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Helping Students Become Better Writers Inside and Outside of Tutoring Appointments

November 27, 2018 | By Natalie Kopp
Student Support

Writing tutors provide invaluable resources to students, but writing help can come from all levels of student support on campus, not just in tutoring appointments. I spoke with Elisha Teague, the Assistant Director of Learning Resources at Franklin University, and Shurouq Ibrahim, one of Franklin's professional writing tutors, to discuss how they help students in the Learning Commons and what we can all do when working with students or course material to help foster stronger and more confident student writers.

What are the different writing help services offered at the Learning Commons?

Franklin University's Learning Commons offers a variety of options for students seeking help with writing assignments. Students can sign up for online or in-person hour-long meetings with a writing tutor up to twice a week though the scheduling link on the Learning Commons tutoring webpage. Tutors will guide students at all stages of writing, from brainstorming to final drafts, and assist both undergraduate and graduate students up until the start of the dissertation. Students may also choose to submit a draft of their paper to the Online Writing Review, where a tutor will spend half an hour reviewing a finished draft and providing comments on areas which may need improvement. Elisha Teague suggests that students schedule a tutoring appointment if they are having trouble understanding an assignment or knowing how to fix their errors, but if they have a completed draft and want a second set of eyes or additional resources to help them edit on their own, the Online Writing Review is a better option. Neither service proofreads for students.

What are the most common errors our students make, and what are some writing tips to help students overcome them?

According to tracking from Learning Commons tutors, the main higher-level writing concerns discussed in appointments are clarity and paragraph development. Shurouq Ibrahim also shares how she's been helping students with paraphrasing recently, and Elisha Teague reminds us that it's not a bad thing to help students with lower-order writing concerns such as grammar and mechanics as well.

- **Issue**: Clarity and paragraph development
- **Tip**: Students can reverse-outline their papers by jotting down the main points of their paragraphs in the margins of

their papers or try explaining their argument aloud to a classmate or tutor.

- **Issue**: Paraphrasing
- **Tip**: Tutors and instructors can break down paraphrasing into a number of simple steps to demystify the process to students: "change the words, change the structure, keep the meaning, and cite."

- **Issue**: Grammar and mechanics
- **Tip**: Good resources to help students hone their own proofreading skills are the Purdue Online Writing Lab section on [proofreading](#) and the University of Wisconsin Writing Center's list of [common errors](#).

Tips for designers and instructors when creating writing assignments:

1. Condense assignment instructions.

Getting started can sometimes be the most intimidating part of a writing assignment, but clear and concise action items in assignment instructions can help students get over this hurdle.

2. Provide guidelines for peer review.

Incorporating peer review into assignments reminds students that writing is a collaborative process, and even the best writers benefit from having others read their drafts. Providing models of what good peer feedback looks like or providing a peer review rubric ensures that students get the most out of peer review. Some useful strategies students may implement for effective peer review include skimming or reading the peer's entire paper before writing comments, outlining the paper to show gaps in the argument, not getting bogged down in sentence-level details, and maintaining an encouraging tone.

3. Remind students that the resources they need are generally close at hand.

Encourage students to bookmark research and APA guides from the Learning Commons website, refer frequently to the Toolbox section of their BlueQuill courses, and make use of campus tutoring, Online Writing Review, and Grammarly.

Confident writing is a powerful tool, and we can all work together at the various levels of student support and course design to help our students grow as writers at Franklin University and beyond.

About the Author

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