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Working

With

the

COWS

A Quick
Introduction

Center for Writing and Speaking (COWS)
Olin 191

Who We Are as the COWS

The staff of the Center for Writing and Speaking is committed to working closely with students in order to meet their writing goals. Our aim is to provide students with a safe and receptive space in which to write, and with the tools they need to approach academic writing with confidence and zeal. We help students at ANY stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to polishing. We are a group of trained peer tutors working together as a community to build a vibrant culture of writing at Whitman College.

Who We Are Not

We are not a proofreading service. Our product in tutoring sessions is the conversation we build with other students around their writing. This is not to say that we cannot help with grammatical and syntactical issues, but that our primary concern is the development of the individual writer rather than the development of an individual paper. We are also a student-centered and student-driven resource. This means we are not in the business of reporting to professors or fulfilling requirements for classes. If professors wish to require consultation with a writing tutor, they should consider hiring a writing fellow to work with their individual classes.

Who We Work With

We work with anyone at any stage of writing. Our goal is to reach students vertically, from their first year to their final year, and horizontally, across all disciplines and needs on campus. Though there are services in place for English Language Learners (ELFS in the LLC), and students with disabilities (ARC), we also serve these students in a collaborative endeavor to become better writers of standard academic English.

Qualities of Successful Tutors

Successful writing tutors…

- Listen well.
- Have fun.
- Are friendly, acknowledging students by name and introducing themselves.
- Let the tutee do the work.
- Are patient and encouraging.
- Provide quiet time and are comfortable in moments of silence.
- Use primarily questioning strategies, rather than answering.
- Read what is at stake for the tutee and respond appropriately.
- Manage their time well.
- Are invested in the COWS and help to keep it a productive and clean space.
- Ask clarifying questions and ask to see the assignment sheet.

Unsuccessful tutors…
- Believe they have all the right answers.
- Jump right into small problems without having read the entire draft for larger problems.
- Do not ask tutees what they want out of the session.
- Talk disparagingly about professors or fellow students.
- Do most of the talking.

Responsibilities in the Center for Writing Tutors

Openers

If you are the first on the schedule, you need to open the door, turn on the lights, make sure the space is tidy and wash dirty cups.

Closers

If you are the last person in the center, you need to tidy up the room, turn off the lights and computers, dump coffee grounds and wash dirty cups, if you have time. A closing checklist hangs by the door in the COWS.

Appointments

Whether you have an appointment or a drop-in consultation you need to do the following: **HELP**

- **H**ello—greet your student and make them comfortable.

- **E**stablish the context—What is the assignment? What does the student need help with? How soon is the assignment due? Prioritize concerns.

- **L**isten and Restate—Try having the student read aloud to you and just listen, or invite them to listen and take notes while you read. Talk about what you hear: "Here is what it seems like you are saying…. " This is the most collaborative part of the session. It is conversation. Resist using your pen.

- **P**lan—The student should leave the appointment with a plan of action that the   two of you have established. Save the last few minutes of the session to recap and set up goals for what to do when they leave the center.

When the COWS is busy, try to end your session ten minutes early. Use that time to fill in the client report form and regroup for the next appointment. It is **okay** to tell the student that you will need the last ten minutes.

Walk-ins

Walk-ins should run very much like appointments, but they may be quicker, depending on how busy you are. Please see page 6 for information on filling out client report forms for walk-ins.

Who Are the Writing Fellows?

Instructors across the curriculum teach many kinds of writing; each understands best the skills and techniques writers need for that instructor's area of inquiry. A professor of French may need to teach composition in French; a professor of chemistry may need to teach the composition of captions for figures in lab reports; a professor of anthropology may need to teach the composition of ethnographies; a professor of theatre may need to teach play summary; a professor focusing on the research paper may need to teach forms of bibliographic reference. The College already offers support for more general instruction in writing through the Writing Center, the First-Year program and course work in Composition. The program for Writing Fellows creates a structure to support writing instruction in discipline-specific writing skills across the curriculum.

What Are the Writing Fellows' Responsibilities?

Where the COWS serves students and is student-driven, Writing Fellows are chosen by and employed by individual professors. We pay them at the same rate as COWS tutors and we offer training opportunities, but their responsibilities are to the professor.

Can You Be a Writing Tutor in the COWS AND a Writing Fellow for a Professor?

YES! They complement each other well. You can also be an ELF (English Language Fellow) for the LLC (Language Learning Center) or a Speaking Tutor for the COWS. You can do all these things! They only build on each other.

Using WCOnline

We use an online scheduling system for **both** appointments and walk-in consultations. The address is www.mywco.com/whitman. It appears as a link on our website at www.whitman.edu/cows. You must use a Whitman email to register in the system.

After you have registered and logged in, you will see this page:

This is the default home page. It is the same page that students see when they visit the scheduling site. Students cannot book appointments in the walk-in slots. That is why they say "Administrators only" in red. As a tutor, you are a basic administrator on the site.
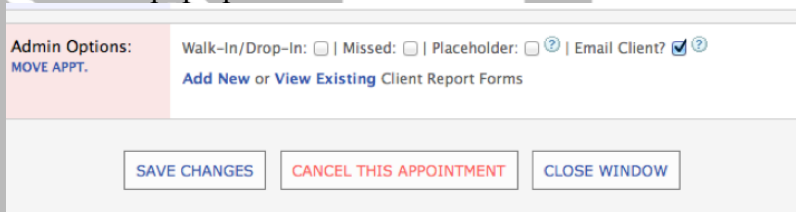
Seeing Appointments

Blue boxes indicate appointments that are booked. Grey boxes indicate appointments that have already passed. Orange boxes indicate YOUR booked appointments. This is how students see it too.

Filling Out a Client Report Form

Every tutor must fill out a client report form on WC online after every student encounter!

1. Click on the blue box for the appointment you have just had.
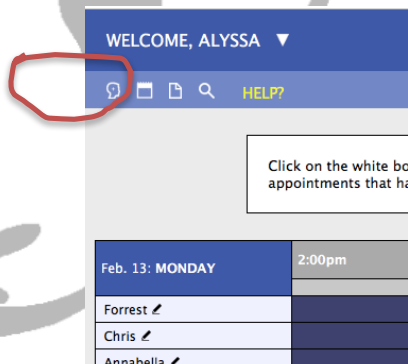2. A box will pop up. The bottom will look like this:

3. Click "Add New."
4. A form will pop up. Answer all the questions. Write whatever makes most sense for the kind of work you did with the student. There are no right or wrong answers.
   At the bottom of the form, you will find the option to email this form to various people: "client," "resource," and "administrator." "Client" is the student who came in. If she would like a reminder of what you talked about during the session, this might be a nice thing to do. "Resource" is the you. "Administrator" is Lydia. Use this option if you have a legitimate concern about the student. There is also an option to add an email address. NEVER EMAIL THE REPORT FORM TO A PROFESSOR UNLESS THE STUDENT ASKS YOU TO. In that case, you can enter this address here. You must have an explicit request from the student! Then save the form and you are done!

Client Report Forms for Walk-In Appointments

1. Click on the walk-in slot in which the student visited you.
2. Make an appointment for that student by choosing their name from the drop-down list at the top. If the student is new, you will need to make them a profile. To do so, click on the small head icon at the top left of the home schedule screen.
3. Follow steps 1-4 above.

Why Bother Filling Out Client Report Forms?

Client report forms help us communicate with each other: tutors with other tutors, tutors with tutees, and tutors with Lydia. The forms also help track common problems that arise in appointments, which classes bring students to the COWS and what class levels tend to frequent the COWS. The client report forms for walk-ins indicate when the COWS is busy and can help influence scheduling decisions.

What Else Does the COWS Do?

- Workshops

- Thesis Boot Camps—structured time with catered lunch for seniors to work on thesis writing.

- Open Houses

- Open Writing Hours

- Classrooms visits

- Faculty Writing Hours

- Speaking tutoring appointments

More

Please visit the cows website at https://www.whitman.edu/academics/center-for-writing-and-speaking for more information.