English Department Writing Center

A Guide for Tutors
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An Overview of the Teaching-Learning Center and the Tutoring Process

Welcome to the Teaching-Learning Center at Palomar Community College. We provide Palomar students with tutoring at all stages of the writing process: brainstorming, drafting, thesis crafting, revising and editing. This center assists students through basic grammar and punctuation instruction as well as advancing their abilities to analyze and evaluate their ideas and texts using well-written prose. The main purpose of trained tutors is to assist students in becoming familiar with the varied writing demands of the community college. The center is not an editing service, so students should not expect tutors to copy edit their paper. Instead, it functions as a learning resource, or community, that seeks to assist writers in the development and improvement of problem-solving writing strategies and analytic abilities. As tutors, we work to emphasize all aspects of the writing process—down to the intricacies of syntax. We encourage students to consider their writing as an ongoing project, subject to various levels of revision necessary to produce a finished product and, more importantly, as a process which allows writers to develop their ability to generate insightful ideas and effective critical analysis. The focus on writing as a process, rather than merely as an “end” product, generates better writing and more competent, productive students.

The center also includes a computer lab and resource area available to all students, including tutors. Various grammar and writing handbooks are available. We encourage you to become familiar with the resources available (including the links on this center’s website), some of which you may find helpful during your tutorial sessions and some of which you might encourage students to use on their own in order to facilitate their writing ability.

The Teaching-Learning Center seeks to maintain a positive, friendly, and professional environment for all students. This handbook was designed to provide information about what is expected from you as a writing tutor in this center at Palomar College. While the primary goal of this center is to provide students with quality, helpful assistance and tools they can take and build upon as their academic careers progress, it is also important tutors have a satisfying and enriching experience where they can grow as professionals and enjoy the experience.
Tutoring Guidelines

Here is an overview; key items will be expanded in the following pages.

Before the session

- Have resources for you and the student
- Know strengths of various tutors (grammar, research, . . .)

At the start

- Sit next to the student
- Establish a relationship
- Ask what the student hopes to accomplish
- Ask for the assignment given by the teacher

During the session

- Let the student do the work
- Ask questions instead of telling the student what to do
- Prioritize—start with the big problems (development, organization, . . .) and save smaller focus for later (sentence, words, tone, . . .)
- Demonstrate once and let the student do the rest
- Provide options
- Build confidence
- Suggest the student use another tutor if you feel there is a personality clash
- Admit it if you don’t know something—look it up later
- Read paper aloud for the student to hear errors/to see where it’s confusing

At the end

- Wrap up, review
- Refer the student to other places if appropriate (DRC, ESL, . . .)
- Share resource information
- Encourage students to read more
- Encourage the student to bring back the essay with teacher comments

For the tutor

- Don’t give out home phone or email
- Don’t meet students outside of writing center
- Don’t release personal information to students
- Encourage the student to use the library/librarians
- Keep accurate track of your time sheet/hours
- Let the director know of any confusing assignments
Further Details on the Guidelines

Before the session:

- Help students make appointments or inform them that the Teaching-Learning Center Computer Technician can assist them. Also, show students the resources that are available to them.

It is important that students feel comfortable and feel welcomed by the people working here. If the staff makes a collective effort to encourage students to make appointments and assists them in doing so, students will be more likely to make appointments. Students should be encouraged to make appointments ahead of time since the center becomes progressively busier as the semester continues. Also, students need to log in and out during each of their visits to the center as well as sign in with the tutor before each session. This center must document student visits to ensure continued departmental funding for its operation. This record will not affect a student’s individual academic record or grades.

At the start:

- Make sure you introduce yourself.

It is the tutor’s responsibility to make sure each student feels at ease. If someone happens to be very shy, try to draw the student out a bit before jumping into a session. Keep in mind students who have not visited the center before may feel intimidated or unclear about what to expect.

- Inquire about the purpose of the visit and ask to see the prompt or assignment and any explanatory materials the student may have.

The session will go more smoothly for you and be more productive for the student if it involves specific objectives outlined at the beginning of the session. If the student does not have any materials, do your best to identify the session’s objectives: discuss possible ideas, brainstorm, etc. You may suggest that students bring their assignments or prompts with them to future sessions. You can remind students that you can be of more assistance if you know the exact nature of their assignment. Because first year students are often unfamiliar with the demands of college-level writing and the degree of organization required to achieve their goals, part of a tutor’s job is to help them learn to navigate the world of college.

- Tell the student not to expect too much.

From the beginning of the session, the student should know that one meeting with a tutor will not bring about a perfect paper, nor will it guarantee an “A” grade.
During the session:

- Make sure the student is doing the writing.
Keep the student involved by having him or her do most of the writing as you go over the paper together. It is too easy for the student to let you do the work. Keep the student an active participant in the process.

- Ask a lot of questions, but try to keep them open-ended.
A tutor’s goal is to ask the kinds of questions that get students thinking and to boost their analytic skills. Whether you are helping a student craft a thesis, correct grammar, or generate vivid poetic imagery, a tutor’s job is to help, not do. For example, if a student comes in to work on a thesis and has no idea where to begin, you might ask the student to articulate his or her main argument and tell you why it is significant. In addition, you may ask a student what examples he or she has to support a position. If a student brings in a thesis that is clearly a summary statement, you may help the student see the difference between a blanket statement and an argument by asking for the student’s individual or particular position on the topic.

While there will be students simply looking for a quick fix, most students you will encounter need just a little support and guidance while exploring different possibilities and positions. Some students may try to manipulate sessions to varying degrees. Always remember to be firm but kind; the session is the student’s session, but a tutor must maintain control. Use your own best judgment. The students that come into the Teaching-Learning Center have varying needs, hopes, and abilities. Sometimes a more directive approach helps—don’t be afraid to step in and offer concrete advice on how to construct a generic thesis, improve a weak thesis, or to show a student how to correct grammar errors or identify patterns of errors. Some developmental students may need portions of their papers edited because they have such a difficult time with English. This extra guidance can help them better learn the proper rules and uses of grammar.

Sometimes a tutor must perform a small amount of “doing” in order to help a student move forward. Please ask other tutors or supervisors if you have questions regarding your methods. For the most part, if you feel you have crossed a line, you probably have. In other words, if you feel you are doing all the work, there is nothing stopping you from shifting the direction of the session by using another tutoring strategy to increase the level of student participation. However, please remember that every tutoring session is an opportunity to build on your collection of instructional strategies and serves as a valuable experience in which you can learn yourself by interacting with students and their writing.

- Prioritize your time.
As someone said, “Don’t major in the minors.” Since you have limited time, focus on the biggest problems first (lack of thesis, development, organization, etc.). If there is enough time, you can cover the smaller areas of revision (the sentence, diction, tone, etc.).
• Do not “proofread” entire papers or assignments, but rather use the session as an opportunity for instruction.

Each tutoring session is only 20-30 minutes. Tutors don’t have enough time to read through entire papers unless they are fairly short. Instead, ask a student for a specific area or problem he or she would like to work on. Remember that students may not always be familiar with the proper terminology or know how to ask for what they need. For example, some students may simply ask you to check their grammar when they may really want you to look over the organization or development of their ideas. There is always room for improvement. If a student asks you for help with grammar or to “edit” his or her essay, remember that a tutor’s job is to instruct, not correct. Your primary goal is to help students identify patterns of errors they may be making and learn how to locate those errors themselves. You might try working on a paragraph or two. Have the student read one section of his or her paper aloud and then go back and work through the errors in that section. You can suggest students go through the rest of the paper and locate additional errors on their own using a similar technique. If you finish one task, ask the student if he or she would like to work on something else such as the conclusion, thesis, or organization. Overall, make sure the student is actively involved. Avoid silent sessions where you read their essays as the students sit by shuffling through their paper work or staring off into space. Such sessions only reinforce bad habits and do little to help the students gain the skills and knowledge they need to work independently. The center does not wish to have a reputation as a quick-fix or editing center.

• Know how to address papers with instructor comments on them.

Students may want help in interpreting instructor comments. Tutors should avoid trying to explain what the instructor is thinking. Instead, help students who are having trouble understanding the words or reading the handwriting.

• Encourage whenever possible.

Students are very unsure of themselves and their writing abilities. Part of your job is to encourage them, pointing out successful parts of the paper.

• If a student asks a question you can not answer, do not hesitate to ask another tutor or the Center Technician to look it up in a reference guide or on-line.

Of course, tutors don’t know everything. No one does. If you can’t offer a student an answer, tell the student that you will find out the answer and will get back to him or her, but move along with the session. You can also investigate with your student by accessing the appropriate resources at the time he or she asks the question. If you handle the situation calmly, rather than getting frustrated or upset, a student is likely to feel at ease in the situation as well. These moments allow tutors to become more familiar with various writing handbooks, on-line writing resources, dictionaries, and resources. Also, this learning opportunity provides a wonderful interactive model for students by showing them how to access the many helpful resources that they may normally shy away from.
At the end:

- Always review what was covered. It’s a good idea to make the student repeat back to you what was covered during the session to see if it has made an impression on him or her.
- Encourage further action by the students. If appropriate, refer the students to the English as a Second Language Department or Disability Resource Center staff. Let them know of books and online resources that can strengthen their writing abilities. Remind them that reading will help their writing abilities by enlarging their vocabulary, showing them sentence and paragraph structure, as well as giving them more ideas to write about.
- When a session is finished, ask the student if he or she has any questions and thank him or her for coming in.

Even if a session did not seem particularly productive or the student seemed unreceptive, it is always common courtesy to thank a student for coming into the center. Often, tutors might not fully realize how much they actually contribute to students. As tutors, we never quite know what outside problems or concerns students may bring with them into a session. Regardless, we do our jobs in the most professional manner possible and remember that our primary function is to serve students.

Particular Problems:

- Please keep your opinions about the nature of writing assignments, grades, program requirements, and instructors to yourself. It is not a tutor’s place to critique or judge course assignments or course curricula. Similarly, don’t tell a student whether you think a grade is fair, an instructor is tough, the requirements are too stringent, or you think the paper deserves an “A” rather than the “C” the instructor gave it. These may be the only situations where it does not matter what you think—and telling a student your opinion can produce a variety of difficulties between students and their instructors. If a student asks you whether or not you think he or she deserves an “A” on a paper or tries to coerce you into agreeing that the assignment is indeed stupid or that the instructor is indeed mean, steer the conversation elsewhere by gently reminding the student that it is not your place to comment.
- Do not contradict an instructor’s comments. Advise students to see their instructors if they are unclear about their instructor’s comments or don’t fully understand the nature of an assignment. Some prompts are more specific than others. If you are unclear about the written prompt or students are unclear about the assignment, suggest that they take the time to clarify the assignment with their instructor. However, please remember that part of your job as a tutor is to help students understand what is asked of them.
- Keep in mind the problem of plagiarism—the use of others’ ideas as your own.
If you suspect plagiarism, ask leading questions, but never accuse a student directly. Ask the student to explain what he or she means by specific statements, summarize the assignment as a whole, explain the thesis, or explain why he or she chose a specific word, etc. If the student has difficulty answering any of these questions about his or her work, you might suggest that the student “revise.” Often a shift in voice or tone that differs from the student’s can mark borrowed words. Sometimes, students may not even be aware that they have committed plagiarism until a reader questions them about their work. Please keep this in mind when you are confronting a possible case of plagiarism. Other than this recourse, as tutors we can hope that instructors, who are usually more familiar with an individual student’s writing, will catch it.

- Be prepared in case you encounter a negative student.

Please remind students that you are present to work on their writing and not to make judgments about the role of your colleagues or the college’s writing instructors. Gently remind the students that you are not at liberty to discuss your peers or writing instructors. If they have a problem, let them know that they can either talk with the Director of the Teaching-Learning Center or the technician. Being diplomatic does not require that you engage in any negative conversation or agree with a student’s opinion.

- Keep in mind you are not a psychologist.

Some students may arrive at the center wanting to talk about problems not relating to writing. Although we all have a great deal going on in our lives, the role of tutor is to assist students in navigating their writing processes. If students arrive at a session and want to discuss personal problems or other difficulties they may be having, try to be sympathetic but attempt to direct their focus to the writing task they came to work on. If they are unable to focus, you might suggest that they reschedule their appointment for a better time when they can concentrate on their assignment. Furthermore, you may refer them to the appropriate student services where they may receive psychological or academic counseling. You can be supportive without compromising your position and responsibilities as a tutor.

- Avoid asking students overly personal questions.

While creating a friendly rapport with students will often help put them at ease about sharing their writing with you, overly personal questions may have the opposite effect. Use your own judgment. Certain questions such as marital status, personal mannerisms, or personal appearance may be inappropriate in a professional environment. If you are unsure about what is or isn’t appropriate here, lean to the conservative side. Similarly, if a student should ask you an inappropriate question, direct questions to the student’s writing.

- Use good judgment while carrying on conversations in the Teaching-Learning Center.

While you are free to converse in this center, remember many students are working on their writing, so please keep the volume level of your conversations down and make sure they are appropriate for a “public” audience. To maintain a professional environment, use good judgment as to the appropriate subject matter of your conversations here.
• Treat everyone with respect.

Everyone that comes into this center deserves to be treated with the same respect that you do. This includes fellow tutors, computer technicians, receptionists, supervisors, and students. We all have to share the same space, and treating each other with respect will help ensure a professional environment is maintained. If you have an issue with a colleague or student, use a respectful tone when addressing your source of conflict. Most problems are a result of simple miscommunications or misconceptions that can be cleared up easily with patience and understanding. If you are unable to work out any conflicts, consider respectfully taking your concerns to a supervisor or the director. There is no reason to address individuals disrespectfully.

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The Paragraph

The basic unit of writing in English is the sentence. If you put several related sentences together on a common topic, you have created a paragraph. Academic writing requires several important parts to a paragraph -- the topic sentence, sufficient support/development, and a concluding sentence.

The Topic Sentence

The topic sentence does two things for the paragraph. It introduces the topic and tells what direction the paragraph is going to take when it discusses the topic. For example, the writer may decide to tell the reader about a shopping experience at the local mall. He or she now has a topic to discuss -- "I went shopping yesterday at North County Fair." But this is not a good topic sentence because it does not yet tell the reader what point the writer is trying to make. The reader has no idea of whether the experience was good or bad, whether it involves some sort of surprise, whether it was far more expensive than the writer anticipated, or whether the writer found something he or she had always been looking for.

The following would be better topic sentences for this idea:
1. "I had a great time shopping at North County Fair yesterday."
2. "When I went shopping yesterday, I couldn't believe how much the owners changed the bookstore in North County Fair"  
3. "I spent much more than I planned when I went shopping yesterday at North County Fair."
4. "I finally found the perfect gift for my brother when I went shopping yesterday at North County Fair."

The topic sentence also needs to be very focused. It should be specific enough to be explained in one page or less. The following would be ineffective topic sentences: "My family is made up of a lot of crazy people." "I have had many adventures with my car over the years." "High school was great fun for me."

Which of the following are good topic sentences for a paragraph?
1. My mom had a unique way of waking me up when I was in high school.
2. I watched two hours of television yesterday.
3. Palomar College has a new student union.
4. I have a lot of bad habits.
5. The San Diego Padres have a good general manager.
Support/Development

It is not enough to simply make a claim when someone writes a topic sentence. He or she must then support the statement by providing enough development so the reader will believe the writer.

The following are methods of support useful for a paragraph: stories, facts, examples, statements by others, descriptions.

What kind of support would be useful in the following topic sentences?
1. In the last week I have become very frustrated with my car.
2. The new computer game I just bought, Kill Them All, has amazing graphics.
3. The parking situation at Palomar College has been terrible this semester.
4. My professor for art history is excellent.
5. There is one job around the house that I try to avoid doing.

The Concluding Sentence

The final sentence of a paragraph should wrap up the idea presented in the entire paragraph. Consider topic sentence # 1 in the previous section.

The writer could end by saying any of the following:
1. "As far as my car goes, this has been a hard week for me."
2. "It's no wonder that I would like to get rid of my car after what I experienced this week with it."
3. "After what I went through this week, I wish I could push my car off a cliff."
The Essay

The essay allows the writer to discuss a more involved and lengthy topic than he or she could in a single paragraph. For example, instead of describing one shopping trip, the writer could discuss his or her advice for the best places to shop. Other lengthy topics might include the following -- an evaluation of one popular computer game, a favorite vacation spot, living with a brother or a sister, plans for life after college, an argument why one particular candidate should be elected President of the United States.

The essay has three major parts -- the introductory paragraph, several body paragraphs, a concluding paragraph.

Introductory Paragraph

The first paragraph gives the writer the chance to introduce the topic and make a claim about the topic. Somewhere between four and seven sentences can be used to introduce the topic. The last sentence of the paragraph should be the thesis, the point which the paper is trying to make. The writer can use several methods to introduce the topic: a story, a funnel, a good question, a quotation, or a startling statement. The thesis sentence should be like a good topic sentence, but it will state the topic and give a direction to the whole paper.

Body Paragraphs

These are the paragraphs in which the writer will attempt to prove what he or she said in the thesis statement. These paragraphs should have all the characteristics mentioned above regarding single paragraphs. In addition, the writer should put the body paragraphs in the best order possible -- according to space/geography, time, or importance. Finally, at the beginning of each body paragraph the author should use transitions appropriate to the author’s method of organization.

Concluding Paragraph

The final paragraph does not introduce anything new to the paper. This is the time for the writer to wrap up what has been said in the body paragraphs. Besides wrapping up the topic, the writer may offer advice or look to the future.
**Parts of Speech**

1. **Noun** -- person, place, thing, idea  
   Ex. -- bird, book, love, respect, San Diego, attorney, democracy

2. **Pronoun** -- replacement for a noun  
   Ex. -- I/me, it, you, he/him, she/her, we/us, they/them

3. **Verb** -- action of a sentence, completers/helpers, or linking words  
   Ex. (actions)—drive, look, argue, study  
   Ex. (completers/helpers)—will, is, was, might, could, should  
   Ex. (linking words) – am, is, are, was, were, has, being, be, been

4. **Adverb**—describes the verb, an adjective, or another adverb  
   Ex.—usually, sometimes, often, not, really, rarely, occasionally

5. **Adjective**-- describes a noun  
   Ex. -- bright, heavy, beautiful, black, small, noisy

6. **Preposition** -- a word placed before a noun or pronoun to form a phrase modifying another word in the sentence  
   Ex. -- about, above, across, after, around, at, before, between, by, down, during, from, in, near, of, off, on, over, through, to, near, until, with

7. **Conjunction** -- a word that joins other words, phrases, or clauses together; most common are the coordinating conjunctions  
   Ex. -- and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet (BOYSFAN)
Run-on Sentences

The sentence is the basic means of communication, so it is important to know when one sentence stops and another one starts. Each sentence has a topic and something said about the topic, expressing a complete idea with at least one subject and verb. We need to distinguish between the starts and stops of each sentence to clarify what we are saying. This sentence is hard to read I stop and start it without warning, I introduce new topics like kangaroos and never tell you when I want to talk about something else like computers they are important to us every day I use mine in my office, my son uses his at his apartment.

There are two kinds of run-on sentences: the fused sentence and the comma splice.

A. Fused sentence

Most writers do not create fused sentences, but it is good to know what they look like. A fused sentence contains two separate sentences jammed together with no punctuation or conjunction separating them. One might look like this: "I am glad I bought this car it runs well and is dependable."

B. Comma splice

Comma splices are very common. They occur when two sentences are joined by a comma by itself. Here is one example: "He went to the beach each day after school, then he hung out with his friends for hours before he went home."

Ways to fix run-on sentences

1. Separate the two sentences with a period.
2. Use a semicolon between the two sentences.
3. Use a conjunction between the two sentences plus a comma before the conjunction.

Fragments

Another common sentence problem is the fragment, which is only part of a sentence that the writer has created. It does not express a complete idea.

The following contain fragments:
1. She lectured her class. And tried to get them ready for the test.
2. Sue rode her mountain bike up the hill. Pedaling furiously.
3. Although he did not have much time. Bill started working on his car.
4. Mike yelled at his brother. Because he was late for the movie.
5. He decided to buy the new BMW. Which cost $40,000.
Punctuation

Comma uses --
1. In a compound sentence ("He came home early in the afternoon, but she was not there.")
2. To separate items in a list ("He took batteries, radios, tents, and spare gasoline.")
3. To separate any words at the beginning of the sentence that are not the subject ("Alone and dejected, she tore up the letter.")
4. To separate adjective clauses if they are not needed to understand the sentence ("He wanted to see the Mona Lisa, which was in the Louvre Museum.")
5. In front of a direct quotation made of a complete sentence (He said, "I quit.")
6. For dates and addresses (700 West 6th Street, Escondido, California)
7. To set off appositives ("Andrea, the student class president, showed up late to class.")
8. To set off all transitions ("Jared was, therefore, asked to fix the computer.")

Semicolon use --
1. To separate a compound sentence that has no conjunction ("The car crashed into the tree; the noise was terrible.")

Colon use --
1. At the end of the sentence (main clause) and in front of a list ("He loved many things about her: her smile, her eyes, her brand new Nissan Altima.")

Apostrophe uses --
1. For possessive nouns (Mike's vacation, the women's church group)
2. Contractions (it's, who's, there's, can't)

Quotation marks --
1. Direct quotations (She said, “I will go.”)

Capitalization --
1. Proper nouns (Mark Twain, Palomar College)
2. Names of particular courses and all languages (Math 50, Spanish)
3. The first, last, and all major words in titles and subtitles of books, articles, and songs (North County Times, Moby Dick, The Merchant of Venice, “The Fog and the Rain”)

Titles
1. Underline major works; use quotation marks for smaller works within major ones (Time, "The Raven," a CD called Limited Edition, a song called "Castanet Dance")
Plagiarism

Most students realize that plagiarism occurs when they copy work from another source and pretend it is their own without giving any credit. But they may not know that they can be accused of plagiarism even if they give credit to their source. Here are basic ways people plagiarize:

1. Their writing contains words or ideas from a source they give no credit to. This is the type of plagiarism most students have been told about.

2. Their writing gives credit to a source, but their passage follows the author’s style and word choice too closely. This is much more common and harder to prevent.

Here is an example of a student’s plagiarism even with credit given.

1. His original source:
   “A characteristic of the symbol is its innate power. The symbol possesses a necessary character. It cannot be exchanged. On the other hand, a sign is impotent in itself and can be exchanged at will.”

2. His research paper, referring to his original source (no quotation marks used; credit is given in the parenthetical reference):
   The basic characteristic of the symbol is its innate power. A symbol possesses a necessary characteristic. It cannot be exchanged. A sign, on the contrary, is impotent and can be exchanged at will (Tillich 412).

Even famous professional authors can get in trouble here. Stephen Ambrose, a well-known historian, got caught.

1. His original source:
   “No amount of practice could have prepared them for what they encountered. B-24s, glittering like mica, were popping up out of the clouds all over the sky.”

2. Ambrose’s The Wild Blue (2001). (no quotation marks used; it was given credit as a footnote):
   No amount of practice could have prepared the pilot and crew for what they encountered –B-24s, glittering like mica, were popping up out of the clouds over here, over there, everywhere.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

1. Give credit for all information that is not common knowledge.
2. Make sure your summaries and paraphrases are in your own words and style.
3. Do not copy text material from the Internet and paste it into your paper without quotation marks and citation.