The Western Kentucky University Writing Center

Tutor Resource Guide

Introductory Note

This guide is meant to serve as a concise collection of the most helpful resources for writing tutors, particularly in an asynchronous, online setting.

This guide does not contain resources on any Writing Center procedures, as these typically change and evolve over time when the technology utilized in the Writing Center is updated. For information on Writing Center appointment and scheduling procedures, see the **"Content"** folder on the Online Tutors Blackboard Organization, where videos and instructions for online tutoring exist.

The resources included in this guide can also be found and viewed individually in their full form on the Blackboard website in the **"Content"** folder, or in print in the Cherry 123 Writing Center. Some resources have been condensed or abridged for the sake of readability of this document.

This guide is made available to tutors both in online PDF format and print (print versions available in Cherry 123).

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5 Tips for Asynchronous Tutoring

Although asynchronous tutoring seems like a complicated process that is completely unalike tutoring face-to-face, there is no need to feel uneasy about it. The following resource consists of 5 simplified tips to online tutoring and leaving comments for students.

Tip 1. Use the SALT formula to respond to student errors.

State the Problem: *"This is a run-on sentence."*

Ask an involving question: *"Where does one idea stop and the other begin?"*

Link to an outside resource: a helpful one for students is Purdue OWL.

Check with another **T**utor if you're not sure about a correction. Refer the student to their **T**eacher for clarification.

In general, try to add notes throughout a paper even if they aren't always editing suggestions. Sometimes it can be helpful to identify places where students have done well, by leaving comments like:

- "Good work developing a clear, strong thesis."
- "Well-argued point"
- "Good job on proper citation"

Tip 2. Read First Paragraphs

When tutoring, it can be helpful to focus on the first overall paragraph and first body paragraph to look for larger issues within the paper.

Reading the 1st introductory paragraph: If you can't immediately point to a sentence that states the following, ask the student:

- What's the topic of this paper? Can you add a sentence stating that?
- What main point (thesis) did you want to make? What position are you taking?
     Remember – a thesis may not be a strong argument, but it should be a position, not a statement of fact.
- Does the point you're making answer the question raised in the assignment?
- Can you hint at the supports for your point that you'll explore further in the paper?

Reading the 1st body paragraph: Look for the following or ask the student about these points:
- Do you have examples? How can you illustrate this point? What evidence do you have to support this?
- Can you explain this further? Who or what was involved? How was this who or what involved? What was the result? What was the lesson learned?
- Is there a contradictory example or counter-argument? What does that involve?
- How does it compare to your example? Which is stronger and why?
- How does this information support your main point?

Tip 3. Look For Facts, Figures or Ideas

When reading a student's paper, if you come across a fact, figure, or idea, be sure to, if necessary, ask the student:

- Where did you get this information? What is your source?
- Do you have both an in-text citation and an end reference for this fact, figure, or idea?
- Are you working in MLA, APA, or Chicago?

If students need more help with their citations than can be easily addressed in an online appointment, refer them to online resources like Purdue OWL, which offers guides to all of the most common citation styles.

Addressing these questions helps to take care of any citation issues the student may have.

Tip 4. Read Conclusions

Another place to leave comments for students is in their conclusions. Look for the following or ask the student about these points:

- What is the main point you were trying to make in this paper?
- Is the main point made in the conclusion the same as the one outlined in your introduction?
- Can you summarize your supports briefly?
- Have you answered all the questions in the assignment?

Tip 5. Ask Guiding Questions

When asked to review a paper for grammar, follow these steps and try these types of questions to help the student identify areas to develop. Try to ask questions that guide the student to a correction rather than making the correction yourself.

Long, confusing, or wordy sentences –
- This sentence is confusing. How can you rewrite it to clarify your meaning?
- Not sure what you're saying here. Who is doing what action?
- You have multiple ideas in this sentence. Which is priority and should be in its own sentence?

Run-on sentences –
- You have multiple actions/verbs in this single sentence. Can you rewrite so each action stands alone?
- You've joined 2 sentences with just a comma. What word can you use instead?
- This is a run-on. How can you rewrite it into 2 sentences?

Sentence Fragments –
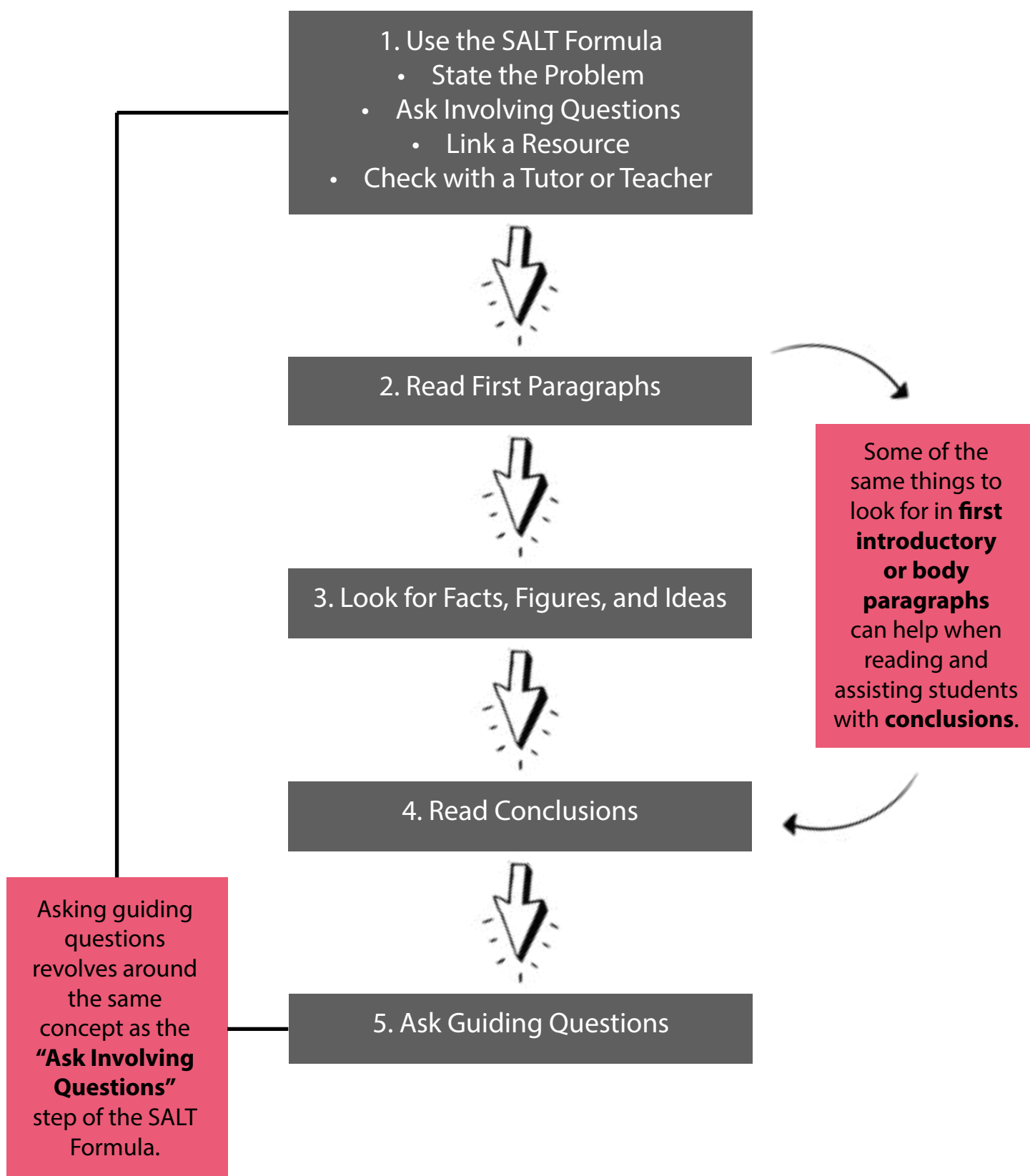- You have an action in this sentence, but who is doing this action?
- You refer to a thing – X – but what is it doing?
- This sentence is incomplete. What sentence does this bit belong with?

Do not mark every example in the paper. After marking a type of error a couple times, encourage the student to check for this kind of error on their own.

(Adapted from Colorado State University)

Flowchart: 5 Asynchronous Tutoring Tips

1. Use the SALT Formula
- State the Problem
- Ask Involving Questions
- Link a Resource
- Check with a Tutor or Teacher

↓

2. Read First Paragraphs

↓

3. Look for Facts, Figures, and Ideas

↓

4. Read Conclusions

↓

5. Ask Guiding Questions

Some of the same things to look for in **first introductory or body paragraphs** can help when reading and assisting students with **conclusions**.

Asking guiding questions revolves around the same concept as the **"Ask Involving Questions"** step of the SALT Formula.

Stock Comments

The following resource contains stock comments. Copy and paste the following into your email response to online appointments at your discretion when a student repeatedly struggles with a particular issue, or when a single comment is not sufficient for explaining a complex issue.

Sentence Structure Stock Comments

Active vs. Passive Voice:

Passive Voice: The subject receives the action.
    Example: The Vikings will be intimidated by Big Red.

Active Voice: The subject does the action.
    Example: Big Red will intimidate the Vikings.

Remember – Readers prefer active voice to passive voice. Why? Active voice is more concise and easier to read.

How to change a sentence from passive to active:
1. Switch the noun receiving the action with the noun doing the action.
2. Take out the linking verb and "by."
3. Match your verb's tense and case to the original linking verb's.

What if the noun doing the action isn't in the sentence?
    Insert the noun yourself!

Sentence Structure Stock Comments (continued)

Introductory Phrases:

There are two kinds of introductory phrases. One **includes** a subject and a verb but not a complete thought, while the other **does not include** a subject and a verb. Both, however, are **dependent**, meaning they cannot stand on their own and suggest that the main subject and verb follow the phrase.

Example (includes a subject and verb):
> When Jackson drives his car, he listens to folk music.

Example (does not include a subject and verb):
> When driving his car, Jackson listens to folk music.

Certain words mark dependent phrases to show that something else is coming. These are often prepositions or words that evoke time. Here are some examples to keep an eye out for:
1. While
2. Since
3. Unless
4. Because
5. Even though

Shorter phrases like the following **do not** need commas, but you may use commas for clarity.
- For my class I wrote a paper on semicolons.

Longer phrases, however, **do** need commas:
- When Tyler found out he was going to be a big brother, he fell to the floor and cried.

Sentence Structure Stock Comments (continued)

Sentence Variation:

As a writer, you have four basic sentence structures at your disposal:
- **Simple**
- **Compound**
- **Complex**
- **Compound-Complex**

For more information on the grammatical structures of these sentence types, please visit Purdue Owl at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/573/02/.

Even the most interesting and concise writing risks coming off as dull to a reader if the sentences aren't strung together in a unique, novel way. The way a piece of prose propels from once sentence to the next is often referred to as the flow, or the sound, or the music of language.

As you continue to write, you will develop an ear for the music of prose, but, as a beginning writer still developing your ear, the surest way to craft interesting sentence-to-sentence tension in your writing is to vary your sentence structure. Here is a very basic example:

"I took the dog for a walk. The dog kept stopping to sniff trees and bushes. She inspired me to think about my life."

Notice how all three of the above sentences are "**Simple"** sentences. As a result, the sentences lack tension and the language sounds dull and even childish.

Sentence Variation (continued):

Let's see what happens when we challenge ourselves to vary sentence structure:

"I took the dog for a walk. Constantly stopping to sniff the trees and bushes, the dog was exploring her world. She was ambitious, and I thought I could use a little of that ambition in my own life."

Naturally, as the reader passes over the dependent clause, "Constantly stopping to sniff the trees and bushes," she will subconsciously wonder to herself what the impending subject will be when she gets to the dependent clause, "the dog was exploring his world." This effect is called **intra-sentence conflict**. It is an example of a way to keep a reader interested on a sentence-to-sentence level.

Punctuation Stock Comments

Comma Splices:

A comma splice is an error in which two independent clauses (complete thoughts) are joined with only a comma.

For example, the following is a comma splice:
"We took a trip to Florida, it was wonderful."

Comma splices are common errors, but are easily fixable.

There are multiple ways to fix comma splices.
> 1. Add a conjunction to link the two clauses.
> *"We took a trip to Florida, **and** it was wonderful."*
>
> 2. Add a subordinating conjunction (when, while, if, because, etc.) to the beginning of the sentence.
> *"**When** we took a trip to Florida, it was wonderful."*
>
> 3. Add a semicolon (if the two parts are closely related).
> *"We took a trip to Florida**;** it was wonderful."*
>
> 4. Split the sentence in two with a period.
> *"We took a trip to Florida**.** It was wonderful."*

Fixing errors such as comma splices can improve not only the grammar, but also the sentence variation in your writing. Look for comma splices in your writing and utilize these methods to correct them.

Punctuation Stock Comments (continued)

Contractions:

Academic papers, like this essay you are writing, do not use contractions. When addressing an academic audience – and here you are addressing your professor – contractions denote informal language.

Some simple examples of this are **can't**, **it's**, **we'd**, **I'll**...and so on.

"Can't" becomes "cannot," "it's" becomes "it is," "we'd" becomes "we would," and "I'll" becomes "I will." Most universities, like Western, expect a certain amount of academic writing; thus, you should stay away from conversational tones in your essay.

Dashes:

Dashes and hyphens are often confused in writing, and surprisingly, not only in lower-level composition. Many writers, even up to graduate-level, often misuse a hyphen when they should be using a dash.

Furthermore, there are two different types of dashes: the **en dash** and the **em dash**, which both function differently.

The most fun aspect of dashes—particularly the em dash—is the versatility of its uses, especially since its use is often never a grammatical requirement.

Dashes (continued):

En dash (–):
The en dash has four uses:
> 1. It can be used to show a **time span or range** (1999–2002 or Chapter 8–12).
>
> 2. It can function when discussing **scores** (the Broncos won 14–7).
>
> 3. It can denote a **conflict or connection** between two things (the New York–Miami flight, the republican–democrat debate).
>
> 4. It can **replace a hyphen** when writing a compound adjective is formed with an already open compound (prep school–educated snobs), though this is simply a stylistic choice.

Em dash (—):
The em dash can be used interchangeably with multiple other types of punctuation:
> 1. **Commas** (Toward the sunset—the car flew down the highway)
>
> 2. **Parentheses** (My dog—a Boxer—has trouble fitting in my Honda)
>
> 3. **Colons** (she could only think of one thing—fear)
>
> 4. **Semicolons** (I like reading Speculative Fiction—the stories often force me to examine the world around me).

Remember, if a hyphen is ever used as a form of punctuation or as a symbol to express range, it is incorrect and must be replaced with the appropriate dash!

Punctuation Stock Comments (continued)

Semicolons:

Semicolons are used to **join two closely related independent clauses** (complete thoughts with a subject and verb), or to serve as **separators** in lists with internal punctuation.

Example 1:
"She liked Robert**;** however, he was annoying when he was with his friends."

Example 2:
"The Grand Canyon is a marvel that cannot be appreciated through pictures**;** you have to see it for yourself."

Example 3:
"The students discussed the following in their English class: the character flaws of Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet, and Mrs. Bennet**;** the historical details of Bath, England**;** and the social constructs of Victorian balls.

Word Choice Stock Comments

Personal Pronouns:

Personal Pronouns are prounouns associated with a particular grammatical person – first person, second person, or third person.

A common mistake in academic writing is using some of the following first-person or second-person pronouns in a formal essay:

- **I** – "I think that..."
- **me** – "To me, it seems like..."
- **we** – "We should understand..."
- **you** – "You should know..."

1. If you aren't sure if a student should use personal pronouns or not.

You may want to check with your professor if it is okay for you to use personal pronouns (I, we, you, etc.) in your paper. Most academic papers are written in **third person**, though this is often not the case depending on your professor's preferences.

2. If you know they are not supposed to use personal pronouns.

I see in your assignment that it says not to use personal pronouns (I, we, you, etc.). Using personal pronouns can create an informal or casual tone that is not appropriate for (most) academic papers.

Word Choice Stock Comments (continued)

Style–Using "Very" and "Really":

"Very" and **"really"** seem to be two of the most useless descriptive words when it comes to writing. A common mistake is utilizing these words for emphasis or to add meaning to a description.

"Very" and "really" don't tell the reader anything specific or important and, therefore, fail to add any meaning to the text. Because the word "real" is related to fact, then it is conveying more emotion than is necessary when writing an academic paper.

To solve this problem, you can either omit the word entirely or attempt to hunt down **a more descriptive adjective or verb** that conveys what you are trying to say.

For example, instead of writing, *"The sun was **very bright**,"* you could write, *"The sun **glared**."*

Once you are able to move past these crutches, you will strengthen your writing and find that there are more specific words that benefit your writing now and in the future.

Who Uses What Citation Style

Many students will come into the Writing Center and state, or indicate on their submission form, that they are not aware of which citation style they should be using. In order for students to ask for help with citations, they first must know which style their discipline follows.

The purpose of this section is to provide the basics of who uses what citation style, so that as a tutor, you can be informed and assist students who have less citation style knowledge.

APA Style

What is APA Style?

APA Style establishes standards of written communication concerning:
• the organization of content
• writing style
• citing references
• and how to prepare a manuscript for publication in certain disciplines

Why Use APA?

Aside from simplifying the work of editors by having everyone use the same format for a given publication, using APA Style makes it easier for readers to understand a text by providing a familiar structure they can follow.

APA Style (continued)

Abiding by APA's standards allows a writer to:
- Provide readers with cues they can use to **follow the writer's ideas more efficiently** and to **locate information of interest** to readers
- Allow readers to focus more on the writer's ideas by not distracting them with **unfamiliar formatting**
- Establish credibility or ethos in the writer's field by demonstrating an **awareness of their audience** and the audience's needs as fellow researchers

Who Should Use APA?

APA style describes rules for the preparation of manuscripts for writers and students in:
- Social Sciences, such as Psychology, Linguistics, Sociology, Economics, and Criminology
- Business
- Nursing

General APA format does the following:
- Covers the basic page layout for a typical APA manuscript, including everything from margin widths to the use of headings and visuals
- Includes a general list of the basic components of an APA paper: title page, abstract, and reference page

(Adapted from Purdue OWL)

MLA Style

What is MLA Style?

MLA style establishes standards of written communication concerning:
- Formatting and page layout
- Stylistic technicalities (e.g. abbreviations, footnotes, quotations)
- Citing Sources
- And preparing a manuscript for publication in certain disciplines

What is MLA Style?

Using MLA Style properly makes it easier for readers to navigate and comprehend a text by providing familiar cues when referring to sources and borrowed information. Editors and instructors also encourage everyone to use the same format so there is consistency of style within a given field.

Abiding by MLA's standards will allow a writer to:
- Provide readers with cues they can use to **follow a writer's ideas more efficiently** and to locate information of interest to them
- Help readers to focus more on a writer's ideas by not distracting them with **unfamiliar or complicated formatting**
- Establish credibility or ethos in the writer's field by demonstrating an **awareness of their audience** and the audience's needs as fellow researchers (particularly concerning the citing of references)

MLA style is one of the most common styles students bring to the Writing Center, and also one that most tutors will have experience in.

MLA Style (continued)

Who Should Use MLA?

APA style is typically reserved for writers and students preparing manuscripts in various humanities disciplines such as:
• English Studies–Language and Literature
• Foreign Languages and Literatures
• Literary Criticism
• Comparative Literature
• Cultural Studies

(Adapted from Purdue OWL)

Chicago Style

What is Chicago Style?

Chicago Style covers a variety of topics from manuscript preparation and publication to grammar, usage, and documentation.

The Chicago Manual of Style is used in some **social science** publications and most **historical journals**. It remains the basis for the Style Guide of the American Anthropological Association and the Style Sheet for the Organization of American Historians.

Chicago Style is one of the least frequent syles seen in students' work at the Writing Center, but it helps to be familiar with the fields that utilize it.

Asynchronous Tutoring Checklist

The following resource is a checklist adapted from Colorado State University's Writing Center that covers the most important tasks to keep in mind and work to complete during asynchronous tutoring appointments, since making comments and marking up a paper online functions a little differently from in-person appointments. This is meant to serve as a guide for what to prioritize in in-text comments during online appointments.

Asynchronous Appointment Comments Checklist	
Identifies 1-2 Higher Order Concerns	
Identifies 1 Lower Order Concern	
Spreads comments across document when possible	
References prompt, genre, or course applications when applicable	
Includes all comments as part of a purposeful series (no random/one-off comments)	
Highlights text appropriately and specifically Uses bolding, italics, underline, and/or highlighting purposefully to improve readability	
Links to appropriate resources in comments but doesn't rely upon them	
Writes comments in complete, proofread sentences	