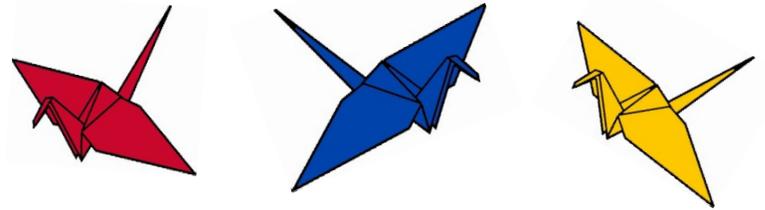


The
**University of Kansas
Writing Center
Consultant Handbook**



This handbook is designed to give you a basic overview of what it means to be a writing consultant at the KU Writing Center. General guidelines and administrative policies for staff can be found on the Guidelines and Policies page of our website.

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What We Do and Why We Do It

Welcome to the KU Writing Center. If you're relatively new to writing center work, we hope this handbook will introduce you to how we operate on both a philosophical and practical level. If you've done writing center work before, you will no doubt find similarities between that work and what we do here at KU. First and foremost, as in most other writing centers, we are committed to providing a learning service, not a service for "checking" or otherwise evaluating papers. To that end, we work quite hard to cultivate a particular ethos—or way of being—an ethos that focuses on a writer's thinking and learning more than on editing and correcting a writer's product. The material presented here will introduce you further to these notions and how they will impact the work you will do as a writing consultant.

Consultants new to the Writing Center are often anxious about their ability to work effectively with student writers. Most often, this anxiety arises from the feeling that they struggle with writing themselves (they are not *perfect* writers, after all), and they are nervous at the prospect of being viewed as writing experts, skilled in the nuances of grammar and usage and confident in the practices of academic writing. But the truth of the matter is that while a writing consultant is expected to be a pretty good writer, it is not necessary to be a grammarian or a rhetorician to be a good writing consultant. Research over the last 60 years has shown that formal knowledge of grammar and usage is of little help in learning to write; while knowledge of these things can and does improve the *control* we have over our written language, it does not precede the proper *use* of it. Because of this, a good consultant does not need to be an expert in grammar or usage either to write well or to work effectively with students. New consultants are usually quite relieved to understand that they need not be grammar aficionados to be good at the work they are going to be asked to do. At the same time, that is not to say that we never work with students on the grammar and usage level. We do. Our discussions with student writers frequently start with their concerns

about these surface features of their texts, but we generally find ourselves directing that conversation into larger issues of content, development, and presentation. Further, English language learners (ELLs) frequently call upon our knowledge as native speakers to help them understand how to use the English language properly. In many of these circumstances, we can get along quite nicely by explaining the whys and wherefores of English in layman's terms, drawing on our own experiences as native speakers and writers. When more exacting instruction is due, we turn to the reference materials in the Writing Center library or call in other consultants for counsel.

This introduction begins by talking about grammar and usage not because these are central aspects of Writing Center work, but because most people *think* that they are—in much the same way that being introduced as an English major (or teacher) often elicits some commentary on the evils of grammar, writing, or the like. Those of us who are invested in writing—as students, as teachers, as writers—are often seen as the primary protectors of language, the ones “in the know,” so to speak. Of course, this is a limited construction of why we do the work we do and why we love it. This same kind of limited construction plagues those of us who work in writing centers. The work of a writing center is often seen in narrow terms that rotate around notions of surface correctness, a view that sees writing primarily as a product rather than as part of an ongoing thinking process. This is what we might call the “writing as skill” model, the idea that writing is essentially a technology rather than a social practice, that it is made up of external and discrete mechanical parts that people learn to manipulate and assemble, and that what is typically wrong with student writing is a mechanical breakdown in grammar, structure, and usage.

In reality, writing is a lot more than that. Correctness matters, to be sure. But in the Writing Center, we embrace a much wider understanding of writing and written literacy. Most importantly, we try not to consider writing skill from a position of deficit. In other words, when working with students with a wide range of writing abilities and experiences, we are well served to look beyond right and wrong,

correct or incorrect, and instead see language use as a flexible and changeable instrument, something that can be positioned along a sort of literacy continuum that moves from informal to formal, from social to academic. This broader conception of literacy sees grammar, form, or usage “mistakes,” not as “mistakes” but as evidence of social and cultural practices that can be examined, valued, and understood in light of the contexts from which they derive. The central question is not what the student is doing wrong, but rather why he or she is using language in a particular way and how we might be able to facilitate another level of writing practice, a level that is more appropriate for university work. We understand that the language practices that students bring to the university emerge as a consequence of their academic preparedness and their social lives, as well as their cultural, ethnic, class, and regional heritage. Part of our work is to help students position their “writing instrument” within the university culture and develop the sort of writing practices that are accepted as valuable and appropriate in the context of the university.

“Learning” to Write

Expressed in the simplest terms, students learn to write by *writing*. Writing is not the sort of thing that can be taught in the traditional content-knowledge sense of teaching a specific and concrete body of information. Writing must be practiced to be learned. Students “learn to write” through the whole long process of writing (from start to finish, over and over again), not in tidying up a final product. This is particularly important to understand as writing consultants. It helps us recognize that our greatest point of collaboration with students comes well before a final paper is written. We cannot facilitate a very significant learning experience if we are merely providing feedback on something that has already been written. At this point, the student writer hopes he has finished his work and is therefore looking for final approval, rather than a *learning experience*. For these reasons, consultants are not expected to be invested in working with student writing in the formal evaluative or editorial sense. Instead, we emphasize attentive, substantive, and facilitative feedback. Our work is primarily invested in the thinking process of the student; we’re more

invested in what we might think of as the *means whereby* writing is created than in what emerges through those means. The conversations we have with students should shore them up and encourage them, expanding their thinking about writing and helping them add texture and complexity to their thinking. The more attention we are able to devote to these earlier writing/thinking processes (brainstorming, developing, organizing, revising), the better the final product will be.

Our Writing Center operates under the principle that students learn and think best through direct social interaction with other people. The development of writing abilities, *learning to write*, is optimized when the writing act becomes part of this social thinking and learning process. We help students learn to write just by talking to them about their process, their ideas, and their writing. It is easy to devalue the role of conversation in the learning process since we have been trained to see writing in terms of end (the product) rather than means (the process). But writing is never *just* writing. It always involves something more, something well beyond the physical imprint of words on paper. This *something more* is tremendously powerful and important to the final written product. Perhaps we should call it writing’s “better half”—the active reflection, deliberation, and dialogue that precedes the formal writing process. The largest part of what we do when we write is invisible: we listen, we think, we talk, we plan. However, these things are not always seen as part of the writing process; because of this, when we write, we most often concentrate only on what is visible and assessable—the written product. As consultants and as teachers, it is important to consider the limitations of this approach. Such a mindset subverts the kind of socially engaged thinking and learning that could lead to a more successful piece of writing.

We develop material—what it is that we have to write—through our interactions with others, both our experiences and our conversations. Writing teacher and scholar Kenneth Bruffee notes that conversation is, in fact, “the origin of thought.” In “Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind,” Bruffee writes that conversation stimulates reflective and critical thought and that we experience and learn in

“direct social exchange with other people.” Also, just as in conversation, our written words are intended for others to ‘hear,’ though it is easy for us to forget that our writing is a conversation with real people. Students, in particular, often construct the writing act as isolating and one-dimensional. (This is understandable, since so many of their formal writing occasions are one-way exchanges with an instructor, in which the writer produces writing and the instructor evaluates it.) Conversation, then, is a powerful form of prewriting. As they develop their writing skills, students benefit enormously from experiences that present the writing act as participating in a larger social exchange.

To that end, as consultants, our first goal is to foster active dialogue and engagement with students rather than to provide a one-dimensional service for the correction of papers. Writing Center consultants become conversation partners and real readers, experienced and invested readers, who help establish an authentic audience and purpose for student writers. Because of this, the real work of the consultation is *meta-cognitive* in nature; it lies above the paper product and is centered instead in the consultant-student dialogue about the assignment and the process of developing strong material for it. Most simply, we talk to students about their ideas and their writing because we believe that it helps them develop, organize, and *own* their thoughts.

In fact, we use the term “consultant” to make the distinction between the role of a tutor and the role of a consultant. A tutor is typically hired to deliver instruction about a particular content; a consultant, on the other hand, is hired to facilitate learning across a broad range of subject areas. The work of the writing consultant is different than the work of a traditional subject-area tutor. For instance, a tutor is often seen as a content expert, but in the Center, we do not work with a specific content; rather, we work from within a learning process that spans across disciplines and involves innumerable “contents.”

Entering a Writer’s Process

The way we help students think and learn in the Writing Center differs depending upon where students are in the development of their writing assignments. If we’re lucky, we’re helping students think toward the beginning: helping them find strong topics and focus, complicate and flesh out ideas, conceive patterns of organization that best meet the needs of readers. Sometimes, we are not so lucky and find that students have missed the rich opportunity for thinking and learning that the Center offers by coming to us too late in the process, already entrenched in underdeveloped thinking and resistant to suggestions for revision. In other words, if students have made what social psychologist Ellen Langer has called the “cognitive commitment,” they will often not want to hear much from us beyond suggestions for minor revision. (Increasingly, however, students and faculty are beginning to understand the real work of the Center—as a thinking and learning space.) As consultants, we play a balancing act: we must be sensitive to our clients’ cognitive commitment, even while we try to motivate them to engage in substantive, meaningful revision.

Despite our lofty pronouncements about the importance of the whole writing process, the typical student who visits the Writing Center has a clear product orientation. He or she is thinking about the “final paper” and is often fraught with anxiety, particularly if the consultation comes right before a due date. Characteristically, the student’s product-bound understanding of *writing* contrasts with the consultant’s concern about the *thinking* that contributes to the written work. Time and again, the student believes that making his paper “good” involves little more than fixing his grammar. Drawing upon that long-lived conception of writing addressed earlier, a conception that sees writing as a linear, one-dimensional act, the student understands writing center intervention as appropriate only *after* he has finished writing his paper. Sometimes we are not able to help very much at this point. And, unfortunately, working at the last minute on an end product does not enact the kinds of skills that developing writers require, skills that ask them to consider not only what they have written, but also why and

how they have written it. In these cases, we often miss engaging the student in substantive learning. This happens. We should expect it to happen. Despite the limitations of this sort of end-of-the-road consultation, we must always work toward providing an effective and helpful service to students, no matter when the student visits us. We want students to leave the Writing Center happy, so even if you determine that the point of significant learning has passed, you should still attempt to provide the service the student requests. Sometimes that means reading for surface corrections and providing final editorial advice. If you find yourself having this sort of consultation, it is important to talk to the student about the limitations of this kind of consultation and encourage him or her to see the work of the Writing Center in larger terms for the next paper assignment.

In our best and most fulfilling consultations, we see students when they are willing, ready, and able to learn deeply and substantively. Deep learning is learning in order to understand meaning, and this is why it is particularly difficult to work with students at the final stages of writing projects. Understanding meaning suggests that students will engage in an exchange that challenges their way of thinking—thinking in terms of content and perspective, in terms of organization and development—all of these things that so often lie well above and beyond the actual written product. On the other hand, a product-oriented session like the one described above sets up a pretty closed system (the conversation is dictated by the paper, is about the paper) while the thinking is the elephant in the room. Though learning may happen, it is often by accident, since the student has already conceived the end-product, so to speak, and is highly attuned to it, contextualizing everything in terms of that one product. These are the students who say (and there are many of them), “I just want someone to check my paper.” At this point, attempts at higher order concerns or at “meta” consulting are often unhappily received.

This kind of session differs entirely from the student who wants to dialogue about ideas, share work, and plan for a paper. This session is open and generative; it is involved in a process of creating. Despite the richness and reward, initiating this kind of session is challenging work

for the consultant. It would be far easier to take a paper from a student, kick back with a red pen, and set to work. In contrast, a good writing center consultation creates a shared exchange that is open-ended and flexible. Writing center consultants must work hard to develop a comfort level and facility for working in these kinds of open-ended systems. In an open-ended system, the consultant must extemporize a lot, must learn to think quickly and engage the student, always working to privilege the collaborative nature of the exchange, focusing on conversation, on reflecting and reinforcing good ideas and strong writing, while at the same time drawing the student out to encourage more engagement, participation, and ownership. A closed session, on the other hand, especially paper marking and correcting errors, certainly simplifies the consultant/student exchange but has significant limitations and often results in a negative consultation dynamic.

As Writing Center consultants, we must accept that both kinds of sessions—both product and process sessions—will be common. In the case of the “product-bound” student, we do what we can—positively attempting to reorient the student to his or her thinking process, creating an open learning session rather than a closed editorial one. At the same time, we must value and honor the student’s expectation. If, after the consultant’s best efforts at a “process session,” the student still insists on a “product session,” we must privilege the student’s expectation. Usually, however, we meet the student somewhere in the middle, circulating recursively through both product and process. Most consultants would agree, however, that the very best consultations involve a student relatively early in a writing and thinking process, where the consultant and student can enter into a lively dialogue about ideas, thinking, writing, process, and product.

Entering a Writer’s Product

There comes a time in every writer’s process. . . .

Despite all of this focus on the writing process, much of our work will

involve the written product too. At some point in the writing process, writers (and writing center consultants) must turn their attention from the writing and thinking process to the written product. They must engage in a revision effort to transform what compositional theorist Linda Flower has called “writer-based prose” into “reader-based prose.”

To distinguish between these two versions of product, consider that writer-based prose emerges as a result of a writer self-involved in writing, while reader-based prose emerges as the writer selflessly revises for a reader. When we write, we write our way into knowing, into figuring things out; we are *inside* a *subjective* process. This can lead to writing that does not translate effectively to a reader. Characteristically, because the writer is inside an ongoing thinking process, the first draft is written incompletely or often backwards in terms of a reader’s needs. When this is the case, the main claim is at the end of the paper, concepts are not defined and points are underdeveloped. Teacher commentary is likely to be something like “Why didn’t you say this at the beginning?” or, with double underscore at the end of the paper, “*Here* is your thesis!” But, if we understand the distinction between writer-based and reader-based prose, we see that such organizational and developmental “problems” are not problems at all, but are natural to the organic thinking/writing process. These are not “mistakes;” they are byproducts of thinking in action. Revising for reader-based prose asks the writer to work back through the writing from an *outside, objective* position. This is terrifically hard to do, especially for inexperienced writers who struggle with the concept of audience.

Writer-based prose is a perfectly natural part of the writing process; however, many inexperienced writers do not take the next step to transform the work for a reader. Most students don’t do this level of revision because they have little conception of the reader and his or her needs. They are not yet able to step away from their writing to see it from an objective stance. They do not yet understand the value of revising for the reader—though doing so is *the most important aspect* of writing a strong final product. Revising for a reader is not

spontaneous and natural. It involves quite a sophisticated mental repositioning, stepping outside the prose to see it with an objective eye. This is hard for even the most experienced writers among us. In “The Maker’s Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscript,” Donald Murray notes that, though “[t]he writer must learn to read critically but constructively, to cut what is bad, to reveal what is good, . . . [s]uch detachment is not easy.” Most people (including teachers of writing) vastly underestimate the effort required in revising for the reader. It requires not only a careful and objective re-consideration of ideas, but also calls for outside opinion, which is the only way to fully understand how the writing is working from an external vantage point. Every writer needs a reader to fully understand what he has or has not done.

When you are working with students on the product level and responding to a developing draft, the most important feedback you provide will be couched in terms of “the reader.” Each consultant plays the role of what we call the “every reader.” Thus, when you respond to a student’s work, try to position all your comments in terms of this “every reader” rather than responding from a self-oriented position (I like this, I think this, I need this). One of the Writing Center mantras, then, becomes, “As a reader . . .” or “What a reader needs . . .” or “Your reader will want you to . . .”. Though a seemingly small detail, this sort of verbal positioning helps the writer begin to construct an internal cognitive framework for reader and audience awareness and understand the overarching nature of readers’ needs.

Focusing Product Feedback

The practical matters of consulting with students will be further developed in this handbook, but there are some general things to think about as you consider stepping into a student’s process. Your first task in a given consultation is setting the agenda for the session, so you can prepare for consultations by considering the following questions:

- Do you want to discuss the writer’s topic?
- Her main claim or thesis?
- Her research and evidence?
- Her essay’s structure?
- Its style?
- Should you put the written work aside entirely and focus on a conversation about ideas?

The answers to questions like these will set the agenda for the session. The need for such rapid diagnosis can be challenging. Thus, a good consultant learns to mentally multi-task. As the consultation begins, part of your mind will be taking in what the writer is saying and evaluating it, while another part of your mind busily scrambles for a response. First, you will be *diagnosing* the paper, noting what is strong and what is not. You will be working to follow the writer’s points, but you will also note where those points are strong and where they might be going awry, beginning to hypothesize about why this is so. Second, you will keep a running mental list of what sorts of issues the paper exhibits. Claims unclear? Development weak? Structure need work? Trouble with paragraphs? Sentences?

Each of these questions attends to what we call the “hierarchy of concerns” that moves from global issues of purpose and focus, to organization issues, and lastly, to local, or sentence-level issues. Composition theorist Peter Elbow talks about this hierarchy as *bones*, *muscles*, and *skin*, which is a handy and visual way to communicate the levels of writing concerns to students. Bones and muscles issues are what we call *global*, meaning that they impact the whole piece on a large scale. These larger rhetorical concerns often span multiple paragraphs of text, and will include questions about main claims and sub-claims, the organizational structure of an argument, the relevance of the content, the clarity and quality of information, and so forth. On the other hand, what we call *local* issues involve the writing on the sentence and paragraph level, which include questions about paragraph and sentence-level clarity, as well as development, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and documentation form.

Consultants practice “top-down” responding, moving from global to local concerns, from bones to muscles to skin. As you read a student’s paper, you will look for examples of the global and/or local issues you hope to talk about. You’ll start to weigh these issues, one against the other, so that you can prioritize your remarks. If a student has difficulty with her focus and claim, the session will necessarily begin with these global issues. This same student might exhibit “local” issues too, but it would be inappropriate to concentrate on these when they are trumped by larger concerns.

Obviously, these are delicate matters on an emotional level too. As you diagnose the product and plan the agenda for the session, you will also be getting a “feel” for the student as a person and a writer, considering the approach or tone you will take when providing your feedback. You must remember how vulnerable the writer is to your critique. Always start on a positive note. As emphasized later in this handbook, the roles of praise and reflection are important when building a fruitful working relationship with a writer and his text.

Consultation Practice: Three Consulting Principles

The previous section introduced the basic philosophy of the Writing Center, and you will continue, with your fellow consultants and in your ongoing Consultant Development groups, to develop and discuss ways that your consultation practice will build on and embody our process-oriented philosophy. While we will continue to discuss effective consultation practice in more depth in the coming weeks, there are three main principles that underscore our work with student

writers:

- Be Non-Evaluative
- Do Not Appropriate Student Work
- Be Sensitive to the Student's Investment

1. Be Non-Evaluative.

Consultants should strive to avoid global evaluation of student work, whether positively (“This is great”) or negatively (“This essay is weak”). It can be difficult to refrain from evaluating student work (especially when a student asks for opinion), but consultants must be non-evaluative. Evaluative language is simply ineffective. It shuts the session off—to the student, evaluation is a judgment, a verdict, a grade. Consultants, therefore, should never render a judgment about the quality of a whole work. Global evaluation is not acceptable nor is it productive.

Consider, however, how local evaluative comment would be different. It *is* acceptable to praise student's execution of part of a work, for example. You can praise a line, an idea, a paragraph, a bit of research, or how the student chooses to open or close a piece. Offering positive or negative local evaluation, you must also explain why you respond the way you do. For instance, if the student has written a particularly strong paragraph in the middle of the paper, you might praise that: “This paragraph works really well for the reader. Let me show you why ...” Or: “your reader might be confused by this paragraph because ... In order to revise for the reader, you might”

In this way, global evaluation is entirely different from local evaluation. Global evaluation is essentially an unsupported generalization, while local evaluation presents a claim and expands with evidence. Global evaluation is particularly problematic because it usurps the authority of the classroom teacher, the one who is, ultimately, responsible for rendering verdicts. Conflicts between the Writing Center and the classroom teacher arise when consultants render verdicts. Students will use one evaluation over another in order

to avoid taking responsibility for the writing effort. If, for example, the classroom teacher says a piece ‘needs work,’ and the Writing Center consultant has said the piece is ‘great,’ it is understandable that the student would feel confused.

Plus, as we all know, writing is subjective. We will not always agree about what when a piece of writing is so-so, good, or great, even though we can all usually recognize when it is very, very bad. Being non-evaluative is the best way to go. Don't make global or general judgments on the relative success of a piece of writing. As outlined above, avoiding these sorts of general evaluative judgments forces you to be more specific and detailed in your responses to students and their writing. You will, of course, need to let students know when work has gone awry; however, do so with more particular and specific language about *how* and *why* a piece of writing is working or *how* and *why* it is not.

2. Do Not Appropriate Student Work.

Perhaps the single most important thing to remember is that this paper or project belongs to the *student*, not the consultant. Our goal is to improve writers; to do so, those writers must be actively involved in the writing and learning process and feel a sense of ownership over the writing. Consultants must strive to retain an active dialogue and shared responsibility throughout the session. In addition, consultants are cautioned against physically taking up the paper in order to read it or writing on the paper for the student. The hard part here is that some students will want you to appropriate their work. They'll say, “Take it. Mark all over it”—and we will be tempted to do so because it is much easier to work with students this way.

However tempting this might be, refrain from taking the paper over. We want students to be active in their sessions, not merely sitting back passively waiting for you to read, evaluate, and then correct their papers. A dialogue-driven consultation is difficult. Many students will resist it. If students do resist, talk to them about the benefits of taking an active position in their sessions.

3. Be Sensitive to the Student's Investment.

Writing is a personal act. Be kind. Privilege kindness always. A student's writing is personal. This is not to say that all the writing students do is personal, but rather that most students tangle themselves up in their writing emotionally. Writing, whether good or bad, is often felt as a reflection of self. The mindset is often "love me... love my writing" and vice versa. Students feel both a cognitive investment in their writing ('This is what *I* think') and an emotional one ('*I've* put those thoughts on display for my reader to *judge*').

As consultants, we must be sensitive to the investments students have made in their writing—no matter how we may perceive those investments. It might look like a hasty scrawl, but perhaps it is the result of intensive, generative labor. We can't really know. We should take the 'best effort' approach whether we believe it to be true or not.

We must err on the side of kindness, encouragement, even providing inspiration. As most of us know all too well, writing is hard and listening to criticism is even harder. Reactions can range from hostility, to embarrassment, to defensive indifference. It is the rare student indeed who can listen without emotion to an attentive but negative critique. Ironically, the hostile or disengaged student is undoubtedly the *most* sensitive of all. Your skill at establishing an appropriate and positive rapport can go a long way toward mediating negative or overly emotional responses from student writers.

Here's the bottom line: When students leave the Center, we want them to be *motivated to write*. You motivate people by connecting with them, by making them feel engaged and interested. We want to increase students' self-confidence as writers. So, even when a student comes in hesitantly with a mediocre effort, it is *entirely possible* to have him leave inspired and excited about the potential to revise. That's your job.

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Consultation Practice: Putting Process Philosophy into Action

As you have probably gathered by now, one of our principle mantras in the Writing Center is 'process over product.' Though it may sound like a broken record at times, this refrain embodies the core value of the Writing Center, the value we place on improving the ongoing thinking and writing abilities of student writers, rather than simply making a particular paper better. As a consultant, this means that even though you typically will be working with a writer on one particular written product, you will also simultaneously be invested in what we call 'meta-consulting,' a level of discussion that moves beyond the written product in order to engage the student in her thinking about her writing and her writing process.

“Meta-consulting” is our shorthand for the kinds of discussions that encourage students to think metacognitively about their work. Metacognition is simply a fancy way of saying “to think about your thinking.” To cognate means to think; to meta-cognate means to think about that thinking. When it comes to controlling writing and the writing process, meta-cognition is as important—if not more important—than the act of writing itself. We might see meta-cognitive ability as having three levels of understanding, understanding of:

- assignment/product: the “what”
- implementation/control: the “how”
- condition/flexibility: the “why”

In the simplest of terms, the “what” refers to the assignment itself—what the student has been asked to produce. The “how” refers to the process the student will employ to reach the end product goal. The “why” refers to the purpose for the assignment, the audience to which it is directed, and the greater learning rationale for the assignment. Strong writers have confidence and fluency on all three levels; a strong writer sees the interplay between the quality of a written product and the metacognitive abilities that make up her writing process, control over her material, and flexibility in meeting her reader’s needs.

Thus, good writers have learned to both ‘cognate’ and ‘meta-cognate,’ meaning that they both think about what to write and think about the hows and whys of what they have written. As natural as this reciprocal process might seem to an experienced writer, many of the students we see in the Writing Center have not yet developed this kind of thinking. For many developing writers, the how and why levels of understanding are often opaque. Because they lack awareness of the multilayered nature of the writing process, the written product itself becomes the primary, if not only, concern. Such students are frequently concerned with the correctness of their product, focusing on whether or not it is ‘right,’ especially in terms of grammar and usage.

In these situations, it’s very easy for both students and consultants to get caught up in the demands of a particular assignment without understanding the bigger picture. In fact, our focus on metacognitive goals often runs counter to what the student writer wants us to do. The student writer often wants a consultant to “fix” his or her paper but when we focus on ‘fixing’ or ‘correcting’ a paper, we get caught up in a kind of one-sided relationship with the paper itself, rather than a reciprocal relationship with the writer about the paper.

An example: As an illustration of these three levels of understanding, consider the different ways one might think about *the length of a paper*. Students who are focused on the *what* level often see a page requirement as an arbitrary number, set by the teacher or other authority, and as simply a “number to be reached.” As consultants, however, we can help them to reconceive this in terms of *why*: a length determines the scope of a project and can help focus and calibrate the breadth and depth of ideas or research needed for it. We can also help coach them on the *how* level: such as by adjusting the scope of their project, explicating further, developing deeper connections or analysis, and so on—rather than simply writing until that arbitrary number has been reached.

Understanding this difference between written product and meta-cognitive process will help you to act as a facilitator rather than an editor. Our focus on writers rather than on pieces of writing establishes our role as advisors and learning partners not proofreaders and editors. Whereas editors privilege the written product, consultants are invested in facilitating writers’ thinking and learning. Consultants can help students develop a metacognitive awareness of their writing by engaging with them in conversations about their writing and writing process.

Though the rest of this section will discuss specific strategies and suggestions for good consultation practice, a good rule of thumb for cultivating a facilitative atmosphere is to ask a lot of questions and let the writer do as much of the talking as possible. By doing so, you

will go a long way toward establishing a rapport with the student and creating an environment that enables and encourages metacognition and student learning.

Good Consulting Practice

As we've discussed, the best Writing Center consultations are the "meta-consultations," consultations that exist above and beyond the final product. There are, of course, many different ways a consultant might achieve that meta-cognitive level, and what constitutes "good consulting" varies from person to person and from consultation to consultation. The type of student too—for instance, whether the student is a native speaker or English Language Learner—will dictate a global or local agenda for the session and will determine the balance of directive to non-directive consulting. Despite these differences, some general principles about "good consulting" hold true across consultations. Fundamentally, the most effective kind of practice focuses as much as possible on facilitating and guiding, not on evaluating or directing.

Facilitators versus Evaluators

The chart below compares the kinds of moves or strategies that characterize whether a consultation is facilitative or evaluative. While any one move might not seem critical, taken in combination, they set the emotional and social climate of the session and deliver subtle messages about writing, the writing process, and the writer.

A FACILITATOR	AN EVALUATOR
<p>Focuses on the writer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> develops a rapport, privileging dialogue over product <input type="checkbox"/> establishes a collaborative relationship, writer to writer 	<p>Focuses on the product:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> spends little time on rapport <input type="checkbox"/> assumes a position of authority <input type="checkbox"/> couches comments in terms

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> couches comments in terms of the "every reader:" "What a reader needs..." <input type="checkbox"/> focuses on meta-consulting, explaining "how" and "why" in order to help writer improve thinking/writing processes 	<p>of self: "What I think," "What I need ..."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> limits discussion to the "what," focusing on <i>what</i> this particular paper needs in order to improve rather than discussing writing, the topic in general, or the thinking and learning goals of the assignment
<p>Makes sure the writer keeps ownership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> keeps hands off <input type="checkbox"/> encourages the student to write, taking his/her own notes for revision <input type="checkbox"/> keeps the paper between them <input type="checkbox"/> asks the writer to read aloud and works through the text by reading, discussing, reading, discussing 	<p>Takes ownership of the text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> marks up student's text <input type="checkbox"/> physically takes the paper from student <input type="checkbox"/> reads text silently (marking corrections), while writer sits awkwardly and waits for judgment
<p>Worries about correctness last:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> talks about what is working and why <input type="checkbox"/> focuses on global issues of content, development, and organization <input type="checkbox"/> emphasizes reader response 	<p>Proofreads and corrects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> talks about what isn't working <input type="checkbox"/> focuses on local concerns <input type="checkbox"/> makes sentence level corrections and suggestions for the writer

A FACILITATOR	AN EVALUATOR
Asks many and varied questions	Asks few questions
Asks mostly open-ended or speculative questions	Asks mostly closed, superficial questions
Sits next to the student	Sits across from the student
Looks mostly at the student	Looks mostly at the paper
Keeps the paper between them	Takes the paper from the student
Encourages student to write and/or asks permission to write on paper	Writes on the paper
Writes with pencil	Writes with pen
Engaged body language	Aloof body language
Models revision and strategies in	Tells student what to do later
Encourages student to talk	Spends most of the time talking
Asks student to read aloud	Reads silently
Shares writing and research experiences	Talks only about the student's process
Leaves the writer motivated and confident	Leaves the writer discouraged and uncertain

<p>Explores ideas through conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> asks the writer about plans/ideas for revision <input type="checkbox"/> makes suggestions through a discussion of options <input type="checkbox"/> asks the writer to make decisions and discusses the possible results of those decisions in terms of the reader <input type="checkbox"/> trusts the writer's idea of a text <input type="checkbox"/> focuses on the things that are working, with the idea that the text is presented for 	<p>Gives directive advice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> tells the writer what to do <input type="checkbox"/> uses directive language: "What you need to do is..." <input type="checkbox"/> works with a conception of an 'ideal' text and imposes this vision for the text on the writer <input type="checkbox"/> looks mainly for things to improve upon, with the idea that the text is presented to be "fixed"
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the reader	
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Notice that the differences between facilitators and evaluators extend throughout the session, including the focus on the writer and writer's ownership, the priorities of the session, and even the methods of reading a paper and interacting with its author. However, because many of us are more accustomed to having people evaluate our writing than facilitate our thinking, as consultants, it's important to remember that we are not authority figures in the way classroom instructors are—nor should we be.

Instead of measuring student progress as a classroom teacher would, in terms of the specific assignment, consultants should measure progress in terms of what the writer is learning about writing and strive to embody these facilitative characteristics throughout their consultations. The chart on the next page unpacks how some of these characteristics might look in practice:

While no one of these actions alone would make or break a session, taken together, these seemingly small gestures go a long way towards creating a consultation climate that privileges and encourages student learning and ownership or one that cultivates an atmosphere of judgment and unequal experience. As you work to

facilitate student learning and encourage metacognition, consider the message sent by such small, seemingly invisible actions. Asking permission to write on a student's paper, for example, underscores the fact that those ideas and that work belongs to and are the responsibility of that student. Using engaged body language shows them that their ideas are interesting and worthy of exploration; sharing your own writing and research experience suggests that they are not alone in their process of learning and development, that it is natural and normal for all writers.

The remainder of this section will continue to discuss good consultation practice, identifying the characteristics of good practice, offering tips and suggestions, and outlining strategies for beginning, conducting, and concluding consultations in ways that best facilitate student learning.

Beginning Successful Consultations: Setting the Right Tone

In order to set the facilitative tone for the session, the first few minutes of a consultation should be devoted to establishing rapport with the student: getting to know the student, discussing his or her project, and making the writer feel comfortable and welcome. Many students come into the Writing Center anxious about their writing abilities and nervous about their consultations. Because of this, these informal conversations at the beginning of sessions encourage students to continue the dialogue into the more intellectual portion of the session, take ownership of their thinking and engage more deeply with their ideas through that conversation, and motivate them to deep revision by helping them see themselves as real writers and thinkers.

As you begin a session, take the time to:

Greet the student. Either meet him or her at the reception area, or

stand at your table to shake hands and introduce yourself. Welcome the student to the Writing Center, and ask if he or she has visited the Writing Center before:

- If so, ask a bit about the session and how it was/was not helpful.
- If not, explain how we approach student writers and their papers. (“Let me tell you what we do here...”). Reassert the goal of the Writing Center: to help students achieve a better understanding of the individual assignments and their writing processes.

Spend the first few minutes of the session chatting with the student. During this conversation, have the student log in to start their appointment and use the questions on that opening form as conversation starters, questions for discussion, and ice breakers. At the beginning of the session, ask the student for contextual relevant information, such as:

- “What kind of assignment are you working on?”
- “When is the assignment due?”
- “What stage are you in the process?”
- “How is the project going for you?”
- “What goals do you have for the session?”

Collaborate with the student to clarify the assignments and set goals for the session. Ask the writer to describe the assignment and its criteria, then work together to establish the assignment's goals. Ask questions such as:

- “What do you think your instructor wants to see from you?” (i.e. reflection, analysis, organization, a thesis, working appropriately with research, etc.)
- “What do you hope to accomplish during the consultation?”
- “What are your goals for this session?”
- “What are your main concerns?”

As you go along in these first few minutes, you should be assessing the situation based on the student writer's responses and setting the agenda for the consultation.

Conducting Successful Consultations: Some General Strategies

After the initial questions and dialogue, it is usually time to turn to the student's written work, and this is the point at which consultants must establish themselves as collaborators, rather than teachers, tutors, or repairmen.

The learning that takes place in the consultation depends on the active collaboration between the consultant and student. One of the challenges for the consultant, then, is finding ways to foster this kind of active, collaborative consultation. Many students you'll see have never experienced this type of collaboration; they don't know what to expect and may find it uncomfortable. Frequently, when asked what they'd like to work on in a session, students will answer with phrases like "grammar check," "edit my paper," or "just make sure it flows."

What we need to realize, however, is that this is frequently the only language a student has for talking about writing and is not necessarily what the student actually needs from a session. Because we prioritize process over product, line editing or proofreading is not a service we offer. At the same time, however, consultants shouldn't tell the student that 'we don't *do* grammar or proofreading here.' In the first place, it is untrue, since we will help students to proofread their own work and teach them strategies for doing so on their own. More importantly,

however, that sort of statement, and the binary thinking it embodies, closes the door to conversation—and thus collaboration. It undermines student ownership by making the student feel like she is wrong to make such a request.

Instead, think of yourself as making a sale to the student. Before you can successfully collaborate with a writer, you have to establish that you will meet the student's needs, that you are worth listening to and that you are on the student's side; if the writer doesn't feel that to be true, he or she will be resistant to the your advice, no matter how wise it might be. You can encourage collaboration through a positive, kind and attentive demeanor, by establishing that you care about the student and his ideas. You can even encourage collaboration with your body language and position at the table—such as sitting on the same side of the table as the student and keeping the paper between you when looking at a student's piece of writing.

Making the Sale

In the first few minutes of the consultation, you must gain the student's trust. If not, the student will either butt heads with you for the duration of the session or listen very politely and disregard all of your advice upon leaving. Obviously, neither of these situations results in much learning. Though it sounds artificial, it is almost impossible to overstate the importance of *making the sale* to the student writer and *gaining his or her trust*. Take the time to do this at the beginning of the session. Chat with the student while you collect the information at the top of the summary sheet; it's a good opportunity to get to know the student and begin anticipating his or her needs. You should strive to impress the student with your genuine interest in him or her as a writer, rather than your expertise in writing.

- Remember that sharing writing is daunting. Demonstrate from the start that we are kind, concerned, and helpful folk. Smile. Be energetic and engaged.
- Acknowledge awkwardness in the session. For example, if

a student writer disagrees with you every step of the way, and you feel as though the dynamics between you and the student are not productive, take a step back and speak openly to the student about it, thereby returning the session back to a “meta-cognitive” place and not a head-banging one. (“I feel as though this session isn’t helpful to you at the moment...”)

Mirroring the Student

Just as it sounds, we use mirroring to *reflect back a student’s own ideas*. It is a great way to demonstrate engagement with a student’s ideas, which serves to affirm those ideas as valuable enough for further exploration. Mirroring frequently takes a form called “summary and sayback.” In this technique, the consultant says back to the writer what he or she understood him to have said, either aloud or in a piece of writing; this serves as an invitation for the writer to restate, refine, or further explore those ideas.

Interestingly, therapists use a similar technique, and many of you likely use it in conversations outside the Center. In all these situations, it encourages the writer or speaker to own his or her ideas and to continue developing them.

- Practice “summary and sayback” rather than evaluation and diagnosis of error. (“What I hear you saying is...”)
- Practice non-judgmental listening and responding. Avoid absolute judgments such as “This is good” or “This is bad.”
- Try not to generalize about the text. Instead, point out very specific things that worked for you. (“Here, on page three, when you write...”)
- Take notes; it can be quite helpful to transcribe for a student as s/he speaks. You might say, “Explain to me what you mean here,” and then jot down the student’s ideas. After the student finishes, play back those words, saying, “Here is what you said to me...” At the end of the session, you can give the student

these notes reminding him that they are his ideas and words, which serve both as a memory jog and an affirmation.

Encouraging Student Ownership

As discussed earlier, we work with *writers*, not *writing*, focusing on the writing process rather than the written product. In order to learn, the student himself must be in charge of revision and must remember that he is ultimately the one responsible for the paper. Furthermore, all writers are more willing to work if they are invested in their ideas, and ownership is a large part of investment. In consultations, your behavior should encourage students to see themselves as the owners of their intellectual property.

An easy way to judge ownership is to pay attention to which person is interacting with the paper the most: holding the paper, writing on it, reading it, and so forth. That is the person with ownership. The following strategies, among others, encourage the student to interact with the paper and subconsciously reinforce the student’s ownership:

- If it is a short paper, have the student read it to you aloud. If it is a long paper, ask her to read a particular section or sections of the paper. (“Read me your ‘best’ or ‘favorite’ paragraph...” “Let’s read your introduction aloud, then talk through from there...”)
- Keep the paper between the two of you, where you both can read it.
- Ask the writer permission to write on his or her paper. Mark sparingly with pencil, rather than pen.
- Whenever possible, have the student write (take notes, free-write, revise) during the session to engage with your suggestions.
- Ask students to model verbally. (“What would that sound like?”)

Making the Session Active

Closely related to ownership and salesmanship, keeping a consultation active dramatically increases a student's interest and investment—and thus his learning. This is akin to the difference between a lecture class and a discussion-based class. A student can certainly learn from a lecturer, but it is the lecturer, not the student, in charge of passing down knowledge. As discussed earlier in the section on “Facilitators v Evaluators,” this is not the situation we want to encourage in the Writing Center. The consultant is not and should not be a lecturer; we are sounding boards for the students, and keeping the activity level of a consultation high will remind students that they are the ones in charge of their learning.

- Limit the amount of “silent” time. It is tempting to take the paper away from the student, read it, and begin the consultation. Instead, read only some of the paper. Wherever possible, work through the paper in sections. Skim and dive if you need a sense of the whole.
- Ask follow-up questions:
 - “How else might you say this?”
 - “What do you think?”
 - “What did/do you mean by that?”
 - “Tell me more about that.”
- Encourage the writer to write in the session: He or she can take notes for revision, imagine on paper what he/she might say, freewrite, or revise in the moment. Value this writing time as a good use of consultation time.
- Make sure the writer gets the last word:
 - “So, what do you plan to do now?”
 - “Which strategies do you think will work for you?”
 - “Let's write down your next steps.”

Keeping It Manageable

While it is tempting to cover every possible way in which a paper

could be improved, this is actually counter-productive in a writing consultation. Remember that the paper is the student's, not the consultant's, and the student must decide to take the consultant's advice in order to improve both the product and the process. If a student gets overwhelmed, he is almost guaranteed not to use the consultant's feedback. As consultants, then, we need to be attentive to the student's needs. Part of this comes from locating a student in the writing process and on the hierarchy of concerns; talking about the organization of the final essay to a student who comes in to brainstorm, for example, would clearly be intimidating. The other element, however, is keeping the feedback to a manageable amount. One can only hold so much information at a time, and one can only take so much criticism in one session. Set your agenda based on your top-down diagnosis.

Try to stay well within these bounds to avoid overwhelming the student writer:

- Keep consultations within the appointment time, even if you do not have a following appointment. Reserve time at the end to close intentionally and well.
- Do not address more than two or three “problem” areas.
 - Inform the student of additional concerns
 - Create a revision task-list the student can take with him/her.
 - Suggest another appointment after revision
- Don't rush. Give the student time and space to process your advice.

Concluding Successful Consultations: Take the time to get closure.

It is easy to overlook the importance of the end of a session. At the

conclusion of successful consultations, students leave motivated to continue working on their draft and confident about their next steps. Consultants should make it a priority to conclude sessions deliberately, leaving enough time at the end to discuss the student's next steps and address any questions he or she might have. Doing so gives the discussion a sense of closure, which makes students both more comfortable with that discussion and more likely to act on the consultants' suggestions.

At the end of the session, take the time to:

- Summarize what you've accomplished in the session and suggest areas you were not able to cover. You may want to write these notes down for the student.
- Ask the student to articulate his or her next steps. It is often helpful to do this in two parts: the general goals or concerns ("So what you need to work on?") and the specific strategies for reaching them ("And how are you going to do that?"). Write this down for the student.
- Thank the student for coming in and invite him or her to come back.

A Note on Time Management

Be attentive to the length of the consultation time—and to the attention span of yourself and the student. Writing Center appointments typically last about 40 minutes (for undergrad appointments) or 60 minutes (for graduate appointments). You will find that you need to tailor your agenda and consultation goals to the amount of time you have with a writer. In addition to the available time, however, it's a good idea to attend to the "cognitive load" of yourself and the writer.

There is a balancing act between "giving the clients their money's worth" in terms of using the full appointment and making sure learning is still happening. Be aware of time when you and/or the

student are running out of steam or if you begin to appropriate too much of the control—both things that may happen when a consultant or student have gone beyond the appropriate cognitive load for that session.

Sometimes it is true that a piece of writing has too many problems to cover in one session. In this case, you should cover the area you and the student determine most relevant and suggest further areas that need work. If the student feels he or she needs more time, suggest that he or she come back on another day, having revised his/her paper between visits and implemented the changes you discussed.

Further, with only 30 to 60 minutes, it can be tempting to jump right into the meat of the session and ignore some of the niceties of conversing with the student at the beginning of the session and taking the time to conclude a session deliberately. Though they may seem to have no bearing on the substance of the consultation, these conversations are actually very important to the quality of the session and can often determine both how well the session goes and how much revision the student does when he/she leaves. Take the time for these conversations. A good rule of thumb is to use approximately five minutes at the beginning of the session to get to know the student and the assignment and another five minutes to conclude the session and identify the writer's next steps for revision or drafting.

The Last Best Practice

By now, you have received a great deal of information about consultation practice—possibly an overwhelming amount. While we believe that all of this information is important for our consultants, remember that the most important aspects of a successful consultation are also the simplest: just being authentic and kind, friendly and encouraging. Even if all you do is show an interest in the writer and his work, you play an important social role for that writer as a real reader and authentic audience.

Being a Writing Center Consultant

As you've seen, as consultants, we are first and foremost student advocates. This means that we assume a student has legitimate concerns, honest motives, and innate intelligence. Most importantly, we take for granted the student's investment in writing success.

Writing consultants are peers, not teachers. As a peer, an undergraduate consultant might work with a graduate student, or a graduate consultant might work with a nontraditional, older student. While there may be differences in age or academic status, on a fundamental level we are all students and evolving writers; consultants merely have more experience with writing and training to talk with people about writing.

Consultants have a different relationship with students than teachers do primarily because our role is non-evaluative. In other words, we may often assess how we can best work with students, but ultimately we do not grade the student's writing. We do not evaluate the student's work—nor do we evaluate the instructor's assignments or teaching. What we can offer as peer consultants is an interest in the writer as much as the writer's project. As we often say in the Writing Center, our primary focus is on *writers*, not *writing*.

In our one-to-one sessions with students, we are real, live readers who engage intellectually with the student as a writer. Since the student is the expert on what is happening in class or the research he or she is doing, we let the writer do as much of the talking as possible. As listeners and readers in the moment of a session, we read aloud, ask curious questions, provide a soundboard for ideas, pose new perspectives, brainstorm, suggest options for revision, offer a reader's point of view, encourage the student to set goals for managing the writing process, analyze the writing task or assignment, help the

student articulate the audience's expectations, recommend that the writer seek out other writing resources, and finally, urge the student to return to the Writing Center!

A Note on Conflicts of Interest:

Because we want to preserve our role as non-evaluative readers and distinguish the Writing Center from other academic sites such as the classroom, we ask that writing consultants who are GTAs *not consult* with students currently enrolled in their own courses, nor hold office hours or student conferences in the Writing Center.

Likewise, a consultant should not work with other students in classes in which he or she is currently enrolled. If you see a classmate on your schedule, speak to the OA on duty, and he or she will switch appointments for you.

Working with Fellow Staff Members

Writing Centers are places for collaborative work on many levels. The most obvious collaboration is between consultants and writers, but the KU Writing Center also encourages collaboration between its staff members: between consultants and office assistants and writers *and* administrative staff. Such collaboration helps us to weave the strongest web of support possible for our writers and for our staff.

The other consultants on your shifts will be wonderful resources for you. Talk to them, ask each other questions, share consulting strategies, or troubleshoot current assignments—these “meta-chats” are welcome and highly encouraged. You are also welcome to ask a fellow consultant for help or clarification—or even to jump in and consultant collaboratively with you. In addition to making the Writing Center a more collaborative and supportive working environment for our staff, it can also model good behavior for our clients: when you seek support from your colleagues, it shows writers that “even writing consultants” can need to ask for assistance.

Our office assistants (OAs) are also excellent resources. The OAs in the Anschutz and Watson Roosts keep the roosts running smoothly so you can work effectively. Among other things, they will:

- Introduce you to the writers with whom you have appointments
- Help you resolve any computer glitches that arise
- Keep your consultations from being interrupted
- Give you 5-minute warnings before the end of your consultation time
- Serve as the face of the Writing Center and set a positive tone for the roost and for your consultation

The administrative staff is also here to offer support in any way possible. We rely on the consultants—a.k.a. *you*—to make suggestions and recommendations for ways to improve services for writers, so please don't hesitate to share your ideas or to come chat.

Who we are and who we serve

Meet the Consultants

The KU Writing Center is staffed by students pursuing a wide variety of degrees and areas of study. Our consultants range from undergraduate students (both upper- and lowerclassmen) to graduate students pursuing masters or doctoral degrees.

Graduate Consultants:

Graduate student consultants make up about 50% of the Writing Center staff. Many of our graduate students are working on advanced

degrees in creative writing, literature, rhetoric and composition, or education, although we are pleased to have a number of interdisciplinary masters' and doctoral students on our staff as well. Many of the graduate students working in the KUWC also hold on assistantships in their departments in addition to the writing center work. Graduate students generally work between 6 and 10 hours per week.

Undergraduate Consultants:

Before working in the Center, undergraduate consultants complete ENGL/LA&S 400: Tutoring and Teaching Writing. As part of their coursework, undergraduates enrolled in the course intern in the Writing Center for one hour each week. During this time, students in the course will work with current consultants in order to practice consultation strategies. Interns begin by observing experienced consultants and gradually take on increasing responsibility and participation; most interns will spend the last month or so of the semester taking their own appointments. Typically at the end of the semester, contingent on the quality of their work, we hire the top few undergraduates to work as paid consultants for subsequent semesters.

Partners around Campus

As a Writing Center consultant, you are participating in one aspect of a network of services which support student learning and success. The KU Writing Center is part of Undergraduate Student Services, though we also work closely with the Graduate School and other units. We collaborate with a wide variety of units and departments around campus to help serve the KU community. It's a good idea to be familiar with some of the other services on campus, as you may want to refer students to them as well. The list below outlines a few of our allies and partners around KU:

- **The KU Libraries** (www.lib.ku.edu): In addition to hosting our Anschutz and Watson Roosts and collaborating on a number of programs, the Libraries are also great resources for information about a great many research and writing needs. We

often refer students to (and receive referrals from) the reference librarian team.

- **The Academic Achievement and Access Center** (www.achievement.ku.edu/): The AAAC (typically called “triple-A C”) houses the university’s main content tutoring, supplemental instruction, student access services, and disability support.
 - **The Applied English Center** (<https://aec.ku.edu/>): KU’s English-language program, the AEC offers five levels of intensive English instruction. In the Writing Center, we work with students in the intermediate to advanced classes. The AEC also runs “The Point,” which offers English tutoring services.
 - **Counseling and Psychological Services** (<https://caps.ku.edu/>): We sometimes refer students who are having trouble coping with their course load, stress, or even homesickness to CAPS.
 - **Graduate Studies** (www.graduate.ku.edu/) We collaborate with Grad Studies on workshops, Graduate Research Write-Ins, and other services.
-

Our Clients

In the Writing Center, you will work with a wide variety of writers in many different disciplines and at all levels. Though projects for Core undergraduate classes comprise a large portion of our consultations, the investment we’ve made in freshmen writing over the last few years means that we are seeing an increasing trend in junior and senior visits for classes across the disciplines. Thus, the population we serve is diverse—in terms of level, subject, linguistic background, and so on.

For example, in the Writing Center, you will likely work with as many non-native speakers and English Language Learners as native speakers, and though many first and second year students come to the Center, we also see a large proportion of graduate students and even faculty. Further, though the Writing Center is popular with students in writing-intensive English and core classes, students come from many

disciplines. We also see students who want to work on writing projects that are not for classes, such as scholarship essays, personal statements, cover letters, web content, and so on. This variety makes it even more important that consultants remember that we are here not to be experts who improve the content of written products, but dialogue-based consultants who focus on improving the writers that we see, no matter what reasons have brought them in.

Practical Matters: Staffing and Scheduling

This section will be a crash course in some of the practical matters of

working at the KU Writing Center: the basic consultant duties, policies, and procedures you will need to know. This is not a comprehensive guide, so please check the official Policies and Procedures packet (posted on the Staff Section of the website) and do not hesitate to ask questions: the director, associate director, or experienced consultants will also be happy to help you.

Writing Center Hours and Locations

If we were on social media right now, we'd describe the KU Writing Center schedule as "complicated." Our writing center is designed as a *decentralized* center with the goal of "meeting writers where they are" not just intellectually, but also in terms of schedule and location. The website is the best place to find our up-to-date way hours and locations, but here is a quick overview.

- We are open Sunday through Friday. We typically offer consultations from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Sundays.
- We have a wide variety of locations (called "Writers Roosts," in keeping with the KU Jayhawk theme). These include our main locations in Anschutz and Watson Libraries, locations in several residence halls, and a roost on the Edwards Campus in Kansas City.

Work Schedules

Consultants work the same weekly schedule for a full semester. Work schedules are completed prior to the beginning of each semester. Each consultant should submit his/her availability to the website as soon after registration as possible, including comments on one's preferred schedule.

You might work at any of the Writing Center locations in a given semester and on any day that the Center is open. In general, consultants typically consult at two to three roosts each semester.

A tentative schedule will be published and e-mailed out once all consultants' availability has been submitted and the schedule has been built. This tentative schedule is designed to give each employee a preliminary look at the schedule and is the last chance to request minor changes. The associate director will make every effort to keep each consultant's working requests in mind. However, there is no guarantee that every employee will get exactly what is requested (number of hours, location preferences, etc.). Any problems or changes with the work schedule should be reported directly the associate director as soon as you notice them.

Absences and Shift Coverage: Policy and Procedure

Consultants are responsible for being present and on time for every shift they work, particularly since our appointments start promptly at the beginning of each shift. However, we know that life happens and you may need to miss a shift sometimes. This section outlines what to do when that happens.

In the event that you need to miss part or all of a given shift, you are responsible for finding coverage for your shift. Once coverage is found, you should immediately inform both the associate director and put it into the system. Let us emphasize this: *consultants must make arrangements for their own substitutes and report the absence in advance.*

To find coverage, go to the Writing Center website and log in to the Staff Page (also called the intranet site):

- First, find a replacement by e-mailing a shift coverage request to the consulting staff:
 - Click on the "Employees" tab, then "Staff Communication." Select the relevant staff group to e-mail (in this case, probably "e-mail consultants).
 - Fill out the form, being sure to include your shift details (where, when, how long, etc.) in the e-mail body.

- Once you have found someone to cover your shift, you need to report your absence coverage.
 - Go to “Employees” tab, then “Report Absence Coverage.” Select the relevant absence report (consultant or OA).
 - Fill out the “Consultant Absence Report” form and hit submit. That reports your coverage to the associate director.
- If you have any questions, talk to the associate director and/or to the facilitator of your Consultant Development Group
- Please note: If an absence is not reported in advance, the employee will be immediately suspended from working any part of their schedule until holding a meeting with the associate director.

There are *NO* exceptions to this policy other than same-day sick leave requests. If you are physically ill or having an emergency, please do not plan to work your shift. As soon as you realize that there may be a problem, contact the Writing Center and then the Associate Director so that we can find a replacement for your shift. Again, as soon as you realize you may not be well enough to work:

1. Call the Writing Center office at 785.864.2399.
2. Email writing@ku.edu and katieelliott@ku.edu with the details of the shift(s) you will miss.

Consultant Duties and Conduct

When you arrive for your shift

Arrive at the Roost at least 5 minutes before your shift is scheduled to begin. The official “start time” of your shift is, in reality, the time when your first appointment will begin—so you need to arrive in

advance to start your appointment on time.

If you are consulting face-to-face at Anschutz or Watson, ask the OA on duty where you should sit. As soon as you have access to the iPad at that station:

1. Clock in! (You gotta get *paid*.) Go to <https://hr.ku.edu> to clock in to the KU hourly employee webclock.
2. Sign in to the staff section of the WC website (also called our intranet). You can get there by following the “Staff Page” link at the bottom right of our home page, or go directly to <https://writingintranet.drupal.ku.edu>
3. Check the message board for important notices and the calendar for current and upcoming events.
4. Follow the link (above the message board) to log into WCOOnline and check your upcoming appointments. (For more information about WCOOnline, see the last section of this handbook.)
5. Either open another internet browser or close out of the system before your first appointment arrives.

If you are working an “Online Appointments” shift, come to Anschutz 424, where the dedicated online consultation area is set up. (References and guides are available at the station for your use.) Log in (as described above) to check your upcoming appointments and see whether you will be meeting your client online or providing written feedback. WCOOnline calls these “meet online” (synchronous online appointments) and “e-tutoring” (asynchronous written feedback). Later on, you will receive additional training about how to conduct both kinds of appointments.

Taking Breaks

We know: Writing Center work is intense. The intellectual exchange in a consultation requires a great deal of energy. This acute mental commitment and interaction, while at times draining, also makes

consulting meaningful and rewarding. If you need to take a break or need to leave the Roost at any time between appointments, please notify the OA on your shift and be certain to be back in time for your next consultation.

Writing Center Projects

If time on your shift is unscheduled, please take that opportunity to work on other writing center projects. This may include responding to E-mail Feedback requests or to Quick Questions. You might also:

- Observe another consultant's consultation or co-consult with a fellow consultant.
- Prepare for an upcoming Consultant Development meeting.
- Work on the Writing Guides: fine-tune existing guides by checking for typos or dead links or by finding new web resources that should be listed. Or generate your own content and pages based on what you see writers need in sessions.
- Make some media! You can take photos around the Writing Center, create videos, or record audio podcasts about writing or the Writing Center for our website.
- Read current or archived writing center publications (such as *Writing Lab Newsletter*, *Writing Center Journal*, *Praxis*, or *Dangling Modifier*).
- Contribute to broader writing center conversations and scholarship by writing, alone or collaboratively, for writing center publications (such as *The Dangling Modifier*, *Praxis*, etc.) or by participating in blogs such as *PeerCentered*.
- Check with Katie or Terese to see how you can contribute to other research or outreach projects.

Professional Demeanor and Conduct

While working with students, consultants are expected to act

professionally. Though the age gap between some consultants and students may seem small and though consultants may feel caught in the role of being neither teacher nor peer, consultants must maintain a professional distance from the students with whom they work. A Writing Center consultant should wear appropriate attire, avoid forming relationships with students outside of the Writing Center, and should not provide irrelevant personal information to students.

Though we will talk more about specific policies and procedures in our new staff training and all-staff meetings, here is a brief overview of the professional demeanor and conduct we expect from our Writing Center staff. Please refer to it judiciously and ask questions as needed.

- Writing Center consultants should be easily identifiable. You will have a small table sign with your name. Please display that on your table when you are working, and wear a nametag (or even your KUWC t-shirt) if possible. This is especially important in Roosts without an OA (such as shifts in Res Halls and Edwards campus).
- Be professional in conversations you have with colleagues in the writing center. For example, discuss issues about the writers with whom you are working, the papers they are writing, or their instructors in staff offices, on the wiki, in the office or in your Consultant Development meetings—in short, in places where such conversations will not be overheard.
- The Writing Center has a policy of confidentiality regarding whom we see, where we see them, and the writing they entrust to our care. No information about writers and their work may be divulged to instructors or other students without the writer's express permission. (This includes even informal disclosure, such as telling a friend that you "saw their student so-and-so in the Writing Center yesterday.")
 - Shred all print-outs and delete all files of writers' work, including online consultations and professional writing. This preserves students' privacy under FERPA.

- We also ask that you preserve the same confidentiality for your fellow staff members. Though clients can schedule appointments with particular consultants (and may ask you to recommend a consultant to them), do not give out any personal information or contact details for fellow staff members.
- Keep your work area neat and put materials away.
- Please reserve the consulting area for consulting. For instance, we ask that you not eat at the consulting tables—and preferably that you eat only during break or “down” times. Similarly, please save personal phone calls, texting, non-academic web surfing, iPod listening, etc. for break times. A good rule of thumb is that you aim to *model good studentship* any time you are on duty. By doing so, you help to maintain a space dedicated to writing consultation and productive learning.

Staff Development and Communication

All-Staff Meetings

We kick off each semester with an all-staff meeting, where we meet all of the new consultants and office assistants; revisit (and sometimes revise) our mission, philosophies, and practices; and set individual and group goals for the semester. The all-staff meeting helps set the tone for the semester and is an important part of getting to know each

other—which is why it is a required activity for all staff. Consultants and office assistants are paid for attending the retreat, and food is provided. It is—or so we hope—both informative and fun.

Consultant Development Groups: Ongoing education and professional development

In addition to our all-staff meeting, we also require all our consultants to participate in our ongoing education and professional development program. This ongoing education and development happens in small groups, creatively titled “Consultant Development Groups,” that meet regularly through the semester. Each small group is facilitated by an experienced consultant and will involve readings and other activities in preparation for participating in group discussion and reflection.

Early in the semester (typically in the first week of classes), consultants sign up for their groups. We offer a variety of meeting times and locations, so you can choose the one that works best for you. Once all the groups have been set, you will meet with your group every other week for approximately 50-60 minutes to discuss Writing Center theory and practice; these biweekly meetings with your consulting group serve as the main professional development activity for writing consultants. *Attendance at these meetings is a condition of employment; you are compensated for this time per your hourly rate.*

Consultant Development meetings blend a loose curriculum—shared topics and readings that all groups will discuss—and organic discussions that stem from the issues and ideas members encounter in the course of their work. Each facilitator will work with his or her group to set meeting agendas, and you are also highly encouraged to volunteer to lead a meeting on a topic of your choice.

This is our system for providing ongoing training. Learning to work in the Writing Center is a progressive experience, and there is no way to fully prepare each consultant in advance. In order to best accommodate this sort of learning-by-doing job, each week’s meeting

agenda will focus on a particular issue you'll encounter in the Writing Center. These range from essential consulting practices and techniques to strategies for particular courses and assignments. By learning about each of these areas with your group, you'll be better equipped to deal with the variety of issues you'll come across in consultations—and ultimately you'll be better able to help students, which is our main goal.

In addition to training our consultants, we also believe that learning about these content areas with other consultants will help you in your career as both a student and a teacher. Many of you either are or will be teaching, and much of the content covered in the Consultant Development groups applies to teaching as well as consulting. In addition, your group will function as a safety net of sorts. If you have any questions or concerns—from “problem sessions” to confusion about procedures—you can ask your facilitator or fellow consultants for help. And, finally, your group discussions will allow you to share your own experiences and learn from the experiences of other consultants.

Staff Communication

In lieu of a deluge of e-mails, we use the Message Board on our website as our main source of information exchange. Please check it regularly to find out about:

1. Administrative issues: payroll, scheduling, shift coverage, etc.
2. Staff development issues: dates and topics for practicum meetings, discussions about writing center pedagogy, good news about productive sessions.
3. Sharing resources and information: useful writing resources, event announcements, and calls for papers or conference proposals
4. KUWC news

The tool helps us stay connected. Please check the message board frequently and reply promptly to any requests. (You may also post and respond to message board posts.) We will also, of course, use e-mail as needed to supplement the message board and to send private or sensitive communications.

Reflection and Self-Assessment

Ongoing self-assessment is something we like to promote in the KU Writing Center: we want writers who consult with us to continue developing their ability to analyze their own writing processes and written products, and we ourselves need to continue developing as reflective practitioners. Reflection and self-assessment can and should take place frequently in the Writing Center—at Consultant Development meetings, among consultants during shifts, and in individual consulting sessions. Additionally, at the end of the semester, you will have the opportunity to complete a more thorough self-assessment during an individual meeting with the associate director and the director.

WOnline: the KUWC Appointment System

We use an online software system to make writing center appointments and to record information about each visitor and his or her session. This recordkeeping is an essential part of keeping track of what we do and making a case for our continued support from KU administration. Until this fall, we used an appointment system built in-house some years ago, but this fall we are delighted to be using a new software called WOnline. (We believe that it will be a great improvement over the old appointment system and are excited to have it. However, because it's brand new to us too, we can't yet provide as much detailed information here for you as we'd like. More to come!)

Managing the check-in and check-out surveys on WOnline is your

primary “paperwork” or administrative responsibility. We rely on consultants to make sure that writers consistently and adequately complete these online forms. We use the statistical information gathered from these forms to demonstrate the importance of having a writing center at KU and to justify additional funding requests. (To be perfectly clear: those forms get us dollars. Please build them into your consultation practice!)

However, properly filling out these forms is not only necessary for helping us learn whom we serve and how. In fact, the questionnaires students fill out on WOnline also improve the consultations themselves. We can use the questions, for instance, to help visitors prepare for a Writing Center session, synthesize what they did in the session, and set goals for future writing projects—all essential parts of facilitating smooth and productive sessions. We also suggest that consultants use them to effectively open and close consultations: as conversation-starters and agenda-setting tools, as well as vehicles for wrapping up a session.

Using WOnline

Here are some of the ways you will use the WOnline software and how its information might be useful to you before, during, and after a session:

When clients make appointments, they fill out information including:

- *Course Information:* Students are asked to supply the course name and number as well as instructor’s name, which will give you some clue as to what kind of project they will be discussing.
- *What stage a student is in the writing process:* The writer will select where he or she is in the writing or revising process, which will give you an idea of where he/she is the writing process.

- *What the student would like to cover during the appointment:* Here the writer marked any/all areas of concern and topics he or she would like to address.

Before your appointment:

You can look at your upcoming appointments to learn about the writers’ histories at the Writing Center and what they planned to discuss with you during their appointments.

When the writer arrives:

It’s a good idea to review the appointment information with your client, once he or she is settled comfortably and ready to begin. Just open up that writer’s appointment and you will see the information that client entered when he or she made the appointment.

This can be an excellent tool for opening the discussion and beginning the agenda-setting process. We strongly suggest that consultants take an active role in talking through this information—rather than rushing through it or asking students to “just check that it’s right.” For instance, you might ask for details about the class, begin talking about what he/she has done so far, or probe into why he or she is concerned with certain areas. You can also use this as a great entry into “teaching the tutorial” or explaining a little about how the session will work.

When the consultation is complete:

At or near the end of the consultation, you and your client will complete a “Client Report Form” for that appointment. To open that form, you’ll open the appointment page and, at the very bottom of the appointment info, choose “Add New Client Report Form.” That will open a short questionnaire that asks you and your client to recap what you worked on in your session and to reflect on what the client’s next steps will be in her writing and revision process.. Once you and your client have fill this out, you can choose to email that information to the client or simply save it in the WOnline system.

Rather than just asking the client to fill this out, we'd like consultants to build this into the closing of your session. Indeed, you might use this as a way to provide the structure for your closing. For instance, you might say, a few minutes before the session ends, "*Let's do one last thing. Let's make a to-do list so you can remember what you're going to do next. So tell me: What are your next steps going to be when you sit down to work on this tonight?*" Then you and your client can discuss these plans, type up your notes, and email those notes directly to the writer—meaning your client leaves with a revision to-do list and summary of the session waiting in his or her inbox.

You have access to any and all past appointment information under "Past Appointments." It can be a great source of information about your developing styles and techniques. As we promote constant self-evaluation and interrogation of our assumptions and practices, don't forget to consider the feedback available to you through the database.

We are here for you.

We know that there's a lot of information in this handbook and a lot to consider as you begin your Writing Center work. Remember that the director, associate director, and grad writing specialist—as well as our experienced consultants—are always here to help. If you have a question, please don't hesitate to ask. We're here to answer your questions, hear your suggestions, and talk with you if you have a difficult, interesting, or awesome consultation, a bright idea, a research project you want to discuss, or if you just want to chat about what's been going on in the Writing Center.

Feel free to stop by Anschutz 424 or contact us by phone or e-mail:

- Terese Thonus, Director

tthonus@ku.edu and 785.864.2398

- Katie Elliott, Associate Director
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- Aron Muci, Lead Consultant and Administrative Intern.
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- Chelsea Murdock, Marketing Coordinator, cjmurdock@ku.edu
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