



Santa Rosa Junior College  
Handbook for Writing Tutors:  
English and ESL



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## Mission & Goals

In Fall of 2011 the ESL Learning Center merged with the Tutorial Centers and English Writing Centers to provide tutoring support to SRJC students working on writing assignments regardless of academic level, first language or discipline. The foundational philosophy in tutoring writing is to help students become successful and confident academic writers; therefore, the essay or assignment draft is a tool, the means by which readers (tutors) and writers (students) can open up a dialogue about the views, experiences, ideas, and skills represented in the students' writing.

The writer's goals and interests determine the direction any session will take; the reader's role is to assist as the writer explores his or her ideas and options. The ultimate goal is for students to apply the skills, strategies, and knowledge learned in tutorial sessions so that they can become independent writers. The readers on staff at all the Centers work to create collaborative, supportive, intellectually-stimulating environments, where they share their joy and enthusiasm for learning and encourage students in achieving academic success.

This handbook, which is an evolving document and will be updated periodically, is also available online at

- College Skills/Tutorial Center: [http://online.santarosa.edu/presentation/page/\\$21591](http://online.santarosa.edu/presentation/page/$21591)
- ESL Department: <http://online.santarosa.edu/presentation/?3048>
- English Writing Center: [http://www.santarosa.edu/english/writing\\_center.html](http://www.santarosa.edu/english/writing_center.html)

## Writing Tutorial Services – Locations & Hours\*

Santa Rosa and Petaluma Tutorial Centers: <http://online.santarosa.edu/presentation/page/?21591>

Santa Rosa and Petaluma English Writing Centers:  
[http://www.santarosa.edu/english/wc\\_sr.html](http://www.santarosa.edu/english/wc_sr.html)

\*Please note: ESL students are welcome at any of the centers at all times; however, although hours vary from semester to semester, ESL-trained instructional assistants and tutors are generally available at the Santa Rosa Tutorial Center at the following times:

Monday – Thursday	8:30am-2:00pm 5:00pm-7:00pm
Friday	9:00am-12:00pm

## Tutoring Writing: Fundamental Theory & Practice

When sitting down to work with a student who wants help with an essay, it's important to remember the underlying philosophy in tutoring writing: to help the student in becoming a more confident, knowledgeable writer – not to simply get a better grade. While students will typically focus on turning their drafts into “A” papers, the tutorial staff defines a successful session as one in which a student has learned a new strategy, rule, or insight into their own thinking and writing. The following principles will help guide you in your work with student writers and will help keep you grounded in the basic philosophies and methods that are widely accepted as best practices in tutoring writing.

1. **Collaborate with the student to establish goals of the session.** The student may not know what he needs help with; a typical default answer is “grammar and punctuation.” Ask questions to discover what the assignment is (ask to see the directions, if he has them), what the student’s academic level is, and when the essay is due. Encourage the student to think about what he is most concerned about with the paper and what issues have been most difficult for him in the past.
2. **Ask questions to determine where the student is in the Writing Process.** If the student isn’t aware of the Writing Process, here’s a general overview to share with the students:
  - a. Prewriting – Thinking about what to write about. Students at this stage may be having trouble understanding the directions or may feel overwhelmed by the task.
  - b. Writing – Creating the first draft. Students at this stage may be looking for validation that they are “on the right track.” They often lack confidence and, very often, just need some encouragement.
  - c. Revising & Editing – Making substantive and surface changes to the paper, usually in multiple drafts. Students are usually more willing to spend time the surface changes, such as editing and proofreading, rather than on the more substantive changes, such as idea development and reorganization. Ideally, students will follow the revision process as outlined below:
    - Global revision: making changes to the larger, substantive ideas and structure. These **Higher Order Concerns (HOCs)** include thesis, content, organization, structure, and development.
    - Sentence-level revision: making changes to individual sentences to clarify meaning.
    - Editing: correcting surface level errors. These **Lower Order Concerns (LOCs)** include errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling.
    - Proofreading: final checking to correct any typographical errors, missing words, or other mistakes
3. **When possible, address global revisions (HOCs) first.** HOCs are indicators of a student’s critical thinking and writing skills, so discussions about HOCs can help the student develop in these areas. It’s easy to focus on LOCs because they are easy to

correct, but remember that our job is to help the student develop as a writer, not to produce a better paper. (Of course, we hope the latter will happen naturally as a result of the former!)

4. **Ask questions, show interest, and be an active listener.** The more the student can talk about his ideas, the better he'll understand them. A good practice is to let the student do most of the talking in a session; ask provocative questions that will guide the student to discovery rather than telling him what needs to be changed.
5. **Let the student control the paper.** Tutoring sessions are a great opportunity for students to gain a sense of ownership – of their writing, of their ideas, and of their education. Put the paper in front of the student. Let the student take notes on your discussion rather than writing the comments yourself. When you give up control, the student gains a greater sense of authority, developing his academic identity.
6. **Teach editing & proofreading – don't edit and proofread.** As you read through the paper, rather than marking every error (which is overwhelming to the student and creates unrealistic expectations), look for *patterns of errors* that you have time to reasonably teach. The student will remember more from a 20-minute mini-lesson on how to use apostrophes than from correcting errors that have been marked on a paper.
7. **Be realistic with what can be accomplished in the time you have.** This rule can be particularly hard to follow when the student comes in, frantic for help, and the essay is due in one hour! Reassure the student that you can help, but also remind the student that you can help *more* next time if she comes in earlier. Pay close attention to the student's level, learning style, and attitude to gauge how much work the student can reasonably accomplish.
8. **Always support the instructor who gave the assignment to the student.** Don't criticize the assignment, the instructor's comments, or especially the instructor's grading. Your role is to help the student develop as a writer. Don't fall prey to the temptation of answering, "What grade would you give my essay?" Professionalism and professional courtesy require that we respect the work of our colleagues. If the student has questions about the assignment or the instructor's grading, refer the student back to the instructor.

## **Tutoring Writing: Working with Writers with Basic Reading & Writing Skills**

Many students entering the college are placed into basic skills courses in the College Skills, ESL, and English departments. These students are variously categorized as basic skills, developing, developmental, or remedial readers and writers. Tutoring these developing writers employs all of the fundamentals of good tutoring. In addition, the following guidelines will help to refine the usual strategies and approaches to increase success with this student population.

1. **Recognize the importance of student “affect.”** Developing writers usually have very low confidence in themselves both as writers and more generally as students. It’s important to be realistic and honest with feedback, but also remember that these students can misinterpret criticism as evidence of an inability to learn. Be sure to point out what the student is doing well and build on that strength. Helping a student to gain confidence can be very powerful in increasing motivation and success.
2. **Focus on one or two manageable tasks or writing issues.** Similar to ESL students, developing writers are also developing cognitive skills and thus have limited cognitive resources. They can be easily overwhelmed and frustrated when faced with too many writing issues or tasks. Because developing writers generally have low self-confidence, this overwhelming feeling can be particularly detrimental to their success in the class and in college. Focus on just one or two aspects of the paper to discuss that the student feels capable of managing.
3. **Avoid jargon.** While vocabulary-building is an important aspect to working with developing writers, don’t overwhelm a student with too much jargon. It’s less important that a student remember to use a comma with a coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses, and more important that a student can recognize those situations in his own writing.
4. **As much as possible, prioritize the Higher Order Concerns over the Lower Order Concerns (LOCs).** Because developing writers are unfamiliar with the Writing Process, they are especially likely to simply ask for “help with grammar” in a tutoring session because they assume good writing means having good grammar. Be sure to ask questions to get a clear picture of the student’s writing context: when is the assignment due, how many drafts has the student written, what tasks has he already worked on in the paper. If the student has only a little time to work or has already completed multiple drafts and wants to focus on LOCs, then discuss *patterns* of grammatical or mechanical errors that you notice rather than marking and naming every error.
5. **Ask questions – often!** Many developing writers are uncomfortable or embarrassed about getting help, so they’ll often sit quietly, offering little input, expecting you to just “fix” their papers. Encourage the student to have ownership and authority over her writing *and* her ideas by asking open-ended questions and checking that you understand

her intentions. Asking questions also demonstrates your interest and enthusiasm for both the student and her subject.

6. **Check the student's understanding of the assignment.** Understanding and interpreting an instructor's verbal and/or written directions is a learned skill. Developing writers often make the mistake of not reading directions completely or of focusing on one aspect of the assignment while ignoring other equally important aspects. Ask the student to explain what the assignment is; then ask to read the directions if available. Discrepancies between the actual directions and the student's understanding of those directions are good indicators of issues the student may need to work on his paper.
7. **Remember, a student taking Sociology 1 can still be a basic skills writer.** Students who are enrolled in a basic skills ESL, College Skills, or English class who seek out tutoring help are easy to identify. However, the Tutorial Center, ESL Learning Center, and English Writing Center are open to students enrolled in any class working on a writing assignment. Reading the student's essay and asking plenty of questions will help you in assessing what the writer's skill level is and how best to approach the session.

## **Tutoring Writing: Working with Students for Whom English is a Second Language**

Tutoring writing with students who are learning English as a second or foreign language (ESL students) can be a very different experience than tutoring writing with native speakers. While the basic principles of good tutoring will of course apply, ESL students are not just working on developing writing skills; they are also grappling with language acquisition issues that impact their writing. The following principles and strategies will provide a context for understanding some of the qualities that distinguish this population of students.

1. **Keep the principles of good tutoring in mind, especially focusing on the larger global issues (HOCs).** ESL students usually have had overt grammar instruction, so they may want to focus on grammatical/mechanical issues when the larger ideas or content need more development. As much as possible, focus first on HOCs. Then, as time allows, look for *patterns* of errors to discuss rather than marking or correcting every error.
2. **Focus on one or two manageable tasks or writing issues.** Don't overwhelm the student with too many writing issues or tasks. Humans have limited cognitive resources. ESL students are already thinking about translation, word choice, vocabulary and grammar. They can be easily overwhelmed by too many writing issues, especially if they are early in the language acquisition process.
3. **Talk is just as important for ESL students – in some ways even more important - than for native speakers.** Ideas in a paper may sound somewhat simplistic, but the language in the paper does not necessarily represent the complexity of the idea the student is trying to communicate. If you've ever had to write an essay in another language, you'll know what this feels like. Ask questions to get the student talking about his ideas. Then tell him to write down those ideas as he's talking! (Talking will also help the student in gaining more facility with English.)
4. **Be aware of where the student is in his development as a writer AND as a language learner.** It takes several years to internalize a new language, and different aspects of language are learned at different, and fairly predictable, phases of time. Language components like the simple present verb tense (I laugh, you laugh), word order (Subject – Verb – Object), and simple questions (How old are you?) are learned early in the language acquisition process. Components acquired much later in the process include using the “s” in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs (she laughs) and use of articles (The water is cold. / Water is refreshing).
5. **Be aware of possible cultural dissonances.** Academic institutions have different expectations and conventions in different countries. For example, the U.S. academic system favors thesis-driven essays that offer clear, logical reasoning and support from overtly cited sources. On the other hand, academic institutions in other countries may favor essays that have a less linear or direct approach to supporting a main idea and

requirements for citing outside sources can also vary. Therefore, it's important to ask questions to learn if a student simply hasn't learned a specific writing skill yet, or if she has learned it in a different way in her native country.

- 6. ESL tutoring often requires more direct, overt teaching of grammatical principles and idiomatic expressions than in tutoring native speakers.** With native speakers, you can ask them to read their papers out loud so that they can “hear” the errors they’ve made based on their internalized sense of grammar. You can often ask native speakers leading questions that appeal to their intuitive sense of language, and they will be able to recognize the “normal” pattern even if they do not know the name of the rule or error. ESL students do not have the internalized English grammar, so you may need to overtly teach a lesson on grammar or explain an idiomatic expression where discussions or question/answer strategies might work better for native speakers.

## **Addressing Grammar Errors & Building Proofreading Skills**

### **1. Identifying the type of error**

*Problem:* Is the error a matter of carelessness (only occurs once or twice), or is there a pattern of a repeated error?

*Solution:* Make a list of the types of errors present, and then count how many for each type. If there is a pattern, make a note to check that error type when next proofreading.

### **2. Deciding which errors are serious and addressing those first**

*Problem:* The most serious errors are the ones that interfere with a reader being able to understand what is trying to be said.

*Solution:* Ask the student to try and explain what he or she meant to say. If the student can reword the sentence in a different way, have him or her write out the new meaning and compare it to the old one.

### **3. Practicing sentence writing**

*Problem:* The student struggles to make complete and independent sentences.

*Solution:* Have him or her practice sentence level writing. For example, have the student write each sentence for a writing assignment separately and with a line skipped between each complete sentence. Proofread each sentence slowly and out loud.

### **4. Reading out loud**

Students will often find errors by reading their writing out loud. And, if the student is reading out loud to someone for feedback, that's even more effective. After an error is corrected, have the student reread – out loud – the corrected sentence. That way they hear and see the correct form and this strengthens and reinforces proofreading skills.

## Steps to an Effective Tutoring Session

Remember, you are not tutoring a subject (art, math, English, etc.), you are tutoring a student. Your goal is to guide the student through his or her own learning processes in order to foster independent learning, discovery, and confidence. Tutoring is guiding and supporting, not preaching or doing the work for the student. Use the following to keep the student in an active role during and after the tutoring session.



Beginning Steps	Task Steps	Closing Steps
<p><b>Step 1</b> - Greeting and Climate-setting: welcome the person, not the project</p>	<p><b>Step 5</b> - Set the agenda for the session: agree on what you will seek to accomplish together</p>	<p><b>Step 9</b> – Confirmation: did you accomplish what you set out to do? Ask the student if the session met their needs and expectations</p>
<p><b>Step 2</b> - Identification of task: help the student figure out what needs to be done</p>	<p><b>Step 6</b> - Addressing the task: use resources and open-ended questions to help the student get the task done</p>	<p><b>Step 10</b> - What's next?: help the student identify what task or assignment is to be done at home or in the next session.</p>
<p><b>Step 3</b> - Breaking the task into parts: help the student learn the process instead of doing it for him or her</p>	<p><b>Step 7</b> - Tutee summary of content: confirm understanding by asking the student to summarize what was just accomplished</p>	<p><b>Step 11</b> - Arranging and planning the next session: be sure to choose mutually convenient times – and honor that commitment</p>
<p><b>Step 4</b> - Identification of thought processes which underlie task: what does the student understand and where does that understanding break down?</p>	<p><b>Step 8</b> - Tutee summary of underlying process: help the student’s metacognitive awareness by talking about how the work got done</p>	<p><b>Step 12</b> - Closing and Goodbye: again, connect with person, not just the pride of accomplishing something together; leave on an encouraging note!</p>

Source: Santa Barbara City College, Cartwright Learning Resources Center Tutor Handbook



## **A Selection of Online Resources for Tutors & Students**

### **BASIC WRITING TEXTBOOK from CAPITAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

An entire textbook – online – for basic writing! The four sections are grammar, usage, writing, and resources, and includes over 200 exercises.

<http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/sensen/>

### **GRAMMAR & WRITING WEBSITES**

These links go to the homepages of some excellent grammar and writing tutorials. Some have explanations, some have charts, and all have exercises, practices, and quizzes.

**Capital Community College** <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm>

**Purdue University Online Writing Lab** <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/sitemap/>

**GrammarBook.com** <http://www.grammarbook.com/default.asp>

**SRJC English Department Online Writing Lab** <http://www.srjcwrittingcenter.com/lab.html>

**Englishpage.com** <http://www.englishpage.com/index.html>

**About.com** (visual graphics of verb tenses and uses)

<http://esl.about.com/od/grammarstructures/ig/Tenses-Chart/spresent.htm>

### **QUIZZES, QUIZZES, QUIZZES!**

The “a4esl” is one of the most popular websites for every level and type of grammar quiz. As the site says, “Quizzes, tests, exercises and puzzles to help you learn English as a Second Language (ESL)

This project of *The Internet TESL Journal* ([iteslj.org](http://iteslj.org)) has thousands of contributions by many teachers.”

<http://a4esl.org/>

## **For Students: Tips for Working with a Tutor**

The purpose of a tutor is to help you learn strategies so that you can become a more independent learner. A tutor is a person who guides you and gives you tools so you can help yourself be successful. A tutor is not your personal editor and homework/assignment corrector.

### **BEFORE YOU SEE A TUTOR:**

- Make a list of questions about your homework, or make a list of ideas, vocabulary, or other concepts you do not understand.
- Decide what you need to know – don't wait for the tutor to try and guess.
- Do your homework/assignment before you see the tutor.

### **BRING WITH YOU:**

- Your book, pen, paper, syllabus, and a printed version of your writing assignment.
- Be organized (!) so that you don't waste tutoring time by spending five minutes searching for your homework assignment.
- Have your list of questions/problems ready to go as soon as you sit down with the tutor.
- Bring a positive attitude in order to complete the job.

### **DURING THE TUTOR SESSION:**

- Be clear and tell the tutor specifically what you need to do.
- Be open to the tutor's suggestions.
- If the tutor makes a suggestion that sounds different from your teacher's instructions, write it down, and then talk with your teacher about it.
- Let the tutor help you plan, organize, and edit your assignments. **IMPORTANT:** The tutor will not write the paper for you.
- Make notes to yourself about what you need to do to complete your assignment after your session is finished.

### **AFTER THE SESSION:**

- Review what you and the tutor discussed or worked on. Decide if you found out what you needed to know. Were your questions answered? Do you feel clearer about what you worked on?
- Plan when you will meet again with the tutor.



# Tutor Referral Form

**Instructor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Class** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

I am recommending that \_\_\_\_\_ (student's name) go to the SRJC Tutorial Center or English Writing Center for help with the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Understanding the Assignment/Pre-Writing</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Controlling Ideal (Thesis/Topic Sentence)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Development of Ideas</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Organization</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Research Strategies</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Editing Skills (Revision of Ideas/Organization)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Proofreading Skills (Grammar Revision)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other: _____</li> </ul>	<p>Comments:</p>
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**Santa Rosa:** Tutorial Center  
 First Floor Doyle Library  
 Room 4251  
 Monday-Thursday 8:00am-7:30pm  
 Friday 8:00am-3:00pm

English Writing Center  
 Second Floor Emeritus Hall  
 Room 1629  
 Monday-Thursday 9:00am-4:00pm

**Petaluma:** Tutorial Center  
 Second Floor Doyle Hall  
 Room 247  
 Monday-Thursday 8:00am-7:30pm  
 Friday 8:00am-3:00pm

English Writing Center  
 Second Floor Call Building  
 Room 690  
 Monday-Thursday 11:30am-1:30pm  
 Monday-Wednesday evening, hours vary

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**Tutor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

I have discussed the following issues with this student:

- Understanding the Assignment/Pre-Writing
- Controlling Ideal (Thesis/Topic Sentence)
- Development of Ideas
- Organization
- Research Strategies
- Editing Skills (Revision of Ideas/Organization)
- Proofreading Skills (Grammar Revision)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

