

Illinois Wesleyan University

# Writing Partner Handbook

For Faculty and Writing Partners



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## About this Publication

This booklet describes the Writing Partners program at Illinois Wesleyan University and is written for Writing Partners and faculty who employ them.

## Introduction: Overview and Philosophy

The Illinois Wesleyan University Partner program links a dedicated Writing Center tutor to a specific class that expects extensive writing from students. The class does not have to be flagged as Writing Intensive, but there should be considerable formal writing in the class (excluding essay exams and informal or in-class writing). The idea is simple: the tutor assists the students at any stage of writing for the class assignments and acts as an informal liaison on writing matters between the instructor and the students. The same general rules and philosophy practiced in the IWU Writing Center apply to Partnering: Partners will coach students but not write or proofread papers for students, and Partners will respect the confidentiality of students. Central to our mission is the belief that writing is a process. As such, Writing Partners continually strive to learn new and creative ways of writing and tutoring, while also respecting the individual approaches students and professors employ in their own work.

## The Role of the Writing Partner

### Who gets selected?

Only Writing Center tutors are selected to be Writing Partners, which means they have completed WC200X, Tutoring Writing, the credit-only semester-long training course for writing tutors. Often faculty members who use or want to use Partners request tutors; they may even nominate specific students as potential Writing Center tutors with the plan of asking them to serve as Partners in their classes. At other times current Writing Center tutors may ask faculty if they want a Partner and initiate the

arrangement themselves. Writing Partners have typically, but not always, tutored at the Writing Center before becoming a Writing Partner.

**The Writing Partner Program serves as a great resource on campus for students. As a student in the education department, I soon learned my freshman year that educational studies writing is much different than a research paper. Adapting typical writing to fit the expectations of the Ed Studies Department is difficult for many students. I am a partner with Education 255 Studying Children and Adolescents, which is a writing intensive course required for all Teacher Education Program candidates to take prior to admittance into the program. Throughout this course, students write extensive portraits reflecting their observations and responses to the particular students with whom they work. Having a partner for this course allows students to meet with somebody who not only took the course, but also understands and can help them write appropriately and professionally about their students, which is the purpose of this writing intensive course. The partnering program is a wonderful partnership between a faculty member, a writing center employee, and a class of IWU students.**

**--Jenifer Rank**

## Benefits

The Writing Partner program benefits three groups: faculty, students, and tutors. For faculty, Writing Partners can provide feedback on writing assignments and students' responses to those assignments and improve the quality of both student research and writing. Having a Writing Partner allows faculty to emphasize the importance of good writing and provide support for students to become better writers, including the opportunity to revise with feedback. Faculty gain from talking over assignments and evaluation criteria with the Writing Partner who can offer advice from a student's perspective. For students, tutors help clarify writing assignments, expand research and evidence, and improve the global and local dimensions of their papers. For tutors, Writing Partnerships offer an opportunity to develop a close relationship with faculty, discover more about writing pedagogy, explore their own writing processes, and enhance their resumes.

## Partners and Faculty

Writing Partners are not teachers or graders. They are students who write and communicate well and who are committed to helping their peers become better writers. Faculty should realize that Writing Partners are apprentices in the fields of writing and teaching and that they look to faculty for mentoring and guidance in those areas. At the same time, Writing Partners are aware of that apprenticeship role.

Since Writing Partners have, like all Writing Center tutors, successfully completed WC200X: Tutoring Writing and are certified Level I tutors (by the College Reading and Learning Association), they have been trained in the following skills:

- Basic tutoring principles, including how to structure a tutorial, adopting a counseling or coaching approach, and respecting students' confidentiality, and eschewing value judgments on student papers and faculty assignments and grades
- Techniques for analyzing assignments, finding evidence, refining a topic, crafting a thesis statement, revising structure and argument, identifying and addressing grammar, mechanical and punctuation errors, and delivering proper documentation style
- Strategies for working with ESL and international students

## Collaborating & Communicating

Collaboration is the key to the faculty-Partner relationship. While acknowledging the mentor-apprentice relationship mentioned above, faculty should make their expectations clear to the Writing Partner and negotiate with the Writing Partner how to actualize those expectations. Clear deadlines and schedules are important, as well as regular meetings or other communications, within the limits of the time faculty have available. In other words, having a Writing Partner assigned to a class should not add significantly to a faculty member's workload. For Writing Intensive-flagged classes, a Writing Partner should not serve as a complete substitute for faculty

feedback on rough drafts; the flag description does stipulate that faculty members are expected to respond to student drafts and to include instruction in writing in the course.

It is the responsibility of Writing Partners to email or telephone their assignment faculty member as soon as the Partnership has been established and to meet with their faculty member as soon as the latter's schedule permits.

### The Initial Meeting

In some cases the faculty member and the Writing Partner may not know each other; in other cases the faculty member may have nominated the Writing Partner for a Writing Center tutorial position with the idea that eventually that student would serve as their Writing Partner. The Writing Center Director particularly encourages this latter relationship. At the initial meeting, faculty and Partner

should exchange contact information and schedules; faculty should make certain Partners know when their office hours are held. Faculty should also provide Partners with a syllabus for the course, access to Moodle or other online resources used in the class, and if necessary provide them with texts. In many cases, particularly if the

**I guess I would stress the importance of communication with the professor teaching the class. For me, it was helpful to find out exactly what Dr. Harper wanted his students to get out of the tutorials. He advised me to focus more on grammar and organizational issues, but other professors may be looking for a tutor who is familiar with and can help the student with the actual subject matter. I also thought it was helpful to establish a system for scheduling tutorials. Dr. Harper and I decided that students should give me at least 2 days to look at their papers before meeting with me, as the papers were fairly long. This helped prevent students from pushing papers on me at the last minute. All in all, I would definitely recommend Partnering to other tutors. I believe my tutorials improved over the semester improved because I was able to focus my attention on just this one assignment. This allowed me to figure out the best ways to help the students in this class and to troubleshoot common mistakes in their papers.**

**--Lauren Vorel**

Writing Partner has taken the class earlier from the faculty member, providing texts may be unnecessary or impractical. If need be, the Writing Center may be able to provide some funds for texts needed by the Writing Partner to adequately fulfill his or her responsibilities.

### The Faculty-Partner Guideline Sheet

The following Guidelines, which intentionally appear on separate sheets to make it easier to duplicate for faculty and Writing Partners, provides a checklist of expectations and tasks which can guide the initial meeting between faculty and Writing Partner and structure their semester-long relationship. The Guideline Sheet is appended to the back of this booklet.

For faculty, there are some highly recommended guidelines:

- Students are required to meet with their Writing Partner for every major writing assignment. We have discovered that without this requirement students will not avail themselves of their Partner, which undermines the value of the program.
- Student tutorials will be a clearly-stated element of the semester grade. This recommendation basically reinforces the preceding guideline.
- Faculty should provide the Writing Partner with grading criteria, writing assignments, and the syllabus. Whatever written assignments are given to students should be given to Partners as well.
- Faculty should meet with the Writing Partner before handing out assignments to discuss those assignments and grading criteria. Verbal clarification, as in the classroom, can greatly complement written instructions.
- Faculty can discuss qualities of good writing in your discipline or qualities of good writing in the class. This discussion should ideally take place early in the semester, and will help the Partner generally understand what you value in student writing and will foster the Partner's development as a writer and tutor.
- Faculty should Set aside some class time to introduce the student to the class. That initial face-to-face meeting (it may be only for 5 minutes) is very important for the student-Partner relationship.
- Faculty are asked to complete an end-of-semester evaluation (appended to the end of this booklet) of the Partnering experience and send it to the Writing Center Director.

For Writing Partners, it is highly recommended that:

- Appear in the class at least once, at the beginning of the semester, so students can connect a face with the Partner's name.
- Distribute sign-up sheets for tutorials, or ask faculty to do so. This is more direct than leaving it up to students to call or email.
- Use the Writing Center database to record summaries of each tutorial conducted, and to deliver these written summaries to faculty.
- Meet regularly with faculty (at faculty's discretion) to discuss upcoming assignments, grading criteria, and student performance and response to writing assignments.
- Circulate a brief evaluation to all students about the Partnering experience; the Writing Center Director will share the results of this evaluation with the faculty member and Partner.
- Complete a self-evaluation of the Partnering experience, and deliver it to the Writing Center Director.

### **During the Semester**

Before each assignment, the Writing Partner should contact the professor to discuss any changes or developments in the assignment and make logistical arrangements as needed. Both faculty and Writing Partner should be available for questions about or revisions to the writing assignments as

they unfold. After each writing assignment cycle, the Writing Partner should contact the professor to discuss the results of the assignment or problems that arose.

## Troubleshooting

A number of problems can arise during the Partnering arrangement. Faculty may feel Partners are not emphasizing the element of student writing which the instructor stresses, he or she may not be satisfied with the quality of student writing even after tutorials, the instructor may feel that the Partner is not adequately available for students, or the faculty member may conclude that a Partner is not easily accessible or seeks too many conferences with the faculty member. Writing Partners, on the other hand, may be frustrated when students don't show up for scheduled tutorials or are unprepared for tutorials, may find it hard to schedule appointments with faculty, may conclude that writing assignments are vague but find it difficult to discuss this with the faculty member. In every difficult situation that comes up, the two-step rule applies: first, talk directly and candidly to your counterpart, faculty or Partner; second, ask the Writing Center Director to coordinate the discussion.

## Partners and the Students

The relationship between a Writing Partner and the students in the class is essentially the same as the relationship between a tutor and tutee at the Writing Center. The core philosophy is to guide and assist the student writer, but certainly not to write for the student. Nor should the Partner evaluate the student's work: that's the job of the faculty member.

## Getting Started with the Class

It's always a good idea to meet the class at least once at the beginning of the semester. The Partner should introduce him- or herself and the Writing Partners program in an enthusiastic, concise, and informative manner. An informational handout, with information about the program, conferencing guidelines, paper due dates, and Partner contact information, should be circulated; a sample informational handout is attached. The Partner should also pass around a sheet where students can enter their names, cell phone numbers, and email addresses. If the Partner can come

**This past fall semester, I partnered with Seminar in Professional Nursing with Dr. Susan Swanlund. I found that my tutorials ran more smoothly than tutorials in which students came in for open writing center hours, because I had a much deeper understanding of the prompt, I was aware of some common mistakes that students may commit, and I had a clear idea of the professor's expectations for the assignment. The advice that I could give to students was more specific and consequently more beneficial. I was also able to improve my tutoring techniques, because many problems were reoccurring with each student (i.e. APA in-text citations). Many students could also send me e-mails to follow up with our tutorials or ask minor detail questions that they may have been more reluctant to ask the professor. I'm now partnering again with the same class, and I'm looking forward to improving this semester's writing partnership from the lessons I learned with last semester's class.**

**--Michael Henry**

several times during the semester, especially on the days when assignments are first given, the student-Partner bond will be stronger.

## Conferencing with Writers

When the assignment is given to the students, the Writing Partner should receive a copy of it, and if possible meet briefly with the faculty member to discuss it. If the Partner is free during the class period when the assignment is handed out, that would be the ideal time for the Partner to

**I have found google docs to be very useful in scheduling appointments. If students come during my hours in the center they sign up for an appointment using the book, but I make extra hours when papers are due and students sign up for those online. I share an excel sheet with the class where they can sign up for a time slot. This works well because students can make/change appointments themselves, rather than having a physical sign up sheet go around in class. –Casey Plach**

circulate a sign-up sheet for conferences on drafts.

Partners may find it useful to email all the students with the schedule after they've signed up for tutorials, and to send that email again mid-way through the conferences to minimize no-shows. While Partners are not expected to have students fill out a Session Form (as used in the W766005riting Center), they may find it helpful for record-keeping. Partners should follow the model of the Writing Center: for papers less than five pages, schedule 30 minutes; for papers between five and ten pages, 60 minutes; for papers between ten and fifteen pages, 90 minutes; and for papers over fifteen pages 2 hours; in all cases time is built into the tutorial for the Partner to read the paper. Each tutorial should be

reported in the Writing Center database and emailed to the instructor; students should be informed that the Partner will write a summary of the tutorial and send it to the instructor.

## Commenting on Drafts

The method Partners developed as they worked in the Writing Center and completed the Tutoring Writing course should be followed for Partnering sessions. Generally, it's easiest if Partner read papers at the tutorial, but if the Partner decides to read drafts ahead of conferences and shorten conferences, that is their discretion. Partners (like Writing Center tutors) will probably write down reactions, glosses, and persistent surface errors, but the focus should always be on global issues: thesis, organization, argument, and evidence. Writing Partners are expected to write more extensive end comments or suggestions for revisions; these end comments could be paraphrased or summarized in the message sent to the instructor. A 3-6 item "shopping list" of revision suggestions keeps students focused and makes the task of revision seem more feasible.

## Winding Up

Partners should close tutorials by summarizing what happened and asking students if they agree. The session information and summary should be entered into the Writing Center database and emailed to the faculty member. If the Partner feels the student could use a follow-up tutorial, it should be scheduled as the first tutorial winds down.

## Appendices

### Sample Information Sheet for Students in a Partner Class

#### The IWU Writing Partners Program

##### **What is the Writing Partners Program?**

The Writing Partners Program pairs student peer tutors at the Writing Center with Writing Intensive-flagged and other writing-centered classes. Writing Partners have received the same training that Writing Center tutors receive: a semester-long, noncredit course which has been certified by the College Reading and Learning Association, the group that certifies Writing Center training around the world. Your instructor, recognizing how peer tutoring can improve student writing and enhance your learning experience in this course, has elected to work with a Writing Partner. This means that each of you will meet at least twice with your Writing Partner this semester.

Writing Partners are not teaching assistants; we do not grade papers or create the assignments. That's the instructor's role. We respond to your drafts in tutorial sessions before you turn your papers in to your instructor. This program, and our training as writing tutors, is premised on the belief that all writers, no matter how accomplished, benefit from revising their work and from having serious responses from trained readers. We help writers at all levels, and not just those who need extra help, though we are willing to offer extra help when it's needed. As peer tutors, Writing Partners act as sympathetic readers and coaches, providing informed, constructive criticism. Partners may well not be experts in the subject matter of the course for which they are partnering, and they may not have taken the course themselves. They respond to the text as it engages the assignment, and to the expectations and objectives the instructor has indicated in conference with the Writing Partner.

##### **How will you work with the Writing Partner?**

At the time an assignment is handed out, your Writing Partner will pass out a sign-up sheet for tutorials for a rough draft. You should choose a time that fits into your schedule, but you should allow yourself plenty of time for revisions before the final due date. How this will exactly work, and how papers and drafts will figure into your final paper grade, will be determined and discussed by your instructor. The Writing Partner will assign tutorials based on the length of the assignment (5 pages, 30 minutes; 10 pages, 60 minutes; 15 pages, 90 minutes; over 15 pages 2 hours), but this may vary depending on how your teacher has structured the assignments. Your Writing Partner will read your draft during the tutorial. Your Partner will summarize the tutorial and send that email to your instructor. As you revise, you may accept or reject your Partner's specific suggestions. **HONOR YOUR TUTORIAL APPOINTMENTS WITH YOUR WRITING PARTNER.** If you absolutely must cancel an appointment, let your Writing Partner know well in advance.

Your Writing Partner: [name here]

Email:

Cell phone:

For questions and comments, contact your instructor, your Writing Partner, or Joel Haefner, Writing Center Director, x3756, or [jhaefner@iwu.edu](mailto:jhaefner@iwu.edu)

## Guidelines for Faculty and Writing Partners

### *Illinois Wesleyan University Writing Partners Program*

This document is intended only to set the parameters for the Partnering experience and to help faculty and Partner think about how to structure and administer Partnering in the classroom. An asterisk indicates a highly recommended practice.

#### **Faculty**

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##### ***Student Tutorials***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Students will be required to meet with Partner for every writing assignment\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Students will be required to meet with Partner at least once during the semester
- \_\_\_\_\_ Student tutorials will be a clearly-stated element of the semester grade\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner should inform faculty member of any students who consistently miss tutorials or who appear to be struggling

##### ***Writing Assignments***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Meet with Partner before handing out assignments to discuss assignment and grading criteria\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meet with Partner after Partner has met with students to assess the assignment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provide Partner with written grading criteria, every writing assignment, and syllabus\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meet with Partner to discuss qualities of good writing in your discipline\*

##### ***Class Participation***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Introduce Partner to class early in the semester to the class\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask Partner to co-conduct one or more peer editing sessions during class time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask Partner to conduct one or more group peer editing sessions outside class time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask Partner to present a workshop on a particular writing skill

#### **Writing Partner**

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##### ***Student Tutorials***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Tutorials will be conducted at the Writing Center or another appropriate location agreed upon between Partner and tutee
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will pass around a sign-up sheet for tutorials, or ask faculty to do so\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will keep open tutorial hours reserved for students in this class
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will reschedule missed appointments once with students\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will provide an alphabetical list of students who attended tutorials for each assignment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will send electronic confirmation of each session to the faculty member\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will keep faculty informed orally of poor student behavior/performance during tutorials\*

##### ***Writing Assignments***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will provide written evaluations of writing assignments and grading criteria before distribution or after papers are due
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will provide oral evaluations of writing assignments and grading criteria before distribution or after papers are due during a meeting with faculty\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will summarize orally collective student reaction to and performance on writing assignments\*

##### ***Class Participation***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Partner will attend class to introduce self\*

\_\_\_\_\_ Partner will attend class on days writing assignments are distributed

\_\_\_\_\_ Partner will co-conduct peer editing session(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ Partner will conduct workshop(s) on specific writing skills

### ***Partnering Evaluations***

\_\_\_\_\_ Partner will ask students to complete a 5- to 10-minute end-of-semester evaluation of the Partnering experience, to be done during class time\*

\_\_\_\_\_ Faculty member will receive a summary of these evaluations\*

### **Writing Coordinator**

\_\_\_\_\_ Coordinator will meet once with faculty about 5 weeks after start of semester to discuss Partnering\*

\_\_\_\_\_ Coordinator will serve as consultant-on-demand, to assist with questions about the teaching, assigning, and evaluating of writing\*

\_\_\_\_\_ Coordinator will meet regularly with Partner to discuss the class\*

\_\_\_\_\_ Coordinator will assist Partner in preparing workshops or group peer editing, if need be\*

### **Other Issues**

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Class title: \_\_\_\_\_

Course #: \_\_\_\_\_ Term: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty:

Partner:

## Faculty Evaluation Form

This form will be submitted to the Writing Center Director and may be shared with the Writing Partner.

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Partner's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you evaluate your relationship with your instructor?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please write below any comments about or suggestions for improving that relationship.

How well do you think your Writing Partner understood or interpreted your assignment objectives?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please write below any comments about or suggestions for improving your Partner's understanding of your assignments.

How would you rate your Writing Partner's commitment to and general attitude towards tutoring?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please offer any observations about or suggestions for improving the overall tenor of your Partner's performance.

How would you rate your Writing Partner's management skills (making appointments, staying on schedule, honoring appointments, filing timely reports, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please write below any suggestions for improving or kudos your Partner's performance.

### Student Evaluation Form

How would you rate your Writing Partner's ability to give specific and constructive advice for improving your papers? (Circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

How would you rate your Writing Partner's ability to create a positive and constructive environment during tutorials? (Circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

How well did your Writing Partner address your questions or concerns? (Circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please rate your Writing Partner availability and punctuality for tutorials.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please rate how well your Partner seemed to understand the intent and objectives of the writing assignments.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please rate your overall satisfaction with your Writing Partner (circle one):

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Average	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

Please write below suggestions for improving the Partner's responses to papers:

Please write below suggestions for improving how appointments were made and where/when tutorials were held.

## Partner Evaluation Form

This form will be submitted only to the Writing Center Director.

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you evaluate your relationship with your instructor?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please write below any comments about or suggestions for improving that relationship.

How would you evaluate the engagement of students with tutoring?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior

Please write below any comments about or suggestions for improving student engagement with tutorials and the writing process.

Please write below any suggestions for improving the role of tutor support in the schedule, the assignments, or in the class structure.

Please indicate any ideas/suggestions you might have for improving “housekeeping” details: scheduling appointments, meeting with the instructor, dealing with missed appointments, reporting tutorials, getting textbooks or course materials, meeting places, etc.

How would you rate your overall experience as a Writing Partner for this course?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Average	Strong	Superior