a narrative. Committees use the statement of purpose to evaluate a candidate's knowledge of his field, to see whether his interests match the interests of their faculty, and to assess his potential contribution to their school's reputation: will he do work that is respected by his peers, both while enrolled in their program and afterwards?

Personal Statements: Who Am I to Tutor Them?

Most tutors feel comfortable dealing with analytical papers in a variety of disciplines. At certain times in the year, however, the pieces you will be working with most frequently will be personal statements. At first many tutors are slightly queasy about critiquing personal statements. We can always make suggestions about how to clean up local language problems, but tutors feel unqualified to say what a good personal statement should be. What right, they ask, do I have to tell someone how to present him or herself? But in many ways tutors are more qualified to judge personal statements than the people who write them. Personal statements are like any other piece of writing. They should read easily, have an apparent structure, be interesting to the reader, and avoid clichés. Since the final audience for personal statements is a committee to which the writer is just another name on a page, it's particularly important that they make sense to a reader who doesn't know the author, and this is a role that you're perfectly suited for. Furthermore, like an application committee, you will have seen a lot of personal statements (at least once you've been tutoring for a little while). You'll know what kind of things make a statement stand out from the crowd.

Pre-Medical Personal Statements

Applicants to medical school or advanced study in other health careers write a number of personal statements during the process. The majority of applicants major in science, and their writing skills may be a bit rusty by junior or senior year, particularly when taking on one of the hardest kinds of writing: self-presentation that sounds sincere and plausible. They will do well to remember that keen observation, detailed analysis, clear organization, and effective communication are required skills for physicians.

The Sequence of Medical Themes

Each of these pieces of writing is done at different steps in the application process.

Cornell's Health Careers Evaluation Committee (HCEC) personal statement – This is used by the HCEC interviewer but is not quoted from or sent to med schools. The schools receive the HCEC composite recommendation, based on the statement, the interview, recommenders' letters and the student's academic achievement. There is no specific topic, and no preferred length; average is 2 pages, though it may range from 1 to 5 pages. The aim is to create a document that helps the HCEC committee present the applicant effectively to medical schools.

The American Medical College Admission Service personal statement (AMCAS) – This is the application essay described above. About a dozen schools do not belong to AMCAS; they ask the candidate to write specific essay(s) as part of the application.

Secondary or supplementary application essays at AMCAS schools – After receiving the student's application from AMCAS, some schools also request completion of a supplementary application.

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) – Two essays are part of MCAT and produce a Writing Sample score. Some medical schools request the essays; all schools receive the Writing Sample score. Very occasionally, applicants will want to practice timed writing at the Writing Walk-In Service to prepare for this test. You can give them tips on writing essay exams. Ask to see their MCAT booklet with sample questions, essay responses, and ratings, if they'd like your ballpark opinion of how they did.

You will tutor many writers of HCEC statements before the annual mid-March deadline, but as the applicant's preliminary internal research for the HCEC often forms the basis for the AMCAS statement, and the latter is the most essential, here are some of its salient features.

The purpose of the statement written for AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service), or for a particular non-AMCAS school, is to distinguish the candidate from others ranked equally well in grades and test scores. As the admission committee's first glimpse of the qualities of the individual, the statement can determine whether the writer is invited for an interview. Writers have the opportunity to demonstrate a unique case for their talents and concerns, a coherent sense of their own interests and

goals, and an informed sense of why the committee would want to meet them in person.

The tone should be fairly middle of the road, avoiding extremes of theatricality, false modesty, or self-congratulation. The statement should sound personal and not canned. Written for an audience of doctors, the statement should be informative and restricted in focus: one to three topics are sufficient to give the admissions committee a firm sense of the writer's motivation for a career in medicine.

Topics should be organized in terms of relevance, not chronology. In the statement's development, **w**hat the writer got from an experience is as important as what she did. Since biases of the committee members can not be known, writers should be wary of subjects that are potentially controversial. Claims about what it means to be a doctor should be avoided unless they are substantive, limited, and supported with evidence. Generalizations and, of course, clichés should be avoided.

Restrictions on length usually preclude an introductory paragraph or formal transitions. A strong lead sentence is most important for engaging readers' attention. Subsequent paragraphs can start with transition phrases or very brief transitional sentences.

Because the statement may require writers to link disparate events in their life thematically, the pitfalls in a weak draft may range from describing an extraordinary life in less than compelling terms, to striking a falsely personal note, usually by dwelling on the impact of a death in the family. Weaker writers may interpret being personal as canceling out being informative. Or, new voyagers on the sea of story form, it might seem like a strikingly original genre to them and they might use narrative without caution, asking the event(s) to speak for itself.

Talking with writers about a weak draft, you might use the tutoring strategy of getting the candidate to talk about some of their experiences. Doing so can help them realize which are most relevant to determining their career choice or explaining what makes them tick, and how they can bring the subject to life. If the draft is not working, ask the writer to put it aside and talk with you about basic questions, (**see the handout reproduced later in this section**).

Strong personal statements are both interesting and persuasive. Canny writers seek out multiple readers among the faculty and their circle of friends to ensure that they've centered the writing on the most salient topics and that the voice sounds like their own. Many applicants claim originality and their own niche away from the crowd, but the most convincing statements make an effort to manipulate the language in **original** ways.

Rhodes, Marshall, & Churchill Scholarships Statements

The Rhodes, the Marshall and the Churchill Scholarship committees ask for a thoughtful, informed, and articulate personal statement as an essential part of the application process. In the case of the **Churchill** scholarship, the statement must make the case for the applicant; there is no interview in which the committee can be convinced to give the scholarship to one particular person and not to someone else; the

statement must do that. In the case of the **Marshall** and the **Rhodes**, where an interview is an important part of the process, the personal statement is the means by which the applicant may get invited to the interview.

Summary of Advice for Applicants for Prestigious Awards

1. Keep in mind the type of person the committee is looking for and choose from among your activities or interests those which best reflect that side of you.
2. As you are writing, try thinking of the readers as individuals whom you would like to meet. What do you want them to know about yourself? How would you present those things to them if you were talking to them in person?
3. Establishing a link between your academic pursuits and your long-term goals, especially in terms of what benefit will result, may be important, especially for the Churchill and Marshall scholarships.
4. Remember that how you will benefit from the award is only half the equation; the committee members will also want to know how the scholarship program or society in general will benefit.
5. Do your homework. The committee will be interested in why you want to study in Britain. Why can your proposed course of study best be done where you propose to do it? If you mention the names of professors with whom you want to study, you must have valid reasons for why their expertise is important to what you want to do.
6. Do not invent spurious reasons for wanting to study in Britain; sincerity or the lack thereof will be evident. Questions in the interview (for the Marshall or the Rhodes) are often based on statements that appear in the essay or elsewhere in the application.

A great many topics may be appropriate for such a statement: an internship, a work experience, an educational experience; how a course of study was put together; study abroad and what it means; obstacles that have been overcome; causes or activities in which the applicant has been involved; the writer's future plans and how they fit into past accomplishments both academically and personally. The list is virtually unlimited. Applicants for prestigious awards are advised to heighten awareness of their audience by thinking through questions such as the following:

> **On the objective level:** How well can you express yourself and your ideas? Can you construct a concise, coherent, well thought out essay?
>
> **On the subjective level**: What kind of person are you? In what ways do you correspond to the committee's ideal? How would you be able to carry out the objectives of the fellowship?
>
> **Above all:** Why would you be a better candidate to whom to give this opportunity than others with similar qualifications?

These questions have the overall objective of convincing the readers that the writer is an interesting person whom they really want to meet, about whom they want to find out more, and who will make an impact on whatever she undertakes.

Such questions of personal purpose and focus are in fact good for tutors to bring to the attention of anyone writing an application statement.

WWIS Handouts: Personal Statement

The two pages that follow have been developed by the Writing Walk-In Service and by Cornell Career Services. They are commonly used to advise applicants about writing personal statements, and can be distributed to those who request a copy.

Starting a Personal Statement: Questions to Ask Yourself

1. What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story? Think about personal or family problems, your history, and people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals. What details of your life might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
2. When did you originally become interested in this field? What have you since learned about it – and about yourself – that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to it? What insights have you gained?
3. How have you learned about this field? Have you learned about it through classes, readings, seminars, work, or conversations with people already in the field?
4. If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, what have you learned? Have you learned leadership, for example, or managerial skills? How has the work contributed to your personal growth?
5. What are your career goals?
6. Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain? Great grades and mediocre MCAT scores, for example, stand in need of explanation, as does a distinct upward pattern to GPA that was average in your freshman year.
7. Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (e.g., economic, familial, physical) in your life?
8. What personal characteristics do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession? Are you compassionate and persistent? Do you have integrity? Is there a way to demonstrate these characteristics in your statement?
9. What skills do you possess? Are you a leader? Do you communicate particularly well? Are you a strong analyst of ideas?
10. Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school – and more successful and effective in your profession or field – than other applicants?
11. What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
12. What would you tell an admissions committee member if you had 5 minutes to answer the question "What's most important for us to know about you?"

Personal Statements: Some Basic Points…

…about Style and Format

1. Grab the reader's attention in your opening paragraph.
2. Express yourself clearly and concisely.
3. Adhere to stated word limits.
4. Be selective. Don't introduce material unrelated to your main point or go into so much detail that your reader will be unable to follow your train of thought. Doing so makes you look undiscriminating.
5. Use concrete examples, not vague abstractions. Be specific.

6. Try to maintain a positive and upbeat tone. While it is often useful to deal candidly with aspects of your history that might be perceived negatively, you want to project confidence and enthusiasm.

… about Your Audience

7. Be sure to answer the question(s) the admissions committee is asking.
8. If a school wants to know why you're applying to it rather than to another, do a bit of research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. Naturally its major distinguishing characteristics will be academic, but if the school's location would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, even this might be a factor to mention.
9. Don't make the mistake of trying to guess exactly what the admissions committee is looking for. Don't just write what you think the committee wants to hear.

… about Choosing a Topic

10. Try several topics, several approaches. You are trying to find the best vehicle for presenting yourself: some topics may prove more successful than others for very subjective reasons.
11. Discuss not WHAT you did so much as WHY you did it, WHERE it might lead, HOW it will contribute to some specific goal of yours (or society's).
12. Avoid bragging on achievements from high school or earlier. It seems sophomoric.
13. Avoid potentially controversial subjects. Remember that you're not just trying to talk about what's important to you; you're trying to impress a committee. It would be a shame to have less than a fair shot because one committee member disagreed strongly with you.
14. Avoid the "laundry list" approach – i.e. don't just make the personal statement another place to tally up all the neat things you've done. The committee can see from your curriculum vitae that you have been involved in a variety of activities. Focus on one or, at most, a few that address a common concern.
15. Avoid obvious clichés. For example, many medical school applicants write that they are good at science and want to help other people, but a successful personal statement will find a way to stand out from the crowd of faceless altruists.

… about Wrapping It Up

16. Get feedback. But make sure you are asking people – whether friends or teachers – who will give you real criticism and not what they think will make you feel good. Ask them if your statement sounds like you, interests them, and is well written.
17. Be meticulous. Check and double check for lapses in spelling, grammar, logic, organization, or anything else. Don't give readers any reason to dismiss your application as careless, not serious, or ignorant.

IV. Tutoring Multilingual Writers: Rethinking the ESL Label

Labels create mental pigeon-holes for both tutors and writers. To keep the tutoring experience fresh, and to balance discussion of substantive compositional questions with discussion of grammar, you may want to adopt a transformative phrase that more than one tutor has liked: **English as a Second Meaning**.

You can help ESM writers learn to notice, and—as Allen Ginsberg used to suggest to younger poets—to **notice** what they notice. You can help them learn to edit, you can make their language-learning mind more attentive by reading aloud (which my colleague Judy Pierpont says 'wakes up their mental grammar'). When students are motivated, the learning mind wakes up, and in this case will start to take in more language; meeting and working with you can restart or enhance their motivation. **Reading aloud**, you can confirm their guesses; you can provide input at the moment the writer is unsure; you can provide impetus for language that is clear to an audience.

Perspectives on ESM

The customary label ESL privileges the acronym's opening word, the language being mastered, at the possible expense of the contexts *from* which and *in* which a writer is acquiring English fluency, and the dialectic between those two contexts.

> **In a genuinely global world,** no one would be monolingual. A language *is* a world. A writer's native origin, comprised of words, ways of thinking, customs and conventions, is worthy of respect and preservation. Ideally, the first world is not left behind or forgotten while moving in(to) a second (or third). (Notice the nuance that use of articles in the previous sentence creates; English can be one of the most difficult languages to learn late.) Writing has different rhetorical conventions in different languages. In Korea, students working with published texts earn good marks by learning to compose what we would call mosaic plagiarism. In Chinese rhetoric, a sophisticated writer would never insult the audience by stating the thesis, let alone by presenting it early in the text.
>
> **Acquiring complete written fluency** in a language posits understanding—though not necessarily adopting—the conventional formats in which that language is composed. You may work with those not yet fully aware of American academic expectations, and thus you can be as much a cultural informant as a language informant. (Although you may be less conscious of it, you do this as you tutor some native speakers born and bred in the U.S.A.) The writer may have been educated in another English-speaking country and may not be conversant with Stateside conventions of how to develop a paragraph or an essay. You may be able to clear up difficulty in several vital areas of academic discourse:
>
> **understanding** the assignment;
> **taking a complex approach** even if the assignment is not completely spelled out or specifically directive;
> **instilling confidence** about taking a complex approach.

Because of the complicating factor of language fluency, you may be tutoring some sessions in a way that's a bit more directive and less collaborative than your usual. You might, for example, alternate leading statements with open-ended questions. Nevertheless the most productive sessions will be the most collaborative.

Bridging Cultures

If you respond to "How do you say…What do you mean..." with both the answer and a question of your own such as "What in your culture…?", you will learn differences in thought-patterns and forms of expression from culture to culture.

Some tutoring sessions are confined to the text the writer brings, but many are not. Talk about reading, about cultural issues, about academic procedures. In some cultures, students are discouraged from approaching authority figures or asking questions. Counsel about effective ways to ask questions of professors and teaching assistants.

Recognize the struggle, the tremendous work and intelligence that have brought such writers as far as the present moment—the respect they deserve for learning a different language, and the self-respect they may need to (re)develop.

Attend to oral fluency. Small talk will clue you in to that, as well as give you a chance to find out how long the writers have been speaking English, and it will give them a chance to feel more comfortable.

Language Acquisition and Late-Stage Fluency

You need not explain when you talk about grammar. We acquire language primarily through the ear. You need not know why the words sound right. Why? Although there are occasional exceptions, later bi/multilinguals who've been accepted to university don't learn well from explanations. At their stage of language acquisition, the senses are often quicker than the mind. They have mastered drills and the logic of the language; you can help them further develop their language intuitions, the cues they receive from ear, mouth, eye, and hand working in tandem.

Tutoring those with late-stage English fluency may elicit your greatest chance to apply the fourth of our basic working principles: Tutors do not have to be experts. The greatest resistances you may be working with are the writer's expectations that you should know how to explain, and your own wishes to be an expert. So relax! Remember that our web site does state that tutors are not trained linguists though they can be excellent language informants. Remember that it's normal for native speakers not to know the rules of their language.

Of course, a few handbook items can be explained, such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement, and the standard syntax of English sentence structure. And when you tutor, you do have a handbook at hand for those writers who might want to study a few more examples during or after your discussion with them. But the article system can't be explained, nor is the usage of (un)countable nouns logical. 'Information,' for example, is not singular, not plural; it's uncountable. 'Ideas' is countable; it has instances. There's no *meaning* in the use of prepositions; usage is idiomatic: a language

custom developed gradually by its native speakers. Until knowledge of a language is internalized, it's always going to sound stilted; that internal knowledge is what ESM students need to pick up. Work with the way English *sounds*.

Because tutoring bilingual and multilingual writers adds the variable of language fluency to the host of variables that every writer brings to the Writing Walk-In Service, sessions can have a way of eddying around language questions. Resist the assumption that grammar is the only thing the student is consulting you for; structure and content may be the place to start.

Pointers for Tutoring Sessions

Your sessions may be ad hoc, but you can nonetheless often balance attention to meaning and its development with attention to grammar and solving for its patterns. Among the practical tips and tutoring strategies collected below, you will find that many apply to or are simply extensions of strategies used with native speakers of English.

The Kinesthetic Sense

In addition to visual and auditory prompts, motion can enhance learning.

It's important that the tutoring process be a two-way interaction from the very start of the session. Ask a quiet person to read part of the paper aloud. Some bi/multilingual writers hesitate to participate because they may be shy; or they may claim to 'hate writing' because they feel insecure about their writing style or correctness. The sticking point here is confidence; the session may wind up reassuring them that they already know grammar skills that they claim they need to acquire.

Write down the sentences or phrases of writers whose thoughts flow more freely from the mouth than on the page. Having these notes to refer to later reinforces comprehension.

Resist the temptation to do the editing yourself. The hope is to further develop *their* ear. Give the writer the pen!

This is one type of session in which the writer's laptop can be useful, even if you usually prefer to work on paper. The activity of physically moving pieces of text around makes it easier for the writer to seen patterns taking shape, and to begin recognizing errors and fixing them himself. Visually speaking, work on a computer is a more active process than working with a hard copy, because the writers actually fixes errors and rewrites sentences as he goes, instead of making notations and fixing things later.

Grammar and Beyond

Those writers whose teachers have repeatedly corrected their papers for grammar may bring this expectation into the session. It can be challenging to explain our tutoring strategies to writers who get frustrated that you don't proofread and fix their mistakes.

You may need to convince writers that the value and complexity of their ideas deserve the extra push to use more complex grammatical constructions—as an antidote to those

who in the earlier stages of language acquisition were urged only or always to write in short direct sentences.

Some ESM writers are on top of grammar when writing about concrete events but begin to founder when they start dealing with abstract ideas. Advise them to slow down and think through sentence structures when dealing with the abstract, for example, when explicitly connecting interpretation with quotations.

Reading a passage together can give you more leeway to encourage self-correction, to get the writer to be more active and perceive systemic problems rather than one-time errors.

Helping with questions of word choice means balancing between changing a slight awkwardness and letting writers keep their own style and voice, the inclination of their own wording. Let them know the more conventional word, but that they need not choose it.

ESM writers are often grateful repeat users of the tutoring service, rewarding to work with. When they come back, discuss whether or how they have been pro-active, making improvements on their own.

Additional resources:

Three excellent **references**:

The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations (1997) – copies kept in the Writing Workshop
Decoding ESL: International Students in the American Classroom, Amy Tucker
Grammar Trouble Spots, Ann Raimes – copies kept at all Walk-In locations

The Knight Institute's **language specialist** is Judy Pierpont, who attends one of our staff meetings each year. She also welcomes individual or small group queries from Writing Walk-In Service tutors about any and all of the materials that follow. Judy composed these for her own students and for the ESL peer tutors whom she supervises. She also has additional brief materials on language that she has developed, such as 'Switching Tenses in English,' that you are welcome to read or inquire about.

Judy has written the following pages of advice on working with language. Don't work with bi/multilingual writers until you have read them. Several tutors have even suggested a required test on them! They are that helpful.

Three Ways of Attending to the Language of a Student Paper By Judy Pierpont c.2000

The purpose of these methods is to encourage ESL students to notice aspects of English and to ask questions about usage, and to help them develop the ability to listen to their intuitions. Not only will they learn to edit better, but these habits of noticing, questioning, and listening will help them learn more English. They will also learn specific things from your corrections. Remember that the purpose of working on their papers with them is not to simply "fix" their errors.

1. *The student asks questions.*
Let the student take the lead, showing you places in the paper where she has questions about how to say something. You can suggest that she use a notation system of some sort to flag her queries while she is in the process of writing. It is often hard for her to locate that place she knows is in here somewhere where she had a question she can't quite recall. I ask my students to use the footnoting capability of their word processor to note questions, but that only works until they start having to use it for other purposes.

2a. *The student reads aloud, slowly, stopping where she has doubts.*
Suggest that the student read through her paper, or a portion of it, *very* slowly out loud listening to whether it sounds like English to her. Have her stop wherever she has doubts and ask you. If she reads too fast to pay attention to the language, make her read at an unnaturally slow pace until you see that she has the idea of paying attention to language. I joke with students who read ninety-miles-an-hour, telling them that they can't possibly be listening to how it sounds. The reading-out-loud technique works best for students who have been in this country for several years and who have developed linguistic intuitions, not complete, but useful nonetheless. They can often suddenly hear that they don't have the right words in an expression or verb tense, or that they have left something out. What this means is that in the process of language learning, the rule or regularity is still in the process of formation. It is just barely accessible to them if they pay attention to their intuitions. Your role at this point can be quite important. If you confirm a student's guess, you are helping her firm up that rule or regularity. If you disconfirm it, say it's not the right choice, and supply the correct version, you are also helping the learning process along. Often a student will say, "Oh, yea, that sounds much better." This kind of statement indicates that she has the language knowledge in her head somewhere, and now she has paid attention to it and made her knowledge much more definite. So this is what's going on when you answer students' questions about language. I must stress that this kind of negotiation, involving question asking and active seeking by the student, is very different from simply correcting a student's paper. To make the process valuable, the student must participate, taking responsibility both for asking for and attending to your feedback. In this activity, you are also teaching the student to do more effective editing, a stage in the writing process that ESL students have a lot of trouble with.

Students who have come to this country recently and who don't have a lot of experience using English orally have much less success listening to their inner knowledge of the

language. They have not developed those all- important intuitions. Your work with them discussing ideas and just talking is important in helping them develop that sense of what sounds right. But they are often very good at asking questions. They may have a developed grammatical knowledge and an awareness of what they don't know yet. Instead of having them read out loud, simply encourage them to ask lots of questions, and be firm with them about not explaining in grammatical terms.

2b. *You read aloud and the student stops you when he has doubts.*
This is a variation on the read-aloud procedure. *You* read aloud, very slowly, exactly what the student wrote and let him listen to you. Pause at the end of each sentence so that he can let what you've read go through his mind. Ask him to stop you where he has doubts about what he has written.

3. *Mark the ends of lines where a little error occurs. The student locates it.*
An extension of the read aloud procedure really makes students pay attention; they enjoy it, treat it as a game. Where the student has a little error that you think he could locate, put a little tick or X, or a line, at the end of the line of text where it occurs, and ask him to read the line, or the sentence, in which the error occurs, and try to find it. The student will really slow down and often will find it immediately. If he makes a lot of wild guesses and can't find anything, I show him. But he has spent enough time looking, that the information I give him may be salient, thus memorable. A variation on this technique is for you to indicate the place of the error, to locate it, and ask the student to supply the correction. I do this if I think the student won't be able to find the problem, but will probably be able to correct it.

I prefer exercise one, in which the student asks questions, partly because he takes responsibility, and I don't interfere by pointing out things he hasn't asked about, and partly because he can attend to all kinds of language issues--sentence structure, word choice, style--not just grammar. Reading out loud in the second activity and indicating the presence of errors in the third tend to focus more on the purely grammatical level. I hope you feel that these language-improving activities seem sensible and doable. Especially if you have an ongoing relationship with a student, when he gets the hang of one or all of the three activities, you can do them again and again. Ask which one he would like to do.

Tutoring Practices: Helping ESL students become more aware of word combinations

By Judy Pierpont
c.2000

You can help ESL students by making them aware of the principle that many words occur in conventional or grammatically structured combinations. You can't teach them a dictionary full of such combinations, but you can call their attention to the fact that certain words entail the use of others. If you deliberately point out "what goes together," you will raise their awareness. You can also explain that the words one uses often depend on the verb, or other words, one chooses. If you like, you can bring up the notion of a "mental dictionary" in which the possible structures that occur with verbs are listed. If ESL students become aware of the principle of combinations and look for them in both their reading and writing, eventually they will learn them more accurately, developing that sense of "what sounds right."

Things you can do:

When you find a preposition or structure in the student's writing that doesn't sound right, check to see if there is some word in the text that requires a different preposition or structure.

Point out the verb or word that controls the combination. See if the student can search her mind to dig up the right "intuition." Often it's there somewhere.

In other instances, point out the word to the student and say the whole combination the way it sounds right.

Let the student roll it over in her mind to see how it sounds. Often she will say it sounds better, a sign that she already almost knows it. In this case, you are confirming her partly formed linguistic guesses.

Encourage the student to pay attention in her reading to verbs and what follows them. All verbs have rules for what can follow them. It might be an object, no object, a particular preposition, or a whole structure. In most cases, verbs can take several different kinds of elements, but it's not a free choice.

This process may be slow going. You won't be able to improve the language of a particular paper substantially, but you'll be giving the student a way of approaching these problems on her own. Explain your goals so that she won't be expecting you to simply improve the language of her paper.

[See next page for a sample from the BBI Dictionary]

Sample page, *The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations* (1997)

A recommended book for later bilinguals

ghosts) 10. a - tbat + clause (it is their firm - that tbe earth is fiat) 1 l. beyond N 12. in the ~ that... 13. (misc.) against one's ~s

believe v. 1. to ~ firmly, sincerely, strongly; mistakenly 2. (D; intr.) to ~ in (to ~ in ghosts) 3. (D; tr.) to - of (I can't ~ it of him) 4. (L) we N that she will come 5. (M) tlley all N tile story to be true 6. (misc.) I ~ so; I N not; it is widely ~d that...; ~ it or not; you would not ~ how much she has improved!

believer n. 1. an ardent, firm, great, sincere, staunch, strong; true - 2. a - in (he's no ~ in miracles)

bell n. 1. to cast a - 2. to ring, sound a ~ 3. to answer the ~ (in boxing) 4. a church; door ~ 5. a diving -6. wedding ~s 7. a ~ chimes, clangs, peals, rings, sounds, tolls 8. (misc.) (boxing) to come out for tbe -; to ring a N ("to remind stub. of stat.") belligerency n. 1. to demonstrate, display, exhibit ~ 2. a state of - 3. ~ towards

belligerent *adj*. - towards

bellow v. 1. (B) be ~ed a command to his platoon 2. (D; intr., tr.) to - at (the sergeant was ~lng orders at her squad) 3. (L) he ~ed that he would fight any man at the bar bellows n. I to operate, use - 2. a pair of -bellyache v. (slang) (D; intr.) ("to complain") to ~ about

belong v. I. (d; intr.) ("to deserve to be") to ~ in (he ~s in jail) 2. (d; intr.) to - to ("to be owned by") (the book ~s to her) 3. (d; intr.) to - to ("to be a member of") (to - to an organization) 4. (d; intr.) ("to be appropriate") to ~ under (tbis item ~s under a different heading) 5. (d; intr.) to - with (these books - with the works on history) belongings n. smb.'s earthly; personal -below I *adv*. 1. to go ~ 2. down ~ 3. far, way, well -**below** II *prep*. ~ in (to be - stub, in rank) belt I n. ["band"] 1. to buckle, fasten one's - 2. (also fig.) to tighten one's - 3. to loosen; unbuckle, undo, unfasten one's ~ 4. a lap, safety, seat, shoulder; life ~ 5. a fan - 6. a money - 7. a cartridge; Sam Browne - 8. a garter (AE), suspender (BE) - 9, a conveyor; endless - 10. (usu. fig.) below the - ("unfairly") ["zone"] (AE) 11. the Bible; corn; cotton; green (BE) - ["symbol **0f** expertise in iudo or karate"] 12. a black; brown; white- ["misc."] 13. under one's ~ ("experienced, lived through") belt II v. (colloq.) (O) ! ~ed him one bench n. ["]udge's seat"] l. from the ~ (a reprimand from the ~) 2. on the - (who will be on the ~ during her trial9.) ["places in Parliament"] (BE) 3. the backbenches; crossbenches; frontbench(es); gov-ernment ~es; opposition ~es ["place where reserve players sit"] 4, (esp. AE) on the - (he spent ten minutes on tl!e ~) ["table"] 5. a carpenter's; work ~ ["long seat"] 6. a park ~

bench **warrant** n. to issue a -

bend I n. 1. to make a ~ (the river makes a ~) 2. a horseshoe; sharp; slight - 3. a knee - 4. (misc,) (colloq.) (BE) round the ~ ("mentally unsound")

bend II v. 1. (D; tr.) to - into; out of (she bent the bar into the right shape; file steering wheel is bent out of shape) 2. (D; intr., tr.) to ~ to (fl~e road ~s to the right; she cannot - them to her will) 3. (misc.) she bent down and picked up tbe book; tbey bent over backwards to please ("they made every effort to be helpful") **bender** n. (colloq.) ["drunken spree"] to go on a -benediction n, 1. to give, offer, pronounce the - 2. to pronounce a - over

beneficial *adj,* 1. - for, to (~ to health) 2. ~ to + inf. (it would be - to keep abreast of developments in Asia)

beneficiary n. 1. to name a ~; to name stub. (as) (a) ~ 2. a chief, main, principal -

benefit I n. 1. to derive, get, reap (a) - from 2. to have a - (she had the - of a good education) 3. a death; fringe; sickness (BE); supplementary (BE); tax - 4. a mutual; tangible ~ 5. to be of ~ to 6. for, to smb.'s - (for our mutual -) 7..(misc.) to give smb. tbe - of the doubt; without ~ of clergy

benefit II v. (D; intr.) to - from (we all ~ed from her SucceSS)

benefits n. 1. to provide - 2. to collect; reap ~ 3. to witbhold - 4. disability; fringe; health-care; old-age; retirement; strike; survivors' (AE); unemployment; veterans'; workers' -benevolent *adj*. - towards bent I *adj*. ["determined"] I (cannot stand alone) ~ on (he was - on getting himself hurt; - on mischief) ["curved"] 2. - double

bent II n. ["propensity"] 1. to have; show a - for 2. to follow one's (own) - 3. an artistic; decided; natural; peculiar ~

bequeath v. (formal) (A) she ~ed her fortune to him; or: she ~ed him her fortune **bequest** n. 1. to leave, make a - 2. a ~ to **berate** v. (D; tr.) to - for **bereavement** n. in one's - bereft *adj*. (cannot stand alone) ["stripped"] ~ of (-of all hope; - of one's senses) USAGE NOTE: In tbe meaning "having recently lost a dear one", the form *bereaved* is used the bereaved parents. **berry** n. to pick ~les **berserk** *adj*. to go -berth n. 1. to make up a - 2. a lower; sleeping; upper ~ 3. (misc.) to give smb./smt, a wide - ("to avoid smb./smt.") **beseech** v. (formal) (H) to - stub. to show mercy **beset** *adj*. (cannot stand alone) ~ by, with (- by doubts)

beside *prep*. to be ~ oneself with (he was ~ himself

Vocabulary Building for Non-Native Speakers

By Judy Pierpont
c.2000

[The article below was written for ESL students]

Levels of vocabulary knowledge: Recognition and production

You no doubt understand many, many words that you are not yet able to use in your own writing. Over time, as you read, many of these words you recognize will probably come into your productive vocabulary. You need to reach a certain level of familiarity with a word or expression (a group of words that seem to go together) before it will be available to you so you can produce it yourself while you are writing. Imagine that you have a mental dictionary in your head. Some words and expressions are so familiar to you that they flow automatically onto the paper when you need to express a certain meaning. There are other words and expressions that you can locate and use if you search your dictionary for that word you know is there somewhere. But there are still others that are in your dictionary (They must be--because you understand them.) but you don't know them well enough to use them.

How a word or expression might become "available for use"

Words and expressions in your mental dictionary are constantly moving from the status of "understanding only" to the status of "available for use." If you take a look at your most recent essay, there are probably many words and expressions there which you have used for the first time. You are probably not aware of the process of learning vocabulary because it goes through slow stages and by the time you are able to use a new word or expression, it just seems as if you have always known it. But think back to a few years ago. You might not have even understood it then. At some point you noticed it and it found a place in your mental dictionary. Maybe you only guessed at the meaning so you weren't even sure that you had it right. But the fact that you paid enough attention to it to see it and guess at its meaning earned it a place, possibly only a temporary place, in your mental dictionary.

Now as a writer you probably need many more words available to you for your own use. You need a larger productive vocabulary. The exercise described below is designed to help you increase your familiarity with words you already understand so that they will become more rapidly available to you in writing. In other words, the exercise should help promote words in your mental dictionary from the "understanding only" category to the "available for use" category. The exercise simply asks you to use natural vocabulary learning processes more deliberately. You become familiar with words and expressions by noticing them. When you first encounter a new word you might simply notice that you have never seen it before, that it has a certain shape, and that you can sort of get its meaning by guessing. Later on when the word appears again, you notice that you have seen it before and this time you may be able to fill in some more meaning components and maybe see what other words or grammar structures accompany it. The third or fourth time you see the word, you may feel that this is a word you understand. This word is now in the "understanding only" stage. The next step is to help these words and expressions move to the "available for use" stage.

Paying attention is the one necessary criterion for learning vocabulary and expressions--or any elements of language. Unfortunately, in your busy life you probably go too fast most of the time to notice the language flowing by you--in speech or writing. Paradoxically, in order to learn vocabulary faster, you have to slow down so that your mind has the time to notice a particular word or expression , time to say it out loud a few times, time to look at the other words and grammatical structure around it. By giving each word you choose a little "quality" time, it will become much more familiar to you than if you just rushed by it. This exercise asks you simply to notice. Nothing fancy except the discipline to do it.

The Exercise
Time per day: 15 minutes. (This time can be spread out over the day. You could fit it in in little spaces of time while you wait for things. If you get your mind in the habit of "noticing," it will do so every time it has a chance.

Materials: Any piece of reading that you have already read and understood.

Procedure: First, read over one paragraph, reminding yourself of what it is about. Then find words and expressions (a group of words that seem to go together) that you already know the meaning of but have probably never used. Go through the paragraph underlining words of this type. Now go back and make a list of them. Make a list of 20-25 words a day--at least 150 a week.

If you see the same word or expression several times, you can write it in your list again; it will simply become more familiar to you. The point is to deliberately pay attention to words in your reading. By picking out words and writing them down, you will be building your familiarity with them and you will be more likely to have them available to you for your own use. (You might circle words that you encounter for the first time, but don't write them in your list.) While you are doing this, you will also notice other elements of language. Slow down and notice.

An Introduction to the English Article System for Non-native Speakers

By Judy Pierpont
c.2000

[The article below was written for ESL students]

What kinds of information do articles provide?

A speaker or writer of English uses articles to provide expected information to the listener or reader about the thing (always a noun) she is referring to. On the most general level, the speaker indicates whether a noun refers to a category of thing--things in general, or to real things in some real situation—in the world or a text. If the thing(s) can be unambiguously identified in the situation (or context), the speaker helps the listener identify the referent (the thing(s) that the noun refers to). Since native speakers expect to find this information in the appropriate places, they are unsettled when articles are missing or used inappropriately, although with a little effort they usually understand well enough.

Why is the article system difficult for non-native speakers to learn?

Most non-native speakers find the article system difficult to understand and to master. And for good reason: This system is quite complex. Students attempting to learn it have difficulty for several reasons.

The first is that they may have received inaccurate information about it; they may think that there are two articles in English, the indefinite article *a* and it's alternate spelling *an*, and the definite article *the*. Actually, there are three that participate in this system and the third is very important: It is the 0 (zero) article, used to indicate that the referent is a category of thing.

Another reason for difficulty is that the status of the noun in the discourse is determined by subtle aspects of the context--in the discourse itself and in the real world. A native speaker senses instantly the aspects of the situation that determine the use of a particular article, but since such knowledge is based on numerous and subtle factors, the system is not directly learnable. You have to rely primarily on "picking it up" from your listening and reading, and consulting your sense of what "sounds right." You may not be able to implement conscious, analytic rules directly; rather you should use them as a framework for learning.

Another reason for the difficulty of the article system is that there are many exceptions and uses that are simply conventional. The article is occasionally omitted where one would expect it, for instance in such expressions as *in class*. Some uses of the article (for instance the use and non-use of *the* accompanying geographical place names) have a certain regularity, but don't participate in the reference system of articles described above.

One last source of confusion is the terminology used to refer to articles; sometimes articles are used in ways inconsistent with the meaning of the terms. For instance, *the* is called "the definite article," but it has uses where the meaning is not definite at all.

The following simplified description should give you a basic understanding of how the system works. With this general outline, you should be able to acquire the more subtle distinctions over time. And it will take time. It will take time to learn to recognize how the principles apply to contexts in your writing. First you will need to notice how articles are used in others' writing. On pages 7 and 8 you will find an explanation of how to use these principles to gain a more complete knowledge of articles. You will also find some exercises that will help you learn an important technique for language learning--the technique of deliberate noticing. If you are motivated to learn how to use articles, you will learn them. It really is the motivation that counts.

General Principles of the Article System in English

1) *Specific or generic reference*

a) Several letters and a package just arrived for you.

The reference is specific since the speaker is thinking of specific 'letters' and 'packages'. But in this sentence

b) I like to receive letters; I hate to receive bills.

the reference is generic, since the speaker is thinking of the general, abstract category 'letters' and the category 'bills,' and is not referring to specific letters or bills.

2) *Expressing generic meaning*

In expressing the generic property of nouns, the concept of the 'zero' article--no article in front of the noun--is important. It is called *the zero article* because the absence of an explicit article is itself significant; it provides information. The zero article is part of the system.

a) If the noun is plural, generic reference is expressed with the *zero article*.

People don't write letters as often as they used to.

b) With non-count (uncountable) nouns[1], generic reference is also expressed with the *zero article* :

Writing letters takes inspiration and effort.

c) If the noun is singular, generic reference is expressed with *a*.

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[1] All nouns are either countable or uncountable, sometime depending on variations in meaning. Some determiners are not used with both categories; for instance, *several* is used only with countable nouns.

A letter is not an easy thing to write.

d) In some cases, *the* with a singular noun is used to signify generic meaning:

The telephone allows us to communicate easily over long distances.

e) With the names of nationalities, *the* can be used with plural nouns in a generic sense:

the Indians... the Chinese... the Koreans...

f) Some adjectives preceded by *the* are used as generic plural nouns.

the poor... the idle rich… the unemployed…

3) *Limited Generic Reference*
When a noun is followed by an '*of*-phrase', it often requires the definite article--in the cases where scope of the generic reference is simply limited.

My father listens to rock. *but* My father listens to the rock of the sixties.

In this example, the use of the article *the* does not refer to a piece, performance, or rendition of music or any particular rock. The reference is to a category which is still generic but less comprehensive than the whole class 'rock.'

Notice in the following examples that *the* is always used when followed by an '*of*-phrase' but is not used with other prepositions:[2]

He listens to the rock of the sixties. *but* He listens to rock from the sixties.

The is not used for limited generic reference when an adjective comes before the noun and there is no following prepositional phrase.

He listens to American rock. *but not* He listens to the American rock.

More examples of limited generic reference with adjectives and '*of*-phrases'/ other prepositions:

Greek history	the history of Greece
Thai temples	the temples of Thailand
Costa Rican wood products	the wood products of Costa Rica wood products from Costa Rica

[2] This explanation is offered for the purposes of simplicity. Technically, *the* is optional in limited generic contexts with prepositions other than *of*.

Kenyan coffee	the coffee of Kenya coffee from Kenya

4) *Expressing specific reference*

A specific reference is always either indefinite or definite and requires either the article *a* or *the* or another determiner (words like *some*, *any*,and *two*, for indefinite, and *this*, *those*, and *my* for definite).

Indefinite

Non-count nouns	**Count nouns**
	a necklace
some jewelry	some necklaces
a lot of jewelry	several necklaces

Definite

Non-count nouns	**Count nouns**
the jewelry	the necklace
	the necklaces
that jewelry	your necklaces

a) Indefinite articles and other indefinite determiners indicate that the listener/ reader is not expected to know exactly which item is being referred to. Often the item is being introduced into the discourse for the first time.

He will bring a friend to the party.

The club has several new members.

b) The definite article is usually used to refer to a specific item mentioned earlier in the discourse.

i. The definite article often presupposes an earlier mention of the specific item being referred to.

Her mother gave her a necklace and a pair of earrings for her fifteenth birthday. She loved the necklace and wore it often. But she put the earrings away in a drawer and forgot about them until she cleaned out the drawer several years later.

ii. Words that rename the referent using another word are also definite.

But the jewelry had little value; it wasn't real gold.

iii. A noun becomes definite if it is followed by a modifying phrase or clause which makes the referent unambiguous.

The book on the table is for you.

iv. The following phrase or clause can be left out if it is understood from the previous discourse or from the immediate situation. If you are discussing a town in the mountains and you say

What is the elevation?

you understand "of the town."

v. When all the instances of a category are included in the reference, the reference becomes definite. They are identifiable.

The California schools were closed last month.

vi. When people or things can be assumed to be a part of the situation being discussed, they are understood as definite—by association.

The California schools were closed last month because the teachers were on strike.

vii. Items that seem unique in our experience require no earlier indefinite reference.

the earth the sky the moon

viii. These are almost like proper nouns (nouns) which are made up of common nouns such as

the United States the Empire State Building

xi. No first mention is necessary for nouns referring to certain things which are part of the cultural situation.

On her way to the bank, Sue listened to the news on the radio.

At this point, usage shades into convention; the grammatical system doesn't provide adequate explanation.

How To Learn the Article System

How should a non-native speaker use this description of the article system to underpin further acquisition of the system?

The descriptive generalizations in this handout should help you understand the article system, but you should not try to simply "apply" the rules in your speech or writing. In many cases, you won't be able to accurately analyze the contexts that determine article usage.

The best way to learn how to use articles is to approximate the natural acquisition of native speakers of a language. This will take some time, but in the end you should be

able to sense which article to use without analyzing the context. You will have the kind of linguistic knowledge that you can rely on because it "sounds right" to you. To start building such knowledge, you need to pay attention to article usage in the speech and writing of native speakers. Researchers in second language acquisition have confirmed that in order for people to acquire new elements of a language, they have to at least notice them, maybe repeat them to themselves and wonder about them. Over time, the new elements become a firm part of the learner's knowledge, even though the learner might not be aware that he has gained this new knowledge. Language learning is like this, as you may know from experience. The mind has a remarkable ability to pick up language and construct a grammatical system. But since the article system is problematic, you need to give your language learning mind some extra help--noticing will provide rich input. Understanding the system a bit will help your mind fit the system together.

You can do a simple noticing exercise to learn articles.

Choose any piece of reading that you have already read and understood. (Any piece that has nouns will have articles. Since all language has nouns, any piece you choose will have articles.) It might be useful to use a transcript of a taped conversation or a video so that you can see and hear the articles at the same time.)

Decide how long you want to spend. The time should be short--five or ten minutes at a time is enough. You can do the exercise once a day, or many times a day, depending on your motivation. Don't let yourself get bored and don't do the exercise mechanically. The aim is to get into the habit of noticing articles; your mind should gradually become naturally alert to the presence of articles.

Find each noun in the reading. Put parentheses around the noun and any words that seem to accompany it, such as adjectives and articles. Sometimes there will be words that express quantity or number, or words that point, like *this* or *that*, *these* and *those*. These words go with the noun. The whole group is called a "noun phrase." Now deliberately notice whether an article is used in the noun phrase--*a/an*, *the* or 0 (zero). If there is, underline it or notice the zero article. (In some cases, nouns are used with no article at all--not even zero -- often with common places, e.g., He's not <u>on campus</u> today. Don't worry about the distinction between no article and the zero article.) Repeat the phrase, listening to yourself. If you wonder about why there is an article, or no article, that's good. But you don't have to able to answer; just posing the question prompts your mind to get to work and figure out this system--on its own with a little help from you.

Be deliberate, alert, and patient, and one day you will be surprised to find that you know the system and can tell if you need an article because it just sounds right.

References to consult on the uses of the article that are simply conventional

Frank, Marcella. *Modern English, A Practical Reference Guide*. Regents/Prentice Hall. 1993.

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V. Subject Specific Writing

This section summarizes salient features of certain genres of writing and of the three major areas into which courses at Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences are divided: the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences. Many writers whom you tutor will be studying subjects with which you are somewhat unfamiliar. Good writing practices apply across all disciplines, but expectations about style and format are different in different fields of study. Aside from specialized vocabulary, elements that may vary include tone, length of sentences and paragraphs, active or passive verb preferences, use or absence of first person, visual elements such as graphs or tables, and bibliographic styles. Some types of writing, such as laboratory reports or managerial communication, follow a prescribed organization. Keep in mind that even within a specific discipline there may be variations of purpose and of style. Expect that the writer with whom you work has been educated a least a bit about how the particular piece of writing is supposed to be presented, and that she may have in hand guidelines from an instructor or the targeted audience that can provide you with further insight.

The Arts: Writing About Music

In the fine arts, an idea or its meaning is inseparable from the form of its expression. Thus writers may find analysis of the arts to be a challenge. Music is as a case in point.

To some, writing about music seems a subjective process. The writer uses broad descriptions to express the emotional responses a piece elicits. To others, writing about music seems impossible – an oxymoron: "You can't show the power this music really holds, and even trying might compromise its integrity"; or, "Music is supposed to express what we can't in common language. It doesn't work the other way around."

But writing about music is neither an exercise in solipsism not an expression of the inexpressible. Its purpose is to foster better understanding and greater appreciation of the music in the writer and the reader; and these goals are accomplished by attentive analysis in lucid prose.

For instance, if the listener is fascinated by a particular musical phrase, he may ask: Why is the performer expressing it this way? What does this add to the work's meaning as a whole? And how does it uphold, demonstrate, and clarify the composer's intentions? In order to listen and write critically, it is essential to use the jargon of music theory and to put aside the tendency to view music as merely a sensual experience. Consider such factors as form, harmonic structure, historical context, performance practice, style and influences, and anything else distinct to the work. These technical aspects of the piece are carefully determined by the composer and exhaustively scrutinized by performers, and they give each musical work depth behind seemingly immediate moments of beauty.

Writers approach music from many perspectives. One can focus on history, theory, comparison of genre or cultures, performance, or any other topic of interest. It may even be relevant to consider other disciplines. Writing about music may seem different than

writing in other areas of study, but like most academic writing, uses a thesis and technical analysis to reach a more-than-superficial understanding of a subtle topic.

The specifics a writer attends to in arts other than music will differ, but it's always important that the paper be more than just reaction – that it pay close attention to particular features of the work's form and context.

Business Writing

Regardless of the form of the business communication, the writer should adhere to a few general guidelines to successfully convey his message to the reader. Business writers should accurately understand their specific target audience. Writers will communicate differently depending on whether the reader is a superior, a subordinate or colleague; an individual with little knowledge of the subject or an expert in the field; or a supporter or opponent of the writer's view on the subject. The writer should use clear and concise language; the reader may be pressed for time or unfamiliar with the subject matter. Likewise, the writer should be courteous and sincere, and he should avoid discriminatory language; he won't communicate successfully if he offends the reader. The writer should emphasize his key points by using short, direct sentences. Finally, using the proper format for a particular type of business communication is as important as its content. To help students think about how to construct a business document, before writing have them think about purpose and audience: "Why am I writing this document?" and "To whom am I writing and what do I want them to understand?"

Some of the most common forms of business communication are cover letters, resumes, memos, letters of inquiry and reports. Tutors and students should consult *The Business Writer's Handbook* for suggestions on proper format and content. The Cornell Career services website (http://www.career.cornell.edu) is also useful for answering questions about cover letters and resumes. An informed applicant's resume will be based on the particulars of a job description and fit the model of a company's ideal employee; thus it will speak to the prospective employer's hiring needs rather than in terms of indiscriminate self-congratulation. A strong cover letter will

Introduce the writer in the first paragraph: "I am writing to express interest…"; "I learned about…"; "I believe my____ is what you are seeking…"

Discuss job-related experiences and skills in the second paragraph (and possibly in a third), including academic credentials, extracurricular experiences, internships, or employment

Close with a paragraph that recaps or highlights skills and makes it clear that the applicant expects there will be a next step. This paragraph can go as far as "I will call next week to arrange a mutually convenient meeting time."

…HAdm165: Managerial Communication

This writing seminar gives quite structured guidelines for assignments. The Hotel School provides specialized tutoring for their students, but occasionally one drops by the Writing Walk-In Service. Slow down with these writers—ask them for the specific writing guidelines supplied by their instructor. These involve *content-value*, *skim-value*, *conclusion-orientation*, and structural requirements for the opening, middle, and closing.

Creative Writing

Here are some tips for working with the beginning creative writer of …

…Fiction:
A common tendency in beginning fiction writers is to try to create transcripts of real life. This impulse to be "realistic" on all counts is problematic: would you want to read a word-for-word transcript of your day? Chances are that such a read would put you straight to sleep. The more selective you can be about which bits of information you choose to share, the more interesting your story will be. Think of a short story as the sum of the parts in a word-for-word transcript that you would highlight if you wanted us to understand something about you or an event.

Some suggestions you might make to the fiction writer:

More than one storyline going on at once can add depth and interest. Sub-plots engage the reader, particularly the sophisticated reader.
Remember to make the distinction between showing and telling, and use them as tools, not as obligate methods.
Explore your options. If you've written a piece in third person, ask yourself whether it would be more engaging in first person; if you're writing in present tense, think about what you might gain from a past-tense insight, etc.
Pay attention to the beginning and ending paragraph or page: often these are paragraphs or pages that can either be omitted or reworked substantially.

…Poetry:
A good place to start with poetry might be to ask the writer to describe her style. Once she's thinking critically about her own poems (which can be difficult, as they are often based on intense, specific emotional states, especially in beginning writers), drafting the poems may not seem so abstract or terrifying.

A few questions to get the beginning poet editing:

How much can you take out of the poem and still have a poem?
Would this poem sound interesting to someone who doesn't speak English? (Are the rhythm and sound of the language interesting on their own?)
Of the images you've got, are there any you've heard before? In similar terms? If so, can you take them out or say them differently?
How many adjectives do you have in this poem? Try underlining them all and seeing how many you can possibly remove. Remember, any changes you make can always be changed back, so always give the edit a chance.

A good technique for editing: try rewriting the entire poem each time you make a round of edits; you'll find new things you didn't realize could be improved.

For **all** kinds of creative writing, as with essays, it always helps to have the writer tell you what the piece is "about," or what she wants the audience to take away from it –

discrepancies between what's on the paper and the author's intent are hard to tackle if you don't have an agreed-upon version of authorial intent. This kind of questioning may also help you gauge how far along the author is with the particular piece, as well as where she is in her development as a creative writer. More advanced writing, perhaps poetry especially, may appear wacky if read with an eye that's expecting beginner's work!

Humanities Writing

Writing for the humanities is notably different from the kind of writing done for other disciplines. It doesn't focus on logic the way a philosophy essay does, nor on presenting diverse facts in a coherent way like a paper in the social sciences, nor on drawing relevant conclusions from data like scientific articles. Instead, a humanities paper is concerned with *interpretation*: of texts, art, history, or another specific field. In explaining her interpretation the writer will use logic, present facts, and draw conclusions, but all of these should be subordinated to the ultimate interpretative goal.

Just what is interpretation, then? We might think of it as explaining what things mean, or as describing the way we ought to think of them. Thus in a history paper you might concern yourself with placing some social movement within a broader historical trend (i.e. describing the way we ought to think of that social movement); in a literature paper you might address the effect some figure of speech has on our understanding of the work it appears in (i.e. explain what that effect means). Clearly, these two types of interpretation overlap. We might think of a paper on a social movement as explaining the historical meaning of that social movement, just as well as we might think of a paper on a figure of speech as describing how to think of that figure of speech within the text in which it appears.

Since an interpretation is an extension or articulation of some interesting meaning, it should itself be interestingly meaningful. Thus a lucid, forceful, and imaginative style is highly valued in the humanities. Your reader should not simply understand your interpretation of a book or a painting; he should feel it break in on him and change the way he reads the book, or looks at the painting. Some of the stylistic standards of other disciplines – such as the requirement in the social sciences of referring to a concept in precisely the same terms every time it is mentioned – can produce writing that seems boring and pedantic if applied to writing for the humanities.

It's worth pointing out that no interpretation is ever absolutely ironclad and definitive. Each individual's take on a subject will highlight different aspects. You're not trying to find the right answer; you're trying to find your response. An essay about gender in *The Rape of the Lock* can exist perfectly comfortably alongside an essay about the mock-epic figures the poem employs. Interpretations can even conflict with each other; indeed, vigorous and thorough interpretation will usually engender disagreement. It's important to remember that your writing need not preclude or anticipate every reading other than the one you advance.

This is not to say, however, that anything goes. Your interpretation ought to be an interesting consideration of an issue, firmly grounded in your subject, be it text, artwork, or historical event, and if it is good it will acknowledge any significant

counterarguments. To interpret a subject is *not* merely to say what your feelings and thoughts about it are. Nor is it merely to give a descriptive account. A humanities paper should be the product of long, careful, and logical thought about a problem or problems presented by your topic. If what you are writing seems not to be truly engaged with what you are writing about (e.g. doesn't quote the text, doesn't describe important historical circumstances), it probably doesn't qualify as interpretation. On the other end of the spectrum, if what you are writing seems entirely unobjectionable and not to require any justification, that probably doesn't qualify either. Good writing for the humanities presents a striking position on a topic and carefully explains why that position is a good one.

Philosophy Writing

Tutors with no training in philosophy often feel some anxiety about tutoring philosophy papers. This anxiety is by and large unfounded, but tutors should be aware that a paper in philosophy (particularly a paper in an elementary philosophy course) is expected to adhere to certain quite specific standards of argument. All quotes should be interpreted, and the opponent's counterargument addressed. These standards are more formal and in some ways more rigorous than the standards of any other discipline in the humanities.

Nevertheless, the best writing in philosophy, as in any subject, is accessible to anyone who puts care and effort into reading it. If you don't have experience in philosophy, don't worry. Although you may not feel like you "know the answer" when reading a philosophy paper (as you may when reading English or history papers), your questions and confusion can identify places where a paper is unclear or incomplete.

Here are some standards and conventions to be aware of:

Crucial words and concepts must be clearly and concisely defined. As a rule, if someone asks "What does X mean in this paper?" the author should be able to answer by pointing to one sentence.

The structure of a philosophy paper should be very clear to the reader. If an author has asked three questions, the reader should find three answers in the paper. No paragraph should contain ideas between which the relation is not readily apparent, even if the relation is subsequently made clear. The paper should never seem to do more or less than it claims to do.

Technical terms in philosophy often have meanings different from their ordinary English meanings. For instance, 'validity' means internal coherence, while 'soundness' means that the premises an argument starts with are true. These terms should not be confused or used interchangeably; an argument can be simultaneously valid and unsound. Be careful; if a student is throwing a lot of "philosophese" around inconsistently, he probably doesn't know what he's saying.

Tutors who aren't familiar with philosophy should follow these guidelines when working with philosophy papers:

Read carefully. You may be able to tear through papers in subjects you're familiar with, since you can often predict where they're going. Don't assume this is the case with philosophy papers. Be ready to be surprised.

Ask questions when you don't understand something. If you can't tell why the author reached a certain conclusion, chances are she didn't explain it as clearly as she could have.

Have the writer explain technical terms to you. Beginning philosophy students often use lots of jargon to sound sophisticated. Make sure they know what they're saying; if a student can't explain technical terms to you in ordinary English, he shouldn't be using them.

Let the writer know what your tutoring strategy is. You don't have to be an expert, and you don't have to act like one either. Tell the student that if the paper is clear to you, it will be clear to anyone. If both of you realize that the best way you can help her is to ask questions instead of giving advice, you'll both have a more rewarding session.

Scientific Writing

In scientific disciplines, well-written reports are important for conveying the process, results, and implications of experiments or studies. Scientific papers explain a problem of interest, document the author's findings, and communicate the significance of the results to a fairly broad audience. When reading scientific papers, tutors should pay particular attention to focus, audience, and structure.

Scientific papers focus narrowly on a question of interest; any extraneous material that does not relate to the core question should be eliminated. Tight links should be established between theoretical information, existing empirical results, and the current study. Tutors should pay particular attention to the relevance of theoretical material that is presented in the paper; students tend to include tangential information in these sections to expand the list of works cited.

Scientific papers are directed towards an audience that is expected to have some pre-existing level of knowledge about the field or topic. While specialized terms should be defined, it is not necessary to provide a definition for commonly used scientific terms (unless specifically instructed to do so, perhaps as part of a report for an introductory class). Scientific names for organisms should be provided when the organism's name is first mentioned (in the abstract *and* in the text), even if common names are used throughout the remainder of the paper.

Like other forms of writing, scientific papers should offer a sound, well-structured argument throughout the paper. The question under investigation and hypotheses associated with that question should be clearly laid out early in the paper. Conclusions must be based on facts that are offered in the paper and not drawn from assumptions or general material covered in class. While appropriate class material may be incorporated as background information, results and conclusions that do not conform to expectations are important for demonstrating deviations from general rules. Excellent papers go beyond just presenting results; they demonstrate a student's understanding of the principles the study was designed to test.

Scientific reports and papers generally follow a standard format that includes the following components:

*Title***:** A very brief statement of what happened in the experiment. Mentions the major conclusion drawn and the proper scientific name of the thing studied (e.g. Escherichia coli, methyl m-nitrobenzoate, etc.)

Abstract: Summarizes the purpose of the study, key findings, their significance, and major conclusions. Does not cite outside sources.

Introduction: States the objective of the experiment and provides concise background and theoretical context of the study. Justifies the performance of the experiment and how it was performed. Cites outside sources.

Methods: Outlines the experimental procedure in sufficient detail to enable another person to replicate the study. Does not report results (students new to writing science papers often make this mistake).

Results: Describes results in narrative form but also includes calculations, tables, and figures that summarize findings. Tables and figures must be clearly labeled so that they can stand on their own. Results are not interpreted in this section.

Discussion: Explains results in detail and interprets their importance and relation to other work. Addresses deviations from expectations and remaining ambiguities. Does not discuss data not reported in the "Results" section, nor does it falsely conclude that the data support the hypothesis (two more neophyte mistakes). Cites outside sources.

Conclusions: Restates major findings, justifies their interpretation, and discusses their importance. Cites outside sources.

Acknowledgements

Works Cited

Appendices: Includes raw data, calculations, or graphs.

There are different types of science writing—lab reports, articles for publication, essays—so be sure to ask the writer what type of format or structure the assignment requires.

Social Science Writing

Different fields in the social sciences observe very different conventions. Psychologists write differently than economists, who write differently than anthropologists. Within sociology, qualitative researchers write differently than quantitative ones. Even within the same department, one professor looks for writing that is fairly literary, another for pieces that are flat out reports. Students who have serious questions about the standards for their papers should consult their instructor. However, we can make some general comments here.

Writing in social science disciplines prizes clarity and factuality over style. The social sciences are centered on presenting evidence in a very matter-of-fact manner, so short, succinct sentences are preferred. Instead of artistic or flowery writing, social science writing must get to the point immediately. Fine writers may occasionally move beyond

clear explanation in the introduction or the discussion sections, but not in the methods section.

The most important facet of creating a persuasive and effective argument in social science writing is citing evidence. No claim can justifiably be made unless it is backed up by data or the quotation, paraphrase, or summary of a credible source. Logical and objective argument following from these sources is valued more highly than claims supported by personal opinion.

In some fields, graphs and statistics must be integrated with the text. Commonly used words may have very particular meanings in these disciplines; examples include *expectations*, *motivations*, *liminality*. Repetition of an important word is sometimes preferred over synonyms.

VI. Strategies and Situations

The first writer who visits your shift has a fairly sound paper written for a course taught by your advisor, whom you know is a tough reader. None of your attempts to get him to engage in conversation about a weak supporting point draw him out. Ouch! The next writer is an active participant, thinks of great suggestions for changes as you read the first pages together, departs with the intention of going through the rest of the paper in a similar fashion, and vows to return tomorrow—and does. Yay! Tutoring runs the gamut.

Options in some writing situations are fairly straightforward. Pointing out successful features of a paper helps nearly every writer understand what works most effectively. If a thesis is argued on superficial points, the writer can underline assertions to see whether they are worth backing up, or can discuss one quote thoroughly in place of using many quotes to illustrate one point. If a thorough and well-ordered essay exceeds the assigned page limit, then discussion and quotes that are least illustrative can be removed.

Other situations require you to be on your toes, and perhaps reach beyond what you thought was your capacity. When they occur, something is at stake. You can feel the pulse of the tutoring session, whether by the delight or the angst you experience, or in the case of types of writer by the mismatch between your own writing preferences and those of the person you happen to be tutoring. How do you cope with matters that matter so much? Read on.

Working with Good Writing

Many writers who consult with you will be struggling with academic papers or personal statements, but some will come in to have a piece that is already very fine looked at. There is nothing more frustrating for a good writer to hear than, "Well, this seems pretty good to me. I can't think of any suggestions to give you." Writing always has the potential for change and improvement. Just because a piece is good doesn't mean it can't become something better. However, working with a talented writer does require that you go about the session differently than you would when helping someone who is having difficulty with basics. Here are a few things to keep in mind when working with good writing.

Look to the language of the paper: If the argument and development of that argument are sound, make suggestions on how to tighten, streamline, and generally beautify expression.

Some good writers become lazy: Good grades come easily to them, and sometimes their talent carries them further than the substance of their piece. Watch for generalities, surface explanations and pretty sounding phrases that don't actually say anything. These are easy to pick up and hard to fix, but without them a paper's quality improves exponentially.

Push the writer to go more deeply into his or her analysis: If you catch hints of brilliance in the piece that haven't been fully developed for one reason or another, encourage the writer to pursue those bits of brilliance and improve the paper. Does the paper fully pursue a significant question? Is the internal

logic of each paragraph complete? Does the series of interesting claims add up? Ask your hardest questions of good writers.

Don't be intimidated by good writing. You were chosen as a tutor in part because you too write well. A session with a good writer is similar to any other; you have only changed your tactics a bit. You may tutor someone who is a better writer than you are. This doesn't mean that your criticisms and suggestions are not valid. Lots of great writers have had editors, and their editors weren't usually literary geniuses. That didn't keep them from being helpful.

Neophyte Writing

Some first-year students have had little or no training in writing. Others have had training but haven't absorbed it. Whatever the cause, there are members of the first-year class who are under-prepared to write at the college level. You won't be able to get them on track by yourself, but you can learn to spot them and tailor your tutoring to their needs. It can make a big difference in struggling writers' careers to have someone encourage them to devote some extra effort to writing and reassure them that there's no shame in doing so. Honestly compliment any worthy sections or qualities of their papers that you may spot.

Writers with no training are not simply identical with struggling writers. Neophyte writing is characterized by uncertainty and timidity. Look for phrases like "the problem could possibly be that…" or "in my opinion it might be a good idea to …" (which of course should be pointed out to the writer as excessive). Look for extreme frequency of a non-causal 'therefore' or a lonely 'this.' Additionally, neophyte writers are disorganized in a way that goes beyond the disorganization you see every day. Watch for them to be unsure of how one paragraph relates to the next, what the fundamental purpose of the paper is, and even when their assignment is due or how long it should be. They may need some tips on time management and priorities.

Certain tutoring strategies can be particularly helpful to neophyte writers:

Articulate the choices they're faced with: The sheer number of decisions represented by a paper can be bewildering to an inexperienced or untrained writer. Help the writer come to grips with their choices by talking them out or writing them down. Address the harder, more interesting topic or the easier, boring topic? Write a five-paragraph essay, or some other form? Summarize the story, or assume the reader is familiar with it? Write the introduction first, or last?

Make them face their material: Neophyte writers lack confidence: they would rather let a topic speak for itself. Hence their papers regularly include quotations with no explanation. This is a problem for all kinds of writers, but tutors should be particularly hard-nosed about it with neophytes. Forcing them to deal with quotations not only produces a better paper; it encourages them to put their own ideas forward, to venture into the realm where propositions are disputable.

"What is the motive behind this paper?" The idea of a thesis statement can be hard to grasp. Neophyte writers get hung up on its technical features – it's

the point you prove, it comes at the end of the introduction, etc. – to the detriment of the statement's basic function: to orient the reader to what's interesting about the paper. To refocus their attention on this larger issue, ask them why they wrote the paper: what seemed cool about this topic and these details?

Have the writer title paragraphs: Just a few words in the margin about each paragraph's purpose will be fine. This is a good way for writers to get a footing in the organization of their writing. It allows them to see where what they projected for the paper differs from what they actually did. It will also help you to see what they *thought* their organization was; it's not always apparent from a reading. Identifying the paper's content and order gives the writer a solid base for rewriting or refining a thesis statement.

Use a word bank: If the writer is having trouble finding the right word at the right moment, brainstorm related words and phrases that are important to the paper. Having a list of these available during revision can clean up both writing and thinking considerably.

Sensitive Subjects

In most tutoring sessions it's possible to draw a fairly clear line between writing and writer; the piece you are tutoring will address some publicly accessible topic, so you can criticize it without seeming to criticize its author, provided you are polite and judicious. Sometimes, however, a piece of writing (perhaps a personal statement) will address a much more personal and sensitive topic – a topic such as psychological disturbance, physical or learning challenges, financial difficulty, grief, illness, or death. These topics need to be treated as sensitive even if you don't viscerally perceive the writer to be especially vulnerable. Under these circumstances, drawing that line is much harder. You must establish boundaries that respect the text or draft *and* the life experience that the statement is based on.

These sessions may be some of the most difficult you face as a tutor. They can be intellectually and emotionally draining and, since each one is unique, there is no way to prepare perfectly for them. Do, however, acquaint yourself with these general guidelines:

Affirm what is written: One of the best ways to show respect for writers' lived experience is simply to affirm that you've paid attention to what they've said about it. Affirmations like "That must have been really hard for you," or "It sounds like you're justly proud of how you reacted," can go a long way.

Don't try to counsel the writer: You're a tutor, not a psychotherapist or a doctor. Writers come to you for help on their writing, not guidance in their personal lives – even if the writing is personal. Avoid advice like "A friend of mine found art therapy really helpful after an experience like that." Even the subtler "Don't blame yourself," can put the session on a footing the writer is uncomfortable with.

The writer's word is the final word: Although in some sessions it's appropriate to be forceful in recommending a writer rethink an aspect of their paper, it's usually not when the topic is intensely sensitive. In particular, respect the

limits the writer sets on the amount of emotion they are willing to display and the details they are willing to include.

Don't let the writer feel guilty about writing: Writers may feel that they "exploit" a tragedy when they choose it as a topic for personal statements. If necessary, reassure them that their lives are theirs to write about, and that they should never feel guilty for coming to terms with tragedy in purposeful, goal-directed writing.

Let the writer define 'overcoming': Writers often address sensitive issues in response to a personal statement prompt such as "How did you overcome an obstacle you've faced?" Rather than render the obstacle in gory detail, such essays should primarily meditate on how it was overcome. But it's alright if the writer failed in some way to overcome a tragedy or disadvantage, so long as they demonstrate thought about the problem and present it with dignity. Personal essays need not end resolutely, but must always end reflectively.

Be frank: Writers may feel uncomfortable or apprehensive about presenting their writing to someone whose experiences or social identity are distant from theirs. Nevertheless, honesty is the best policy. Of course you have every right to maintain your privacy. But don't fudge your presentation of yourself to create a false feeling of sympathy. Your experiences will inflect the session, whether they are on the table or under it.

Style

Style is hard to learn and hard to teach. Think of style as the set of choices a writer makes in writing – conscious or unconscious choices about which words to put down onto the page, about how to arrange them into sentences, about what rhetoric to deploy. For example, consider the military connotations of that final word choice in the previous sentence. Scanning the next paragraph, a reader finds a word that connotes astronomy. What diction would render connotations consistent: 'about what rhetoric to constellate'? But ending with that unusual infinitive seems a little forced. Parallel structure tones it down and adds grace: 'about how to arrange them into sentences, about how to constellate rhetoric.'

A writer learns to make these choices in a way that satisfies self and audience only after sustained thought, careful reading, and much trial and error. So when you tutor a writer on style, you should realize that you are not going to be able to render him a brilliant stylist over the course of a half hour. You can, however, do a great service for inexperienced writers *vis-a-vis* style: you can let them know that the choices are there to make. Most beginning writers don't have a feeling for the galaxy of ways there are to put things. Opening up to some of this breathtaking variety is a first step. A good style is a varied style; writers aren't good stylists because they have one way of saying things, but because they have an arsenal (!) of phrasings to choose from.

Some tutors feel strongly about style. If you are one of these tutors, resist the urge to "correct" a writer's awkward phrasings and poor word choice. Instead, try these strategies for illuminating the choices available to her:

"How could you say this with fewer words?" One of the tics of first-year writing is to burden sentences with constructions like "the fact that … " or "the idea in the novel that … " Encouraging writers to take the time to realize that these phrases are meaningless provides an object lesson: the first formulation of a sentence is not always the best formulation.

React to the style as a reader: Style has an effect on the reader, and good stylists will try to tune this effect to their purpose, be that purpose clarity or something more rhetorically sophisticated. Try articulating the effect the writer's style is having on you: "All of these prepositional phrases in a row seem choppy – I'm having a hard time seeing where the sentence is going." Is this an effect the writer wants? What effect does the writer want, and how can it be achieved? Once the desired effect is determined, you may need to give some advice: "Maybe you could smooth the sentence out by using a subordinate clause instead of the prepositions."

Compare sentences: Find a sentence that seems to you to be written in a good style, and place it next to an indifferent or unfortunate sentence. Point out what works about the exemplar – "You really manage to tell me where things are in relation to each other with these prepositions," – and see if it can be applied to the other. This exercise shows not only that there are a variety of choices to be made about style, but that the writer has already made choices in some places that are different than those made in others.

Working with style requires you to read more carefully than usual; you may be able to skim a paper to get the gist of an argument, but you cannot skim it to get the gist of its style. Nevertheless, it's good work; style lets the glory into writing.

Types of Writers

Every writer is different. But as you encounter more and more of them in your tutoring, you may begin to notice the differences falling along certain axes. Sometimes it can help a tutoring session to be able to place a writer as a type; doing so will help you to identify characteristic strengths and weaknesses, as well as to employ tutoring strategies that you've found to work for similar cases in the past.

Jensen and DiTiberio posit that writers may vary along four axes:

How they generate ideas: Some writers generate ideas actively, others do so reflectively. ***Active writers*** discover what they want to say by writing or talking about it. They work well in groups where they can bounce their ideas off of others. Introductions and conclusions are hard for them to write. The first draft's conclusion may contradict the stated thesis, and they may have to find the paper's start at the end of what they write. Active writers must go through several drafts to reach a point where everything clicks. ***Reflective writers*** plan out what they want to say before writing it. They prefer to work alone, so that they're not distracted from pursuing their ideas. Their first drafts are well organized and fairly complete. As a result, later drafts may be minimally developed; some reflective writers are quick to convince themselves that they've said all they have to say.

How they form their perspective: Some writers are factual, others are theoretical. ***Factual writers*** reason inductively. They focus on details and sometimes include too many or fail to fully explain the significance of examples. The overall purpose of their drafts may be lost in the step-by-step close-ups. They may omit generalizations or handle them awkwardly. Often they can be helped by a series of questions about a specific paragraph. ***Theoretical writers*** are concerned with ideas; they like trying something new or creative. Their drafts may lack illustrations or connecting explanations; they may assume that readers see the connections because they do. As a result, they may need reminders to demonstrate their assertions while revising and to focus on the relative emphasis of the paper's supporting points.

How they prefer to affect the reader: Some writers are objective, others are personal. ***Objective writers*** aim to convey a message to their audience as clearly as possible. They argue carefully and logically and they value organization and directness in their essays. Thus they mark out each section of their work with obvious transitions ("Now I'll examine…"); their essays are easy to follow. Revision is easy for them, since each stage of their argument or presentation is independent of the others, or depends on the others in a well-defined way. They prefer concrete, no-nonsense feedback from instructors and tutors. ***Personal writers*** aim to affect their reader emotionally. Their papers will be based around appeals to values and feelings rather than irrefutable argument. Accordingly, they attach importance to the "flow" or "mood" of the piece; they see their work as a sort of tapestry of interwoven themes. Revision is difficult for them, since everything they've written is freighted with important emotions. If they feel it needs work, they are likely to rewrite a section or even a whole paper from scratch. Because of their intense emotional involvement with what they've written, they are very sensitive to criticism.

How they manage time and information: Some writers are focused, others are inclusive. ***Focused writers*** choose narrow topics. They dislike being under pressure, so they start writing early and plan time for each stage of the process. They excise information from successive drafts rather than add it. As a result of their tight focus, they sometimes fail to come to grips with the complexity of their subject. ***Inclusive writers*** choose broad topics. They are unaffected by pressure and start essays late in order to collect more information. They include more information in each successive draft. Sometimes their papers seem diffuse or hard to follow because they fail to delineate what they are writing about.

These are axes, not categories. Few people fall at one extreme or another; most fall somewhere in between. It's not necessary to type every writer you come across, but it can be useful. Knowing what kind of writer you are dealing with can determine how you react to their work (don't come down hard on a personal writer), as well as pointing you towards productive work (reflective writers will benefit from being asked to expand their

thinking) and away from unproductive work (inclusive writers won't cut; they need to see how everything fits together).

(Un)Common Problems in Tutoring

Although tutoring is usually enjoyable, it can be challenging, and occasionally real problems do arise. Below you will find several that crop up with some regularity. They aren't the sort of thing that happens every day, or even every semester, but you should be prepared to handle them, with a sense of humor or gentleness when you can. Consult the Director if any of these situations becomes problematic.

Triangulation
When you tutor you may find that there is a third person involved besides you and the writer: the instructor who gave the writer his assignment. Of course the instructor won't show up to the tutoring session in person; but, as the person who ultimately will grade the writer's paper, she often looms large in the writer's mind. Thus writers who are concerned about their grades have a tendency to ask "What did my professor mean by…?" or "What will my professor think of …?" This tendency isn't a problem as long as you answer honestly: you don't know. You will often be able to bring your own expertise to bear on what the instructor has said or written, and your standards for good writing probably won't be too far from the instructor's. However, you should always remind writers that the best way to find out what an instructor meant is to ask her.

It is a serious problem if a writer comes to rely on you to interpret his teacher's comments. You may get it right the first few times, but you will inevitably misunderstand; then you, an authority figure in the writer's eyes, will give the writer advice that conflicts with his instructor's. Not only does this put the writer's grade in jeopardy, but if the story gets back to the instructor she's liable to be quite unhappy with the WIS. **Do not, by any means, tell a writer that you think his instructor's standards are wrong.** You may be honest if those standards are not your own, but you should always encourage the writer to keep his final audience in mind when writing. (If he decides he doesn't care about how his instructor will react, just make sure you didn't encourage him to make that decision.)

This may sound like an easy problem to avoid, and usually it is. Writers can be crafty though: they want you to tell them how to understand what their professor told them; failing that, they want you to tell them that they don't have to pay attention to the instructor, since she doesn't make sense. They may be taking an instructor's remark out of context, or misunderstanding it. It can be hard to keep from telling them what they want to hear. Try to be supportive without taking sides; bring the focus back onto the writing. Even experienced tutors get caught in the triangulation trap, particularly when they sympathize strongly with the writer – when they recognize a writer having problems similar to problems they themselves have had in another class, or when they just feel the writer to be in a very difficult situation vis-à-vis the instructor or the course. Bottom line: be careful whenever a writer brings his instructor up.

Philosophical Differences
Students frequently bring in papers expressing strong opinions. You will normally read these papers to make sure the thesis and following argument are strong, cohesive, and clearly written – just as you would with any other paper. However, this task becomes problematic when the student's views offend you or seem ignorant. If you can't control your feelings on the topic or you are worried that you can't provide a fair critique, it is in your best interest (and the student's) to calmly explain that you feel uncomfortable reading the paper because of its subject matter, and recommend another tutor who might be more appropriate. **This is not merely a good practical policy, but your right; you never have to work on writing that makes you uncomfortable.**

The Hostile Student
Writers sometimes feel defensive when having their papers read by a tutor, and sometimes this defensiveness is channeled into hostility, either at the tutor for offering criticism, or at the professor, or even at the assignment itself. If you sense hostility, hold off on criticizing the paper and first offer some praise for its strong points. Another way to calm a writer's hostility is to let her know she is in control by asking her why she came in, or where *she* thinks her weaknesses are. Emphasize that you want to be helpful, and ask whether the write would like to try another tactic. Sometimes it is helpful to ask the student questions about the class, the assignment, or their attitudes towards writing in general; once the writer has voiced her opinions, the hostility may dissipate, as she will realize that you are trying to work with her, not attack her. **However, if a writer remains hostile after your best efforts, it is your right to bring the session politely to a close. You never have to work with a writer who makes you uncomfortable.**

The Unengaged Student
"My professor told me to come here to have my paper read, so just read it and tell me what to fix." Sound familiar? When a student comes into the Walk-In Service against his will, merely to appease a professor, he will probably act disinterested, annoyed, and bored. As a tutor, you have a right to explain to him that tutoring involves both of you, and that he needs to work *with* you – you do not revise *for* him. You will inevitably run into this type of student, and there's no perfect way to change his attitude. It's best to ask him questions about the paper, or to make him explain it you – anything to get the student more actively involved in the tutoring session! Write some notes to convert the talking into writing. If the session becomes very frustrating and unproductive, feel free to explain to the student that you feel that you have done everything you can for him. A good line to use is, "Well, that's all I've got. Do you have any more questions?" If he wants the session to continue, he will have to give you some input. If he doesn't, he'll go home.

The Student Overusing or Abusing the Tutoring Service
A good tutor can be a crutch for an insecure or lazy student. Patterns form, in which a writer comes in on a regular basis and does less and less work beforehand (e.g. the writer comes in each week with a rough outline but expects you to flesh it out or come up with a thesis). If you observe such a pattern, explain to the student that he must write a thoroughly thought-out paper and cannot expect you to do the work for him. Insist that he bring you something you can work on together; refuse to do work that you think he can do himself. If a student persists to the point of becoming a real problem, it is worth

mentioning the student's name and the problematic pattern to the Director of the Walk-In Service.

The Erotic Zone
Erotic energy is one of the fundamental motivators of human aspiration. And it is an important energy in genuine teaching; the Pygmalion story did not arise for lack of material. The love of a subject, or of a mode of expression such as writing, infuses those involved with it. But your focus while on the job is intellectual passion, which is not to be confused with passion or projection between people. On very rare occasions, a writer may cross the boundaries of your professional relationship and ask for personal contact information or even ask you out. It is wise to avoid demurring, and to dispel the discomfort of this type of situation with a direct and polite statement in which you acknowledge the compliment and move on. 'No' is a complete sentence, and extended explanation is unnecessary. Ask whether the writer is ready to concentrate on the task at hand, the piece of writing. Be friendly, but rein in extra smiles or laughs that could be misinterpreted as flirtation.

Attitude Adjustment
If you're in danger of growing blasé or inured because of the many sessions you've tutored, interrogate yourself; make sure that you don't assume the writer has dropped in for a grammar check or that you know what their writing issues will be.

If you encounter discouragement, reinforce that all writers have consistent issues that they get used to working on continually.

If an overly ambitious writer is pressuring you, reading aloud is a good way to slow down.

Delight and be satisfied when writers read a sentence out loud and self-correct it, or when you can suggest the word they have been searching for, or when you have integrated your comments on overall structural issues with grammar. You are helping the vocabulary or the structure to become salient, and thus more easily remembered.

Know when to stop. The goal is to learn a bit, not to complete a perfect paper. Set limits, realistic goals, when you begin and as the session progresses.

VII. Techniques and Reflections from Past Tutors

As you've gathered from earlier pages, there is no generic template for approaching common writing situations. But a light bulb that clicks in one tutor's head can shine for others—as when the 'So what?' question became shorthand for informing writers that a draft weak on analytic development needed some thinking through.

Tutors frequently mention open-ended questions, silence, keeping the pen in the writer's hand, as foundational techniques whose delivery improves with experience. Short lists on scrap paper are useful as tutorials commence and end: succinct bullets or boxes of information can indicate categories of your suggested changes; you can ask which the writer might wish to talk about first, or work on next, during or after the session.

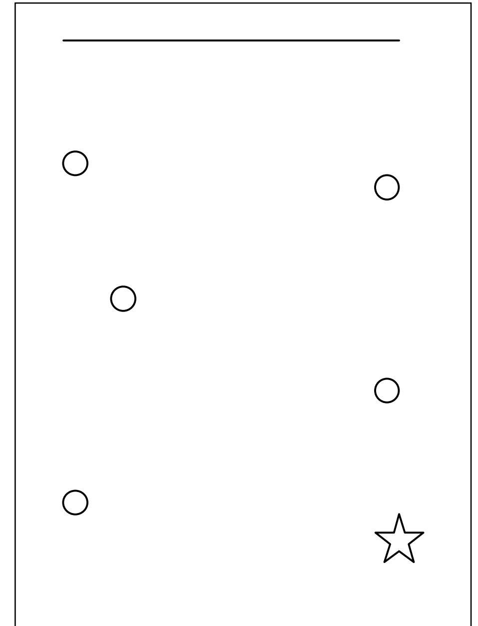
Using **analogies** or **simple visuals** can help slow you down, prevent your leaping toward a hypothetical solution, allow you to spend more time asking for information, and weight the session toward the writer's responses and questions.

> A tutor who was an officer for the debate team drew on experience with **oral forensic argument** to explain the importance of analysis, thoroughness, and organization when establishing and laying out a case. A column of individualized declarative statements represents the claims of the thesis. A second column contains written arguments against each of the points in the first column. Treatment of objections necessarily follows, and the conclusion exposes the underlying philosophy or value system that supports each set of statements.
>
> This tutor also coined the term Advanced Placement Syndrome for the FWS paper that seems to have written itself without getting down to genuine writing, and responded to such instances by talking about **the stick under the umbrella**. Well trained in secondary school, some writers structure papers around devices rather than ideas; fancy diction stands in for actual supporting points. Three or four steps of analysis may be compacted into a single sentence. The way out of this syndrome? Rhetoric that effortlessly inflates, pops up like an umbrella, needs substance—the stick, the handle that supports it. Once substance is discussed or imagined, the writer can move on to outlining the draft, or making charts of crucial statements and their parts.

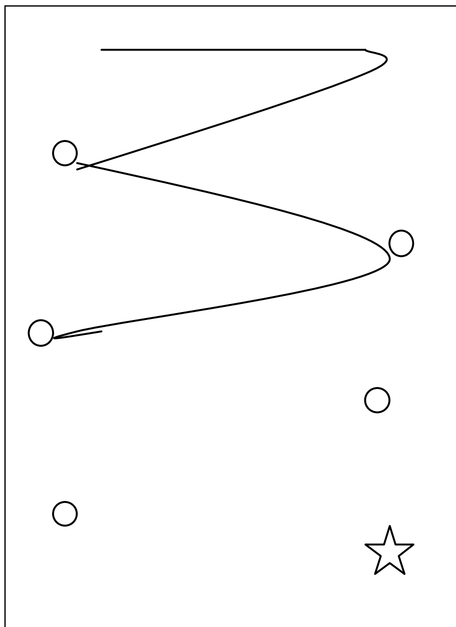
You bring your body language, choice of words, and methods of making points to every writer that you work with—and you can be self-reflective and self-directed about those qualities. Walk-In Service staffing is designed to assemble a mosaic of tutors with expressly different strengths. Brainstorming at meetings or soloing on a shift, tutors have created memorable techniques for furthering the writer's progress and involvement. This section includes two illustrated examples. Within the storehouse of tutors' reflective wisdom that completes this section, you will also find some mnemonics. If they attract you, be like Shakespeare: borrow them. And then invent your own.

The Snake

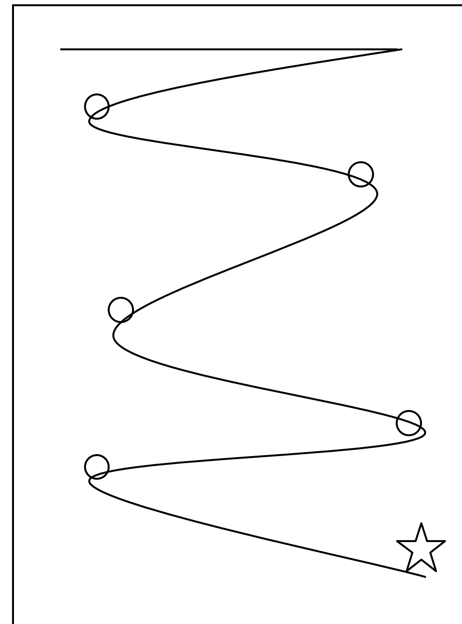
Many times, particularly with students in First-year Writing Seminars, a draft may have a thesis, but after stating it in the first paragraph, the paper seems to drop the thesis and just present a bunch of supporting points without explaining how they are supporting the thesis, how they connect together and why that is important. "The Snake" is an explanation/visualization of how a thesis should work in a paper.



In this first picture, the large rectangle represents the paper as a whole. Whether the paper is 2 pages or 20 pages, the thesis should still work in the same way. The horizontal line represents the thesis statement and the dots represent the different points that support the thesis statement.
The star represents the conclusion.



In this second picture, the thesis leaves the top of the paper and begins to snake down from point to point.



A thesis should snake through the entire paper, connecting each point, regardless of how distant or unconnected those supporting points maybe. The thesis should be omnipresent and constantly drive the paper forward.

The Signpost Story

The "signpost story" is great for helping students write and organize that crucial first paragraph of a paper. A cartoon-like device accompanies the telling. The signpost analogy can help writers think about what the opening paragraphs of a paper must accomplish, and it provides a framework for the rest of the paper as well.

"OK. This is going to seem a little weird but I'm going to tell you a story that will help you fix your introduction/start your paper/organize your paper. Just bear with me…I promise it will help in the end. (An older and wiser tutor told it to me because she'd heard it from an instructor when she was an undergrad, and she said it changed the way she wrote papers for the rest of her college career.)

"So imagine you're sitting here in Rockefeller when a bunch of guys in ski masks burst into the room and kidnap you. They blindfold you, tie you up, and throw you in a car. They drive for a while, and when they take you out of the car, you can tell you're at an airport. You can hear planes taking off and landing all around you. They load you onto a plane—in the cargo hold, you think—and the plane takes off. You have no idea where you're being sent.

"You fade in and out of consciousness during the flight and become completely disoriented. You have no idea where you are, or how long you've been in the air. After a while—it could have been four hours, eight hours, twelve hours—they wake you up and attach something to your back, and then they open the hatch and push you out of the plane. Fortunately, they've activated your parachute, and you float safely to the ground below.

"But you have no idea what continent you're even on, because you don't know how long you were in the air. You take off your blindfold and look around. You're clearly in a desert. [Draw desert horizon line with some scraggly grass]. You could be in the Sahara Desert, in the Mojave Desert, the Gobi Desert. There's not a soul in sight.

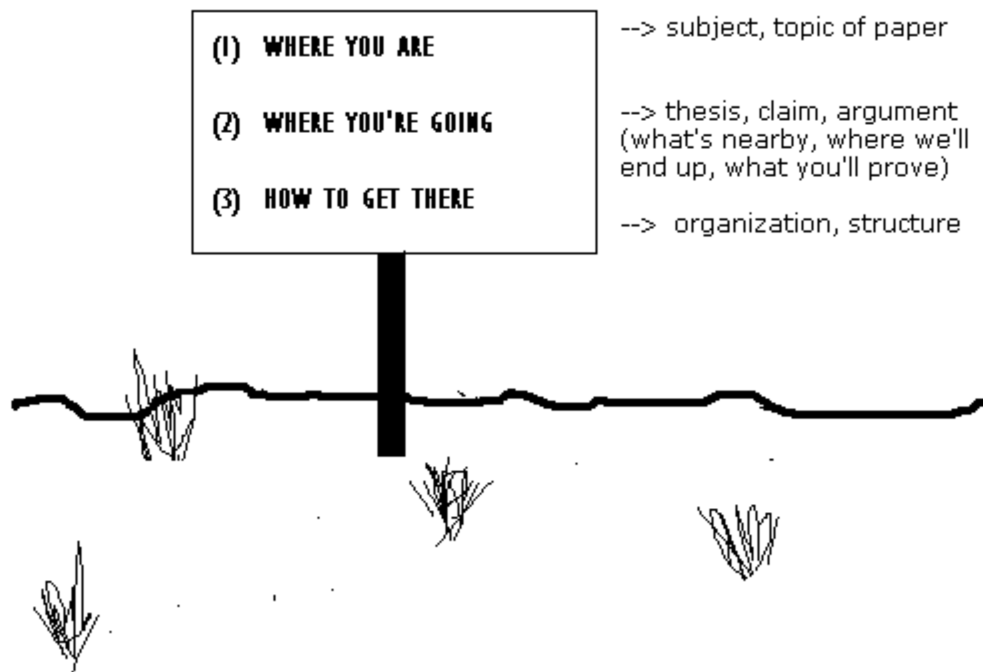
"You wander around aimlessly until, thank goodness, you see a sign up ahead. [Draw rectangular sign, with blank number 1 through 3.]

"At this point, what information would you want to have on this sign? [Pause, sometimes students will have the answer.]

"The first thing you need to know is WHERE YOU ARE. So let's say the sign tells you you're in the Mojave Desert. Great. What else do you need to know? [Pause.]

"Well, you'd need to know WHAT'S NEARBY, or WHERE YOU'RE GOING. Is there a larger town or some type of civilization nearby? You need to figure out how far away your final destination is. Maybe you're hoping to end up at the Grand Canyon, or maybe you're hoping to make it back to Ithaca. Either way, you need to know where you're headed.

"OK, last thing. Now that you have a goal for where you're headed, it's important to know HOW TO GET THERE. You need more than just "Ithaca, 3,000 miles." You need directions and landmarks.



"Alright, so if we take these three things, and apply them to your paper, we can come up with the three things a well-organized paper must accomplish in the first few paragraphs. Falling out of a plane and into the desert is like the reader falling into your paper. Readers want to know, 'What type of paper am I in? Is it a biology research paper, or a literary analysis? If it's a literary paper, what text is it analyzing?'

"Then the reader wants to know what you're going to prove to us. Why are we reading the paper? What are we going to learn from it? What's your claim or argument? This is the THESIS. It's where the paper is headed.

"The third thing the reader wants is a sort of preview of where this paper is going. In order to prove your thesis, there's got to be some sort of structure or organization to the paper. What categories have you divided your evidence into? What areas of the issue are you going to explore? A reader will be able to understand your argument better if she gets some sort of "heads-up" before launching into all the good points you're going to make. Let the reader know what to look for as she reads."

If the student needs help with the third category—organization and structure—and seems to like these types of visual diagrams, you can try the ever-so-helpful subway analogy! As you might imagine, this one involves a platform, a destination, and a number of stops. Or if you wish to avoid mixed metaphors, simply offer distinct definitions of several abstract terms: summary tells what happens; interpretation tell what the happenings mean; analysis, by examining the parts and relating to the whole, tells how the meanings are revealed.

Reflections from Past Tutors

Below are past tutors' reflections on nearly fifteen years of tutoring. You'll find problems, advice, and strategies from the people who have done your job in the past. The problems we run into as tutors are similar, but the solution that works for one person won't always work for another. In reading this section, pay attention to the diversity of tutor voices and approaches you encounter. Because they bring different perspectives to tutoring, your coworkers will be some of your greatest tutoring resources – whether you hear what they have to say in these pages or at staff meetings.

My goal in learning to tutor students has been to discover and practice methods of encouraging their active work so that I could rely less on teacherly speech….The most difficult situation I have had to navigate is that in which the writer wants me to read a rather long paper, usually a first draft, for "clarity" and "the argument." At first, I tried to read such papers all at once, with the expectation that when I was finished I should have a succinct and helpful and specific assessment ready for the asking. This proved unrealistic (imagine!), especially when the paper covered a field far removed from my expertise, or when the writing was at such an early stage that one could not separate the clarity or opacity of the argument from the basic opacity of the prose.

What I have found to be a much better solution is to make use of whatever confusion I feel as a reader and ask the student to explain what I don't understand as I go along. (This seems so simple. Myths of pedagogical omnipotence die hard!) This way, I find that the tutee remains engaged throughout the session, for he or she is "on call" for me while I read; also, I've found that when I register what is unclear in the paper at the moment of my confusion, I can explain the source of that confusion in a more immediate (and less teacherly) way.

The biggest problem I have encountered thus far is keeping my attention span for all hours of a shift. People often wait in line to see me. They tend to be unhappy when I say I just need to take a minute or two to clear my head between each session. But, after a few times of feeling my concentration all but disappear in a session, I have decided that, no matter how impatient those waiting may become, one or two minutes to set myself up to start again are necessary.

This semester many students have come in for help with specific problems. This has posed some problems occasionally when I think that the tutee should be working on something other than what he tells me he wants to work on. I usually try to address the student's concern first and then my own, but what has happened a few times is that the writer wants to work on something like a transitions and I will find that the paper is very disorganized or lacks a thesis. It is sometimes hard to bring up the larger issues, especially if the paper is due in a few hours. In some cases I haven't told the writer the major problems I have found because I don't think they have time to fix it. In such situations I think it only makes the student anxious to bring up big problems. It has been kind of frustrating for me to know that I should be helping the student with a higher-order concern but am not able to do so.

In instances of an impending deadline, it is important for me to acknowledge that the writer may not want to rewrite the whole paper. I give permission, in a sense, for the

writer to take my suggestions to heart immediately or to think about them on future assignments or on a rewrite of the current piece. This places the session in the context of a long-term project to write better.

I think that tutors – or, not to over-generalize, I think that I, myself – develop certain "diagnostic routines" and patterns of certain preferred topics to help students on. For instance, I find that no matter what else I also bring up in a session, I'm pretty likely to choose a paragraph and have the writer seek out and destroy passive verb constructions, simply because they crop up in so many papers. Another example of a common diagnostic routine: when a paragraph seems as convoluted as a pile of pumpkin guts I very often ask the writer what the main point of the paragraph is; I then ask them if they may not want to coagulate the main idea into a topic sentence around which the rest of the "graph" (newspaper slang) can revolve.

Six weeks ago, when I started to work as a Walk-In Service tutor, I was extremely excited about my new job, but I was also very nervous. Although over the summer I had read and thought about the information given to us about the role of a walk-in tutor, I was still worried about what exactly I was going to be expected to do. I wondered if I knew enough to help people with their writing and even if I did, I wondered if I would be able to share that information with them. The students who come into the walk-in workshop have the same questions and doubts. They ask me questions such as "Are you an English major?" and "Are you a graduate student?" What they really mean is "Who are you that you should claim to know any more than I about anything?" What I have started to realize in the last six weeks is that what makes a good tutor is not age, wisdom or intellectual knowledge. The skills needed are not ones that can be acquired and mastered by reading a book or attending a training session. The only way to become a helpful, efficient tutor is by working with writers, listening to them, talking to them, and learning from them what it is that they really need.

One of the major tidbits that I am learning from working with writers is that the student must do the majority of the work. I know we have discussed this a lot in staff meetings and it was covered in the reading material, but it is one of those things that you must really figure out for yourself. I am learning how to reach that balance between being helpful as a tutor and letting the student figure out the answers by her/himself. It is becoming easier to detect when the balance is good, when the student is not doing her share of the work, or when it is necessary for me to do a bit more. Usually, I have been happy to discover that students can fix up their papers the best themselves, and all they need is a push in the right directions.

I realized that I needed to do in my tutoring what I was asking writers who came in for help (who usually are readers as well) to do – be more invested in the outcome of your endeavors, whatever they are, and – just as importantly and somewhat related – don't run from confusion and emotion; use them as stepping stones into analytic, or at least highly provocative, discourse.

What does this entail for the reader/writer? Lose yourself in whatever you are reading, or writing, enough to convince yourself at the moment of doing it that you either love it, or at least feel passionate about understanding it. This involves reading as writing, as well as writing as reading (but I won't go into those because we've discussed them many times at meetings.) This involves questioning everything – what did the author say/do? Why did the author say/do this? Did it work? How do I feel about this

piece? Why? What kind of language did the author use? Why? What kind of language do I want to use to address this? What points really struck me? How are they related? How could I explain to someone my point of view, using examples?

But I must stress, organization is key also! But I think that comes from practice, trial and error. What kind of questions get me somewhere? Can I set my questions up in some sort of hierarchy? Are certain questions connected? When is it time to take a step back, stop asking questions, and ask someone to help me out?

Not only have I been feeling very good about the help I am giving, but I have also been benefiting from the work myself. I've been thinking a lot about writing, the importance of writing in the larger scale of things, and communication in general as a vital skill for life. I've been feeling truly inspired to try to instill in others an appreciation for writing and expression of thought. Writing is similar to reading, learning, speaking and acting in the way that they are all ways of taking in information, organizing it, and expressing it or presenting it in some way to others.

A technique I have been using recently that has been working well and has increased my confidence as a writing tutor is having students with grammar problems read their papers OUT LOUD!! Every person I have done this with has found it extremely beneficial. It encourages them to find the mistakes themselves, which increases their self-confidence about their work. I make sure that they are holding the pen and they are making all the corrections on their paper. If they don't notice the mistake themselves while reading, I point out the spot with the problems but give them time to figure out the mistake themselves if they can. While reading, I tell them to listen to themselves talk. When they stop briefly, that usually indicates a need for a comma and when they stop for a full breath, that usually indicates a need for a period or semicolon, etc. These tips help students to learn how to revise and correct their own work in the future.

I have learned a lot about other languages through work with ESL students. Languages other than Romance languages have proved fascinating because their structure is so different from what I am familiar with. I have found in some cases it has been beneficial to ask students to explain a little about their language to me, so I can better understand how they are approaching English.

My first night as a tutor was a whirlwind. I had been assured by the other tutors that Sundays were pretty dead. However, as soon as I arrived at RPU, an endless stream of students flowed in and the rush would not stop. My anxiety increased in proportion to the student influx. I was fearful that I was not able to give them proper evaluations on their papers. By the end of the night, I could not even comprehend what the words on the paper were saying. I came home in a daze and wondered whether I was actually cut out to be a writing tutor.

One of the biggest difficulties I have encountered is understanding students' papers because I have not read many of the books they write about. Consequently, I constantly ask them for explanations. I have found that my confusion is actually an effective technique. Students are forced to analyze the story, sometimes in ways they had not yet considered, in order to answer my questions. As a result, they are working through their own confusion, formulating concrete ideas to use in their papers.

Working with advanced writers or with the astute writer might be perceived as "easier to correct," but they are the most challenging. Such papers rather seem like a good mystery, in which I, as the tutor, must seek out the subtle flaws in order to get to any underlying errors or idiosyncrasies. The give and take between author and tutor at this point is also rewarding – you are able to contribute to the creative process without doing any of the background work on that particular topic…it's a writing freebie. My favorite paper thus far was a fantastic study of David Mamet's use of rhythm and non-verbal patterning as true expression in *Glengarry Glenross*. What a fantastic paper, in its originality and subject matter, and well-written to top it off. The kind of rapport which one is able to build in such sessions seems the most healthy of any session, as a recognition of equality between tutor and writer is present, unstated and obvious. I think working with advanced students naturally leads to that, though, as they are able to understand the nature of our work and are perhaps more comfortable with their writing.

I have also had some nasty sessions, with careless writers, i.e – those who just don't care, and one particularly hostile session with a medical school application. The applicant had been before, seemed to be fishing for a tutor he liked, and I don't think he liked me. He didn't trust my advice, he questioned me, he upset me. I chalk this sort of experience up to personality, time of night, and anxiety levels. It happens. Unfortunately, with the medical school application incident, I carried the tension home with me, woke up with it and eventually shook it off the following afternoon. Good sessions can make you glow, for me in a satisfying, but ultimately temporary way. Bad sessions, however, can stay with you, simmer for a while and lead me to question myself. I think I am learning to just let them go without seething, which is so counter-productive it really drains the energy which I have to reserve for my own work.

In one case, the student was quite confused when I suggested that he should be making an argument, a complicated point that is not self-evident. We talked about what a thesis is, and I think I got my point across when I said "OK, so what is the point you are trying to make in your paper?" When I offered him the opposite of that point, it was such a ridiculous counter-thesis that I think he realized what he was putting forward did not really need argumentation because it was obvious. Upon further discussion, I found out that in the past papers, the instructor was more concerned with grammar and "keeping on the topic," than in an argument. The question is, is this really all the instructor is interested in, or is the student just not paying attention?

I particularly believe in communicating to the students how engaged I am in their ideas, *because their own writing has engaged me* and prompted me to think of connections, ask questions, or notice tensions. By reacting with genuine interest, I hope I am bringing the writing alive to the student, indicating that their writing does affect a reader.

Writing First-year papers was an anxiety-provoking, almost torturous experience for me. I dreaded each one, and each page would be accompanied by bursts of frustration, and even tears at times. I make sure, and would like to continue making sure, that I never forget this while I'm tutoring. If I know someone has to hand in a paper the day after our session, I make sure the work we do that night can be feasibly accomplished in a short amount of time, and always remind students to not stay up all night.

Tutoring at the WIS is frustrating: inherent in the service as an institution is the impossibility of evaluating the work it accomplishes. When I'm done, with a session, I

know I probably won't see the student I've just worked with—or their writing—ever again. This used to bother me somewhat. I've had a tendency to try to be heroic as I work with students—to try to grapple with every issue that stands between a student's paper and the Pulitzer Prize, from content down to comma usage. This desperate strategy was, at least in part, motivated by my recognition that every session was my "only chance" at a student. If I were to let anything glide by that I could address, if I were to leave any question unasked, then the student might never learn the difference between a weak and a strong argument. Of course, in reality not every paper I read has needed help in every area: but I do know that I've had some l-o-o-n-g sessions because I just had to discuss strenghtening the argument, and work on structure, and address some grammar issues.

This semester I've made some changes in how I approach the biz. Late last spring semester, and so far this fall, I've been using a more stripped down strategy, aiming not at "fixing" everything, but at helping a student really learn one or two things. What this means is that I spend some sessions suppressing the pain caused by the white hot glare of a more or less completely vapid argument just to emphasize the importance of a coherent body-paragraph. Just yesterday I forced myself to ignore almost all of an ESL student's language usage problems in order to squeeze out the long and unnecessary passages of summary—"background information," he called it—from his paper.

I've run across many people with whom I feel identity is a bigger issue than it is for some other people – that is to say, I have had a more difficult time "dissolving" in the material because I can't ignore that there's something distracting about the way in which our personalities coincide. Some of what contributes to this, or so I've been thinking, is vocabulary. By vocabulary I mean the words I use to describe a student's work. I think they sometimes find my take on their work baffling, and in some cases, entirely unhelpful, because more and more I've taken a more holistic approach.

This "holistic approach" is probably a result of boredom and frustration: I don't want to work with students who don't care. Therefore, I start on a very macroscopic level. I say things like, "what are you excited about in this paper?" and "can you make this apply to your own life?" and, sometimes, "I'd rather see you write about the part of it you care about and stray a bit from the subject than see you write exactly to the topic and not care, not remember."

Whether or not I'm overstepping my bounds as a tutor I haven't decided yet. But my suspicion (as reinforced by my experiences with students who come multiple times to the walk-in service and either end up seeing me twice or more or ask for me specifically) is that my obstinacy in many cases comes from not being able to work over time with the student, helping him or her shape writing as a process rather than a band-aid. I only have my own experience to work with, and in my own experience, writing needs to develop slowly, with lots of consideration and floundering. With time for slow growth, lots of exploration and error, I think writing gets taken better care of, addressed as a whole discipline rather than one paper, one paragraph, one class.

Last night I read a paper that had an introduction which contained 5 different putative theses. I blocked them out for the student (I actually drew blocks around them) and then we read through the key ideas of each paragraph to extrapolate which was actually the thesis of the paper. This was interesting, especially because all 5 theses were interesting and well written, and hopefully helped us both with our writing (it helped me by showing me what it means to overstuff a paper!)

I like to have fun with the tutees whenever I can, though not all who come in are good candidates for a lighthearted atmosphere. I feel that I am friendly and fun with those who respond well to it. One of the more exciting sessions I've taken part in was one where a tutor working the same shift was working with someone who had similar problems, questions, and concerns as the person I was working with. The conversations blended between all of us, including people waiting in line to work with the tutors, and we ended up holding a fun, informal almost-English-class in which we addressed everyone's concerns in a group setting.

I have been tutoring writing for more than a year, and every semester has been almost a completely different experience. The first semester I wanted to do everything for the students who came in- show them charts and diagrams, verb charts, organizational charts, anything and everything possible, I think in the hope that they could not help but become better writers with so much attention and information in front of them.

Later it became evident that some people had no interest in learning, and that a few others were actually deathly afraid of the writing process. So many diagrams and tense charts and etc. seemed to scare them, and I found that patience and encouragement could do so much more to improve their confidence than the actual improvements we made on any single paper. Some people who initially came in with a sort of bad attitude would leave telling me how much better they felt, and sometimes the students who came in being as nice as possible were actually trying to take advantage of the service and persuade the tutors to write the papers for them. Even so, I have also noticed that many of these people are in some ways very intimidated by the demands put on them by the university, and their attempts to have a tutor write for them is an expression of their total lack of confidence in their own ability.

Just as when I started tutoring, I still today find that the most difficult part of tutoring is dealing with ideology in papers. Just this past week, a student brought in a paper on Affirmative Action, framed as a dialogue between Thurgood Marshall and Jennifer Gratz (?), a white student who was rejected by Michigan and sued them for discrimination. The student writer is black. The paper took as its basic assumption – the starting point of all discussion – that various victim-groups (blacks, women, whatever) should have some sort of solidarity because they have all suffered from discrimination. Meanwhile, I sit there reading her paper. I'm white. I'm a man. To make matters worse, I'm a political conservative. On the one hand, I think her paper is utter hogwash, assigned by a race-mongering professor in order to perpetuate the cycle of perceived victimhood and entitlement among educated blacks. On the other hand, I know it is my job as a tutor to help the student present her own viewpoint. So I suppress my political views, ignore the paper's assumption that I am "the enemy", and do my best.

So here's what happens: the student, in her paper, considers the argument that "AA is, by definition, discrimination partly on the basis of race, and thus unconstitutional." She then makes Thurgood Marshall reply, "It's very ironic [sic] that you raise the 14th Amendment, you white woman. Consider all the past injustices suffered by blacks..." I attempt to explain to her that no matter whether you think AA is good or bad, that is not an adequate reply to an objection that appeals to Constitutional law.

The next five minutes are spent with each of us utterly missing the other's point: mine, that when you raise an objection in order to defeat it, you actually need to do so,

rather than just talk around it; hers, that – well, I'm still not sure what hers was. I draw diagrams, I write propositions down, I do everything I can to make her see that there's a distinction between the Law and your private conception of "what's fair" – and that the United States is not governed, nor do courts make decisions, nor do famous constitutional lawyers like Thurgood Marshall make arguments, based on a Cornell undergraduate's private conception of fairness.

Nothing gives. She isn't seeing it. I give it up, and we talk about some non-ideological "dramatic" points of her dialogue (she has the characters drinking different beverages in a coffee house – Thurgood has an espresso, with nothing added; Jennifer Gratz has a latte, and a third character, bourgeois and Jewish, has a Chai. We go on to touch on grammar stuff, and that's the end of it.

I have a hard time with this part of my job. The separation of worldview from writing tutoring is difficult. I know it's necessary. But there are times when I come away wondering, "Would I have put that point that way if I didn't disagree with the student's belief?" I suppose I could rationalize the problem away: "It's good for Cornell students to come in contact with a different point of view. It's good for me too." But after a year and a half of tutoring, I still find it tricky to tread lightly.

This is a true to life anecdote about triangulation, from which I hope other tutors may learn. One evening, early in the semester a first-year student comes in with a paper that she has been asked to rewrite. She does not have the rough draft because the instructor hasn't handed them back yet. She is taking a FWS that deals with a great deal of literary theory, and not to be unkind, but this student is hardly the sharpest tool in the shed. She explains to me that her instructor says that she needs to work on developing her theses. Upon looking over her paper I see that she has only an observation and that she hasn't applied any analysis to the topic at hand. I think this will be a short and sweet session in which I describe the difference between an observation and a thesis, but as the session continues it becomes clear to me that she has very little grasp of the theories that she is supposed to apply, so she really can't create a thesis. As an English major fairly well versed in lit theory, I figure that I can help her out a bit. That first session we spent about an hour and a half determining what the particular theories she had learned in class were, if and how they applied to the week's assignment and how to create a thesis from that. We ended up doing this every week for the next 5 weeks. I encouraged her to speak to her instructor about her difficulties, and she assured me that she did, but that all he ever did was say exactly what he had said in class, and that that didn't clear anything up for her. He made a few comments about general trends he noticed in her writing, which she relayed back to me, but I felt these didn't really address or even capture the difficulties this student was experiencing. As the weeks progressed I became more and more irritated with this instructor who, I thought, was doing such a poor job. My irritation continued until the student brought a paper that had the instructor's actual comments. This was the first time that the student had done this. After reading his comments, I suddenly understood everything that he had ever said regarding the student, and also understood that she had misunderstood and misconstrued his meaning when relating the information back to me. Once I understood what he wanted and where he felt her problems lay, it was much easier assisting her.

So, even as an experienced tutor I was taken in by this case of triangulation. This student was not doing it intentionally. She was simply struggling in the class, she was frustrated, and she didn't understand the material or most of her instructor's

feedback. She had the best intentions coming to the Walk-In Service and really wanted to improve, which she did, but I also learned a lesson from my time with her.

I have one tutee who has come to me four times with the same mediocre paper. He tends to write clearly enough, but while his other writing issues might at first be chalked up to his ESL status, by the second and third time he came around I figured he could have proofread the paper before coming in to save some hassle. This is where I have more trouble and need to get more assertive—in telling the tutees where the line is drawn between what I'm to do and what they're to do.

I often feel as though I am walking a line —it's difficult to tell when I'm having ideas *for* the student versus when I am finding the ideas that are already in him or her. Usually I err on the side of charity; I will never withhold an idea. What I wish is that I were more skilled at leading students to ideas themselves, rather than presenting the ideas and saying "does that make sense?" I am a little too direct for cat-and-mouse games in general, but I think they could be an effective teaching tool in this case. I feel as though students would remember and understand ideas better if I let them come to them themselves.

I have felt frustrated when working with a few students this semester that have brought in papers containing information and statements that I know were wrong or used wrongly. The two instances that I'm thinking of have involved statistical papers. In both cases, my efforts to explain to each student why his use of a certain phrase was incorrect failed miserably, and each rejected my suggestions of how to rephrase certain statements more appropriately. I'm not quite sure how to deal with situations like this; on the one hand, it's incredibly frustrating to see a student walk away with a paper that is full of incorrect statements, but on the other, we're not there to be statistics tutors. In both cases, I quickly refocused on the writing itself, but I felt that any suggestions I could offer for improving the writing paled in comparison to the major content problems. But then again, if a student came in with an English paper filled with misinterpretations of a novel, I'd probably never know the difference. I'd appreciate thoughts from other students who have encountered similar situations.

Building rapport has given me more social confidence. It is very important to be on the same wavelength with a student before/while a session goes on. Smiling, maintaining eye contact, and remaining personable, hospitable, and soft-spoken allow me to feel good about the tutor-student relationship that is developing. These skills have been valuable in breaking the ice with other students and co-workers.

This semester I came to the walk-in service myself for assistance on one of my papers. Although my tutor made some very helpful suggestions, I think I may have learned as much from being in the tutee position as from actually working with him. Before then, I forgot how nerve-wracking it is to watch someone reading your paper and marking it up! This experience mainly reinforced the importance of making sure tutees are as comfortable as possible, and that the tutor explains exactly what's going on, without talking down to the student.

I see my role in the Walk-In Center very much as one of providing the writers with options, whether those options be at the global or sentence level. Often, writers are so close to their own work that they are unable to see, for example, that they can choose this organizational style over another in order to clarify a point which they know is not coming through clearly. In cases like these, my role is simply to point out to them that they *could* do X instead of Y – and usually, the writer sees immediately what sort of difference that choice would make to his or her argument. At other times, the issue may seemingly be a more grave one, like the structuring of a thesis statement. Just last week I had a FWS essay in which the student was trying to make a narrow and argumentative thesis, and ended up with a terribly ungainly thesis sentence. Instead of trying to condense the thesis on the spot, I talked with him about strategies for using the introduction paragraph to talk about some of the material he tried to include in the thesis, thus enabling a more streamlined thesis statement later. I left the decision of how (or whether) to make these changes in his own hands, but still provided him with the information to make an informed decision on this topic.

I have made a concerted effort to improve my tutorial sessions with Cornell staff—many of whom visited the Walk-in Service for the first time. Some staff members have come in with first year writing seminar essays (the most popular "genre" I think we tutor). I've been most excited, however, to work with a staff person who came with an essay assignment from Empire State College (site location, Downtown Ithaca Commons). Rather than stop the conversation after asking her about the essay assignment, I asked her multiple questions about her educational experiences at Empire State—expectations of her professors there, and also about her relationship to her about own writing over the years. I suppose this line of questioning benefits us both: I remind the staff person how valuable the education they bring to the Cornell or Empire staff classroom—and I really do benefit from their reminders that multiple models—besides the ones we've learned at Cornell—exist in writing education.

Along the theme of choice, I feel I've improved the organization of my delivery of feedback. I'll use a scrap of paper and scribble my suggested changes into 3 or so categories—usually mechanics, argument and persuasiveness—then I ask the tutee which comments they wish to hear first. Or, I'll prioritize before them the higher priority categories (in my opinion)—the tutee always has this scrap of paper to take with them, and I hope this method provides an incentive/alternative useful approach to organizing their own essay revisions.

VIII. Further Opportunities for Experienced Tutors

The Essay Response Consultation
This collaboration between an experienced Walk-In Service tutor (at least one year on staff, or previous experience teaching an FWS) and a First-year Writing Seminar Instructor is designed to provide faculty and TAs with free, private consultation about responding to student essays.

There's an article about the results of ERCs on our web site. More than one undergraduate tutor has reported that the gain in self-confidence as an aspiring teacher helped with making post-graduation plan decisions.

Once a consultation time has been arranged, the instructor gives the tutor a set of student papers (either the originals or xeroxes) on which the instructor has written comments, as well as any questions that the instructor has. The two meet shortly thereafter to discuss the commentary/ response. Usually, instructors wish a tutor to consider an entire set of student papers, but some pass along several with comments that they've been pondering. Either way is fine.

The ERC is fun to do, and pays well. Discussion focuses on the instructor's questions and on the written commentary on students' papers, but dialogue about teaching methods and philosophies often arises during these ERC consultations, as can new questions on the instructor's part. The average consult takes 2 to 2 1/2 hours, including the papers transaction, the time it takes to read/skim the commentary/papers, the meeting, and an e-mail report to the Director of the Walk-In Service giving a brief synopsis of how it went and what the tutor learned.

If you do one of these consultations, keep in mind the delicacy of the situation. It's not one in which to overstep your boundaries. In addition to any requests the instructor communicates to you before you meet, it's also quite important to gauge the instructor's specific needs and concerns during the session, and to respond to them.

Summer Medical Theme Consultant
This position, for a graduate student tutor, runs from mid-May after the WW IS closes through June or July. It is funded by Health Careers, and operates through our office facilities.

Consultations with pre-med students who are writing their application statements take place in person (during a walk-in hour or by appointment, or both), by email, and sometimes by phone, at the applicant's expense. Records are entered as you work. At the end of the summer the consultant sends the WWIS Director a brief report, plus total numbers and a numbers breakdown by certain categories. This report is also sent to the Health Careers.

Class presentations or workshops
These are usually arranged with a professor by an individual tutor. Tutors often will work within their department or within a course that they've previously taken, giving a question and answer session or a workshop on writing.

For those with initiative and with public speaking experience, the WIS Director welcomes ideas about presenting to large lecture classes or other venues that will publicize our tutoring services among students, staff, and/or faculty.

Tablers and Speakers at Campus Events
Requests come in regularly for tutors to staff informational tables during special events such as the Grad Student Orientation Fair or the First-year Families Weekend, or to speak at special programs at residence halls. These experiences are brief, fun, and (like others in this section) paid.

Appendix A

Reference Materials for the Writing Walk-In Service

Books

The Business Writer's Handbook
By Alred/Brusaw/Oliu
Grammar Trouble Spots
--by Ann Raimes
How to Write a Winning Personal Statement (in RF 178 only)
--by Richard J. Stelzer
Writing: A College Handbook
--by Lincoln/Heffernan

Brochures

The Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others
--by the Cornell University Office of the Dean of Faculty
Career Guide (by Cornell Career Services)
Cornell Health Careers Guide (ditto)
Cornell Premedical Guide (ditto)
Cornell Legal Careers Guide (ditto)
Graduate and Professional School Application Guide (ditto)
The Help Sheet (various campus counseling and referral services)
--by the Cornell Information & Referral Center
Second Language Students in the Writing Class
--by Judy Pierpont
They Were Learning Disabled
Cornell Office of Equal Opportunity

All WWIS locations have a dictionary & thesaurus on hand.
In addition, anyone who wants to see *The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations* is welcome to consult the reference copy kept in the main room of the Writing Workshop.

Tutors are welcome to use the **Writing Workshop Library** in Rockefeller 174, an extensive collection of books about the practice and teaching of writing. A two-shelf section holds issues of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, books about tutoring, and published, prize winning, and generally excellent writing by the WWIS tutors.

Appendix B

Referrals - Contact info

Freelance Editors
At all our locations, at the Writing Workshop desk, and as part of our web site, the Walk-In Service maintains a list of freelance editors for those times when people seek help with writing that goes beyond the scope of our tutoring service: writers who have a thesis, dissertation, or otherwise long paper or project; or writers seeking editing and corrections:
http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/workshop/walkin/about/freelance.html

ESL Assistance
Judy Pierpont
jp28@cornell.edu
Judy arranges one-to-one peer tutoring services for later bilingual students who are enrolled in Writing 137-8. She is also available to consult with Walk-In Service tutors and FWS instructors about questions about language and usage.

Keith Hjortshoj <kgh2> is the designated faculty in the Writing Workshop for international grad students to talk with about their difficulties in writing.

Deborah Campbell <dc20>, in English for Academic Purposes, teaches a course for international grads who are writing a long project. Such students should also be encouraged to find someone in their field to help them with the language of their work.

First-year Writing Seminars
Katy Gottschalk, Director of First-year Writing Seminars
kkg1@cornell.edu

*Please note: Katy's contact information should be given out only to those students who appear to be having serious difficulties with an instructor.

Writing Assistance for Undergraduates
Joe Martin, Director of the Writing Workshop.
jam8@cornell.edu
Writing 137 (fall) and 138 (spring), a 3-credit First-year Writing Seminar, is designed for students who need more focused attention on essay development in order to master the expectations of academic writing. Small classes and frequent individual conferences. Admission is by permission only.

Darlene Evans, Learning Strategies Center
dme27@cornell.edu
Darlene is the LSC's faculty writing instructor, available by appointment to meet on an ongoing basis with undergraduates writing FWS papers who need more continuous assistance than the Writing Walk-In Service can provide because of either learning disabilities or the need for better preparation for college-level writing.

Writing Assistance for Graduate Students
Barbara LeGendre <bl17>
Writing 702 is a tutorial course for graduate students who need individual help with dissertations and other writing projects--especially for those who are blocked, making slow progress, or struggling to meet advisors' expectations. 3 credits, S/U; admission by permission of instructor only.

Research Assistance
Tony Cosgrave
Librarian
ajc5@cornell.edu
Students needing additional research information about any writing project are encouraged to drop by the reference desk at any of the libraries, or to consult http://www.library.cornell.edu/services/askalib.html.

Career Assistance and Professional School Assistance
Cornell Career Services
103 Barnes Hall
(607) 255-5221
*Please note that each college also has its own individual career counseling center.

Jane Levy
Senior Associate Director of Career Services
Specializing in pre-law and general job search
jel2@cornell.edu

Judy Jensvold
Senior Associate Director of Health Careers
jmj5@cornell.edu

Health Services
Gannet Health Center - Professional counseling & psychological services
(607) 255-5155

EARS
211 Willard Straight Hall
(607) 255-EARS
Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service - staffed by students: free and confidential peer counseling services

Appendix C

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines
101 McGraw Hall

Paul Sawyer, George Reed Director of John S. Knight Institute

Katherine Gottschalk,Walter C. Teagle Director of First-Year Writing Seminars

Keith Hjortshoj, John S. Knight Director of Writing in the Majors

Bruce Roebal
Administrative Manager and Registrar

Donna O'Hora
Administrative Assistant

Maude Rith
Administrative Assistant

Writing Workshop
174 Rockefeller Hall

Joe Martin, Director, Writing Workshop

Mary Gilliland, Director, Writing Walk-In Service

Barbara LeGendre, Senior Lecturer

Judy Pierpont, Senior Lecturer

Elliot Shapiro, Senior Lecturer

Wendy Martin, Administrative Assistant