

Writing Center Assistance Across the Disciplines

by Karen Bilotti, Writing Center

Instructors in a variety of disciplines frequently ask if they can require their students to attend tutoring in the Writing Center for a particular assignment. The answer is a definite “Yes!”

Students with assignments from courses across the curriculum are making productive use of the Writing Center. Here are a couple of suggestions if you would like to require students to come, or if you would like to strongly encourage them to come in:



- Contact me at kbilotti@rwu.edu or 254-3630 and let me know you are sending students over to the Writing Center. We can talk about your expectations and requirements for the assignment.
- Email me an assignment sheet in advance of your students coming over. I will email the assignment sheet to the tutors and make sure we are all prepared.
- Encourage students to come in to the Writing Center early in the process, so we can help students with some of the “larger” writing concerns like organization, research strategies, and thesis construction. Sometimes, students come in the day the paper is due, and the tutor becomes little more than an editor or human spell check. We’re also a pretty busy place. Last fall, for instance, we recorded 2,150 appointments in the Writing Center!
- Request that I send you a list of the Writing Center tutors to see if any of your former students who excelled in the course are available to help! Some instructors have also used tutors who are currently in the course to assist students.

If you would like me to come to your class and speak to your students about how they can get the most out of tutoring, we can arrange for that, too. It helps if students have expectations of tutoring that match what the tutors will actually do. Our tutor education strongly emphasizes an interactive, dynamic approach to working with the writer. We do not “fix” papers; rather, students should expect to come in and have a conversation about their paper’s plan, how their thesis reflects that plan and points forward to the rest of the paper; they should expect to come in and grapple, maybe, with one important point in a pivotal paragraph; they should expect to come in and talk about why their sentences are all one length (probably long—the sentences are almost always too long); they should expect to come in and point to where they adequately defend some claim; and, yes, they should expect to come in and talk about their pronoun references. They should expect to leave not with a sanitized version of their work, but with a paper littered with commentary and questions (mostly their own, but sometimes the tutor’s).

We deeply appreciate the support and testimony from these RWU faculty who have sent their students to the Writing Center: Matthew Ulricksen, Political Science; Matthew Gregg, Business; and Don Lee, Writing Studies, Rhetoric and Composition. We are also very pleased to provide testimony from a student in Professor Ulricksen’s Course.

(continued on next page)

(Writing Center Assistance Across the Disciplines - continued)

Professor Ulricksen: *"Last semester, I decided to make sessions with Writing Center tutors a mandatory component of my writing rubric. Upwards of ten percent of a paper's grade is determined by how frequently the student met with a writing tutor, and whether the tutor was a peer or faculty writing tutor. Despite some grumbling--particularly by upperclassmen--the overall quality of style and content has improved substantially. And, students have admitted to me that this requirement forces them to get their papers done in a more timely fashion. The Writing Center requirement is here to stay. Thanks much to Karen Bilotti and the Writing Center staff for supporting me in my efforts to raise the writing standards in my courses. Their efforts on my behalf exemplify how shared visions and collegial relationships can bring academics and student support services together to serve the best interests of the student."*

Professor Gregg: *"With the assistance of the Writing Center, my students' papers showed marked improvement over their prior assignment. In particular, their thesis statements were better constructed, their sentencing was more fluid and logical, and their grammatical mistakes were almost completely eliminated. I would recommend the Writing Center to all of my colleagues in the Business School."*

Professor Lee: *"My writing courses usually have three to four major assignments per semester, and the students are required to revise each assignment twice. And I require my students to meet with a tutor at the Writing Center at least once per assignment, meaning that the students meet with writing tutors at least three times per semester, but many of them meet with tutors more often than that. Student feedback about my writing courses often mentions the benefits of the tutorials at the Writing Center."*

Kyle Warner, student in Professor Ulricksen's course: *"We discussed Rousseau a bit in class and his theory that sometimes you have to force men to be free. This idea applies in this situation. Often some students are sure of what they have written and understand it so well that they figure the audience will too. We get stubborn and stick to what we have written and are a slave to our own intellectual mind that created the paper. This requirement, in a sense, forces us to be free. It forces us to be free from ourselves and our potentially narrow view on an essay that we have put a lot of our mind into. Going to the Writing Center lets us take a step back and allow another to wrap their head around what we are saying and give us the most objective feedback possible."*

Writing Happens

The Writing Center is located on the second floor of the Main Library, within the Center for Academic Development. We are open 56 hours per week: Monday through Thursday, 9 am – 8 pm; Friday 9 am – 3 pm; and Sunday 2 pm – 8 pm. Our mission is to help all RWU students with any writing-related assignment.

Students can walk in and see a peer tutor without an appointment. To see a faculty tutor, students should sign up in the appointment book on the secretary's desk in the CAD.

The Writing Center also offers an e-mail tutoring service, E-Help. Students can go to the following web address and e-mail their papers: <http://writingcenter.rwu.edu/ehelp>. We will attempt to respond, Monday through Thursday, within 48 hours.

All of the services of the Writing Center are free.

THE WRITING CENTER WILL BE OPEN DURING FINALS WEEK ON A MODIFIED SCHEDULE. HOURS ARE POSTED ON THE CAD OUTER DOOR AND IN THE WRITING CENTER. THE CENTER CLOSSES ON TUESDAY, MAY 19 AND WILL RE-OPEN IN SEPTEMBER. THE WRITING CENTER IS CLOSED FOR THE SUMMER.

The Independent Clause is published through the Roger Williams University Writing Center. The newsletter is published twice a year, fall and spring. Questions or comments, contact Karen Bilotti at kbilotti@rwu.edu.