



What Writing Fellows Will and Will Not Do with a Student's Paper

What We Will Do (first five minutes of a session)

Ask discovery questions to identify the best starting point for the student's paper:

- Ask the student preliminary background questions (e.g., instructor's name, course title, due dates, etc.).
- Ask the student for a written assignment sheet—if one is not available, the Writing Fellow will ask the student for course notes or a verbal description of the assignment.
- Ask what stage of the writing process the student is working on—prewriting, first draft, revision, editing, or documentation.
- Ask the student to identify any weaknesses in the paper (e.g. content, thesis, organization, paragraphing, sentence structure, etc.). *While students may not use terms like "thesis," Writing Fellows are trained to recognize how students might describe their own writing problems.*

What We Will Do (20-45 minutes, depending on the length of the session)

Read the entire paper with the student to address high-order concerns (HOCs) or macro issues:

Does the paper

- Follow directions of the assignment.
- Identify a specific purpose and audience.
- Provide a clear thesis (a main idea developed throughout the paper).
- Progress in a clear organized way (grouping similar points under an organization plan controlled by a thesis).
- Develop each idea sufficiently and effectively (using rhetorical approaches—narrative, description, argument, comparison, etc—evidence, and logic to develop the main and supporting ideas with examples and a variety of details).
- Connect paragraphs through the use of transitions and repeated key words.
- Use appropriate language that fits the audience and matches the purpose of the writing.

Check for proper documentation of outside sources of information, such as books and periodicals, if such sources are required by the assignment:

- Ask the student what documentation system he or she is required to use (e.g. MLA, APA, CSE), and make sure the student understands the system.
- Comment on the clarity of separation between what the student's sources say and what the student says in the paper.



- Discuss with the student his or her use of a variety of source notes—summary, paraphrase, direct quote, and graphic.
- Show the student how to “frame” source materials—introduce source material through “signal phrases” (e.g. the author states, John Smith argues)—and complete the source material with parenthetical citations.
- Discuss the differences between “common knowledge” information that does not require attribution or citation and “specific knowledge” information that requires attribution and parenthetical citation.

What We Will Do (if there is time in the session)

Look over the paper with the student for the purpose of “instructional editing” of lower-order concerns (LOCs) or micro errors:

- Identify common writing problems such as fragments, run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, shifts in person, and unclear or awkwardly constructed sentences.
- Focus on a limited number (2 or 3) error types—research shows that most students’ errors occur in patterns (e.g. always confuse the use of apostrophes, misspell homonyms, join sentences with commas, use dependent clauses for sentences, etc.).
- Direct the student to a sentence that contains an example of one of these error types, and have the student read it aloud to see if he or she notices the error.
- Help the student understand the problem, show the student how to consult handbooks or websites to find solutions to the problem, and show the student strategies to avoid the problem in future writing.
- Direct the student to a different part of the paper to identify a reoccurring problem, and have the student attempt to work through the problem/solution without help.
- Suggest the student make another appointment to focus on just this problem if the student continues to struggle with understanding the patterned error.

What We Will Do (last five minutes of the session)

Review the main points of the session and end the session with positive feedback:

- Ask the student to verbally identify two or three writing strengths or weaknesses discussed in the session.
- Ask the student to verbally identify writing strategies the Writing Fellow modeled for the student.
- Ask the student to verbalize how he or she will use these strategies to improve the paper.
- Suggest a follow-up appointment to work on another stage of this paper, a future paper, or writing skills in general.
- Emphasize one writing skill the student does best, and emphasize how that skill can be expanded or applied to other areas of the student’s writing.



What We Will *Not* Do

Proofread a paper (identify and correct each error, item by item)

- Identify errors item by item. Students need to accept ownership of their work and be responsible for their work, errors included.
- Use consultation time to correct individual errors, because there isn't time to look at each word, it is more important to show students "how" to find and correct their individual errors.
- Encourage student dependency on Writing Fellows for identifying and correcting errors.
- Ignore editing errors in a student's paper. If serious editing or proofreading problems exist, Writing Fellows will suggest future appointments to address them and work on strategies for correcting errors.

Suggest writing style changes

- Use a thesaurus to change one or two syllable words to multi-syllable words, as this is almost always an ineffective strategy.
- Suggest specific changes for nouns, verbs, or adjectives to improve the student's writing style (we may, however, ask the student to think of different approaches to word choice).
- Suggest the student rewrite phrases or sentences to suit the Writing Fellow's writing style choices (we may, however, suggest that a paper is too wordy, too informal, lacking in detail, etc.).
- Rewrite sentences or passages for a student (we will, however, encourage students to use a variety of sentence patterns to create an interesting and flowing writing style).
- Write on a student's paper for any reason (revising diction, syntax, etc.), which could compromise a student's ownership of the paper.

Influence the content of the paper

- Suggest that a student add or subtract any specific content in a given paper (we may, however, suggest that more or less development of an idea is needed, or that new ideas should be added to meet length requirements of the assignment).
- Suggest to a student that an instructor "wants" specific ideas or content in a paper (student often incorrectly conclude that writing papers for instructors is formulaic).
- Alter the content of the paper in any way (we will, however, ask questions to determine if the student understands what he or she is writing about and if the issues discussed in the paper have been addressed sufficiently).
- Suggest to a student that the content is correct or incorrect (we will, however, discuss with the student whether or not there is sufficient support for the student's ideas).