

Consultant Handbook



Spring 2017

Writing Center • University of Pittsburgh

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Understanding Your Responsibilities as a Consultant

Please access our tutor pages on the website for meeting announcements and resources for consultants. Go to writingcenter.pitt.edu and click on the “Information for Tutors” link in the footer of any page.

If you are new to tutoring, we can give you a copy of the *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. This little book is not perfect, but it will give you a good introduction to what it means to be an effective and ethical tutor. Ask Sandy or Jean for a copy.

What To Do As Part of Your Day-to-Day Consulting.

Consultants in the Writing Center work with students for ten hours a week. Most of this work consists of one-on-one consultations with student writers; for faculty consultants, it usually includes several hours of work with Composition Tutorial (CT) and Workshop Tutorial (WT) students. On occasion, you may need to prepare for appointments (read a long paper, for example). Log this time in the online scheduler as preparation; it is part of your ten-hour commitment.

In addition to working with students, consultants attend meetings, consult with WC and other faculty, and engage in professional development activities. Both new and experienced consultants may be asked to participate in orientation sessions at the beginning of fall term. Sometimes consultants are asked to undertake special projects or perform administrative duties as part of their work.

Limits of Help. Although your job is, of course, to help students with their writing, there are reasonable limits as to the kind and amount of help you can provide. You are not expected, for instance, to be familiar with the specific requirements of individual instructors, courses, or departments. Such information, if pertinent, is normally provided by the student.

You are not expected to—nor should you—act as a proofreader. If a student seems to want this sort of help, you can recommend that he or she pay an editor. Each term, names and phone numbers of those willing to edit for pay are collected, and this list is kept at the front desk. In addition, we have a sheet available at the front desk that explains why we cannot edit work for students. While we do not expect you to edit papers, we also ask that you not summarily dismiss students who come in and ask for editing. Most of the time, when a consultant explains how we work, the student is very happy to have a session with you.



Please refrain from any evaluation of a student's work in terms of a grade, even a pass/fail grade. Though some students might like you to, you should also refrain from making judgments about the appropriateness of assignments and/or teachers' remarks on papers. If you come across a situation that troubles you (e.g., a highly problematic assignment or comment), you can always refer it to the director of the Writing Center.

Our files are confidential. We do not make written reports to teachers other than teachers of WT students. If a CT student is struggling, you may communicate with the SC teacher in the same way we do with WC teachers.

We do not sign papers for students to prove that they have visited us. Sandy can give the student a sheet explaining this.

Hours of Operation. We work with students by appointment as well as on a drop-in basis. Our hours are published in our flyer each term.

Meetings. Staff meetings will be held on **Wednesdays** from **9:30 – 11:00**. While we don't have a staff meeting every week, those that we do have are mandatory for all consultants (including peer interns and tutors). They are considered part of your contractual obligation.

If you have class at 11:00, then it is fine to leave the meeting 10 to 15 minutes early.

For faculty, we have so far successfully argued to keep the contact hours at 10 per week by saying that consultants also attend meetings and engage in some professional development regularly.

Peer tutors are required to attend and can also count the meeting time toward their hours on their time sheets.

Locking up. Consultants working in the evening may be responsible for locking up the Center. Turn off the lights and make sure that the Writing Center's door is tightly closed. Sandy will instruct you in setting the alarm system.

Summer hours. During Summer Term, the Writing Center operates on a reduced schedule and with a significantly smaller number of consultants, usually three graduate students only. We don't hire part-time faculty in the summer. We don't have staff meetings during the summer. We may, instead, ask consultants to help us with special projects.

Hillman. During Fall and Spring Terms, the Writing Center also staffs a satellite site at Hillman Library (ground floor: enter the library and go back and to the left). A few consultants will be assigned hours at these locations, and they will meet with students who have made appointments. We keep a box of supplies at the front desk on the ground floor of Hillman. Let Sandy Foster know if you need anything at Hillman. If you need new or additional books, sign holders, or other office supplies, let Jean know.

CGS. We have a new site in Posvar Hall, just for veterans and CGS students. Right now, we are there for just 10 hours a week. Work at this site may include some distance online tutoring as well.

Safety Issues. While we haven't had significant problems with security, we try to make sure that

you will always be on duty with another consultant or a work-study student. The phone number for campus police is posted on the front desk; don't hesitate to use it if you feel unsafe. If an interaction with a student unsettles you for any reason, speak to the director of the Writing Center immediately.

Setting Up Your Schedule. When you are assigned to work in the Writing Center, you will be asked to fill out a form indicating twenty hours per week when you are available to work at the Center. From these, you will be assigned a ten-hour schedule that combines one-on-one consultant work and regular appointments with CT and WT students.

Sandy will set up the online scheduler with your hours, which will be the same every week.

You are responsible for telling Sandy about any changes that need to be made to the scheduler, for example, a student with a standing appointment stops coming or if your availability to students changes for any other reason.

If you must leave the Writing Center for a few minutes, let the person at the front desk know where you are.

We expect you to keep your hours, to show up on time, and to finish appointments on time. A lot of people are inconvenienced if you don't.

Record Keeping and WOnline. Students fill out an online form each time they visit the Writing Center. Sandy will help you register for WOnline and show you how to check your schedule so that you can see what students expect to work on.

Be sure to leave time at the end of the tutorial (usually five minutes) for both you and the student to complete the necessary forms. The student will have an evaluation to complete and you will complete a brief online report for the session. Complete your report on the day you meet with the student, preferably immediately afterward. **Note: You must complete all your forms for sessions each week.**

Sandy keeps the data from your students' evaluation forms and can give you a summary for a whole term (percentages and comments) if you want it for your teaching portfolio. Please give her several days' notice.

Contact information. Every term, we will ask you to fill out a 3x5" card with your contact information. If your contact information changes in any way over the term, please get your card from Sandy and update it. If you are an undergraduate, make sure we have your permanent address as well as your local address.

Expertise: WOnline allows you to share your areas of expertise with students. We are always grateful when consultants are willing to make themselves experts in areas for which we have demand. Sandy can usually tell you what kinds of expertise students are looking for. We have a growing library of resources, and we are always happy to add to it. Just give Jean a title, and she will order it.

Telephone Tutorials. Occasionally, students will be out of Pittsburgh or otherwise unable to

come to the Writing Center. We can arrange a telephone tutorial: the student can share a document with you via Google Drive so that you can both look at the document at the same time.

Official communication with teachers and others. Please carefully proofread everything you send out as part of your Writing Center work, whether it is an e-mail message, a hand-written note, or a more formal document. We sometimes hear from teachers who have received correspondence from consultants with sentence-level errors in it. It is an annoying fact of life that people judge teachers in an English department more harshly for allowing such errors to persist in their writing and that English departments hold Writing Center faculty to an even higher standard. Please do what you can to ensure that we don't get calls from faculty who say, for example, "I'm concerned about the comma splices in my CT students' writing, and I just found two comma splices in a note from a CT consultant."

Students' privacy. Be careful with students' private information. If you want to throw away a document that includes a student's personal information, shred the document. If you leave a note in a teacher's mailbox in which you discuss a student's work or grade, use a campus envelope. Do not discuss students with others outside the Writing Center, and don't discuss students with other staff members in public areas where you may be overheard.

Handling complaints. If a student or a faculty member complains to the director or associate director about a consultant, our first step is generally to ask that person to talk with the consultant directly to try to resolve whatever misunderstandings or problems have come up. When this happens, please deal with these issues in a way that is professional and not defensive. Realize how difficult it is for a student to raise a concern with a consultant.

Absence and making up time. Faculty consultants and peer interns may miss up to 5 hours of consulting time a term without making that time up. If a religious holiday falls on a day when a consultant would normally work, that time may also be missed without having to make it up. All other time must be made up, as close as possible to the time when it was missed. Make sure that your CT and WT students get the time they are entitled to. Sandy can help you determine how much time you have missed and made up. Your make up time needs to be added to the online scheduler so that you can actually get appointments during this time.

Note: Since peer tutors are paid by the hour for time they actually work, they are not required to make up hours, though they are welcome to.

The Writers' Café and outreach events are acceptable ways to make up time you have already missed.

If you know that you are going to miss some of your hours at the Writing Center in advance (for a conference, for example), try to trade hours with another consultant; if this isn't possible, you can ask someone who has worked here in the last year to cover your hours. If neither option is possible, make sure you cancel all your appointments with Sandy. In addition, please let the director know, in writing, as soon as possible.

In case of illness or family emergency, call the Writing Center desk (412-624-6556) and let us know that you won't be coming in.

If you have not missed any time and you facilitate a Writers' Café, International Café, or outreach event, you may take yourself out of the schedule for 2 hours to compensate for the time. Tell the director and receptionist what you are doing, and do it ahead of time so that we don't have to cancel all your appointments.

Professional Development and Service. We do not expect that the consultants who work at the WC—faculty, grad students, or peer tutors—will be experts in issues of usage, conventions, process, and so on when they arrive. We do, however, expect that they will become experts while they work here—that they will use their time to learn more, so that they can answer questions, identify problems and strengths in the texts they see, and so on. Professional development is part of the job. You might identify a couple of issues to work on for yourself each term. You may wish to begin with the things that you feel uneasy about (how exactly a person identifies passive voice, for example). If you don't know how to answer a question, it's better to look it up with a student than to make up an answer you're not sure about.

Service is important to the Writing Center. In our evaluations of consultants and peer tutors, we privilege those who contribute to the Center by advancing our knowledge; contributing to the national conversation about writing centers; supporting the work of others; or developing or advancing our programs, practices, reputation, or connections with students or other areas of the University.

It would be helpful if, at the end of the year, you wrote up a brief self-evaluation for the directors in which you describe your contributions to the Writing Center, the professional goals you've achieved, and your future plans for your work in the Writing Center. If you feel your contribution has been unrecognized, the self-evaluation is a chance to rectify this and will also help you clarify your work in the Writing Center for future job applications and your teaching portfolio.

Writing Center Blog: The peer tutors and interns post in our blog. Faculty consultants are welcome to post, comment, or just read. See our faculty webpages for the URL and ask Geeta for access information, since it is a private blog.

Resources for Writing Center consultants. In the bookcase near the kitchenette area, we keep many resources for consultants (including ESL materials and style handbooks). You are welcome to use these materials, but please make sure that you return them so that others can use them as well. Books with red stickers must remain in the Writing Center. Those with green stickers may be checked out for two weeks: put the date and your name on the card in the pocket at the back of the book, then put the card in the card box.

There are two main periodicals in the field: the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *The Writing Center Journal*. We have issues of both in our library.

Outside Tutoring and Editing Jobs. The Writing Center provides a list of editors and tutors to anyone who requests it. If you have a student who needs services the Center doesn't offer (i.e., editing a dissertation) you can give the student this list. If a student you're working with in the Writing Center asks that you do additional editing or tutoring work for pay, refer that student to the list. In order to avoid any misunderstandings or a conflict of interest, it is probably best if you refer that student to someone else (either on the list or in the Writing Center) rather than working with him or her yourself.

The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors has a good section at the end on working with people outside the Writing Center. Pay particular attention to the points about billing and meeting space.

Common Sense in the Writing Center. Please try to use common sense when working in the Writing Center. Some people have allergies to perfume and aftershave; avoid wearing these if at all possible.

It's important to remember we are a collaborative operation; if you're late, you make things difficult not only for your students but the people working at the same as you. If you consistently disappear for a cigarette break during down time, this means you are unavailable for drop-in appointments.

Remember that we work in a shared space. This means, for example, that it is a good idea not to talk in loud voices, especially about students. Take a minute to clean up the coffee area.

Finally, we expect consultants to be respectful to Sandy and the work-study students. Do not ask Sandy to manipulate your schedule so that you don't have to work with students. Do not tell her off because you have too many appointments. You're expected to tutor students during the time you're at the Writing Center; down time is a gift, not a right.

Other activities. We need tutors to be involved with all our activities: Writers' Café, International Café, outreach events, the Writing Center newsletter (*Writing Centered*), our social media efforts, and more. Please let Geeta and Jean know if you want to work on one of these efforts or if you have an idea for how the Writing Center can support student writers. We are happy to talk about new ideas, and we are willing to make reasonable accommodation in your schedule to allow for other work.

If you facilitate a Writers' Café or International Café session, you may take two hours off your schedule (or consider two absent hours made up).

Workshop Tutorial

In Spring 2009, because of changing student admission standards, the Composition program planned to eliminate the six-credit Intensive Workshop in Composition course (previously known as Basic Reading and Writing).

In order to offer support to those students who would now take Workshop in Composition but may not be completely prepared for it, we developed the two-credit course Workshop Tutorial. Peer tutors do not work with WT or CT students.

WT students meet with their tutors for one hour a week. They may generate text during appointment, and tutors may talk to them about strategies for being a good student as well as writing issues.

Meet with Your Students Every Week. Your WT students are paying for the two credits they get from CT, and you should no more cancel a lot of their sessions than you would cancel a lot of classes. If you have to miss a session because of illness or some other legitimate reason, it is important that you make up the missed time with your students. Do not ask your students if they want to make it up; just make it up. Do not let students leave early just because they say they have nothing to work on: find something to work on.

Follow up with Students Who Don't Attend WT. When students don't show up for WT, call and/or e-mail them immediately to remind them that they must keep or cancel appointments. Contact the WC teachers and if relevant, our contact at Academic Support Services for Student Athletes (ASSSA) and report that the students are missing sessions.

Communicate with Workshop in Composition teachers and ASSSA. It is very easy to simply email a copy of your WOnline report to the WC teacher and our contact at ASSSA. Sandy can help you with this if you have questions. Some WC teachers will email with you a lot; you won't hear much from others. Send the reports either way.

Early evaluation. A WT student who has learned to produce reasonably correct prose may be eligible for early evaluation at midterm: he or she will pass WT and will no longer need to work with you. The Workshop in Composition teacher must initiate the process for early release. If you think a student would be a good candidate for early release, talk to the WC teacher and the ASSSA contact, **NOT** the student.

See page 8 for a table that compares WT and CT.



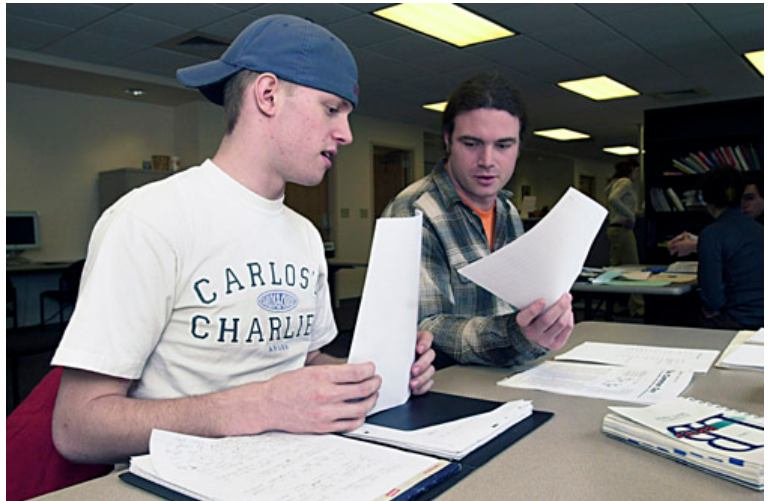
Composition Tutorial

In August 2003, the course formerly known as General Writing Intensive was re-named Composition Tutorial (CT).

Because CT is a credit-bearing course, peer tutors do not work with CT students.

CT is a one-credit course that students are placed into on the basis of either their summer placement essay or their in-class placement essay assigned by their Seminar in Composition (SC) teacher.

CT is taken concurrently with Seminar in Composition and the assignments that students write for SC provide the material for your work with the students in CT.



Students are placed into CT because they need extra support in sentence- and paragraph-level issues in their writing. Sometimes those issues may have to do with coherence and development, while other times they may have to do with understanding and using conventions in appropriate ways. CT and SC are meant to be complementary learning experiences for the student. Consultants don't usually spend a lot of time discussing with CT students the texts that they are reading for SC, but you may find that a student sometimes needs to have that kind of conversation with you in order to develop an argument. Similarly, we do not expect that CT is the only place where students get help with the sentence- and paragraph-level aspects of their writing: these issues should also be taken up in the Seminar in Composition classroom.

In addition to your on-going work with your CT students, you have ethical and administrative responsibilities to keep in mind.

Meet with Your Students Every Week. Your CT students are paying for the one credit they get from CT, and you should no more cancel a lot of their sessions than you would cancel a lot of classes. If you have to miss a session because of illness or some other legitimate reason, it is important that you make up the missed time with your students. Do not ask your students if they want to make it up; just make it up. Do not send students away after a minute or two if they claim they have nothing to work on in a given week.

Follow up with Students Who Don't Attend CT. When students don't show up for CT, call and/or e-mail them immediately to remind them that they must keep or cancel appointments and that they must pass CT in order to pass SC. If you don't hear back from students, ask Sandy Foster to check to make sure they are still registered for CT and SC. If a student stops coming to CT and doesn't respond to email, let Sandy know so that she can talk that name off the schedule.

If asked to, update SC teachers on Student Progress. We mostly don't communicate with SC teachers about their students, but if someone insists, it is ok to send your WOnline reports.

Table Comparing WT and CT

Workshop Tutorial	Composition Tutorial
2 credits for 1 hour a week	1 credit for 30 minutes a week
Two consultants may share a student, though we try to schedule one hour with one consultant.	One consultant works with each CT student.
In addition to helping students work on understanding assignments, understanding texts, editing, and proofreading, consultant may invite students to generate text or talk with students about “studenting” skills.	Consultants are more likely to work with students on addressing the assignment and sentence- and paragraph-level issues.
Consultants report to WC teachers (and ASSSA, if relevant) weekly by using the email function built into the WOnline reports.	SC teachers are notified that their students are taking CT, but we do not typically report beyond that memo.
After checking with the WC teacher, the consultant may release the WT student from one hour a week at or after midterm.	Since CT is an elective, the student must attend the whole term.
It is up to the consultant to request and review a portfolio at the end of the term, if the consultant feels like it would be helpful or useful for the student.	Consultants need to be able to say with confidence that their CT student has or has not met the requirements for the course. If collecting a portfolio is necessary for you to be able to do this, ask your student to give you one by the Friday of the last week of classes. You may ask CT students to submit portfolios to you electronically if you wish. If you want to get a second and third opinion on any folder at the end-of-term meeting, you can print out a hard copy. One exception: if you are failing a student because he or she is still having significant problems with sentence- and paragraph-level issues, it would be useful for us to have a writing sample on file, just in case of a grade appeal.
Before our end-of-term meeting, consultants complete forms that go to the WC teachers and offer your report on how the student did in WT. WC teacher or End-of-Term Review determines whether the student gets a Satisfactory or No Credit grade in WT.	Consultant decides whether the CT student has earned a Satisfactory or No Credit grade on the basis of written work and attendance. Consultants complete a CT grade roster before our end-of-term meeting and turn it in to Sandy at that time.

Using the Physical Space, Equipment, and Books

Facilities

Kitchen, water, coffee, etc. We have a refrigerator where you can store your lunch if you need to. We have a coffee maker and coffee in the Writing Center. Feel free to make coffee, but put a quarter in the coffee can for each cup you drink so that we can buy more coffee. The machine provides both chilled and hot water. We encourage you to bring in a mug or travel cup for your use. Please use supplies respectfully and keep the area tidy.



Copier and printers. The copier and printers must be used gently since we depend on them and will have a hard time replacing them if they die. We understand that sometimes you may wish to prepare for class while you have downtime at the Center, but please refrain from printing out tons of material that is not directly related to your work at the Center or in your Pitt classroom. There are self-serve printers on the second floor.

Computers. The computers are meant to be used by consultants who are working with students, by students who are coming to the Center for help, and, if computers are available, by consultants who have downtime and want to check e-mail or do other work. Please don't monopolize computers if students need to use the computers. And please make sure that students don't use the computers as if they are in a computer lab—we were given funding for the computers for tutorials, preparation for tutorials, and some post-tutorial work.

When you are using our computers, don't open attachments unless you are sure that the attachment is safe. And please don't leave important files on hard drives and expect to find them later: we regularly clean off all the documents.

If there is a problem with a computer or if it needs an update or software package, please let Sandy or the associate director know so that we can address that need as soon as possible.

Mailbox. You have a mailbox by the copy machine. Please check it regularly.

E-mail. We generally communicate via e-mail, so please check your e-mail at least once a day during the week and tell us if your e-mail address changes.

Peer Tutoring Program

Our peer tutoring program began its present incarnation in 2000 (Margaret Marshall taught one group of peer tutors when she was here; after she left, the class was not offered again immediately). The program is an important part of our educational mission as a university-based Writing Center. The peer tutoring program offers us the opportunity to work closely over the long term with undergrads who are deeply interested in writing and teaching. The mentoring, support, and teaching that we do with the peer tutors—as with grad student consultants—is part of the work of the Writing Center. While some consultants may be asked to work closely with the peer tutors (observing and being observed, being interviewed, working on conference papers), every consultant in the Writing Center is responsible for supporting the peer tutors' work by treating the peer tutors with collegiality.



Our peer tutors have contributed in significant ways to the culture and effectiveness of the Writing Center. They have a unique perspective on the work we do here and their experience tends to be intense and short (they graduate, after all). Please do what you can to ensure that each peer tutor has a rewarding experience in the Writing Center and is invited to grow intellectually as a result of the time they offer us.

We have created a peer intern handbook (available as a pdf by clicking a link on our Meetings and Announcements page) that spells out details for interns and their mentors. Below are the basics.

Becoming a peer tutor. Students who want to become peer tutors are required to take Tutoring for Peer Writers, EngCmp 1210. Here is the short description of the course: "This course prepares students to be effective tutors for peer writers by introducing them to issues and scholarship in teaching, writing, and working as a tutor. The course is appropriate for students from any discipline who are interested in careers in teaching or who recognize the importance and difficulty of responding well to drafts written by others. The course is a prerequisite for those students who wish to intern or work as peer tutors in the Writing Center."

After students take EngCmp 1210, students may apply to become peer interns. Interns get three credits, and they tutor four hours a week, meet with mentors for an hour a week, attend regular meetings, read further scholarship on writing center theory, and either substantially revise their research paper from the course or draft a new research paper. After the internship, peer tutors may apply to work in the Writing Center for up to eleven hours a week (ten hours of tutoring, one hour meeting) at an hourly rate that exceeds minimum wage.

Guidelines for mentoring a peer tutor. In the fall term, the students in the peer tutoring class will visit the Center to be tutored as they work on their own papers. We also ask tutors to allow the students in the peer tutoring class to interview them, observe them, and ask questions of them.

This is an important part of their learning process. At the end of the fall term, some of the students will feel prepared to start co-tutoring or working with a student in your presence with your support.

Each spring term, we invite some experienced faculty tutors to mentor the new group of peer interns. We match peer interns and mentors who are working at the same times so that it is easy for you to conference with each other. Peer interns will be more independent in their tutoring, but they will still need your help to create a rich learning environment that supports the intellectual work they are doing as new tutors. They will also be working on research papers that they will present to the staff, and they will have standing appointments with you to get help with these papers. Please take these sessions seriously. Students may give you the draft to read ahead of time, in which case you may mark time in the book to read and respond to the drafts. Feel free to block out a slot on the two schedules when you want to confer with the intern you are working with. The intern should feel free to do the same when he or she wants to confer.

If you are a mentor, it will be your responsibility to:

- meet with the peer intern regularly to develop and work on a research paper due at the end of term.
- observe tutorials.
- allow the intern to sit in on tutorials with you, especially at the beginning of the semester, when we are not very busy.

Guidelines for peer interns. As a peer intern, you will work 5 hours a week on site and attend meetings. Here are your responsibilities:

- unless specifically exempted from a particular meeting, attend staff meetings.
- engage with your mentors.
- work on a research project.
- keep up with blog.
- make up time you miss.

Guidelines for peer tutors. When you are a peer tutor, we expect you to continue participating in the life and culture of the Writing Center and to engage in professional development as a consultant. You must attend weekly staff meetings and continue contributing to the Writing Center blog. If for some unavoidable reason you can't come to staff meetings, you must talk to the director or associate director to make a plan to make up the time through a project, interviews, or some other activity. Peer tutors are asked to sign a contract agreeing to abide by our policies. Sandy has this contract.