

Suggestions for using Writing Center services via e-mail

Please Note:

Appointments are needed for email sessions just as for any other session

writing.center@und.edu

University Writing Center consultants are available to work with students through e-mail (especially distance students, although there may be times when e-mail sessions are also useful for on-campus students). Consultants are trained to help students plan, draft, revise, and edit their own work. There is no charge to the student for this service.

Follow these guidelines to make your e-mail session as helpful to you as possible:

Plan ahead Conducting a Writing Center-session-over e-mail can entail a series of back-and-forth messages, which means that long distance sessions are inappropriate for writers who need help "right now." At the very least, you need to leave time for your e-mail to "reach" the Writing Center and for a consultant to read and respond to your message. We respond to e-mails as quickly as we can—usually within two working days of receiving them, but sooner if possible.

- ***Tell us all about your assignment*** Papers aren't generically "good" or "bad" (although papers are more or less clear, more or less grammatically correct, etc.). A stronger paper will be one that addresses the assignment fully, thoughtfully, and according to the instructor's specifications. We need details about the assignment in order to help you do those things.
- ***Identify your questions*** We are weary to conduct long distance sessions according to the same principles as we use for face-to-face sessions. So we'll want to begin with your own sense of the kinds of help you need and your own questions. The more specific the questions, the more likely that we'll be able to provide useful comments for you. For example, a question like "Is there anything I can do to improve this paper?" doesn't tell the consultant much about your particular concerns. But if you ask, "Do I really have a thesis here?" or "How can I improve the organization of this paper?" we'll be better able to provide a useful response.

In general, you might consider the following categories of possible writing problem areas as you frame your questions:

getting started, developing a thesis; developing/expanding the paper; developing greater depth of thought; organizing a draft; introducing or concluding the paper; writing clearly; avoiding redundancy; improving fluency or transitions; following a required format; developing solid sentence structure; improving punctuation/grammar/mechanics; documenting appropriately.

- ***Consider copying your paper into the text of your e-mail message*** Depending on your questions, we may not need to read your entire paper; perhaps we can just help you think about possible approaches to organization, an introduction, analysis, support. But in many cases it helps to be able to read what you've written so far. E-mailing attachments is notoriously problematic, so it's probably better if you copy your paper while you're in your word processing program and then paste it into your e-mail message to us. There's another advantage to this approach: you can insert questions in brackets or using all capital letters, so that we can easily distinguish between your questions and text. And we can use a similar strategy for inserting comments when we write back to you.
- ***You may e-mail the Writing Center more than once about the same paper*** Take the time to read and consider your first set of comments, but let us know if you have more questions that we might be able to help you think through. Always keep in mind that you will get much more out a thirty minute session by making an appointment to come in person to the Center.

writing.center@und.edu

*Good luck with your writing project, and let us know
how we can continue to make our services
more accessible and more helpful for you!*