

Working with Your Writing Assistant

The Basics:

1. When a professor accepts a WA, s/he agrees to require all the students to meet with the WA individually or in small groups at least three times throughout the semester.
2. All WA's have taken Writing Theory, a full-semester course on the theory and practice of tutoring and writing instruction taught by Jill Stephen and David Rosenwasser. Linda Bips has worked with the trainees on student development.
3. WA's have been trained to work collaboratively with students on papers-in-progress and have learned ways to avoid plagiarism while doing so. They can help students understand assigned topics, brainstorm ideas, develop and revise drafts, and work on technical matters.
4. WA's are paid by the hour for the following activities:
 - a. class time (they should attend all class meetings)
 - b. meetings with their FYS professor
 - c. the mandatory three individual or small group sessions with each student
 - d. offering presentations/workshops
 - e. two hours of prep work per monthly pay period (a set amount of hours per month toward compensation for time spent preparing for class)

Recommended Practices:

1. WA's meet with students individually or in small groups outside of class at least three times in the semester. Ideally, the WA should meet with students at different points in their writing process—at the invention stage (early), as they develop drafts, and as they respond to and revise on the basis of the professor's written comments.
2. WA's are not allowed to grade papers, nor are they allowed to write written comments on a set of papers. Normally, they read student papers with the student, and with the student's permission, they may write on the draft. Tutors often write notes on separate paper for the student to keep.
3. WA's are not paid for tutoring sessions when the student does not show up, so in-class sign-up sheets rather than open office hours are better.
4. Ideally, the professor and WA will meet weekly to discuss students' progress and to work out the role of the WA in the coming week. The WA can be a resource in planning day-to-day work in the seminar and can keep the professor informed, from a student's point of view, about any problems seminar members might be experiencing.
5. The WA and the professor should review together any materials that the WA wishes to distribute to the class—prior to distribution. The WA and the professor should work out together the scheduling of tutoring sessions between class members and the WA at various points in the semester.
6. It is productive for the WA and the professor to meet in order to go over a set of papers that the professor has written comments on and graded; this gives the WA a sense of how the professor responds to writing.
7. Faculty are encouraged to discuss writing assignments with the WA. This helps the WA answer students' questions about the assignment. It is also helpful if the professor makes assignments in writing.
8. Conferences between students and the WA are most productive if the professor requires that students bring some writing to their meetings with WA's. At the first individual tutorial, working with the student's written text (the summer essay, a response to a class reading) focuses the session on the student's writing process and sets a precedent for the rest of the sessions that semester. First meetings like this also help faculty assess their students' individual needs early in the semester.

Sites for Negotiation between FYS Professor and WA:

1. The role of the WA in class discussion: determine how often and how much the WA should participate. The goal is for the WA to model careful reading and thoughtful commenting without usurping the students' role.
2. Making in-class presentations on writing: some professors think this is a good idea, and others don't. In any case, the professor and WA will want to talk about how such presentations might be made collaborative.
3. The professor and the WA should talk about timing of due dates and tutoring sessions, so that neither person is deluged. In some cases, the WA talks with one half of the class on a given paper while the professor talks to the other half. They would then switch students for the next round.