



Tutoring ELL Writers

Tutoring ELL (English Language Learners) or multilingual writers can be different than tutoring native English speakers. It is important to adapt the session to best fit the needs of the writer. Below are some tips that can help the ELL writer feel more comfortable with writing and coming to the Writing Center.

Explain the Nature of Tutoring Session

Some students might not be familiar with peer tutoring, therefore, it is important to let them know the **basics of the session**. Explain the **goals, procedures, and expectations of the session**. Let them know that we are here to help them further develop their writing skills and their comfort writing in English. A brief and careful explanation of **how the Writing Center works** can diminish a lot of potential frustration.

Ask if the writer would prefer to read or listen. Some writers find it useful to read their own work aloud, however some might be more comfortable listening to you read their work out loud. It is common for ELL writers to feel uncomfortable reading English aloud or to lack confidence in his or her work. The writer might focus on “correct” pronunciation or reading proficiency instead of concentrating on what they they have questions on. Having the tutor read the writer’s piece might allow the writer to notice more aspects of their piece they want feedback on.

If the tutor is reading the piece, **read through the mistakes that do not interfere with the understanding of the subject matter**. The text might have a lot of minor errors that are noticeable but do not interfere with clarity. Read the text as written but as naturally as possible. If there is time to return to these minor errors at the end, feel free to do so but **do not begin by addressing grammar**—unless that is the only issue. If some grammar-related issues seriously interfere with the clarity of the piece, mark them down to return to them later or stop reading and work with the writer to identify and fix the problem. Tell the Writer, **“I’m not sure what you mean here. Can you explain this to me a bit more?”** — once the issue is resolved, continue reading the piece.

Emphasize Vocabulary Development

Encourage the writer to pay attention to groups of words that often occur together. If you find diction-related issues in the piece, ask the student for alternatives to that word(s) and give them time to think of a couple before you make suggestions. **It is important to remember to provide two or more suggestions for the writer to make sure he/she is still making a decision on the language that goes into the piece.** However, if there is only one way to say it, provide the correction for them and make sure you give some explanation as to why this is the only choice.



Provide Proofreading Strategies

When both the tutor and writer are ready to focus on language/grammar, ask a few questions:

- What do you normally have trouble with?
- How do you usually proofread your paper?
- What are you most concerned with?
- What specific issues/challenges did you have when writing?
- How can I best help you with language/grammar concerns?

Learning about the writer's own difficulties and strategies will help the tutor understand how to approach this portion of the session. Explain that you will concentrate on the errors that are most confusing first and then work on the less confusing errors. If the correction is rule-based, provide suggestions as needed but make sure to explain said rule to the writer. If the errors are item-based — like idioms — try to elicit the correction, but provide if necessary.

Conclusion

ELL writers are language learners, and learning a language takes years of practice and study. ELL writers are also developing writers, so they do need some higher order feedback just like native speakers. However, the difference is that because they are learning their language, ELL students face limitations in their pieces are primarily due to vocabulary and understanding of complex sentence structures. As tutors, we can support the development of their writing skills by talking about language at any point in the writing process when it might be helpful. Remember to be flexible and comfortable with the movement between discussing the idea and the language.