

Stages of a Writing Consultation: Setting the Tone

WELCOMING

Prep for students before they arrive

- Ensure that the physical writing center space (library or Mood) is welcoming and professional (e.g. set up signage in the library and turn lights on in Mood).
- Establish who is going to greet incoming students and who is taking the next consultation.

Welcome arriving students verbally and physically

- Make eye contact, stand up to greet and introduce yourself, and assist with the check-in process.
- When it's busy, give waiting students a timeframe and direct them to the intake information and seating area.

Introduce our Writing Center practices

- Explain our collaborative consultation style so that students aren't caught off guard when you engage with them (as opposed to evaluating or editing their writing).
- Give students a heads up that we're trying to keep consultations to roughly 30 minutes.

COLLABORATING

Begin by engaging students

- What are you working on? Explain your prompt to me. What are you struggling with? What do you love about this paper? Are there specific things you want to look at (or prioritize)? Has your teacher given you any feedback that you want to focus on? What is your timeline like and what are your goals for this paper?
- Offer students a pencil & pad, right off the bat. Writing your name on the pad is helpful.

Describe your process

- Remind students that writing assignments aren't really ever done, they just get turned in. Point out that getting started writing is often the toughest part – getting a draft out is much better than spending 45 minutes finding perfect sentences.
- Ask the writer how he or she would like to go through the paper (options: writer reads aloud, consultant reads aloud, consultant reads silently). If the last, ask the student to construct an outline of as you read, or ask them to read silently next to you.
- Steer clear of silently marking students' papers or smiling/laughing/frowning without explanation.
- Ask before you mark on a student's paper.

Give feedback with healthy doses of positives, questions, and self-reflection

- Pick out moments that work and comment on them. Use these as models.
- Address global concerns rather than local ones. Focus on higher-order concerns and writing patterns. Don't get too bogged down in grammar and punctuation.
- Ask students to verbalize any unclear sentences/thoughts in the paper. Early in the consultation, you might transcribe for them. Later, you can hand over a pencil. Try to shift note-taking from yourself to the writer over the course of the consultation.
- If there are structural problems, ask students to verbalize their theses and then connect main ideas back to those theses (or ideas to each other). Describe where your disconnect or confusion comes from and encourage students to brainstorm about ways to connect or develop ideas with you. Reverse outlining is particularly useful tool for engaging about structure.
- Empathize with common issues like vague pronouns, awkward transitions, and repetitive conclusions. Let students know that you notice these things because you struggle with them in your own writing and continue to watch out for them in your papers.
- Meet students somewhere comfortably between their respective levels and your own. Don't worry whether they can identify gerunds and infinitives; explain rules without all the intimidating jargon.

EMPOWERING

Emphasize students' agency

- If you're asking questions, giving up the pencil/paper, requesting that students read passages to you, and giving them some time to reflect or work on their own (when the flow of students allows for this), your students are probably feeling more confident as their consultations wrap up. During the last 10 minutes of consultations, be extra aware of drawing out and encouraging students' capabilities.

- When you have about five minutes left, offer the writer a choice – “We have a limited amount of time left on this consultation; would you rather focus on x or y?”

Wrap up consultations with reflection

- Remind students of what the consultation has focused on and ask them specific questions about the things they are planning to continue working on. Encourage them to jot down priorities for continuing work and point out specific progress made during the consultation.

- Thank students for coming in and encourage them to return. If they'd like to make an appointment, direct them to a computer they can use to do so.

- Ask if they'd like you to email their professor.

- Ask them to complete our exit survey. Emphasize that it is anonymous, and that it should take less than one minute to complete.

- Guide them to a computer where the exit survey is set up.