

# Statement on Writing Centres and Staffing

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## Introduction

As writing specialists, members drawn from the writing studies community of Canada instantiated in academic writing-related associations (such as those listed at the end of this document) have put together the following statement on writing centres and staffing. Our goal in writing this statement is to promote academic excellence for all students. We believe that writing centre staff require knowledge of writing studies research and proven instructional models. This document was endorsed by the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing on May 30, 2016.

Those providing writing instruction need to have expertise in writing studies to engage in evidence-based pedagogies. Excellent writing support requires instructors who have local knowledge of the students at their institution and who can collaborate with faculty from many disciplines to develop better writing assignments and effective and clearly communicated grading practices and policies.

To ensure best practices at writing centres we endorse the following principles:

## Best Instructional Practices for Writing Centres

Students who work with writing specialists at writing centres should improve their writing and critical thinking.

When students work with writing specialists at writing centres, they improve both their writing and their thinking (Bean, 2011; Williams & Takaku, 2011). Students in all disciplines at all levels (including graduate students) benefit from assistance aimed at improving their writing abilities (Jones, 2001; Lunsford & Ede, 2011; Williams & Takaku, 2011; Yeats, Reddy, Wheeler, Senior & Murray, 2010). This finding is also seen in studies on learning trajectories of English as an Additional Language (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Babcock & Thonus, 2012; Huang, 2010; Snow & Kahmi-Stein, 1997).

Rationale: Students enter university programs with little knowledge of disciplinary writing expectations. As they adapt to their programs and learn the ways of thinking as well as the knowledge in the field, they begin to write like members of the community (Pare, 2002). Writing centre specialists have teaching expertise and knowledge of writing in a variety of disciplines.

Writing centres are fundamentally teaching units.

Writing centres are fundamentally teaching units where writing specialists are engaged in teaching activities (Monroe, 2003; Graves and Graves, 2006). Responsibility for the teaching of writing must be undertaken by writing specialists who hold faculty-level appointments similar in rank to the course instructors they work with. In the case where a writing centre uses peer tutors, those tutors must be guided and supervised by a writing specialist.

Rationale: Working closely with course instructors and their students allows writing centre instructors and peer tutors to adapt to changing expectations, changing disciplinary interests, and changing program needs. Using a developmental approach to teaching writing, writing centre instructors and tutors help students adapt and succeed in their programs. The centres must be closely aligned with academic units in order to support student learning and maintain collaborations.

Writing support is best attended to in disciplinary contexts.

Writing support is best provided in disciplinary contexts, where writing specialists work with faculty in the disciplines to share expertise about the local disciplinary genres in which students are asked to engage. (Bean, 2011; Williams & Takaku, 2011).

Rationale: Writing is not simply a matter of learning to follow grammatically correct patterns of expression; rather, it is a tool to enable all the thinking and adapting that students must do in their studies (Hillocks, 1985, 1986; Bean, 2011). Writing expectations must reflect the important role of apprenticeship in learning to write in a discipline. Writing is an integral part of students' disciplinary learning and development.

Writing competency is a degree outcome for all university students.

Writing competency (as part of communication) is a degree outcome for all university students across the country. Writing centres are always critical agents within universities as they strive to ensure all students are competent writers, including students who bring with them a variety of language backgrounds and proficiency levels. Writing centres need to be recognized for their

important role in addressing this degree outcome. (Yeats, Reddy, Wheeler, Senior & Murray, 2012).

Rationale: While it is natural to associate disciplines such as English and History with teaching students to write, it must be acknowledged that all students write at university and in the workplace. Writing centres are able to play a vital role in increasing awareness of this reality, in encouraging faculty members to participate in the role of “teachers of writing”, and in aiding students in their growth as thinkers and writers across the disciplines.

Peer tutors need to be educated and mentored.

Students who work as peer tutors in Writing Centres need to be educated in the field of Writing Studies, and mentored by professionals with expertise in Writing Studies (Grimm, 1996; Howard & Barton, 1996).

Rationale: While students who work as peer tutors can be effective, the quality of their work depends almost entirely upon the quality of mentoring they receive. Mentors must be writing specialists with a demonstrated academic interest in the academic field of writing studies. They demonstrate their commitment to the discipline of writing by, for example, belonging to one of the major writing studies organizations listed at the end of this document; contributing to online forums associated with these groups; and/or writing articles for publication by one of these groups or in other scholarly media.

Writing professionals use and apply research from writing studies.

Writing professionals are committed to using and applying research from writing studies and related fields to improve their practice and provide students and faculty with effective writing instruction. (Graves & Graves, 2006)

Rationale: Not every educated person will sit down and immediately be able to help students develop their thinking and writing skills. Explicit knowledge of writing theory and practice allows writing instructors and mentored peers to teach writing (Brent, Pare, & Segal 1998). A writing scholarship background enables writing instructors to improve their practice informed by the ongoing scholarship of writing.

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## National Writing Studies Organizations in Canada

Canadian Writing Center Association (CWCA)

Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing/Association canadienne de rédactologie  
(ACR/CASDW)

Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literacy (CASLL/Inkshed)

## Regional Associations

Atlantic Canadian Writing Centres Association (ACWCA)

Campus Alberta Writing Studies (CAWS)

Writing Studies of Southwestern Ontario (WSSO)

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