



## **826 Boston Peer Tutoring Training Manual**

### **Section I: Welcome to the Peer Tutor Program**

Congratulations on being named a Writing Room Peer Tutor! As a Peer Tutor, you will help all fellow students by providing help on their writing needs. Quite often you will find assisting your peers to be a personally rewarding experience.

### **Contact Information**

**826 Boston Website:** [www.826boston.org](http://www.826boston.org)

**826 Writers' Room Blog:** <https://826writersroom.wordpress.com>

**826 Boston Phone Number:** 617.442.5400

JoJo Jacobson, In School Program Manager: [jojo@826boston.org](mailto:jojo@826boston.org)

Johnny Sadoff, Commonwealth Corps In School Coordinator: [johnny@826boston.org](mailto:johnny@826boston.org)

### **The Mission**

The mission of The 826 Boston Writers Room is to provide classroom support for writing assignments throughout the school day, in addition to holding after-school activities and clubs ranging from from a slam poetry team to a student-run literary journal, *Rubix*.

826 Boston's Writers' Room is a collaborative project with Northeastern University's Writing Program. With the help of Northeastern tutors and peer tutors like yourself, the Writers Room is able to provide one on one tutoring to students throughout the John D. O'bryant School of Mathematics and Science.



Throughout the school day, we assist teachers at the O'Bryant high school both in classrooms and in our Writers' Room space--we work with students individually and in small groups, making sure they get the attention they need in order to succeed in their schoolwork and improve their writing skills.

## **Purpose of Tutoring**

In your role as a peer tutor you will consistently work to dispel the common misconception that a tutor's job is to simply provide correct answers. A good deal of effort is aimed at helping students become more independent. You will be helping students assess their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to their writing.

## **Peer Tutor Job Description**

Peer Tutors are selected O'Bryant students who work collaboratively with the Writers' Room staff, Northeastern tutors and tutors from the community to provide individual tutoring sessions to those wishing to enhance their writing skills.

Peer Tutors work with students to provide guidance in other students writing, teach and help strengthen their writing skills and provide them with specific writing strategies on an individual basis. Peer tutors will be helping on different types of writing. These types of writing may include college essays, fiction and nonfiction pieces, analytical essays, writing prompts and research papers. Peer Tutors will be required to undergo continuous training and receive feedback on their ongoing performance.



## Peer Tutor Self- Evaluation

One way to get more from the substantial investment of your time as a peer tutor is to think of your job as a learning experience. The following questions are designed to guide you in this thinking.

What do you expect to learn as a result of being a Peer Tutor?


List at least 2 strengths you feel you bring to the peer-tutoring role?


Identify at least 3 goals you would like to achieve as a result of being a peer tutor?




--

Identify at least 3 challenges you think you will face as a peer tutor? How do you think you can overcome these challenges?


Identify at least 3 techniques that you think make an effective peer tutor?


## **Section II: Peer Tutor Responsibilities, Roles and Relationships**

### **Responsibilities of a Peer Tutor**

1. Be on Time



- a. If you are going to be absent or late, inform a Writers' Room staff member. You should email Johnny at: johnny@826boston.org to inform him of your lateness or tardiness.
  - b. Peer tutors are responsible for attending all of their scheduled work hours and participating in ongoing training when the opportunity arises
2. Help the students to become independent learners/thinkers
  3. Be positive—even when discussing a student's mistakes. Remember to give constructive and helpful criticism
  4. Don't engage in negative talk about a teacher
  5. Treat all students with respect
  6. Be knowledgeable about writing
  7. Establish mutual expectations with the student you are tutoring
  8. Be accepting of a variety of learning styles
  9. Be willing to learn
  10. Be patient with the students, as not everyone learns at the same pace

### **Role of a Peer Tutor**

A peer tutor is...

- an interested, active listener
- a curious questioner
- a friendly face
- a non-judgmental peer
- a willing reader
- a professional
- self-reflective

Your responsibility as a peer tutor is to facilitate students' independent learning. Students will model your productive behaviors if you are patient and positive.



Remember, you are representing the Writers' Room Peer Tutoring Program and the interactions you have with other students will ultimately influence the way the entire O'Bryant community views the Writers' Room. Other qualities include:

- Use open ended questions frequently
- Connect new information to existing knowledge
- Assess the requirements of each assignment
- Assess the needs of each student that you are tutoring
- Develop clear communication between you and the student that you are tutoring

### **Setting the Tone of Each Session**

The tutor/student relationship is a partnership. Each party contributes to tutoring sessions in his/her own way. Therefore both are responsible for setting the tone and keeping the lines of communication open during each session.

In order to establish a productive working relationship with students, it is important that both parties have a clear understanding of tutor/student responsibilities. This sets the groundwork for realistic expectations. Allow the student to participate in setting these expectations so that she or he can begin the role of an active participant in each tutoring session.

Peer tutors should suggest ways to improve the areas in which the student feels he or she needs help. Peer tutors should aid in discovering the other students' problems and then work on a solution together. Use handouts and your own skills for tools.

### **Section III: Teaching and Tutoring Writing in The Writers' Room**

An ancient proverb says, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for that day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for the rest of his life." That philosophy is incorporated into the Writers' Room tutoring program and is especially appropriate when helping students with all stages of a writing assignment. We



feel that learning to write well will be a helpful skill for students throughout their lives.

While tutoring in the area of writing, the Socratic method – which encourages asking questions of students to help them discover corrections needed rather than have the tutor make corrections – is preferred. When the student makes and understands the changes s/he is making in a paper, learning that can be reapplied is occurring.

The goal of tutoring is to foster student independence following the principle that peer tutors can help students help themselves by stimulating active learning and building students' confidence in their own abilities. Throughout all stages of the writing process, tutors can use the Socratic method to find students' levels of comprehension before moving to new concepts.

### **Working with special education students**

In your experiences as a peer tutor, you may come across students with learning disabilities. While tutoring these students, there are a few things to look out for and to keep in mind. The following is by no means an all-inclusive list; but we have gathered guidelines so that you are better equipped to tutor effectively. It should also be noted that we do not diagnose, label, or question students about disabilities. We acknowledge that all students have different ways of learning and this list acts only as a guideline for working with students who may have learning differences. (The following was compiled using information from the Schwab Learning Center and research from Robert Solley, Ph.D.)

#### **Some signs of a Special Education student**

1. Slow reading.
2. Decoding difficulties.
3. Consistent reading/spelling errors.
4. Poor fine-motor coordination (e.g., messy handwriting.)
5. Avoidance of writing and reading.



6. Reliance on memory without understanding.
7. Social difficulties and/or organizational problems.
8. Unusually high verbal skills that may mask dyslexia or # 7.
9. Unusual sensitivity to sounds, lighting, touch, or other sensations.
10. Unusual distractibility, impulsivity, or hyperactivity.

### **Strategies for teaching Special Education students**

1. Value the student's uniqueness.

Make the student aware that he/she has the potential to succeed despite his/her disability. Help the student to be positive about him/her self. Praise and be enthusiastic about the student's strengths.

2. Establish rapport with the student.

Once the student sees that you are invested in him/her, he/she will be more willing to open up to you and your tutoring.

3. Deconstruct complex words.

Teach parts of words and then move on to the whole. Get students familiar with the foundations of words and then build upwards from there. Oftentimes it will be best to have the students read aloud if possible.

4. Avoid distractions.

Try to minimize the amount of potential distractions as much as possible. Students will be able to focus more if there are fewer things around them to get them nervous.

5. Differentiated Instruction.

Try different learning strategies with the students. Students learn differently and so we need to teach them in ways they feel comfortable and in ways that they relate. This will take time, but once you get familiar with your student's learning style, it will get much easier to make learning accessible.

6. Student Participation.



Keep the student engaged in the learning. Once they tune out, it will be difficult to bring them back into what you are trying to do. Whether or not the material is exciting, be enthusiastic about what you are teaching them and they will stay engaged.

### **Characteristics of Effective Writing Center Peer Tutors**

As much as possible, peer writing tutors should have knowledge and experience as writers. They should write frequently and appreciate the process of writing—from the preliminary exploration of the idea through the hard work of drafting and redrafting to the final careful editing. As is often pointed out, the great advantage of working with a tutor is the ability to focus on process—on helping the student learn not merely how to polish the product but how to go about writing. Peer Tutors must be ready and willing to guide the process, to help students search for ideas and structures, for language and grammar.

Peer Tutors should be ready and willing to acquire as much knowledge as possible of writing as craft—of grammar and linguistics and standards. They should be able to read sensitively and to diagnose keenly—to go to the heart of the matter in determining what can be done to improve a piece of writing.

- Peer Tutors should be friendly, outgoing people who possess the characteristics necessary to be good advisers. They should be sensitive to students and quick to detect fear and hesitation and to give encouragement. They should avoid the “I know better” attitude and mean it when they say, “What can I do to help?”
- Peer Tutors should be flexible and energetic. The wide range of problems that come to the Writers’ Room make demands on the energy of the peer tutors.



- Peer Tutors should be able to work comfortably with others. Frequently in the Writers' Room, a number of people tutor in close proximity. Often, students do not see the same tutor at every visit. Therefore, Peer Tutors must work cooperatively with other staff members to be sure that students' needs are met.
- Peer Tutors should be willing to learn and to try new methods. A tutor who thinks "mine is the way" is usually uneasy when other students don't agree. For instance, those who insist on detailed outlines before writing, will lack the willingness to help students explore. On the other hand, a Peer Tutor must have the ability not to undermine a referring teacher who does have a specific approach.
- Peer Tutors should also be open to some degree of supervision. Peer Tutors should be willing to be observed by Writers' Room staff. This observation is used to improve your performance as a peer tutor. Peer tutors should also be willing to receive and provide feedback

-Adapted from Steward and Croft, The Writing Laboratory

### **Suggestions for Tutoring Writing**

If you are not sure how to get started, here is a recommended framework.

First, ask the student if they are working on their piece of writing for a class assignment. If so, ask if they have brought the assignment with them. It is important that peer tutors are aware of the teacher's guidelines and expectations for each assignment.

Next, read through the essay once completely without a pen in your hand, just to get an idea of what the student has written and to assess how you want to guide the process. The student can read it aloud or you can read it to him/her.



Then, offer a word of praise or appreciation about the student's writing or thinking. Ask your student what he/she thinks the strengths of this piece of writing are and what can be improved.

If you are specifically assessing the strength and impact of a college essay, we recommend the following strategy from one of our partner teachers. After reviewing the essay together, ask the student these questions:

1. Is it a unique story that only you can tell?
2. Is it important to who you are?
3. Is there potential for detail?

## **STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS**

### **Hierarchy of Concerns:**

Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to begin. Keeping in mind a hierarchy of concerns can be helpful. As a rule of thumb, focus on ideas and organization first, then add detail. Focus on spelling and grammar LAST...grammar only takes priority if it interferes with meaning.

1. **IDEA:** does the essay have a clear central theme, idea or topic? Does it reveal something significant about the student?
2. **STRUCTURE:** are the paragraphs in a logical order? Is there a strong intro and conclusion?
3. **DETAIL:** is there sufficient sensory detail? Does the essay show instead of tell?
4. **TRANSITIONS:** are there smooth transitions from one idea or paragraph to the next?
5. **WORD CHOICE:** are individual words use appropriately? Can a more precise or evocative word be used instead?
6. **SPELLING/GRAMMAR:** Are all words spelled correctly? Do sentences flow smoothly? Reading aloud can help.



If a student is really struggling, turn the essay over and ask the student to tell you the story he/she is trying to write. Take notes while he/she talks.

As a peer tutor you will work with students who are at different stages of the writing process: some will have a draft to revise, while many may be at the very beginning of the process. Depending on where they are, you will need to address different concerns.

**Brainstorming** - “I haven’t started yet and I don’t know what to write about”

- Talk to your student! Get to know him or her. Ask if there’s a unique story that only he or she can tell. What is important to your student? What sets your student apart? Some students might be uncomfortable revealing something personal to their tutor at first, so building a rapport can be especially helpful.

**Drafting** - “I know what I’m going to write about, but I haven’t started”

- Get them to articulate the “point” of their essay. What “truth” about themselves are they trying to convey?
- If they don’t already have an outline, plan out the paragraphs. 4 to 5 paragraphs is more than enough.

**Revising** - “I have a first draft”

- Have them read the essay out loud.
- Is there any repetition of thoughts, ideas, words, or phrases? Are there any clichés that need to be removed?
- Are there any key details and/or sensory language that could be added to make the piece more powerful?
- Reverse engineer an outline. Could they organize the essay differently? (Start from the end, start from the middle, organize chronologically, organize some other way.)

**Editing** - “I’m almost done...”

- Read the essay aloud. Is the meaning clear? Are there any sentences that don’t make sense? Review the essay for grammar with these questions in mind.



- How can they rewrite this sentence/section/paragraph to make it more understandable to the reader? To make the beginning/ending/paragraph more engaging?

## **Suggestions for Peer Editing**

### **1. Identify Values in the Paper**

Start with positive feedback on your peer's paper. What did you like about it? What are the best parts? What are the strongest points? Where did you become more interested? What ideas did you find exciting? What words resonated with you? What things surprised you? (Praising qualities in the paper is not so much a matter of flattering the writer or of stroking the writer's ego, but of identifying shared values.)

### **2. Describe the Paper**

Explain the main ideas of the paper and how it is organized. How are the beginning, middle, and end related? What are the main points of your peer's paper? After reading the first page, where did you expect the paper to go? How did your knowledge and feelings about the topic change as you read? State some related topics that the paper did not include.

### **3. Ask Questions About the Paper**

Ask questions about the writer's meaning and wording. Be clear about what you see to be problems. What questions came to mind as you read it or your peer read it aloud? Ask about parts that need more explanation or that are not clear to you. Ask "What did you mean when you said...?" and "Why did you say...?" Ask for clarification, further information, and elaboration on parts you found particularly interesting.

### **4. Suggest Points to Revise**

Give suggestions for improving the paper. Which points in the paper confused you? Suggest places that need more information, more clarity, or more detail.



What do you wish you learned more about in the paper? Are the tenses correct and consistent? Did you notice any other grammatical issues?

## **5 Most Common Grammatical Errors**

As a peer tutor you will often encounter many different types of grammar errors. Here are some of the most common grammatical errors that you may encounter:

### **Error #1: Run-on Sentence or Comma Splice**

A run-on sentence is a sentence that joins two independent clauses without punctuation or the appropriate conjunction. A comma splice is similar to a run-on sentence, but it uses a comma to join two clauses that have no appropriate conjunction.

Fixing a run-on sentence or a comma splice can be accomplished in one of five different ways:

- Separate the clauses into two sentences.
- Replace the comma with a semi-colon.
- Replace the comma with a coordinating conjunction--and, but, for, yet, nor, so.
- Replace the comma with a subordinating conjunction--after, although, before, unless, as, because, even though, if, since, until, when, while.
- Replace the comma with a semi-colon and transitional word--however, moreover, on the other hand, nevertheless, instead, also, therefore, consequently, otherwise, as a result.

For example:

- Incorrect: Rachel is very smart, she began reading when she was three years old.
- Correct: Rachel is very smart. She began reading when she was three years old.
- Correct: Rachel is very smart; she began reading when she was three years old.



- Correct: Rachel is very smart, and she began reading when she was three years old.

### **Error #2: Pronoun Errors**

Pronoun errors occur when pronouns do not agree in number with the nouns to which they refer. If the noun is singular, the pronoun must be singular. If the noun is plural, however, the pronoun must be plural as well. For example:

- Incorrect: Everybody must bring their own lunch.
- Correct: Everybody must bring his or her own lunch.

Many people believe that pronoun errors are the result of writers who are trying to avoid the implication of sexist language. Although this is an admirable goal, correct grammar is still important.

### **Error #3: Mistakes in Apostrophe Usage**

Apostrophes are used to show possession. However, you do not use an apostrophe after a possessive pronoun such as my, mine, our, ours, his, hers, its, their, or theirs. For example:

- Incorrect: My mothers cabin is next to his' cabin.
- Correct: My mother's cabin is next to his cabin.

In the case of it's, the apostrophe is used to indicate a contraction for it is. For example:

- Incorrect: Its a cold day in October.
- Correct: It's a cold day in October.

### **Error #4: Lack of Subject/Verb Agreement**

When speaking or writing in the present tense, a sentence must have subjects and verbs that agree in number. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural as well. For example:

- Incorrect: The recipes is good for beginning chefs.
- Correct: The recipes are good for beginning chefs.



### Error #5: **Misplaced Modifiers**

To communicate your ideas clearly, you must place a modifier directly next to the word it is supposed to modify. The modifier should clearly refer to a specific word in the sentence. For example:

- Incorrect: At eight years old, my father gave me a pony for Christmas.
- Correct: When I was eight years old, my father gave me a pony for Christmas.

## **TRANSITIONS**

As a peer tutor you will encounter many students who need to transition from one idea to the next. Here is an introduction to the different types of transitions students can use in their writing.

### **Types of Transitions**

A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. In each case, it functions the same way: First, the transition either directly summarizes the content of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section or implies such a summary (by reminding the reader of what has come before). Then, it helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the new information that you wish to present.

**Transitions between sections:** Particularly in longer pieces of writing, it may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that summarize for the reader the information just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section.



**Transitions between paragraphs:** If you have done a good job of arranging paragraphs so that the content of one leads logically to the next, the transition will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows. A transition between paragraphs can be a word or two (however, for example, similarly), a phrase, or a sentence. Transitions can be at the end of the first paragraph, at the beginning of the second paragraph, or in both places.

**Transitions within paragraphs:** As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases.



## Transitional Expressions

Logical Relationship	Transitional Expression
<b>Similarity</b>	also, in the same way, just as..., so to, likewise, similarly
<b>Exception/Contrast</b>	but, however, in spite of, on the one hand...on the other hand, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet
<b>Sequence/Order</b>	first, second, third, next, then, finally
<b>Time</b>	after, afterwards, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, simultaneously, subsequently, then
<b>Example</b>	for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate
<b>Emphasis</b>	even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly,
<b>Place/Position</b>	above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, back, nearby, there
<b>Cause and Effect</b>	accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus
<b>Additional Support of Evidence</b>	additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then
<b>Conclusion/Summary</b>	finally, in a word, in brief, briefly, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, to sum up, in summary

### Online Writing Resources

**Resource for Writers:**

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

**Grammar:**

<http://englishplus.com/grammar/>

**Citations:**

<http://www.citationmachine.net/>

**General Resource for writers and writing teachers:**

<http://guest.portaportal.com/umwrite>



**Quality Control  
Tutoring Observation Checklist**

- *Asking questions as much as possible is the best strategy for empowering students!*
- *Remember, tutors should NEVER criticize the teacher's strategy.*
- *If a peer tutor doesn't know the answer, he or she can help by saying, "I don't know--but here's what we can do to try to find out the answer together" and follow up by asking others or searching online.*

check		notes
	Peer Tutor greeted student (friendly)	
	Peer Tutor inquired about student's academic needs (eg "which teacher is this for? what is the assignment? which parts are the most confusing? which parts do you feel most confident about?")	
	Physical set up of interaction (seated side by side or at an angle looking over academic work together is optimal. student should have keyboard/writing implement. tutor should be leaning forward, demonstrating interest.)	
	Peer Tutor asked clarification questions (eg "Are you trying to make the paper longer? What do you mean here? Is this your thesis statement?")	
	Approximate ratio of student speaking time to peer tutor speaking time (75 student: 25 tutor is optimal. tutor speaking too much is not empowering.)	
	Peer Tutor checked for student's understanding frequently and thoroughly (asking "do you understand"--and then if student doesn't say anything or offers a cursory "yeah," tutor says, "ok, so now you walk me through it, and I'll help fill in anything you're confused about as we go along.")	
	Any skills that were transmitted (eg grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, brainstorming strategies, etc) were relevant to the assignment and the student's needs and were explained fully.	





