Table of Contents

I. Philosophy
The Idealized Writing Center 1
The Philosophy of University Writing Centers 2
The Purpose of University Writing Centers 2
Writing Center Theory Into Practice 4
What the Writing Center Means for Your Course 5
Engaged Readers and Audience 6

II. Structure
How Can You Help the Writing Center 6
What We Need from Instructors 7
Language of the Writing Center 8
Hierarchy of Concern 8
Open-Ended Questioning 10
Gradual Release of Responsibility 10

III. Services
Our Services 11
Face-to-Face Consultations 11
Email Consultations 12
Embedded Online Work 13
Writing Consultant Peer Review 13
In-Class Presentations 14
Supplemental Web Materials 15
Who We Work With 15

Conclusion 16
Works Cited 16
The Idealized Writing Center

One of the first goals of our Writing Center, and one of the primary reasons we thought to create this guide, is to demystify the academic space reserved for the collaborative writing process. We strive for every instructor of a writing intensive course to understand the services we offer at Spalding’s Writing Center. We want you to have the foundational knowledge of our Writing Center philosophies and best practices, so you can utilize our services in an effective way that enhances your teaching practices and creates a longstanding partnership with our Writing Center. We believe another important goal is to assist you with communicating to your students the importance of a collaborative writing process.

Successful collaboration is foundational to successful writing.

Much like what you’ll read about later in this guide, we believe there is a hierarchy of concerns in the writing process and a gradual release of responsibility in writing feedback. This framework parallels the ideology that skills of process writing is of greater concern than the skills of polishing and editing a paper. We uphold the rhetorical philosophy that the skills of critical thinking and rhetorical presentation are far more important than the skills of interpreting APA formatting and scanning a text for typos and misplaced commas. We uphold the compositional philosophy that a perfectly polished text, yet having nothing significant to communicate, is inferior in comparison to a text of sophisticated rhetorical moves with a few mechanical blemishes. We advocate for the focus of writing to be the focus of discovering ideas and presenting those ideas in a rhetorical presentation that aligns with discourse expectations.
The Philosophy of University Writing Centers

University Writing Centers became professionalized as early as the 1970s! We continue the tradition of professionalism in the Writing Center through rigorous academic training that begins before the staff member becomes a writing consultant and continues throughout the time spent with us at Spalding’s Writing Center. Staff members are comprised of undergraduate and graduate students handpicked by Writing Center Leadership. Our staff members undergo an equal level of training, no matter their current academic standing. Becoming an informed reader is an evolutionary process that is forever improving through constant reflection and evaluation. Academic feedback is informed by continuous academic training of our staff in the fields of composition, rhetoric, critical analysis, and University Writing Center philosophy and praxis. Further, Writing Center Scholarship is founded upon the philosophy of peer feedback. To meet the diverse needs of a diverse student body, we strive to equip our staff with a broad range of transferrable skills, theoretical foundations, and scholarly practices.

The Purpose of University Writing Centers

University Writing Centers were not created as spaces for remedial students! Rather, the Writing Center was created as a space to foster a collaborative experience of writing (hence, the peer feedback mentioned earlier). At the Spalding University Writing Center, we destigmatize the services we offer by referring to our staff as consultants, rather than tutors. We focus on building the confidence of writers by using their strengths to improve their weaknesses. We accomplish this goal by cultivating a supportive, inclusive environment in which our consultants can give the student writer informed, engaged, critical feedback.

We do not shape a student writer’s voice; we help them find their voice.
We discourage peer consultants from appropriating student writers’ voices, so we definitely do not edit their papers, nor give them specific content to include or exclude in their rhetorical presentation of the written discourse. If we were to do so, we would be committing the heinous academic crime of plagiarizing their work. Rather, we help them discover the skills they did not know they already possessed.

**Additionally, we are not the evaluators, because that task falls to you—and we definitely don’t want to appropriate your pedagogy.**

Just as every writer has their own stylistic ideals of good writing, so does every professor. Therefore, if there is a specific question of content or rhetorical style that we cannot answer we model the best practice to find that answer: inquire with you. Ultimately, we uphold this theoretical foundation: We’re guides, not teachers. But, we still have a lot to offer our peers by simply being an informed reader. By asking open-ended directional questions, we guide the student writer to their personal discoveries and guide them in recognition of patterns of concerns in their writing. We guide them in the best practices to address those concerns and shape future writing practices.
Writing Center Theory into Practice

We hope the brief overview of our theoretical concepts and ideologies that shape our Writing Center practices is a step towards demystifying your University Writing Center. To shift the focus from the abstract to the concrete, we would like to share an overview of a one-on-one collaborative peer review:

- We acknowledge the writer as an individual with unique needs
- We greet the writer with a smile and welcome them to the Writing Center
- We create a rapport by asking them a personalized question to engage small talk and set them at ease
- We ask the writer what they are writing about and to articulate the goals of the writing
- We ask to review the assignment sheet because we want to assess if they have a clear understanding of the writing task
- We ask about their concerns with their current stage of the writing process because we want to offer individualized feedback
- We explain collaborative feedback is essentially a collaborative conversation
- We explain that we will read the paper aloud from start until finish because there is benefit for the author to hear their words spoken by the audience and it allows us to consider a hierarchy of concerns
- We explain that will review a hard copy of the text so we can critically engage with static words through dynamic annotation because writing is a mode of discovery
- We look at where the writer is at in their writing process and use the hierarchy of concerns to meet the their needs
- We establish a plan for revisions using the framework of a gradual release of responsibility
- We encourage the writer to return
An informed collaborative conversation about writing is the essence of University Writing Center Scholarship and best practices. By the end of the consultation, the writing consultant will have guided the student writer in a conversation about the rhetorical moves of their text. In idealized Writing Center practices, we will have worked together to find points of discovery and set a list of goals for further drafting and revision. Modeling successful strategies and practices is one of the foundations of our work. Hopefully, this explanation of the practice of collaboration in our University Writing Center will better inform you of the thoughtful academic work we practice (and reflect upon) daily.

**What This Means for Your Course**

We advocate to meet your class on the first day. We uphold the ideology that the Writing Center is more than a space of informed collaboration; it is academic student support comprised of knowledgeable, dedicated, and engaged staff. We request to personally meet with your students so we can personalize the Spalding University Writing Center. To demonstrate your support of the Writing Center, inviting us to your class on the first day is defined as an informal 5 minute presentation of the services offered at the Writing Center. We introduce ourselves as writing collaborators and normalize the services we offer. We inform students that good academic writing is shaped by good academic collaboration.

**We’re not concerned about perfectly polished papers; rather, we’re concerned about perfectly presented ideas.**

We don’t evaluate and judge students’ writing, nor do we evaluate or judge any part of their writing process. Rather, we are here to help students shape their writing practices into a successful writing process. We are so much more than editors because we are not editors!
We Offer Feedback as an Engaged Reader

We offer a critical audience. We offer a collaborative sounding board of invention. At the closing of our classroom visit, we share with your students the ways to make the Writing Center work for them. We encourage them to be thoughtful students who schedule multiple visits: in-person or online. We tell them how to make the most of their session by coming prepared with an assignment sheet, a list of their concerns, and a willingness to be engaged, so we can work with them to turn concerns into revision goals. We encourage your student writers to build lasting relationships with us for the benefit of their collegiate success. In our vision of idealized writing center practice, we get to know your students on a personal level starting the first session of their freshman year until the moment they walk across the graduation stage.

How Can You Help the Writing Center?
(Share, Normalize, Communicate)

There are three easy steps you as an instructor can do to help support the Writing Center here at Spalding…

1. **Share our service.** Let students know the Writing Center is here for them. Get us involved in your class. Let students know the different ways we can work with them. Let them know we are here to collaborate with them to make their writing better.

2. **Normalize the Writing Center.** Let students know that feedback is a normal and integral part of the writing process. **Don’t present the Writing Center as a punishment or a place for bad writers because it creates a negative connotation that stigmatizes both the center and the student.** Instead, present it as a service used by students, staff, and faculty when they need a second set of eyes on their work. We want to spread the message that the WC is used by all writers and a completely normal thing to do.
3. **Communicate with us.** Let us know how what we can do to help support your students. Let us know about your assignments. Share your prompts, rubrics, and anything else that may give us added direction in our feedback. Let us know specific things we need to pay attention to as we give feedback. Let us know where you see consistent patterns of error in your students’ writing. Tell us when you see us falling short.

**What We Need From Instructors**

**Scaffold the WC into your assignments and sessions.** We have found that when the WC is used as a supplemental support tool throughout the writing process it gives students the opportunity to experience feedback and revision as an organic thing. The WC can be folded into assignments by encouraging students to use our service throughout each part of the writing process. WC facilitated peer reviews are an additional way to support students in a peer setting.

**Draft, Revisions, and Drafts.** Writing is an iterative process that encompasses drafting, feedback, and revision performed multiple times. If drafts are required in a course, the WC can support the class by giving students feedback throughout the assignment either face-to-face, through email, through peer review, and through the embedded online WC.

**Communication.** Talk to us. Tell us your needs. Tell us how we can help. Help us to form a relationship with you that we can grow over time. When we work with instructors over multiple sessions, when we have a dialogue about what works and what doesn’t, it allows us to grow as a center.
Language of the Writing Center

- **We don’t edit papers.** We give feedback in collaborative way.
- **We don’t teach writing.** We introduce ways for the writer to evaluate their own writing.
- **We don’t give grades or talk about grades.** We help students revise their work through guided feedback based on writing center best practices.
- **We don’t judge work.** We meet the student where they are in the process and tailor our feedback to give them direction in revision.
- **We don’t turn people away.** Our sessions are typically 45 minutes. We will work with students as much as they want (although we prefer time for revision between sessions).

Hierarchy of Concern

We use a hierarchy of concern model in order to meet the student where they are in their writing process. This model is what our consultants are trained to follow when working with a student’s paper. This model uses a trickle-down technique which starts with higher-order issues and gradually works toward lower-level issues. During a consultation, we focus on the biggest issues with the student. If all of those issues are met, we gradually work our way through the hierarchy of concerns. In other words, if a student comes to us with higher-order issues, our feedback will be primarily focused on these issues. The following is a brief overview of the hierarchy of concerns model. (Note: This isn’t a static/rigid model as many areas overlap and work with and alongside one another.)
Higher-Order Concerns
We like to think of Higher Order Concerns as *Global Areas of Revision*. A paper may have a beautiful presentation of grammar and mechanics, but the rhetorical presentation of content may be hideous.

- Genre
- Thesis
- Organization
- Meets Requirements of Assignment
- Argument/Claim and Supporting Evidence

Medium Order Concerns
We like to think of Medium Order Concerns as *Mid-level Considerations of Revision*. At this level of concern, we take a closer examination of how rhetorical content is presented at the paragraph level and cross checking this with the global areas of revision.

- Transitions
- Topic Sentences
- Clarity
- Open-Ended Questioning

Lower Order Concerns
We like to think of style and mechanics as areas for *local revision*. Although, in the context of the writing center, this lower order concern seems to be of the upmost importance to the writer. Our “call to action” as collaborative writing consultants is to first guide students in how to think critically about the global rhetorical moves in their writing then consider lower order concerns much later in the drafting process.

- Grammar
- Spelling
- Formatting
Open-Ended Questioning

One of the utmost important theoretical foundations of writing consultation is to **not take ownership of the student’s writing**. *St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (and a slew of composition philosophers such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow) argue that **collaborative conversations about writing empower the writer**. We want to **guide** the writer in discovering the tools for writing, **show** them how to use those tools, then allow them **time to practice** using the tools.

Open-Ended Questioning is meant to do several things simultaneously:

- Validates the writer’s work as something worth exploring and talking about
- Allows the writer to come to conclusions on their own
- Builds confidence in the writer
- Teaches metacognitive techniques the writer can employ in future writing practices

Gradual Release of Responsibility

As we go through these various levels in the **hierarchy of writing concerns**, we use a **gradual release of responsibility** to draw attention to issues in the paper while creating agency in the writer. In other words, we want to **guide the student in self-discovery, not do the work for them**. We don’t want our center to be a fix-it shop focusing solely on lower-order concerns. Rather, we wish to promote a community of collaborative learning that empowers the writer.

So, what does a gradual release of responsibility look like in the context of the writing center?

1. **Identify Concern:** Show how to fix; Reference a resource; Explain
2. Identify Pattern; Cross-Reference previous concern; Draw connection to resource

3. Refrain

When reviewing a writer’s text we’re guiding the conversation with focused inquiry of patterns of concern. During the session, we assist them in identifying the issue, show how to fix the issue, reference a source on the issue for them to take with them after the session, and explain how to identify the issue in the future. As we continue to model this practice, we identify the issue for a second time and cross-reference the first occurrence. Finally, we refrain from addressing any more localized errors so we don’t take ownership of their writing. We let them know to look for these recurring issues throughout the remainder of the text when they revisit their revision practice outside of the center. We have set them up for successful independent learning after the session by giving them the tools to identify the issues on their own.

**Specific Services**

In all of the services the Writing Center provides we ask that instructors communicate their needs with us as much as possible. Our goal as a Writing Center is as a support unit. While we have a philosophy and best practices which drive our center, we have no other agenda than to support your students in your classroom. **The more information we have, the more we can collaborate with faculty, the better we can meet the needs of your students.**

**Face-to-Face Consultations**

The WC would like to encourage in-person consultations. These consultations consist of reading and discussing the student’s work with thoughtful feedback which uses our [Hierarchy of Concerns](#) and [Gradual Release of Responsibility](#) models. We meet the student where they are in the writing and go from there by giving them a handful of areas to focus on in their revision.
What do we need from you? Tell your students about this service. Normalize it for them in the sense that everyone should use the WC as it’s a way to get feedback. We want to squash the idea that the WC is for bad writers and instead instill in students that feedback is incredibly important to the writing process (for everyone) and the WC is a place where they can get that thoughtful discussion of their work.

How can students use this service? Students are encouraged to make an appointment by calling (502) 873-4494 or by emailing us at writingcenter@spalding.edu.

Email Submissions
The Spalding Writing Center allows students to submit their work via an online form. Once a submission is received, our consultants then read the work and use comments in the margins to focus on areas of concern. We also include an email letter which directs the student to larger areas of concerns or patterns of error within the text. We ask students to submit their writing along with the assignment and any previous feedback from the instructor.

What do we need from you? Let your students know this service exists. A lot of students cannot physically make it to the WC for whatever reason. This is a way for them to receive feedback without a face-to-face meeting. We ask instructors who make the WC mandatory for students to please give us notice that the class will be using our service. Sending us the assignment ahead of time and letting us know of specific goals in the writing helps us prepare and support your goals for your students.

How can students upload their work? Students can use the following link to upload their work. http://library.spalding.edu/wc-consult. If they submit directly to the WC via email, they will receive an automated response directing them to use the online upload form (provided via the link listed). This allows us to collect information and track student WC usage. Our turn-around time is generally 24-48 hours for a 5 page paper. Longer papers are often sent back in chunks to allow the student to receive feedback and make changes without having to wait for the entire paper to be
completed. Please let your students know that we need time to give feedback on their work and they need time to use that feedback to revise.

**Embedded Online Work**
We work with Moodle class discussion boards by facilitating an analytical conversation about the writing process. We not only *tell* students about the tools of writing, we *show* them how to use those tools.

**What do we need from you?** We ask that you contact us prior to the session that you would like us embedded. This gives us time to prepare and hopefully time to meet with you to discuss your concerns, assignment, etc. We have found that an online presence that is integrated into the assignments and syllabus is most beneficial for students during the course as it allows for an ongoing discussion of their writing and where they are in the process. The presence of the WC in an online embedded format can take many different shapes and serve various purposes. We would very much like to meet with you to discuss options as to what role the WC can play in your online environment.

**How do I schedule the embedded online Writing Center?** You can contact Charles Maynard at emaynard@spalding.edu or Abbie Lemmon at alemmon@spalding.edu. You can also use the following link [http://spalding.libsurveys.com/wctraining](http://spalding.libsurveys.com/wctraining) to request the online embedded Writing Center.

**Writing Consultant Peer Review**
We welcome you to bring your students to the Writing Center to participate in small group discussions about writing assignments in progress. We guide students in reflection of their writing and the writing of others. Basically, we get into small groups, usually with each group facilitated by a WC consultant. Students then share work and respond to one another with the WC consultant acting as a facilitator. The goal of peer review is to get the students to reflect on their own work and on the work of others while receiving feedback for direction in their revision process.
What do we need from you? We ask that you give us several weeks of notice before scheduling a peer review. Our schedule gets incredibly busy and while we try to fit everyone in, in the time they need, we can better staff a peer review if we have more time to prepare. If we have never done a peer review with your class, we would like to discuss your concerns and your goals for your students. This can be done over the phone, email, or in person. Before the peer review we like to have the assignment, a clear direction as to the purpose of the writing, and to hear your concerns.

How do I schedule a peer review with the Writing Center?
You can contact Charles Maynard at emaynard@spalding.edu or Abbie Lemmon at alemmon@spalding.edu. You can also use the following link http://spalding.libsurveys.com/wcworkshop-request to request a peer review with the Writing Center.

In-Class Presentations
Have you noticed an element of writing that your class is struggling with? You are welcome to invite our writing professionals to your classroom. We offer specialized writing workshops to meet your needs and the needs of your students. These workshops can be panel discussions with WC staff (and QEP staff as well), mini talks, or small group workshops. This is a flexible model that we can tailor to fit the needs of your class.

What do we need from you? We ask that you communicate the needs you see in your students. We want to be able to tailor our presentations to target specific areas of concern in your students’ writing. We like to have several weeks of notice before a presentation so we can prepare. We often use handouts and other reference materials that we make available to your class during the presentation.

How do I schedule a presentation with the Writing Center?
You can contact Charles Maynard at emaynard@spalding.edu or Abbie Lemmon at alemmon@spalding.edu. You can also use the following link http://spalding.libsurveys.com/wcworkshop-request to request an in-class presentation with the Writing Center.
Supplemental Materials on the Web
We’re pleased to announce that we have recently updated our website. We have created a user-friendly digital space filled with thoughtfully crafted resources for students and faculty. You are welcome to download and distribute any materials you may find useful in your teaching practices. Also, it may be helpful to direct your writers to the student resource section of our website. Additionally, we view our supplemental materials on as living documents. If you have any revisions to suggest, or would like us to create an individualized resource for your course, we would love to assist you. Please reach out to Charles Maynard or Abbie Lemmon for additional information or visit us on our website at https://library.spalding.edu/wc-faculty

Who We Work With
This section details the different support departments we work with and how we work with them.

Accessibility
The Writing Center works closely with Accessibility to make sure we are meeting the needs of all students. When the WC works with a student with needs that fall under those covered by Accessibility, we make sure to communicate, ask questions, and determine what we can best do to meet the needs of the student by keeping our lines of communication open with both the student and Accessibility.

QEP
Spalding’s current Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is Writing Through Revision. This places the WC at the forefront of this initiative as a support unit. We work closely with QEP to understand their goals and vision while we help to implement those goals in the classroom. We collect and share data gathered in the WC to help fulfill these goals while maintaining open lines of communication with QEP staff.

Librarians
The WC often works alongside librarians as we enter the classroom and discuss writing and research. We communicate our approach with visiting librarians, discuss our learning outcomes for the session, and coordinate as a single interdepartmental unit.
In Conclusion
If you made it this far, thanks for reading! Sincerely, we appreciate you for taking the time to read this guide. In doing so, we hope you have a greater understanding of the philosophies and practices at our Writing Center and have gained some new insights in how to make the most of our work. We strive be a successful support unit for you just like we’re a successful support unit for our Spalding students.

Works Cited
Murphy, Christina, and Steve Sherwood. The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors. 4th ed., Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2011.
Contact the Writing Center
writingcenter@spalding.edu
(502) 873-4494

Online Faculty Resources
https://library.spalding.edu/wc-faculty

Charles Maynard, Writing Center Director
cmaynard@spalding.edu
(502) 873-4261

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