Handbook of Policies & Procedures

Center for Reading and Writing

2019-2020
A story is told of Degas, who, in the intervals of painting, amused himself by writing sonnets, and on one occasion found that his inspiration had run dry. In his distress, he went to his friend Mallarmé. “I cannot understand it,” he said; “my poem won't come out, and yet I am full of excellent ideas.” “My dear Degas,” was Mallarmé's reply, “poetry is not written with ideas; it is written with words.”

----from Lytton Strachey’s introduction to George Ryland’s *Words and Poetry*(1928)

... To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colors, and curious odors, or work of the artist’s hands, or the face of one’s friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening.

----Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*(1868)

...

Nothing matters to me so much as a comely and muscular sentence.

----Cynthia Ozick, “The Seam of the Snail” (1985)

...

Learning to read is more than learning to group the letters on a page. Learning to read is a skill that marshals the entire resources of body and mind. I do not mean the endless dross-skimming that passes for literacy, I mean the ability to engage with a text as you would another human being. To recognize it in its own right, separate, particular, to let it speak in its own voice, not in a ventriloquism of yours. To find its relationship to you that is not its relationship to anyone else. To recognize, at the same time, that you are neither the means nor the method of its existence and that the love between you is not a mutual suicide. The love between you offers an alternative paradigm; a complete and fully realized vision in a chaotic, unrealized world. Art is not amnesia, and the popular idea of books, as escapism or diversion, misses altogether what art is. There is plenty of escapism and diversion to be had, but it cannot be had from real books, real pictures, real music, real theatre. Art is the realization of complex emotion.

Preface

This handbook is intended as a quick-reference guide for consultants in the Center for Reading and Writing. If you have a question, and none of the Center staff are around to answer it, we hope this will provide the information you need, at least until one of us becomes available. It is not designed to be the final word on complex matters, which you should, of course, take up with a staff member—perhaps during a mentoring session—at a time when both of you will have a chance to talk things over thoroughly.

Following up on questions that arise from their practice is what professionals do; and, make no mistake about it: we expect you to become professionals at this work, even if you are only doing it part-time, and have no intention of ever making a career of it. There is simply no way to do this kind of work well that does not involve living through it, and being changed by it, in the way that all professionals do, and are, through and by the work that they do.

An important part of becoming a professional is knowing how to engage productively in the cycle that leads from experience to reflection to discussion and then, finally, to action, which completes the cycle when the newly deliberate action becomes part of some new experience. But experience does not enter into the cycle immediately (most of the things that happen to us daily pass without so much as reconsideration, let alone reflection). The cycle begins with a question, and the question begins with a doubt: a feeling that, whatever the nature of the experience, your role in it could have been different, and that the significance of that difference is worthy of consideration.

Doubt, then, is necessary, but also potentially dangerous. It cannot be ignored, which means, in practical terms, that to pretend to ignore a doubt is to delude oneself, and self-delusion is always harmful. Thus the reflection and discussion are always necessary. Rainer Maria Rilke, in his *Letters to a Young Poet*, has something interesting (and relevant to our business) to say about doubt, in Letter 9:

> And your doubt can become a good quality if you train it. It must become knowing, it must become criticism. Ask it, whenever it wants to spoil something for you, why something is ugly, demand proofs from it, test it, and you will find it perhaps bewildered and embarrassed, perhaps also protesting. But don't give in, insist on arguments, and act in this way, attentive and persistent, every single time, and the day will come when, instead of being a destroyer, it will become one of your best workers—perhaps the most intelligent of all the ones that are building your life.¹

Training oneself to doubt well—to doubt as a professional—is something that we would like to help you learn to do, as it is something that, as Rilke suggests, will stand you in good stead with whatever you may go on to do after you leave the Center. But we can only help if you bring those doubts, and the questions that they give rise to, to our attention. I can assure you that, whatever they may be, we will be happy to help you to reflect upon and talk through the issues that underlie them.

----Tom Kitchen, May 2019

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WHAT IS GOOD WRITING?

Anyone who works with writers to help them improve their writing has an ethical obligation to be aware of his or her own understanding of what it is that constitutes good writing. Not to have asked oneself this question—to go to work with only a vague sense that one knows good writing when one sees it—is to pretend to a degree of professionalism that one has not yet achieved, which is both dishonest and potentially harmful. It is every consultant's responsibility to have asked, and to have at least begun to answer, this question.

Of course there will never be complete agreement as to what good writing really is; but complete agreement is not necessary, or even desirable. What is necessary is that all consultants should be able and willing to share their definitions with one another so that all may learn from one another. In that way we can all continuously test our own definitions for soundness while at the same time expanding them to accommodate considerations that might never have occurred to the thinker in isolation.

Since you must be the author of your definition, we will not provide one here. But we can offer you a few reference points with which to begin, if that would be useful. One axis of the compass lies between perfect coherence and perfect complexity. That is to say, the greater the complexity of a concept, the more difficult it must be to communicate a coherent understanding of it. An example of a perfectly coherent statement of an uncomplicated concept would be a flawlessly-written five-paragraph essay: it holds together admirably, but this does not prevent us from wishing that the writer had tried to find something more interesting to say. The texts we love always fill us with wonder at the writer's ambition in attempting to communicate an idea that resists explication at every turn, and the tension in the struggle is part of what keeps us reading with our senses finely tuned to the meaning in each sentence.

Another axis lies between sound and sense. Words, sentences, paragraphs and texts all have meaning (a sentence that does not mean anything is not a sentence by any definition that I recognize), and grasping the nuances of meaning embedded in a particularly clever statement is a pleasure that most of us would insist upon experiencing frequently before declaring a piece of writing good. But is it enough to manage only the meanings of the words, etc.? Most of us who read for pleasure also look for artistry in the management of the sounds that language makes on its way to making sense. Even for those of us who don’t love poetry, ugly prose can never be good, no matter how full of ideas it may be (and attempting to overfill a sentence or a paragraph is one sure way to turn good thinking into bad writing). And if you think ugliness of language is merely a matter of taste, then I would refer you to George Orwell: whose Nineteen Eighty-four is essentially an imagination of the horrors of a world in which bad writing is a tyrannically-enforced norm, and who, in his essay, “Politics and the English Language,” points out that “the slovenliness of our language makes it easier to have foolish thoughts.” Full of ideas is not necessarily smarter.

Of course, you may construct a compass of good writing from an altogether different set of points; or you may choose to frame your definition without a compass. That’s fine. What matters is that you should be able to answer the question confidently when it comes up for discussion, as it assuredly will. It’s probably a good idea to try to start by doing some writing of your own. The shortest definition you can make that includes only everything that matters is what you’re looking for.
THE CENTER

WHAT WE DO

Although all students have learned to read and write well before they come to college, the kinds of reading and writing that they will be expected to do here differ, often significantly, from the kinds of reading and writing they have already mastered. Some students are able to make the transition to college-level reading and writing on their own, but many need help in order to succeed. We’re here to offer that help. But there’s a fine distinction to be made between helping someone to master a skill, and helping someone by practicing the skill on their behalf. Looked at one way, doing the work for our clients makes sense: we can do it better and faster than they can, their professors would be more pleased with the quality of the work, and their grades would be better as a result. The problem with this is obvious. But you should be prepared for the fact that many students will expect exactly the kind of help we can’t agree to give them, and that you will be tempted—you will!—to provide it. There’s nothing wrong with being tempted, as long as you remember that you can’t give in, no matter how tired and frustrated you are.

WHO WE ARE

There are four full-time staff for the Center for the 2019-2020 academic year. They are:

Tom Kitchen, Director
Susan Prendergast, Reading Specialist
Priscilla VanAulen, Outreach Coordinator
Ramon Reyes, Dev. Writing Specialist

You can always ask whichever one of us is nearest for whatever help you may need. You will also be assigned to meet weekly with one of us, as part of your professional development.

Help with reading and writing in the Center is provided mostly by trained Ramapo College students, who are officially known as consultants. We avoid using the terms “tutor” and “tutoring,” primarily because these have a pejorative sense for some students (and faculty), and because there are so many different kinds of tutors and tutoring that to identify our services in this way causes more confusion than clarification. We ask that you use “consultant” to identify yourself when you work with students. By changing the language, we will change the perception, and eventually the culture.

There is also one non-student who will be consulting and doing other work for the Center for this academic year. She is:

Peggy Hartog, ESL Master Consultant

It’s worth your while to get to know Peggy; there’s a lot she can teach you about the work we do here, and how you can get to be better at it.

Last, but certainly not least, the people we help in the Center are students, but, when we discuss the work, we will call them clients. It’s a meaningful distinction, in that it helps us to be clear about the role we play in helping them. Calling them clients reminds us that our job is to help them; which we do, as noted above, by addressing ourselves directly to them, and only to the work insofar as it can be used to help them.
WORKING IN THE CENTER

PAYROLL AND ONLINE TIME-REPORTING

Once hired, you need to visit the Cahill Center to complete two forms. You should then bring the forms to the Director for signatures, and then return the forms to the Cahill Center. Once the process is complete you will be placed on the payroll.

Online Timesheets are submitted bi-weekly. To avoid clerical complications and delayed pay, you must submit on-line timesheets by 11:59 pm of the final Saturday of the pay period.

In completing on-line timesheets, you must indicate actual days and times for hours worked. In reporting working hours, you must make sure to indicate a.m. or p.m. after hours worked.

SCHEDULING OF CONSULTING HOURS

Consultants are expected to work 8-12 hours/week in the Center during hours arranged around their academic schedules. During the semester the Center is open Monday through Thursday, 10:00am to 8:00pm, and Friday, 10:00am to 2:00pm. No consultant should propose a schedule that includes a shift of more than four consecutive hours, or more than six hours in a single day.

You will set your hours before the start of the semester, and it’s important to consider carefully before committing to a schedule, because once you’ve agreed to it the Center will be relying on you to fulfill your obligation. If you do come to feel overwhelmed by your obligation, bring this up in a meeting with the staff member who’s mentoring you.

LATENESS, ABSENCE, & COVERAGE

It is essential that all consultants report to work on time for regularly scheduled hours. The Center simply cannot retain consultants who fail to meet this standard.

Please keep in mind, when you schedule your hours, the fact that you are expected to be ready to work at the start of your shift. Shift start and end times may be adjusted to the quarter-hour if you need the extra time to be ready for work.

If you will be unable to work a shift, it is your responsibility to (a) notify at least one member of the professional staff, and (b) attempt to find coverage. Also, professional staff must be informed ASAP when arrangements have been made for coverage. Plan for absences well in advance, and you should have no difficulty. If you’re sick or injured, but not so bad off that you can’t type or text, let us know.

If someone asks you to cover a shift, please do so if you can; however, if you feel that you’re being taken advantage of, let a professional staff member know. We all need to make sacrifices in order to keep things running smoothly, but nothing erodes morale more quickly than resentment among team members who feel that they’re being asked to shoulder more than their fair share of the burden.

During the week prior to exams, no consultant should request coverage except in the most extreme case of emergency.
MANAGING THE SESSION

Consulting work involves working in close proximity with a great many people. Many of these people will pose absolutely no problem whatsoever, and sessions will proceed smoothly, but sometimes the close proximity of conflicting personality types can interfere with the work, and consultants need to be prepared for that. The best way to head off trouble is to take the lead in establishing relations with the client. This is a critical first step in the process of managing the session, and if problems result from a failure to lead, then the consultant bears primary responsibility. Manage the session, and you will have few problems.

You can establish the right tone of formality by being properly polite. While it may feel forced and unnatural to begin each session in exactly the same way, doing so is a kind of ritualistic behavior that most clients will recognize (even if only unconsciously), which will prepare them to take their cue from you. You want to be businesslike: not like the salesman welcoming customers into a showroom, but rather like a doctor or therapist greeting a new patient. This way you can put some warmth in your greeting without risking that the client will misinterpret your welcome as something else.

A keen sense of self-awareness is essential for establishing an appropriately professional demeanor. A consultant has to know how he or she appears to the client, and must be able to regulate and adapt that appearance to benefit the session, if it becomes necessary. This does not mean that you have to change your personality, or conform to a predetermined profile; you have to be yourself. But you can either be yourself in ways that encourage the client to trust you and to work with you, or in ways that, if you’re not careful, may influence the client to withdraw from you and the help that you’re trying to offer. If you’re not aware of how your personality is affecting the client, then you can’t control the effect you’re having. Developing a sense of self-awareness is a matter of paying attention to how clients respond to you in your sessions, observing other consultants at work, and asking for and accepting feedback from clients, other consultants, and professional staff.

Some sessions may fail to progress for reasons that clearly have to do with issues that a client has brought into the Center, and if you suspect that’s the case then it’s OK to address an issue head-on: that is, to say that you sense the client’s discomfort, or something to that effect. Showing that you are unafraid to (politely) address an issue increases your authority without burdening you with the responsibility for controlling it. Address the client with an “I feel” sort of statement, so that it has the tenor of an observation rather than an accusation. This may not solve the problem, but it prevents you from having to tiptoe around it. Plus, most students really don’t want to be rude to strangers, and will make an effort if you point out (implicitly—never overtly) that by imposing their moods on a session they are being uncivil.

Other clients may more actively ignore boundaries, and these can be harder to deal with. Oversharing can be endured, but it’s OK, too, politely to remind such clients that you don’t need or want to hear about their personal grievances or frustrations, not to mention the intimate details of their private lives (unless, unwisely, they have made these the subject of the paper they’ve brought to the Center). Anything that makes you uncomfortable about your safety should be brought immediately to the attention of one of the staff, or, if no staff are available, to the attention of Campus Security. Quickly excuse yourself from the session and ask the Desk Attendant on duty to call for help.
**DRESS & APPEARANCE**

As a student aide, you are not required to dress in any special way. “Wear what you would normally wear to class” is a fine general guideline for most people. However, clothing should be clean, neat, and not overly revealing.

Personal hygiene is also important. Here the best rule is probably that a client sitting next to you should not be consciously aware of how you smell: and that goes equally for the results of infrequent bathing and overuse of scent. Beyond that, the next best rule is, as above: try not to distract the client (with a ridiculously untrimmed beard, frighteningly filthy hands, etc.). Use your judgment. And if you see another consultant who seems to need some help in gauging the effects of his or her appearance, have a quiet word with one of the staff.

**EATING AT WORK**

Candy provided by the Center may be eaten by anyone at any time, but otherwise eating in the Center should be avoided if possible. Consultants are always welcome to take food into the conference room, and should do so if they’re eating a meal; it’s unfair to clients and other consultants to fill the room with the smell of your food, or to leave the remains of a half-eaten sandwich/burrito/lamb korma where they can’t help being revolted/being made hungry by it.

Clients are not permitted to eat meals in the Center, and it is your responsibility to ask them to put the food away, or to leave the Center to eat it, if you see them doing so. If you need to, call on a staff member for assistance.

**LAPTOPS**

The Center has four laptop computers that you may check out to use with clients as you consult (they are not available for personal use, but you may bring your own, if you have one, or borrow one from the Library). To check out a laptop, tell the desk attendant or one of the staff, who will retrieve one for you while you sign the check-out form; sign again when you return the computer. **Under no circumstances are the laptops permitted outside of the Center.**

**PHONES**

As should go without saying, you should silence and put away phones and personal electronics while you’re consulting. Leaving a phone out on the table is an unnecessary invitation to distraction. Never interrupt a session in order to take a call.

**FRIENDS IN THE CENTER**

There is no rule against greeting your friends if, on occasion, they happen to be in the Library and come over to say hello. If you’re not busy at the moment, and if they’ve never been inside, you can take a few minutes to show them around, and make them feel welcome. There is also no rule against conducting sessions with friends. If they come specifically to work with you, you may help them, provided that you treat them no differently from any other client.

However: visits should be rare occasions, and **under no circumstances may a consultant encourage or permit friends to linger in the Center if they're not here to work.** If they won’t take a hint, explain to them that you’re working and that they have to leave. Walk them to the door, say goodbye, and turn away.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

MENTORING

Beginning in the fall, all consultants will be assigned to meet individually with staff so that we can get to know you, and you us, and for the purpose of your ongoing professional development. Each consultant will arrange to meet with one staff member at a time to discuss questions and concerns, and to learn the crafts of consulting and representing the Center. By the end of the year you’ll have had a chance to meet with each of us at least once.

An important function of these meetings is for consultants to report problems. Mistakes are human, and can be forgiven, and no consultant who is quick to report an error or failure will be punished or held in low esteem (except, perhaps, in cases where the error or failure amounts to criminal activity). But the Center cannot tolerate the cover-up of serious mistakes. The staff are there to help: if you are not sure whether to speak up, then it’s always better to do so, and as soon as possible.

TRAINING

All consultants must undergo training at the beginning of the academic year, in the fall; this training will typically take place during the week before the first week of classes for the fall semester. Attendance during the entirety of the training is absolutely essential, and no consultant may be hired for the academic year who has not attended the full training session (special exceptions for minor absences may be made for returning consultants, with staff approval, but approval should not be counted on as a foregone conclusion).

Consultants should regard training as an opportunity to teach as well as to learn, and all participants are expected to engage fully at all times. Returning consultants will be expected to speak up to give new hires the benefit of their experience and expertise; new hires will be expected to speak up with questions and concerns, especially if those are not being directly addressed by the training.

There is no way that a few days’ worth of training can include all of the information necessary for a year’s worth of work in the Center, but staff do plan carefully, and will attempt to lay down guidelines for the year’s work during the training.

MEETINGS

Meetings for all consultants and staff will be held regularly; every attempt will be made to offer two dates for each meeting, so that consultants can choose a day that better fits their schedule. These meetings are mandatory for all consultants. A consultant who misses one will have to make up the time with his or her mentor; a consultant who misses two or more may have his or her hours severely curtailed, or employment terminated outright.

Meetings are participatory events, and consultants are expected to do more than merely show up and sit quietly. You don’t always need to lead the discussion, but you do need to find a way to make your voice heard.
**PROBATIONARY PERIOD**

You were hired because we believe in your ability to do the job. Our belief gives you the benefit of the doubt for a probationary period, during which we expect you both to make a reasonable number of mistakes, and to try to learn from them. Making mistakes in good faith is an important part of learning, and no one will be blamed for putting a foot wrong (except in cases where harm to other students, or to the Center, is clearly deliberate).

The term of the probationary period is one semester. Consultants beginning work in the Center in the fall will have until December to prove themselves, making mistakes and correcting them, as a regular part of learning the job. Along the way all consultants will, as mentioned above, have occasions to meet with staff to ask questions and discuss how things are going; although, of course, any serious matter should be discussed as soon as possible, with the first available staff member. Failure to bring a mistake to the attention of one of the staff will be regarded as a much more serious offense than will the act of making it.

No consultant will be let go in December simply for making an honest mistake, provided that he or she has discussed the mistake with staff (in mentoring meetings or other discussions) and has made some demonstrable effort to overcome it. Mistakes that come to light in spite of a consultant’s attempt to hide them may, however, be grounds for dismissal. Other reasons why the Center might decline to continue a consultant’s employment into the spring may include (but are not limited to) the following, *if these behaviors are coupled with the consultant’s refusal to discuss the evidence with a mentor, and/or a refusal to try to make behavioral changes to correct the problem:*

- strong evidence (e.g., session notes, client surveys, observations) that a consultant is resisting the norms and practices of the Center (e.g., regularly ending sessions early, neglecting to assign tasks, etc.)

- strong evidence (e.g., client surveys, faculty feedback) that a consultant’s professional demeanor/affect is intimidating or off-putting to clients

- strong evidence (e.g., observations, reports from colleagues) that a consultant is engaging in behavior disruptive to the harmony/good working order of the Center (e.g., holding grudges against other consultants or staff, seeking to create factions among Consultants on the basis of some personal enmity, etc.)

- strong evidence (e.g., observations, reports from staff and colleagues) that a consultant is not engaging with the Center as a willing participant (i.e., “just phoning it in”); this would apply, for example, to consultants who never participate in training sessions or meetings, who always wait to be called on to meet with staff, or who show no interest in opportunities to deepen or widen their connection with the work of the Center.

The point of telling you this is not to worry you; we want you to succeed. But if you’re having difficulty, we want to provide you with plenty of incentive to address concerns well in advance of the end of the semester, so that there will be ample opportunity to explain and, if necessary, correct behaviors. Failure to rehire at the end of the probationary period is a last resort, but a necessary one, in the event that a promising candidate turns out not to be well-suited to the work that we do in the Center.
THE CONSULTING SESSION

SESSION STRUCTURE

Every session should proceed according to the same basic structure: (1) a beginning, in which the consultant greets the client, establishes the ground rules for a session, and becomes familiar with the client and the text in question; (2) a middle, in which the consultant facilitates the client’s engagement with the text, by eliciting from the client responses to queries about the text, and by giving the client discrete tasks to be completed that will further the client’s engagement with the text; and (3) an ending, in which the consultant brings the session to a close, ensures that the client has a solid basis upon which to begin independent work with the text, and leaves the door open to further work at the Center.

As every session is the same, in a way, so is every session unique. Having a script for the session will help you, as a consultant, not to lose your way: which is important, because, although the session belongs to the client, it is yours to manage. Managing the session is how we can provide consistent quality of service. Consultants who fail to manage the session do so at the expense of the client’s opportunity for learning, and that simply isn’t good professional practice. Internalize the script so that you feel what’s coming next without having to think about it, and so you will know what to do if you feel that a session is slipping off the rails because it isn’t proceeding according to plan. As always, if you find yourself dealing with a client who refuses to cooperate with the script, your choices are to confront the client about his or her refusal, or to stop the session to find a staff member to help.

THE SCRIPT

1. Beginning the session
   a) Greet the client, say your name, ask theirs, and ask them if it’s their first time visiting the Center. If they’ve come with a paper, ask when it’s due.
   b) The desk attendant, if one is on duty, should prevent anyone from sitting down with you if the paper is due that same day; but if you get one of these, then explain to the client that it’s against our policy to work with papers the same day they’re due. You should not agree to go over the whole paper (no matter how short it is) for a “quick check,” or anything of the kind. You will be asked to do this, so be ready with your answer. It is not cruel, even though you have to refuse the request.
   c) Finish collecting information for the consultation form; explain what you’re doing, and what the information will be used for, if the client asks; don’t allow yourself to be hurried. When you have the information, ask what brings the client to the Center. Listen carefully to the answer to this question, and let the client finish talking. If the client names more than one or two things, ask to repeat them back, to be sure you have everything. Make notes if you need to, but after that put down/ cap/close your pen. This is a crucial moment, at which you take charge of the session. If you allow yourself to be rushed, or to be distracted by the client’s demands, you will find yourself conducting the session at a disadvantage. Also, this is where you begin to earn the

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2 Exception: if a client has arranged with YOU during a prior visit to come in for a citation check on the due date, you may see the client for this purpose (which should also be communicated to the desk attendant).
client’s trust and good will. Be friendly, patient, and encouraging. Speak slowly. Don’t make jokes yet.

d) If the client asks for, or clearly expects, a “proofreading/editing” session, explain that we do not proofread or edit for clients, but that we will help them go over the text to look for errors and patterns of error. Agreeing to do this should not prevent you from asking higher-order questions about the text, or from attempting to engage the client in a discussion about the argument (or lack thereof).

e) Set the parameters for the session. Tell them sessions last 40 minutes. Explain that you will mostly be asking questions, and that they will have to do most of the work (including making their own notes). Ask if they have any questions, and answer them, if they do.

f) Ask to see the text, the assignment, and any related materials. Start with the assignment, if possible. Read it, and ask whether the client understands it; if not, then take time to help the client clarify. Ask a question about the assignment, to see whether the client really understands it.

   If this is a reading session, then ask to make a copy of the first few pages of the text. Use this to read along with the client, and annotate.

   If this is a writing session, again ask to see the text, and, again, scan it, but not for more than a minute.³ Give it back to the client.

g) Ask a question about the text: anything will do, but your aim is to put the fearful client at ease, to challenge the reluctant or resistant client, or to engage the passive client. Try to ask a question that will get them thinking, so they forget about the fact of the session.

2. The work of the session

   a) Ask the client to begin reading the text. Tell the client to choose where to begin. Say that you will interrupt occasionally, and that you’ll stop them when you’ve heard enough. If the client stumbles in a reading, stop them and ask them to mark the place. If you hear something that you don’t understand, stop them and ask them to mark it. Interrupt if you hear something that sounds interesting or unexpected, but don’t comment or evaluate at that time; just ask the client to mark the place and resume reading. Try to interrupt at least a couple of times before stopping, but be very casual about it.

   b) Stop the reading when you’re ready to ask a question. But don’t be trying to think of a question while you should be listening. Just listen and focus on the text. You will know when it’s time. If you aren’t sure, stop the client after about ten minutes of reading.

   c) About having the client read: some (many, perhaps) will express reluctance to do so, but you’ll find that fewer will if you are firm and matter-of-fact about it—as if it’s obvious that that’s what’s supposed to happen. If you are tentative about asking, then you are likely to have a harder time. If you do encounter resistance, just say that this is how it’s done, and wait for them to start. Don’t be drawn into a discussion about it. If this makes you uncomfortable, then endure the discomfort. If you absolutely have to, read aloud for

³ Use this opportunity to scan for citation and documentation (i.e., is there any, and does it look OK to a cursory glance? Is there a bibliography, reference, or works cited page?). If you suspect problems, probe with questions. If you think it necessary, tell the student that you want to reserve 10-15 minutes at the end of the session to go over citation and documentation.
the client. But whatever you do, do not begin a session by reading the text silently yourself.

d) When you stop the client, ask your question. You will have thought of one, but if you are worried that you won’t have, remember that you can always ask something about what it is that the text is supposed to help accomplish. (NB: it’s not a good idea to lead with the “what’s the thesis?” question; if the thesis is an issue, give the writer a chance to bring it up; you can ask about the thesis later, if need be.) If it’s a reading the client is having trouble with, you can ask about the subject of the class, and the topic associated with the reading. If it’s an essay or research paper, the client can tell you about how it came to be assigned. If it’s some other kind of writing, the client can explain what it is, and how it came to be assigned.

The goal is to get the writer talking about the text. Given enough time, the client will uncover the underlying problem or weakness, if you listen carefully.

e) As soon as the problem emerges—regardless of whether it has been discovered by you or by the client—go back to the part of the text the client has read to illustrate it.

For example: as often as not, with an essay the client has written, the problem will be that there’s no clear argument, and the client will have read you the first paragraph or two of the draft. Question the language of the draft’s beginning until you can get the client to state a claim strong enough to drive an argument that can carry the essay (and be sure to remind the client to write it down, if necessary).

Or, for example: if the problem with a draft is a lack of clarity, owing to difficulties with grammar or word choice, show the client where the breakdowns occur, and have them explain the meaning. Again, as soon as they have made sense of a passage, remind them to write down the explanation so they don’t forget how it goes.

Or, for example: if the problem has to do with the difficulty of an assigned reading, show the client how to analyze and unpack the language of the text. Remember to let the client do most of the generative work. Your job is to ask questions, and wait for the client to give the answers. And be sure to check for understanding. “Do you see what we just did?” is a good question to ask frequently.

Also: as you grasp the problem, and begin to discuss it with the client, it’s imperative that as you do so you also offer some praise for what they’ve managed to accomplish, and to be positive about their progress. Clients know they have problems with their writing, but they also need to know that they have something good to work with and to build on, and they are depending on you to point that out. This is where having a clear knowledge of what constitutes good writing is essential to your success as a consultant. Be ready and able to articulate what it is that the client has done well.

f) When you have worked for a while on the problem, give the client a task to perform. Be explicit about this: say, “I’m going to give you a task.” It can be anything that the client can do to practice whatever understanding has been reached, but it should involve the client in writing something: a summary, an outline, a new paragraph, an edited version of an existing paragraph, filling out an SQ3R chart, annotating text, etc. Allow the client to complete the task alone. You can get up and leave, or send the client to go work on a computer. But be sure to let the client know that the session is not over, and give the client a specific amount of time to do the task.

g) When the task time is up, recall the client, with the newly-generated text, and bring the session to a close.
3. Ending the session

a) Ask the client to read the task text aloud. Don’t interrupt this time. When the client is finished, offer some praise; then tell the client one thing that could be done to improve upon what they’ve written. Leave it at that.

b) Tell the client it’s time to make a plan for what to do next. Try to use questions to steer the client in the direction you think best. Encourage the client to write the plan down.

c) Give the client some encouragement. This does not mean false hope (you have to be honest). But in your time with the client you will have encountered some basis for the possibility of the client’s success, and it’s your job to make sure the client knows you saw it. Never forget to do this, and never let the client see that you aren’t enthusiastic about doing it.

d) Ask one last time whether the client has any questions, and answer if they do. Repeat your name, and invite the client back to work with you. Offer them the option of making an appointment, and direct them to do so at the desk, if they seem interested.

And (as if that weren’t enough) you must keep the following in mind:

- Time allotted for the consultation is 40 minutes. (5 minutes are for the consultant to record information about the session, after the client has left.) If the Center is not busy, consultants may choose to work for another 5 minutes over that time, but no longer. If, on the other hand, a client wants to end the session early, try first to persuade them to stay, then, if they continue to insist, let them know that you will enter on the form that they left against your advice. Under no circumstances should a consultant ever offer to end a session early (i.e., under 35 minutes).

- The client must remain in full and complete custody of the text under discussion, except during a brief, preliminary overview that the consultant makes at the beginning of the session. Even if you agree to read aloud for the client (and you should not do this often) the text must remain in front of the client. Seat yourself so that you can view the text as the client reads.

- Although a consultant may agree to act as note-taker for a client during a brainstorming session, under no circumstances will the consultant mark the text under consideration for the client. Clients should mark their own texts, and consultants, unless they are acting as note-takers, should put their pens away, or at least leave them closed or capped during the session.

- Grades are not our concern. Clients should flatly be told that we cannot promise that working with a consultant will result in a higher grade for the assignment. If you meet with resistance on this point, try telling the client that most of the benefit to be had from the session will be reaped during the reading of the next text, or the writing of the next paper. Also, consultants must avoid being drawn into discussions of grades that clients think are unfair. Simply say, “I can’t speak to that,” or something similar, and refuse to discuss it further.
**RECORD-KEEPING**

Center effectiveness and funding are dependent upon data compiled in records of the sessions we conduct. **Consultants must record complete information about each of their sessions as soon as they have time to do so, and must make sure that all information has been reported before ending their shifts.**

The form for recording session information can be found online, in the Ramapo College Google Drive (login at g.ramapo.edu). In Google Drive, under “Shared with me,” you will see a document named “Consultation Form”; open this, and you will first see the entire record of sessions for the current period. At the top of the page, choose the tab labeled “Form,” and, on the drop-down menu that appears, click on “Go to live form.” A new form will open for you to complete. When you have recorded all of the necessary information, make sure that the box for “Send me a copy of my responses” is checked, and click the “Submit” button. The information will be entered into the master spreadsheet, and it will be sent to your Ramapo College email address. **You have not finished your responsibility until you have forwarded the email with the session information to crw@ramapo.edu.**

The most important part of the form is the “Session recap,” in which you must describe, in detail, what took place in the session. Part of the value of the session recap is, of course, the record: this is the only actual evidence of the session, and it is your responsibility to provide as much substance and detail as you can. Your memory of the session will, of course, be subject to the biases of your perspective, but you should make every effort to restrain judgment, and to write your version of what happened as if it were possible for you to offer a completely objective report.

N.B. For clients who leave the session early (before 35 minutes have elapsed): you must make a note in the session recap that the client left early, against advice (because, of course, there is no good reason for a consultant to advise a client to leave a session early). Tell them that you are about to do this, to give them a chance to reconsider.

Just as important as the evidence of the session is the reflective practice that goes into your writing of the session recap. Writing out your version of events is a way of going over them in your own mind, so that you will have a chance to think about them, and remember them later. If you fail to do a thorough job here, the likelihood is that the details of the session will be lost to you in the blurry composite of all of the sessions you have had in a given day, week, month, or semester; and lost, they will be of no value to your improvement. And an important part of the practitioner’s art—the praxis, which characterizes all professional work, and distinguishes it from other forms of labor—depends upon the memory of doing that, when reflected upon, feeds the practitioner’s knowledge of how better to conduct future iterations of the task. This is not assembly-line work, and the baseline assumption is that, no matter how long you have been doing it, you can, should, and will continually strive to get better at it. The session recap is essential to that endeavor, and no one is excused from taking it seriously.

Your aim is to produce 3 readable, coherent paragraphs; bear in mind that faculty will probably read what you have written. Don’t rush, but don’t take forever, either. If you’re qualified to be a consultant, then you should have no trouble banging out 3 readable, coherent paragraphs about a session in the space of 5 minutes: this is record-keeping, not literature. If you find you’re having trouble—either cannot write enough, or cannot finish quickly enough—then bring this problem up with your mentor.
HOW TO DO ALL OF THIS WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MIND

At this point—regardless of whether you are new to consulting or are returning to the work after having done it for a year or more according to some quite different guidelines—you are probably wondering how we can expect anyone to do all of this, and do it well.

Here’s the thing: we don’t expect perfection from anyone, but we do expect, and demand, that everyone make the clients’ education the top priority. So if you forget to ask when the paper is due, and find out only midway into the session that it’s due in an hour, that’s OK—you forgot, and you’ll remember next time. But the moment you take a paper away and read it silently to yourself while the client sits there doing nothing, you will have failed to make that client’s education the top priority it needs to be; you will instead have decided that what is more important is your own need to feel “in control” of the text, making a bet with yourself that the fact that the client is learning nothing at all while he or she sits there in silence will somehow be offset by the wisdom that you will be able to impart whenever you have finally satisfied your need to master the text. And that’s wrong. Because the clients’ education is never yours to risk, and because the only wisdom you are authorized to provide is the wisdom you help the clients generate for themselves. The hard truth about this kind of work is that in order to do it well you need to be able to set aside your ego. It doesn’t matter how smart you are, or how good a writer you are; it doesn’t matter how much you love helping people. It’s too easy to burn out doing this kind of work, unless you can say to yourself, “this is not about what I want, but rather about what the client needs.” What sounds like selflessness here turns out to be basic self-preservation.

What’s hardest about this is that it probably isn’t the kind of mental or physical challenge you’re accustomed to. You were hired because we recognize that you know how to rise to a challenge, and we’re hoping that the reason for your success wasn’t your intelligence or your talent, but rather your determination to succeed. You can’t think or push or charm your way towards this kind of success. It’s more about letting go of something than it is about getting anything. But you can do it if you keep reminding yourself that this is what’s important, and that success on these terms is not about making something happen, but rather allowing it to happen. Letting go of what you want and focusing on what the client needs will help you not to sweat the small mistakes, and not to make the big ones, and you’ll find that this trick comes in handy in other ways, when you’re facing other kinds of challenges that threaten your sanity.

APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS FOR SESSIONS

As a consultant you are providing the client with a valuable service, and you have the right to expect cooperation from the client, and the right to demand civil treatment. Any client who fails to be courteous at all times while in the presence of the consultant should be warned that the session will be halted, and that the client may lose privileges if rude behavior persists. The client must also be considerate of others in the work area and should be reminded, if necessary, about noise control and the sharing of space. Ask any staff member for assistance if at any time you have trouble with or feel threatened by a client whose behavior is interfering with the work of the Center.

Upon visiting the Center, clients are expected to bring the course syllabus, the instructor’s directions for completing the assignment, and any related texts and drafts. However, in the
absence of the instructor’s assignment sheet, the consultant should try to get as much information as possible about the instructor’s expectations and directions for the assignment.

**WORKING WITH CLIENTS AND TEXTS**

A consultant provides client-centered assistance. The goal of this assistance is the development of a plan to maximize the client’s strengths, and to address and compensate for (if not eliminate altogether) the client’s weaknesses. To consult is not to do the work for the clients; it is to advise, and to provide them with strategies that they may use in order to achieve successes that may rightly be called their own. We do not offer the client our ideas; we help clients to discover what their own ideas are. We do not point out or correct clients’ errors; we help them to discover and correct their own errors, and to learn to make fewer of them the next time. This is not easy to do. Most days it will seem much easier simply to do the work for your clients, and it will be tempting to think that at least that way they will have achieved some benefit (especially when you are working with clients who seem unteachable); it will be tempting to know that clients will thank you for “helping” them in this way, and to feel the power of your own knowledge and skill admired by those who feel themselves utterly incapable of reaching your level. But you should know that to give in to temptation is to commit a selfish act that will not only harm your client, it will make it harder for him or her to ask for and receive client-centered help in the future; in effect, you make it harder for the next consultant to work with that client (especially if the next consultant to work with the client is you).

Here are some client-centered scenarios:

**Reading Client:**

- If the client wants help with a text that you are familiar with, remind yourself to set aside any impressions you have formed, or conclusions you have drawn. Holding on to these may interfere with your ability to help clients develop their own ideas about the text. Be careful not to ask questions to which there is (according to you) only one “right answer.”

- If the client wants help with a text that you are unfamiliar with, give yourself permission to work through the session in ignorance. It is not necessary for you to “know” the text in order to help the client, and, in fact, the way you handle “not knowing” will be a model for the client. If you are nervous about not knowing, the client will be, too; if you are calm and confident in your approach, it makes it easier for the client to be so. Allow the client to start anywhere. If need be, you may model textual analysis for the client, but only once or twice; after that, make the client do the work.

- Give the client a task to perform that involves the use of one of the strategies named in the Reader’s Toolbox. Make sure the client understands the purpose of the task, then leave the client alone to do it. Tell the client how much time will be allotted for the task, and keep a careful watch. When the time is up, go over the task with the client before ending the session.

**Writing Client without a Draft:**

- If the client has no draft, then the consultant can assist in planning a strategy for handling the assignment. First, find out whether understanding the assignment is a problem for the
client; often, with writers who haven’t yet begun, it is. If the assignment is not a problem, assist the client to generate or organize ideas (e.g., brainstorming, outlining, mapping, etc.). If it seems like a writer’s block issue, discuss strategies for starting and sustaining work on a draft.

- If the assignment isn’t a problem, find out if there’s a reading problem. Ask questions to find out whether the writing is to be based upon some reading, and, if so, whether the client understands how the material for the writing assignment is to be derived from a reading of some text; if the client has brought the assigned reading or research to the session, challenge the client to find some text that can be applied to the assignment; if the client demurs, you may direct the client to what seems to you like a likely place to begin, and have the client read for a while; then see if you can, with questions, help the client to find a path to understanding.

- Give the client a task to perform that will generate some writing that can be used to produce a draft. Have the client write about something concrete—some form of evidence—if possible; even if that is only a memory of experience. Frame the task as a freewrite, of sorts, so as to allow the client to discard what doesn’t work, or isn’t helpful, keeping only what may be of use. When the time is up, go over the task with the client before ending the session.

Writing Client with a Draft:

- If there is a draft, find out what the client wants to do with it. Note that what the client wants may not be what you think is needed, and you are not obligated to follow the client’s wishes entirely (the client is NOT a customer). But it may not be helpful to confront the client’s misunderstanding head-on. Rather than outright refusing to do something the client wants (e.g., “change all of the short sentences into long ones”), interrogate the request (e.g., “why do you want to do that, exactly?”), or table it while you both consider the text, and then begin work by asking questions about the issues that seem most in need of attention, while keeping in mind the possibility of addressing at least some, or some part of, the client’s original request.

- If the client is noncommittal about the issues, or seems genuinely not to know what to ask for, then again let your questions guide the client to a consideration of the issues that seem paramount to you.

- Assign a task that will give the client a chance to practice dealing with the issues you have addressed in the session. This may involve rewriting some of the paper, or possibly adding new text to it. Or the task may involve the creation of some secondary text (e.g., a reverse outline, or concept map) that will help the client later in revising and rewriting the text.

**PLAGIARISM**

Helping students to cite and document sources correctly is an important part of the work that we do in the Center. Many of the problems you will see as a consultant are the result of a simple
misunderstanding, which is often caused by a lack of concern that is far out of proportion to the seriousness with which the academic community takes the matter of properly crediting source material. Some problems you will quickly recognize are the result of deliberately deceptive intent. And all of it is frustrating to anyone who wants to help students help themselves. And that makes it all the more difficult to approach plagiarism—intentional as well as accidental—with the necessary dispassionate regard for the client’s academic well-being.

The rule of the Center is that we do not report or threaten to report plagiarism, either to the faculty or to the administration. What we must do, however, is confront clients with the fact of plagiarism, whenever we see it. Clients who do not know they have plagiarized must be made aware that they have done so. Clients who do not care that they have must be made aware that their carelessness may lead to dire consequences. And clients who insist on refusing our help must be made aware that such a refusal is in direct conflict with their own academic self-interests.

Also: although we do not report plagiarism, we do record in our session notes the fact that problems with sources were discussed. This is especially necessary in the event that a client does not take the advice to clearly and carefully cite and document all source material, if the client’s instructor discovers a plagiarized passage in the client’s work. In such a case, we want to be able to point to the record (a copy of which may be in the instructor’s possession) and show that citation and documentation were discussed with the client, who then refused to follow up on the discussion with work on the paper. This is not simply a matter of CYA for the Center: because if the faculty do not believe that we talk to clients about properly crediting source material, then they may not recommend our services with the kind of enthusiasm that will encourage their students to come to the Center. Failure to record even once could in this way do serious harm to the Center.

For more on citation and documentation, see below.

**GRAMMAR &c.**

Although it should be made clear at the outset of a session that consultants do not proofread or edit clients’ work, this does not mean (and so it should not be implied) that we do not provide assistance to clients with sentence-level issues. Sometimes it is abundantly clear that help with sentence clarity and precision is the first concern, and it would be disingenuous and ultimately self-defeating for us to pretend otherwise to a client who brings in such a text.

Knowing this does not, unfortunately, make it any easier to address sentence-level problems in a constructivist, client-centered way. One obstacle to success may be the client’s ignorance: it is useless, for instance, to talk of comma splices or fragments in terms of dependent and independent clauses when the client has no understanding of or interest in these concepts. If we attempt to reach back through clauses to definitions of subject and predicate, we are merely pouring ice water on the cold ashes of the client’s passion for the topic.

Another obstacle is, sometimes, a consultant’s own lack of enthusiasm for all things grammatical and syntactical. Many, if not most consultants are drawn to reading and writing because it is something they have always naturally been good at, and thinking analytically about sentences is something they have never had the need or the inclination to do. These consultants’ intuition can tell when something is wrong with a sentence, but it may not tell them precisely what, and it
certainly won’t tell them how to name the problem; and this leaves them more or less unable to help the client. That, as should be obvious, is not an ideal state of affairs.

What is there to do about these obstacles? In the case of the second, it might seem obvious to demand that all consultants make a keen study of sentences in English: how to construct them gracefully and punctuate them effectively. Unfortunately (again), this isn’t practical. Such a study is the work of many years, and consultants who are just making a start when they begin work at the Center would not be much farther along before it was time to graduate. And it still wouldn’t help in cases where their clients couldn’t name or understand the finer points of sentence-level expertise.

Well then, if some of us can spot errors, but can’t name them, and most of our clients can’t spot, can’t name, and don’t much care to do either, then what? Consider what Stanley Fish writes, in How to Write a Sentence:

[I]f one understands that a sentence is a structure of logical relationships and that the number of logical relationships involved is finite, one understands too that there is only one error to worry about, the error of being illogical, and only one rule to follow: make sure that every component of your sentences is related to the other components in a way that is clear and unambiguous (unless ambiguity is what you are aiming at).⁴

That, in case you didn’t notice, is a very logical sentence in which every component is gracefully and effectively related to the other components, and you can easily recognize its logic and interrelatedness without diagramming it (which, trust me, you don’t want to try). And we can take Fish’s advice to bypass the rules, and their names, and address sentence-level concerns with our clients directly in terms of logic; which they can certainly understand. It is, really, as simple as telling them that this or that statement doesn’t seem to make sense (doesn’t seem to: because, in fact, it does make sense to the writer, who reads it in his or her own mind not as it appears on the page, but rather as it appears in the fullness of its meaning, not all of which has made the journey from brain to paper).

And as for anyone who could improve their grasp of English grammar, syntax, punctuation, and mechanics: we won’t demand that you make those improvements, but that doesn’t mean we think you might as well not bother. Yes, it’ll take a while, but all worthwhile things do. And it’s best to get started right away; ask the Director if you’re not sure where to begin.

WORKING WITH UNFAMILIAR TEXTS

If you take the view that the consultant’s job is to address the text, and not the client, then it makes sense to assume that consultants should only work with clients who bring them texts that they are used to working with; so, for example, clients working with history texts should only work with consultants who are majoring in history. But if you take the view that the consultant’s job is to address the client, and not the text, there’s no reason to make this assumption.

Say a client comes to you for help reading a psychology text. If you don’t know or care much about psychology, you might find, if you tried to read it, that you would have as much difficulty with it as the client. But it’s not your job to read it better than the client, because it’s not your

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job to read it “for” the client. It’s your job to help the client read it; which means, again, that you work with the client, and not “on” the text. How do you do this? In case it hasn’t yet been made clear, you do this by asking questions of the client, and by listening to the client’s answers; which, if you do so carefully, will enable you to help the client identify weaknesses in understanding, which the client can then learn to overcome.

What if a client wants to know if her business memo is any good, but you don’t know what a business memo should look like? The obvious answer is that no consultant should ever make even a casual evaluation of a client’s work, even if the genre is utterly familiar. It is the client’s job to know the conventions of the genre; if he or she doesn’t know, that’s a weakness that you can help the client learn to address.

When you think about it this way, you can see that the greater danger for any consultant is working with familiar texts: because these are the ones that will tempt a careless consultant to revert to “expert” mode, offering advice and making pronouncements about the text that will leave the client no wiser or better educated.

**ESL CONSULTATIONS**

If there is an ESL-trained consultant available, it is best to refer clients directly to her or him. There will, however, be occasions when it will be solely up to you to help a client with ESL issues.

When it comes to writing assistance for ESL students with minimal proficiency in English, it is easy to be drawn into doing exactly the sort of line-by-line editing that is strictly against Center policy, simply because it seems there is no other way to help them. If you are confronted with a text that is so full of errors that you know it has little chance of passing if submitted as is, then it is important to (1) be honest with the client about how much work lies ahead, and (2) explain that you cannot help them to “fix” all of the problems. If the student wants to continue, decide on a particular pattern of error to address (choosing and using articles and prepositions are common traps for many non-native English speakers, for example), and focus on that, giving the client some tasks to complete (the Purdue OWL, for instance, includes pages on articles and prepositions, with exercises), and then returning to the client’s text for practice with proofreading for this pattern of error (the client looks for and notices preposition use in the text, decides in each instance whether it is correct or not—and, if not, what the correct choice would look like—and checks with the consultant; repeat, &c.).

**WRITERS WITH LEARNING OR PHYSICAL DISABILITIES**

Accommodation for learning and other disabilities is provided by the Office of Special Services (OSS), and clients who identify themselves (without prompting, that is—never ask a client to reveal if she or he is disabled!) as having been diagnosed with a disability should be asked whether they have already been to talk to someone in that office. Providing academic help for students with diagnosed learning disabilities is work for professionals trained to deal with the problems these students tend to encounter, and is best left to them. You shouldn’t refuse to help someone with a disability, but you should make sure, before you begin, that your client is fully aware that specialized help is available.
OUTREACH

Working in the Center is an important part of the job, but there is more to being a consultant than just being a consultant in the Center. On occasion, Consultants need to carry the work out of the Center, and into the classrooms, where the students are. Asking for help is extremely difficult for many students, and it is often especially hard for those who need the help the most: feelings of inadequacy and doubt can lead students to regard asking for help as an admission of failure, particularly when they suspect that they will be judged or stigmatized if their friends, classmates, or professors see them going into the Center. The best way to counteract the fear that students feel is to stand before them and welcome them, as openly and warmly as we can, and to assure them that feeling overwhelmed is a normal part of the college experience, and that those who don’t seem to be feeling inadequacy or doubt are just good at hiding it (or dangerously unself-aware). The two main forms of outreach—which every consultant must take part in—are pairing with a writing-intensive class, and conducting brief informational sessions (also known as “The Road Show”).

The Outreach Coordinator for the Center will help Consultants schedule the work required to meet their obligations, and any questions or concerns should be directed to her for the most immediate and knowledgeable response.

CONSULTANT/INSTRUCTOR PAIRINGS

Every semester, as part of their outreach pairings commitment, consultants are required to pair with at least two writing-intensive classes (most frequently these will be CRWT or RIH). The purpose of the pairing is to make it easier and more likely for students in these classes to use the Center as a resource for reading and writing assistance. The rationale is simple: students who know someone in the Center—who can identify not only a face, but also a name and a personality—are likelier to feel comfortable about entering what is, to them, a strange place, and admitting that they need help. Of course, it is up to the consultants to be welcoming and encouraging, and to be approachable for these students.

Another benefit of the pairing is that it allows consultants to work with faculty, and this provides them with a window into the world of teaching in higher education that they probably have not had before. Understanding teaching from the faculty perspective will not only help you in your work with that instructor’s students, it will help you work with all sorts of other students and assignments.

The extent to which an instructor requests your services will vary depending upon the instructor. While one instructor may ask you to do The Road Show, attend three peer review classes, and meet monthly, another may only ask you to do The Road Show, in addition to referring students to you in the Center. As long as you have reached out to the instructors to whom you are assigned a couple of times at the semester’s start (see below), you have fulfilled your responsibility in offering your services. The Center keeps track of instructor responses, so recording them is part of your record-keeping obligation. We will reassign you to other faculty if those you were paired with are unresponsive or uninterested.
MEETING WITH THE INSTRUCTOR FOR A PAIRING

Arranging for a meeting with the instructor is each Consultant’s responsibility. The Consultant can use the following email template to initiate a meeting with the instructor:

Dear......

My name is......, and I am a Consultant for The Center for Reading and Writing (CRW). I am writing to introduce myself as well as inform you that I have been paired with your spring section of......

My work as a consultant for the Center requires that I hold specific hours at the CRW and work with students on strategies to assist them with their writing. Those hours will be worked out once the consulting schedule is set. Of course, students are welcome to visit The Center for Reading and Writing and work with anyone who is available. However, as the Consultant assigned to your section, I am available to address your assignments and your students’ concerns more specifically. In addition, I can visit your class to assist your students with peer-critiques.

I was wondering if you have time during the first or second week of classes to meet with me so I can introduce myself and talk about the services we provide. Please feel free to let your students know either in the syllabus or verbally my name and contact information.

Lastly, if you would like me to have a copy of your syllabus and writing assignment guidelines, please feel free to send them to me.

Sincerely,

Consultant
Consultant’s email
Center for Reading and Writing

THE CONSULTANT’S FIRST VISIT TO THE CLASS: THE ROAD SHOW

As indicated above, you will reach out to each professor with whom you are paired via email and wait for a response. In addition, you will reach out to other faculty teaching Writing-Intensive (WI) courses to see if they would like you to visit their classes to do The Road Show. Each of you should do at least five Road Shows over the duration of a semester.

What is The Road Show? It is a 10-minute presentation on the Center’s services that you will deliver to a wide variety of classes. The purpose of The Road Show is to familiarize students and faculty with the services provided by the Center for Reading and Writing; encourage ALL Ramapo students to use the Center; and provide students with the opportunity to meet you, the Consultants.

Faculty Response (or lack thereof): After receiving a response from a professor requesting The Road Show presentation, reply confirming your appointment, and put it on your calendar and the Center’s central calendar. You may visit classes during the times you are scheduled to work in the Center and when you are not. Regardless, you will be paid for all time dedicated to Center activities. If you would like to do a class visit and presentation during the time you are scheduled to be in the Center, please ask your sponsor for approval and cc the director, as soon
as you receive the request from the faculty member. Once you receive approval from your sponsor, post a note on the main bulletin board/central calendar indicating when you are doing a class visit and when you will return.

If you don’t receive a response to your email message after a week has elapsed, please send the message to the professor again. If you still don’t hear back from the professor after the second message, you may stop sending messages and assume the professor is not interested at this time.

**Preparing for The Road Show:** Your first visit to a class to which you are paired should be to deliver The Road Show. You are expected to practice it before each delivery. As you want to make a positive impression on the professor and the class, a high level of professionalism is expected.

As discussed in training, the following tips should be followed in giving a strong presentation.

1. **Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice!** Nothing substitutes for focused practice. You can use the conference room and equipment in the Center to practice when you’re not tutoring. The outreach coordinator will be happy to assist you in gathering a small audience. Also, it is important to have someone time you, so you respect the professor’s time by staying within the 10-minute maximum.

2. **Your Voice.** Project your voice and avoid speaking too quickly. Also, be mindful of using fillers such as “like,” “uhm,” etc. Often times using these words becomes habit, and we don’t hear ourselves, which is why it is helpful to have someone listen specifically for your use of fillers and count them when you practice your presentation. This will help you reduce and eventually eliminate them.

3. **Posture and Gestures.** Stand up straight with your shoulders back and your hands comfortably at your sides. It is appropriate to use hand gestures to emphasize key points, but avoid moving your hands nervously without purpose.

4. **Do not hide behind the computer screen.** Step away from the computer after advancing to the slide you will be discussing. Stand in the front center of the room so you are clearly visible to all the students.

5. **Know the Content.** While it is appropriate to glance at the slides while speaking, avoid simply reading the bullet points. Learn the content on each slide well enough, so you speak to the class and not the slide.

6. **Know the room.** Visit the classroom in advance and test the equipment. If it is not working properly, discuss it with your sponsor to get it resolved.

7. **Relax.** Pausing and smiling before you begin speaking will help calm your nerves. Remember that it’s natural to be a little nervous, so take that nervous energy and turn it into enthusiasm!

8. **Visualize.** Imagine yourself delivering the presentation *superlatively* and run that video through your head multiple times. Imagine thoroughly knowing the information, speaking clearly with intonation, looking at the class using eye contact effectively, projecting enthusiasm while being open and inviting. Imagine being a consultant you would want to bring your assignments to in the Center for Reading and Writing.

    ----from Toastmasters International - 10 Tips for Public Speaking

Don’t forget: before going to the class, check to ensure you can access the presentation by either emailing it to yourself or accessing it directly on the Internet.
Classroom Conduct: Arrive at the class a few minutes early to introduce yourself to the professor, if you have not had an opportunity to do so yet, and get the presentation ready to go. Whether you have met the professor or not, it is important to be polite and professional when entering the class. Look the professor in the eye and speak up in an appropriately friendly manner. Following is a suggested script:

Consultant: Hello Professor____. My name is ______. I’m a consultant from the Center for Reading and Writing. Thank you for allowing me to do a short presentation on our services. May I set up the computer/projector?

After completing The Road Show, promptly turn off the projector and exit the presentation. Then thank the professor again and leave. Your consideration of the professor’s time will be appreciated and respected making her more likely to invite you and/or other consultants back to present in future classes.

Other Road Show Requests: Road Show requests will also come into the Center from faculty who visit the Center website and those who hear about this service from their colleagues. Consequently, you may be asked to conduct additional Road Shows throughout the semester to honor these requests.
APPENDIX: CITATION & DOCUMENTATION

ADDRESSING CITATION/DOCUMENTATION ISSUES

A significant part of what faculty want clients to learn and practice when they assign research projects is the correct use of a particular style for citing and documenting sources. As it turns out, citation and documentation is often something that clients do need to learn and practice—that is, many of them don’t know how, and many of those who do are not as adept as they think they are. As a consultant, it is an important part of your job to help those who ask you to work with them regarding citation and documentation, and also to recognize problems and help those who haven’t asked for assistance (possibly because they didn’t know they needed it).

You do not need to be an expert in order to help with citation and documentation, but you do need to be alert to the issues, and you need to know enough about all of the widely used styles (MLA, APA, Turabian, Chicago, and AP) to be able to recognize when something doesn’t look right, so you’ll know to check the correct form in a manual. If you think you see a problem, all you need to do is ask the client to mark the place in the text, and, when you’ve come to a stopping point, tell the client to wait for a moment while you find the manual; when you have it, come back to the client, find the appropriate place in the book, and compare the correct form with the client’s text. You are not only helping the client to correct the text; you are modeling the very behavior that the client needs to engage in when drafting (noting potential problems, waiting for the right time to get up from writing, going to get the manual, and sitting down with it to check). If it turns out that you were wrong, and the client’s work was correct, that’s never a problem; just congratulate the client on getting it right, and go back to work.

Following a style is like cooking a recipe from a cookbook. You gather the ingredients (in the case of citation and documentation, the source material, with all of its identifying information) and then you follow the steps as outlined in the book: start with this, follow with that, etc. It’s simply a matter of having the right materials in the right order. No one wants to eat a cake that’s been made by someone who left out the sugar and the eggs, and few professors are going to be happy with citations that leave out important information, or references that put information in the wrong places. Always follow the manual, and you’ll be OK. Try to guess—even if you think you know the style well—and you can get into trouble very quickly.

The manuals will be available in the Center, in hard copy (book form), and we also have ready reference cards for MLA and APA styles, to handle the most common problems. It is also possible to find style guides online, and, if you notice that a client has a lot of problems with citation and documentation, it’s worth taking the time to look up the appropriate website with the client (because clients are more likely to use the web than a manual). This can probably wait until the end of the session, however.

It’s your responsibility to do whatever it takes for you to be comfortable with the use of a given style. If that means practicing generating citations and works cited/reference entries in your free time (or during downtime between sessions), then so be it. However you do it, find the confidence to address any style with any client who needs help.
DOCUMENTATION AND STYLE MANUALS

MLA. This is the style required in all Critical Reading and Writing (CRWT) courses, including 101 and 102, for which all clients have to include some research. If a client tells you that their paper is for a CRWT course, you should immediately ready yourself to check the citations and documentation. Also, MLA is used for literature in English and other modern languages (MLA stands for “Modern Language Association”), so you should be alert for it if you learn that the paper is for a class in any of these subjects.

Copies of the MLA handbook are available in the Center. Also, MLA style is discussed at length in Rules for Writers, which all clients in CRWT courses are required to have.

In addition, The Purdue OWL can be used to check form and look at examples.

APA. This is the style used for research in psychology (APA stands for “American Psychological Association”), as well as other disciplines in the social sciences (sociology, social work, education are among the most common). It is similar to MLA (both use what’s known as “parenthetical citation”), but there are important differences. If you are closely familiar with one but not the other, be sure to keep a manual close by to check; don’t assume that because something “looks right” that it is, unless you are closely familiar with both styles.

Again, copies of the manual are available in the Center, and a search similar to the one suggested above (with APA instead of MLA) will quickly find a helpful website.

Turabian or Chicago Manual of Style. The title Turabian is taken from the name of a woman who published a famous short guide to the famously complex Chicago style (named after the University of Chicago, where it was developed). This style is used for papers in history, and sometimes also for courses in the School of Business. It’s a footnote style, which makes it easily distinguishable from MLA and APA. If you don’t use it yourself, or don’t see it often enough to feel comfortable with it, just make sure you have the style manual handy, and check a few citations and references to see if the client has the form correct.

Copies of both the Turabian manual and the complete Chicago Manual of Style are available in the Center; the official website is chicagomanualofstyle.org. You can also go to troy.troy.edu/writingcenter and click on “Research/Documentation” and then “Chicago (Turabian) Documentation.”

If you should happen to come across some other style for citation and documentation, don’t be alarmed—there are many more of them out there (each of the “hard” sciences seems to have a style of its own, and there are styles for journalism and legal writing, to name a couple more). A client who is working with an unusual style should be able to tell you something about it, and should have a copy of the manual (or at least a style sheet) to work with. If the client wants help with style but doesn’t have a manual or guide to show you, you can ask for them to come back with it for another appointment.
List of Consultants for 2019-2020

Sue Auger – Reading Specialist
Jared Berberabe
Brian Bushell
Ruth Engel
Kiersten Farrell
Gina Gerbasio
Sara Gustavsen
Peggy Hartog – ESL Specialist
Gunnar Hopson
Noor Khan
Tom Kitchen – Director
Emily Lamonica
Samantha Lauridsen
Sanskar Marahata
Grace McCrone
Courtney Ober
Ramon Reyes – Developmental Writing Specialist
Morgan Ridgway
Jeremy Rocker
Jessica Ryan
Erin Schwartz
Priscilla Tovey Van Aulen – Coordinator of Program and Faculty Outreach
ISOCRATIC OATH

I SWEAR BY HERMES LOGIOS, GOD OF ELOQUENCE, AND ATHENA GLAUKOPI, GODDESS OF WISDOM PENETRATING THE DARKNESS, THAT I WILL ACT ALWAYS IN ACCORD WITH THE TENETS OF THIS OATH AND COVENANT:

TO RESPECT THE ART OF ORAL INSTRUCTION AS EQUAL TO ANY OF THE LIBERAL ARTS, AND TO SHARE WITH OTHERS--IF THEY SO DESIRE--THE BENEFITS OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE AS A PRACTITIONER.

I WILL SEEK TO GUIDE MY CLIENTS ACCORDING TO MY BEST ABILITY AND JUDGMENT, STRIVING ALWAYS TO DO HARM TO NO ONE.

I WILL RENDER NO ASSISTANCE THAT DIRECTLY CHANGES THE CLIENT'S WORK, OR THAT DIRECTLY CAUSES THE CLIENT TO CHANGE THE WORK, ACCORDING TO MY IDEAS; AND I WILL ABSOLUTELY REFUSE TO DO SO NO MATTER HOW PITEOUSLY OR THREATENINGLY A CLIENT TRIES TO PERSUADE ME.

I WILL NEITHER PROOFREAD NOR EDIT A CLIENT'S WORK: NOT EVEN FOR CLIENTS WHOSE WORK IS CLEARLY IN DIRE NEED OF BOTH; I WILL INSTEAD, IN CASES WHERE I SEE THE NEED, BE FRANK AND HONEST ABOUT THE TEXT'S DEFICIENCIES, AND ATTEMPT TO TEACH THE CLIENT SOME OF THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CHANGES SO THAT THEY MAY BE MADE INDEPENDENTLY BY THE CLIENT.

NOT ONLY IN THE CENTER, BUT EVERYWHERE IN THE COLLEGE, AND BEYOND, I WILL HOLD TO THE ETHICS OF MY PROFESSION AS A CONSULTANT, AND I WILL STRIVE TO REPRESENT TO ALL THE IDEALS OF THE PROFESSION.

ALL THAT MAY COME TO MY KNOWLEDGE DURING THE PRACTICE OF MY PROFESSION I WILL HOLD SECRET FROM THE PUBLIC, SHARING IT ONLY WITH MY FELLOW PRACTITIONERS (WHO ARE EQUALLY BOUND BY THEIR OATHS), EXCEPTING ONLY THOSE INSTANCES IN WHICH THE CLIENT HAS GIVEN ME EXPRESS PERMISSION TO SHARE THE INFORMATION, OR IN WHICH CERTAIN HARM WILL COME TO OTHERS IF I DO NOT.

IF I DO NOT VIOLATE THIS OATH, MAY I ENJOY THE RESPECT OF MY COLLEAGUES FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, AND BE REMEMBERED WITH AFFECTION BY ALL. MAY I ALWAYS ACT SO AS TO PRESERVE THE FINEST TRADITIONS OF MY PROFESSION, AND MAY I LONG EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF HELPING OTHERS TO HELP THEMSELVES.