

CHSS 390:  
Peer Tutoring in Writing Across the Disciplines  
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**Peer Tutor Handbook:** <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/peertutor.html>

**Course Description:** A variable credit, experiential learning course in the tutoring of writing across the disciplines. The course focuses on practical application of writing theory and pedagogy from course readings, development of tutoring skills, and self-reflection through journals and a final paper. After the first five weeks of training, you tutor two to three hours a week. You may take the 1-credit course up to three times.

**Prerequisites:** English 302 with a grade of A, 60 credit hours, overall G.P.A of 3.0 or higher in the student's major. In order to take this course, you must submit two recommendations from faculty members and a sample of recent academic writing; before enrolling, you must complete an interview with the Director of the Writing Center.

**Objectives:** The course aims to provide you with a theoretical and experiential grounding in peer tutoring, allowing you to move from the traditional role of student to a more dynamic role as peer instructor and collaborator. Throughout the semester, our concerns will be practical as well as pedagogical. We begin by examining theoretical and pedagogical approaches to peer tutoring and then move into reflective practice. Each of you will be mentored by a graduate TA/tutor, a person who will observe you tutoring, act as a sounding board for your concerns, and also make sure that you receive ample opportunities to tutor during your three-hour shifts.

**Format and Requirements:** In the first five weeks of the course, we'll meet once a week as a class to discuss the readings and your experiences observing sessions. During these weeks, you'll submit a weekly reading log, making connections between what you've been reading and what you've been observing in sessions. After approximately five to six weeks, you'll begin tutoring on your own for three hours a week. At that point, you won't need to keep a reading log; rather, you'll write weekly or bi-weekly Townhall posts (frequency depends on how sessions are going) throughout the semester, describing tutoring sessions, raising relevant tutoring problems or issues, and reflecting on the tutoring process. If you are discussing something confidential in nature, you will email me directly. The final course requirement is an 8-10 page reflective paper. Course reading, reading log entries, and the Townhall posts should inform this paper.

If you are a student in your second or third semester of CHSS 390, you are not required to keep reading logs; however, you will still write weekly or Townhall posts. You will still write a final paper; however, you may propose or be asked to do a project related to your writing center work as an alternative to the final paper.

**Methods of Evaluation:** You will be evaluated on your thoughtful and full completion of the course requirements. Note: If you miss a significant number of hours of tutoring and/or class time, you will not be able to receive a grade of "A" in the course.

**Course Texts:**

- Leigh, Ryan. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. (Provided courtesy of Bedford/St. Martin's Publishers).
- Selected readings on writing pedagogy, ESL issues, and tutoring strategies.  
(Please see attached reading list for more details)

Weekly Assignments and Training:

Week 1: Introductions to writing center work.

**Read:** An introduction to tutoring and to the University Writing Center. Browse *The Writing Center Handbook* online, particularly “Tutoring Guidelines and Strategies.”

**Training:** Learning the routine—work with the director to schedule training times. When you have set up your training times, you’ll be assigned a graduate TA/tutor to mentor you. Your mentor will help make the training process go smoothly, will advise you on best practices, and will also serve as a sounding board for your questions and concerns. Your first training session entails bringing in a piece of writing and being tutored (make an appt online with an available tutor). In your first Townhall post, you’ll reflect on the first week of training, making connections to what you have read in the writing center handbook.

Week 2: How we tutor and why.

**Read:** Our Practice: *Bedford Guide*, Chapters 1-4. In your reading log, note and reflect on information you think might be useful. These entries can be quite short. Some theory: Read Muriel Harris’ “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors” (online) and David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University.” In your reading log (hard copy), consider why you would be asked to read these two articles as an introduction to tutoring practice.

**Training:** Observe two tutoring sessions. Remember that we must always ask a client’s permission for someone to observe a session. Describe and reflect on these sessions in your Townhall post, making connections to readings and whatever other experiences and observations you may have. Read Jess’s write-up on tutoring sessions as a model and Terry’s observation notes on Jennifer’s to see how one might handle a brainstorming session.

Week 3: Who are our clients? Thinking about different learning, writing and tutoring styles.

**Read:** Look over the writing center demographics in your packet. Also Read *Bedford*’s chapter 5, noting especially the pages on learning-different (LD) students. Also read Harris “Working with Individual Differences in the Writing Center Tutorial”, “Tutorial Talk and Personality Types,” and look over materials from Disability Support Services. **Write** about your writing process. We’ll discuss sample tutoring scenarios.

**Training:** Tutor a tutor (different tutors each time) on three or more of the sample essay in the folder in the front file cabinet. Continue to observe as many different sessions as possible. After each training session, meet with the tutor and/or your mentor for analysis and reflection on the process. In Townhall, write an update about the sessions you’ve observed and interesting aspects of your discussions with tutors about styles and strategies. As always, make connections to your readings as you see them.

Week Four: Tutoring non-native writers/speakers and the role of grammar knowledge.

**Read:** Review *Bedford* Chapter 5 on non-native students. Gillespie “Is This My Job?” Gillespie and Lerner “Working with ESL Writers.” Review the handouts in your packet on strategies for working with ESL writers. Make observations in your reading log (hard copy).

**Training:** If possible, observe one of our ESL specialists working with a non-native writer.

Week Five: Handling difficult sessions. Tutoring with technology.

**Read:** *Bedford* chapter 8 and articles “On Difficult Clients” and “Teaching Writing Consultants to Utilize Supportive Behaviors (Control vs. Problem Orientation etc).” Also *Bedford* chapter 6. Read Amaris’ and Andrew’s final papers. In reading log, take notes on what you consider important information for tutors to consider in all of these readings.

**Training:** Tutor with observation by experienced tutor and/or Alex/Anna.

Week Six: Tutoring writers across the disciplines.

**Read:** *Bedford* chapter 7. “Introducing Students to Disciplinary Genres” (Look especially at the three ways the authors say conventions differ, reflecting deep epistemological differences) and “Helping Students Write Literary Analysis.” In reading log, take notes on what you consider important information for tutors to consider.

**Training:** Tutor with observation.

Week Seven through Fifteen: **You’re a tutor!!!**

Exam Week: You are not required to tutor during exam week. **Due:** 8-10 page reflective paper on your tutoring experience, synthesizing responses to course readings, log entries, and your training and tutoring experiences. **Note:** Please share a draft of this paper with the other peer tutors either online or in a group session.