

Robert J. Connors Writing Center Faculty Information Sheet

“Writing is thinking on paper. Anyone who can think can write.”

– William Zinsser, *Writing to Learn*

In every class, in every discipline, students write – to help understand what they have learned and to clarify, record, and share their thoughts. At the Writing Center, our focus is the writer. We work with faculty and students across all disciplines, not only to help teach writing, but above all, to help teach writers.

Visiting the Writing Center

Everyone can benefit from a second opinion, another pair of eyes or a chance to talk over their writing. Many students seek informal writing advice from roommates or other classmates, and we certainly encourage all discussions that promote writing. The Writing Center contributes to the culture of writing at UNH by offering neutral, trained consultants who can provide feedback in a more formal, but still relaxed, atmosphere. No one needs to have a writing “problem” to talk with us, only writing that they need to do.

We are open, free of charge, to all UNH undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff. We offer consultation on any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to polishing.

Writing Center Staff

The writing center directors, writing assistants, and core staff are all UNH students, graduate and undergraduate. We come from all disciplines, and we try to pair writers with writing assistants in their areas of study, if possible. Regardless of expertise, we are cautious about intruding between the student and professor, and must always respect the author's ownership of the work. In our capacity as writing coaches, we must rely on students to be the final experts on their own papers.

Conferencing at the Writing Center

Most of the semester, we set aside an hour for each conference. During high-volume periods, we may reduce them to one half hour to meet demand. The student is in charge, and the writing assistant will ask what the student wants to work on. The writing assistant will also ask about the assignment and talk with the student about the topic.

If the student has the assignment, we will go over it and make sure the student understands each piece of it.

If the student does not bring an assignment, we will work with the assignment as the student describes it.

If the student is in the early stages of planning, the student and writing assistant will brainstorm, talk about sources, and work on organizing information. The writing assistant will ask questions about the topic and the student's position on it. They may look up library databases together or talk about reliable sources on the web.

If the student has a paper ready, in part or whole, the student and writing assistant will read it aloud together, reviewing the paper by "ear" as well as eye.

The Focus of a Conference

There is no template that can describe or anticipate the directions that a writing conference will take. However, here is a general description of how we approach them.

We begin a conference by looking at the overall structure and aims of a paper. Does it have a thesis? Does the paper make sense? Does it support its thesis? We look to see that the student has sources or points of evidence, an argument, a conclusion. We ask questions about awkward passages or gaps.

If the paper has met these higher-order concerns, then we will talk about lower order concerns, syntax and sentence structure, transitions between paragraphs, integrating citations, and recurring grammar and punctuation errors. We are not editors or proofreaders, but we will try to address any repeated grammar mistakes we see. As well as using a series of Writing Center handouts on common writing issues, we will help students to use their own writing references (like handbooks) to research errors.

We will adjust the conference based on the level of the student and the paper. For example, a master's thesis conference will proceed differently from one dealing with a freshman personal essay, and an ESL student may receive more direct help with usage issues. We will also try to give students the best help we can in the time they have -- if a paper is due in a matter of hours, the writing assistant may focus on a few specific changes that the student can make in that time.

Faculty Files: We maintain a reference file for those faculty members who send us copies of their syllabi or assignments. These come in handy when students don't bring documentation with them.

Faculty Notes: At the end of a conference, the writing assistant will ask whether the student wants a note sent to the professor who assigned the paper. These notes are meant as a record and brief summary of the work done in the conference. Please feel free to contact the writing assistant for more specific information about any session.

Class Visits: We are happy to visit classes and discuss who we are and what we offer. We are also available to provide class workshops on the writing process.

Hamilton Smith Hall Rm. 7
Monday – Thursday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Friday 10 a.m. -1 p.m.
603-862-3272

Walk-in hours at Dimond Library 502 (opposite the elevator),
Wednesday 6 – 9 p.m., Sunday 5 – 9 p.m.