

Encouraging Students to Use the Writing Center

Professors sometimes ask how to best encourage their students to seek feedback from the Writing Center. Many students readily seek an outsider's point of view on their writing. However, some students avoid conversations about writing for fear of embarrassment or the emergence of unanticipated work. Ironically, these students' own possible failure is not a strong enough motivation for them to bite the bullet. A clear view of what the Writing Center can do for them, however, can dispel the fear of the unknown.

Every Writer Needs a Reader. Student writers need to become aware of an audience beyond the professor. By the time they enter college, students are used to having their writing assessed and assigned a grade. However, few students have received substantial peer feedback showing the impact their writing can make on someone who is reading it for meaning. This perspective, essential for learning the value of writing, is available from peer writing consultants in the Writing Center, where we assist writers not only in fulfilling their assignments but also in thinking beyond the professor and the grade.

You Don't Have to be Sick to Get Better. The Writing Center assists veteran and novice writers. In fact, half the writers we see every semester have a GPA of 3.5 or higher. Wise writers of all backgrounds seek feedback from experienced readers. Students should look for opportunities to talk out their ideas, watch what their writing does to an audience, and ensure that their message comes across the way they intend it. Your students need to know that the Writing Center is a service they should use whether they excel in writing for not.

Should You Require Students to Use the Writing Center? This question has long been debated in the Writing Center field, and the answer really depends on your students' needs and the way you discuss the Writing Center with them. Some students see required Writing Center sessions as busywork (or even punishment), while others feel anxious about scrutiny from a third party. On the other hand, asking all of your students to use the Writing Center may be an effective way to get them talking about their writing and show them that all writers can benefit from constructive peer feedback. Alternatively, some professors offer incentives such as extra credit or extended deadlines to those who use the Center. No matter what you choose, letting your students know what the Writing Center does will give them the best chance for effective sessions. Our message for writers is NOT "You need help and the Writing Center has it" but RATHER "You are doing interesting work, so let's see what a reader says."

Suggest Students Seek Feedback Early in the Process. Consider offering extra credit for Writing Center sessions held early in the writing process. Writers are welcome to talk with a writing consultant even before they have begun writing. And when they do, they often begin their writing process with a huge advantage. In fact, the best use of the Writing Center might involve more than one session per project, since writing and revision are best done in stages. Also, consider placing the deadline for sessions a couple of days before the paper's due date. This deters procrastination and leaves time for students to revise after their sessions.

Urge Them to Come with Questions in Mind. The writing process overflows with questions, not just questions about the research topic but also questions regarding the project's goal, the concept of audience, incorporation of sources, organization, examples, tone, paragraph structure, word choice, grammar, format, and documentation. Writers who begin their sessions prepared with questions for their consultant often come away with better ideas.

Set the Example. Faculty members sometimes bring their assignment descriptions to the Writing Center to see how a student interprets it. This practice benefits them and their classes, and it also shows students that even veteran writers can gain from talking about their work with an outside audience.

Invite Us to Your Class. We jump at the chance to visit classes and introduce the Writing Center service, give workshops, or facilitate peer reviews. We can take five minutes or the full class session if you like. Or if you prefer, you can schedule a time to bring your class to the Center.

LWC Writing Center