

CHSS 390: Peer Tutoring in Writing in the Disciplines

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Description: 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: We'll meet as a class for one hour a week for the first six weeks of the course, discussing the readings listed below and sharing insights from your training experiences, with the latter making up the other two hours a week you'll commit to the course. You'll write hard copy logs on the assigned readings and send weekly training updates on email to the whole class. After week six, you'll be tutoring on your own. At that point, you'll continue to stay in close touch with your graduate tutor-mentor and with the class via regular email updates on your tutoring. I'll observe you tutoring at least once as will your mentor. At the end of the semester, you'll submit a 6-8 page final paper synthesizing the readings you did early in the course with your experiences as a tutor.

You can read much more about the course in the **Peer-Tutor Handbook:**
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/peertutor.html>

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 available online, on E-Reserve, and in course packet. (The list of readings and their location is in the packet you'll receive in the first class.)

Weekly Assignments and Training:

Week 1: Introductions to writing center work.

Class: Read an introduction to tutoring and to the University Writing Center. Browse the *Writing Center Handbook* online, particularly "Tutoring Guidelines and Strategies." Write a short reflection essay on what you see as the role of a writing center in an academic institution and how you think you can contribute to the GMU writing center (think about yourself as writer and a reader) and what you wish to gain from this peer-tutoring experience. Please be specific in your reflections.

Training: Learning the routine—work with Terry 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. Begin by making an appointment online with an available tutor. In your first *email log*, reflect on the experience of being tutored: describe the writing you brought to the tutor and what your goals were for the session. What did you notice about the way the session was conducted? What, if anything, surprised you? What tutoring strategies were especially helpful? Were there strategies and/or advice that weren't particularly effective? Why?

Week 2: How we tutor and why.

Class: Read: On tutorial practice: *Bedford Guide*, Chapters 1-4. In your *reading log (hard copy)*, take notes 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" (E-reserve). In your *reading log (hard copy)*, consider why you would be asked to read these two articles as an introduction to tutoring practice. These log entries should be about a page or so long.

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 *email log*, making connections to readings and whatever other experiences and observations you may have. How was each session different? What new strategies did you learn from each? How would you have done it differently? Why? *Read* (but no log required) Jess's write-up on tutoring sessions as a model of the kinds of details you might want to include in your email updates. Note, however, that your updates don't have to be that long (Jess was catching up on her updates). Also read Terry's write-up of a session she observed Jennifer tutoring. This write-up will give you a sense of the kinds of things Terry notices when she observes your session.

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

Class: Read: *Bedford's* chapter 5, noting especially the pages on learning-different (LD) students and non-native writers/speakers and the role of grammar knowledge. Also read Harris "Working with Individual Differences in the Writing Center Tutorial" (E-Reserve) and "Tutorial Talk and Personality Types" (E-Reserve). *Write* about your writing process. You'll share your writing with others in the class, so please bring it in hard copy. We'll also discuss sample tutoring scenarios.

Training: *Tutor a tutor (different tutors each time) on three or more of the sample essays* 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 your *email log*, 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.

Class: Read: Gillespie "Is This My Job?" and Matsuda and Cox's "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," both on E-Reserve. Review the handouts in your packet on strategies for working with ESL writers. Read *Valuing Written Accents: Introduction, Chapters 3 & 4*. In your *reading log (hard copy)*, take notes on aspects of the readings that you found most useful and interesting. Make connections between the readings as you see fit.

Training: If possible, observe one of our ESL specialists working with a non-native writer. In your *email log*, note your observations, questions, and concerns about tutoring ESL students.

Week Five: Handling difficult sessions.

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

Training: Tutor with observation by an experienced tutor and/or Anna/Terry. *In your email log*, describe your session, reflect on your strengths and weaknesses, and explain what you might have done differently and *why*.

Week Six: Tutoring writers across the disciplines.

Class: Read: *Bedford* chapter 7; “Introducing Students to Disciplinary Genres” (online: look especially at the *three* main ways the authors say conventions for writing differ according to different disciplinary ways of knowing); and “Helping Students Write Literary Analysis” (online). Browse the writing guides on the writing center website (under “Students” then “Writing for your Major.”) *In your reading log (hard copy)*, take notes on what you consider important information for tutors to consider. Draw from your experiences writing in different disciplines.

Training: Tutor with observation by your GTA mentor. Also, **record your session** (remember to ask the client’s permission). Listen to your taped session and in your *email log* write a self-evaluation of your session. Describe your experience listening to yourself tutor and reflect on your strategies and style as a tutor. What did you learn about yourself that you hadn’t noticed before? What seem to be your strengths and areas that need improvement in that session and in general? What changes might you make in your tutoring based on what you learned from listening to the tape? This email log will only be sent to Terry. ***Set up a meeting with Terry to discuss your taped session, your self-evaluation and your readiness to start tutoring on your own.***

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

Exam Week: You are not required to tutor during exam week. **Due:** 6-8 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.**