

What Is the Writing Center?

The Writing Center is the place to come in order to get feedback on your writing. Peer consultants—students from a wide spectrum of majors on campus—are trained to read your written work and give you solid responses to questions or concerns that you have pertaining to a particular assignment.

How Does the Writing Center Work?

Students should come to the Writing Center with the professor's expectations, along with specific questions in mind to ask the consultant. For example, the following questions are useful: *Is my thesis precise and assertive? Does my topic sentence direct and focus the material I put into this paragraph? Are my paragraphs coherent—do they hold together naturally? Does my conclusion bring closure to the rest of the paper?* Keep in mind that many students mistakenly think that "If I can just get all the grammar problems corrected at the Writing Center, I'll have a great paper." But writing is more than grammar—much more. Although we can help you with a grammar problem (a surface-level issue), there are other concerns that matter even more, such as whether or not your argument makes sense and is adequately supported (a deep-level issue). **Keep in mind, the Writing Center is not a "fix-it shop" where consultants correct all the problems and make your paper perfect.**

Will the Writing Center Really Help?

The answer to this question depends on whether or not you are willing to work on your writing over time. Too many students wait until the day or night before a paper is due, and then they come to the Writing Center expecting a miracle. Under these circumstances, it is virtually impossible to help a student improve. As you already know, writing involves learned behavior from past writing experiences—good habits and bad habits. To truly improve your writing, you have to learn how to become objective and identify characteristic weaknesses that you have acquired in the past. Research shows that the best way to do this is by getting feedback repeatedly before an assignment is due. If you get into the habit of bringing a draft of each paper to the Writing Center twice before you turn it in, your writing will noticeably improve over the course of an academic year. Good writing takes effort, so try to be intentional about developing deliberate habits as a writer.

What Else Can I Do to Improve My Writing in Each Class?

The place where students most often go wrong is in misunderstanding the assignment *and* the teacher's expectations for student writing, in general. So, always spend time carefully reading each writing assignment to understand exactly what the professor expects of you. Also, find out what general requirements the professor has for writing in her particular discipline; in other words, a biology lab report should be written differently than a philosophy paper. Learn to accommodate to different teachers, different disciplines, and different class requirements for writing. Don't assume that what one teacher desires will be the same for another.

Is There Anything I Can Do to Make the Process of Writing a Paper Easier?

Step #1: Make sure you understand what is expected of you. If you don't have a clear sense of what you are supposed to do, ask a friend in the class or (even better) the professor for clarification.

Step #2: Whenever possible, choose a topic you can get passionate about. Students write better papers when they care about the topic. Find something that you can hate or love, strongly like or dislike.

Step #3: Do some kind of invention. E.M. Forster says, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" Just write rough ideas out on a page, which you can then transform into your first draft.

Step #4: Write your first draft. Without too much concern for grammar or spelling, write your first draft. Don't be a perfectionist! Start by generating complete paragraphs of thought that will be revised later.

Step #5: Revise your introduction, thesis, and paragraphs. Make sure your intro captivates your reader. Be sure that the thesis is restricted, unified, and precise. Sharpen all topic sentences.

Step #6: Write another draft. Rewrite the paper, keeping an eye out for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Bring your paper to the Writing Center for feedback (at this stage or even earlier).

Step #7: Proofread your paper, correct any errors, and turn it in. Have someone else proof your paper; then do minor revisions. Finally, eyeball your text once more before handing it in.