

Writing Center Valued Practices

Below are valued practices for effective tutoring, identified by University of Central Florida Writing Center peer consultants and adapted by Director Scanlon's work in writing centers. Let's be clear: you cannot, in fact you should not, try to cover all of these in any one appointment. Rather, these are practices that guide our work in the writing center at Illinois Wesleyan. R. Mark Hall's *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work: An Inquiry-Based Approach to Tutor Education* is where these practices come from and is also the book we read in the UNIV 201 course for writing center tutors.¹

1. Greet the writer warmly; learn his, her, their, name; establish rapport with the writer. *Our tutors hope to welcome you to the space every time. We like to be able to see you more than once, too, to really build connections.*
2. Learn assignment requirements or rhetorical situations, including the writer's understanding of the prompt and/or the professor's feedback. *We ask that you bring your prompt with you or paste it into the appointment set-up form when you sign up so we have an idea of what you'll be working on.*
3. Learn about the writer's processes, beliefs, & attitudes toward the writing task. How have they approached it thus far? Do they have any feedback from their professor? peers? Etc? *We don't want to invite you to complain about your professor, but rather to share how you've done in their class in the past. This spot is also a great one in which to talk about your peer review or other in-class work you've done that might connect to your paper.*
4. Set reasonable expectations and negotiate with the writer what to work on and why during the session. *We might not get to everything in a session but our tutors are trained to prioritize higher order concerns that support your paper's overall meaning (things like thesis statements, use of resources, and avoiding plagiarism) over lower order concerns (spelling, grammar, citation format) that don't interfere with your paper's overall meaning as much.*
5. Address writer's learning beyond the specific task. *We'll often engage in discussions about how what you do in one class might be transferable to what you do in other classes.*
6. Ask questions and use directives to engage the writer in active learning. *We'll ask more questions than we'll answer. This method is to avoid being too directive and to*

¹ Available in ebook form from Ames Library [here](#).

avoid writing your paper for you. We want to make sure your voice is the one that comes through, not ours.

7. Address the writer's concerns. *We ask that when you make an appointment you tell us what you want us to focus on. We'll address these concerns along with the issues we notice, discussing all of them and strategies you can use to overcome them to make your paper stronger.*

8. Focus on only a few specific issues to work on in a single consultation. *We won't get to everything in every session (especially if it's only a half-hour session) so we want to make sure to focus on one thing at a time. It's also why we recommend coming multiple times for each assignment.*

9. Prioritize global concerns that interfere with meaning before less significant local errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. *As mentioned above, we prioritize higher order concerns that affect the overall delivery and quality of your paper as compared to smaller concerns that affect only portions of your essay.*

10. If there is a draft, read through a considerable chunk of it in order to set priorities, rather than responding paragraph by paragraph (at the sentence level). *We try not to stop after every sentence to point things out. Rather, we like to look for patterns and discuss them at the whole at the end of your paper.*

11. When addressing sentence-level errors, target selected patterns of repeated problems. Avoid a scattershot approach. *As mentioned above, we look for commonalities in your writing where you may find challenges. We don't try to address every misplaced comma in that first appointment. That's why we recommend you come back more than once.*

12. Create opportunities for writers to demonstrate learning by talking, practicing writing strategies, and problem solving. *We ask that you engage in the writing process with us. Tell us what you notice, too, so we can discuss areas for improvement as well as areas you're excelling in.*

13. Demonstrate active listening. Avoid dominating the conversation. Make effective use of silence. *We will sometimes sit silently or walk away while you think about a particular piece of writing. We hope to give you time to organize your thoughts without making you feel like we're impatiently waiting.*

14. When identifying strengths, be specific. Avoid overly general praise that could be construed as predicting a grade. *We will never provide a grade. Rather, we'll point*

out specific areas where you're achieving strong writing and talk about how you can mirror that style elsewhere in your paper.

15. Offer specific, useful suggestions for revision. *We will provide examples and resources, make sure you understand them, and then discuss how they will improve your writing.*

16. Use, explain, and recommend writing resources, print and online. *Often, we'll recommend style books and the OWL at Purdue. We'll also suggest other tutors who might provide support as well as our amazing Ames librarians. Additionally, we keep a [list of resources](#) in case you need extra help in a variety of ways across campus.*

17. Assist writers to make a plan for work after the consultation. *Often, before you leave, we'll spend time discussing your next steps. We'll provide guidance on where you should redevelop your paper and what you should bring to your next appointment.*

18. Invite the writer to return to the Writing Center; schedule a follow-up consultation. *We want to see you again! Even if it's not for the paper we've previously worked on, we hope you feel welcomed and want to come back.*

19. Use tone and body language to facilitate learning. *Sometimes, we get super into something that you're writing. We'll nod a lot, smile, lean in, etc. Know these gestures are our way of showing interest.*

20. Be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid roles of editor and authority. *We love learning from your writing. It's one of the best parts of being a writing center tutor. So don't worry if we're asking lots of questions; it's because we're interested!*

21. Model strategies to find answers and to solve problems. Be willing to say, "I don't know." Don't pretend expertise. *We aren't experts. Rather, we're peers who like learning. It means we won't always know the answers but we'll model how to find them.*

22. After the consultation, write detailed session notes of work done and recommendations for what to do next as well as a reflection on what you thought of the conference. *We'll share these notes with your professor if you ask it of us. Otherwise, they don't get shared.*