

Preparing for your writing center visit

You can help make your writing center session more effective by preparing for it as thoroughly as possible, whether you're at an early stage of the paper or completing your final draft. Whether you have 50 minutes to talk to the tutor or only 15, you'll want to use the time productively. The following tips can help you prepare.

Schedule your session in advance if your writing center takes appointments. Many writing centers are very busy, and appointment times fill up well in advance, especially just before midterms and finals. Be sure to use any resources the writing center might offer — a flyer, a Web site, a conversation with a tutor — to become familiar with the center's procedures and policies ahead of time.

Think about what you need from the session and write down those thoughts. What specific problems are you having with this paper? Has your professor made suggestions on previous writing you've done for the class? What general concerns do you have about writing? You've been writing for years and probably have a pretty good idea of where your personal pitfalls lie: Be ready to share them with the tutor. Tutors work hard on their own writing, too, and they know just what it's like to have a problem that's personally difficult to solve.

Be sure to bring a copy of your assignment and any related class notes. Some professors distribute an assignment sheet or post assignments on a course Web site; others give assignments verbally. Most will discuss assignments and take questions in class, so if the assignment is not clear to you, ask your professor to clarify before visiting the writing center. The more information you bring to the tutor, the more effectively he or she will be able to help you complete your assignment.

Bring any other writing you have completed relating to the assignment. This might include drafts, free-writing, journal entries, peer review comments, or notes from group discussions. If the assignment involves research or material from a textbook or handout, bring those items to your session, too. Remember, the more tutors know about your thinking and writing process, the more precisely they'll be able to focus your session and the more help they'll be able to provide.

Be prepared to schedule follow-up sessions. A single session is helpful, but don't expect it to polish your writing to perfection — even professional writers have to work continually at improving their craft. You've spent a lifetime developing your writing habits, some good and some not so good. Your tutor will help you to identify what you're doing well and what you can do better on future assignments.