

Helping Your Students Make Effective Use of the Writing Centre Find us in 3G11/Appointments at 204.786.9129

As an instructor, you can play a vital role in student success by helping students better understand our writing tutoring services as they prepare for an appointment.

What do we do? We make better writers by giving students a vocabulary and the tools to talk about their writing. Student writers meet with peer tutors who have been trained in tutoring writing, and peer tutors sit down to discuss any concerns a writer has with his/her paper. Tutors focus on “higher-order” concerns first—organization, coherence, argument, evidence—and can also help students with any element of style, grammar, or mechanics.

What don’t we do? Because we make better writers by enabling students to view their own writing with a critical eye (ideally, we want to teach each student to be their own editor), we are not a “fix it” shop where students can drop their papers off for proofreading or editing. However, our tutors are prepared to have explicit conversations about error and grammar at a writer’s request.

Preparation counts. Encourage students to bring their written assignment sheets and notes about any additional instructions you have given during class. Also encourage them to bring any relevant course materials, including textbooks and writing handbooks that you have required them to purchase. Peer tutors often help students with documentation and other mechanics issues by demonstrating how to look up appropriate examples in their course textbooks.

Visit early. Many students think they must bring a written draft of a paper to the Writing Centre, but this is not true. On the contrary, we encourage them to visit during the pre-writing stage to discuss the assignment requirements, brainstorm topic ideas and develop a plan or outline.

Visit often. Writing assistance is especially helpful for students who visit the Writing Centre multiple times at various stages during the creative process. A single visit is often not sufficient time to address everything. The more students visit, the better the writing gets.

It’s *your* writing. Encourage your students to take ownership of their Writing Centre appointments and subsequent revisions. Students are not obligated to use every suggestion made by a peer tutor. The Writing Centre relinquishes control over what students do with their writing after they have visited us. Our goal is to help students make good decisions about their own work.

“I think my teacher said . . .” When students visit the Writing Centre for assistance in revising an essay, encourage them to bring any written feedback they have received from you. It is very helpful for the peer tutor to see exactly what you have commented on so they can assist the student with interpretation and application of the feedback.

“What was that?” Feedback from both instructors and the Writing Centre is open to interpretation. What the peer tutor suggests and what the student hears and internalizes might not

always be congruent. Please be aware of this and encourage students to take notes during their appointment to minimize confusion and produce a tangible point of reference.

Back to you. Our peer tutors are familiar with the general requirements for some courses but not with instructor-specific requirements. They rely on students' understanding of these requirements and might, therefore, need to send the student back to you with specific questions.

Misguided expectations. If students tell you they visited the Writing Centre and did not find their session helpful, it might be useful to ask about their expectations. Sometimes, well-intentioned students ask peer tutors to edit a paper or predict a grade, which our staff are not permitted to do. If the student does not fully understand why these requests cannot be fulfilled, a follow-up conversation with you can provide further clarification.

Feel free, as always, to contact me with questions about writing at h.leppfriesen@uwinnipeg.ca.
Helen Lepp Friesen
Tutoring Centre Coordinator