

# Tutoring First-Year Writing Students at UNM

## A Guide for Students, Mentors, Family, Friends, and Others

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## Introduction: For Students and Tutors

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### Almost all writing students can benefit from tutoring

We encourage *all* writing students to seek additional help—not just those struggling to make the grade. When students develop solid writing skills early in their college careers, they significantly improve your chances for success at UNM and beyond. Even “A” and “B” students benefit from good tutoring.

We have created this pamphlet to help students and tutors get the most out of tutoring. If students and tutors understand their roles, students will benefit and tutors will not cross that difficult line between appropriate and inappropriate help.

#### Looking for help?

UNM offers free tutoring services through CAPS—the Center for Academic Program Support. It's located on the third floor of Zimmerman Library. They tutor in the Student Union Building Monday through Thursday evenings.

Tutoring is also available at a number of other centers around campus. [See the list of other tutoring resources at the end of this pamphlet.](#)

### In a nutshell—the goals of a tutoring session

When students receive help from a writing tutor—from a trained tutor, mentor, parent, or friend—they're usually working on a specific assignment. However, the goal of any tutoring session should be helping the student improve his or her overall writing skills, not just the essay at hand.

Students develop their writing abilities when they *themselves*, with your guidance, work on and on improve a particular writing assignment—not when the student merely witnesses the changes made by the tutor.

### Too much help

We want students and their tutors to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate help, not always a simple distinction. Tutors should not correct grammatical mistakes, rewrite sentences, or alter content. In fact, in some cases this type of “help” might be considered plagiarism.

#### What is plagiarism?

The term “plagiarism” refers to work or part of a work that is not the sole production of the student, but for which the student takes credit.



## For Students

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### What to Expect from Your Tutor

As the student, you are ultimately in charge of your education. By deciding to seek tutoring, you are already taking a step in the direction of success by taking responsibility for your own success in your English 101 and English 102 classes. However, in seeking tutoring, you also accept responsibility for any help you receive. It is your responsibility—not the tutor’s—to know and understand what types of tutoring are acceptable and what types constitute plagiarism.

While all CAPS and many other UNM tutors have received extensive training, some other tutors and mentors may not be familiar with what constitutes acceptable help, or how they can tutor effectively. Therefore, *you* must learn and understand what is acceptable help. This guide is meant to help you maximize your tutoring experience and achieve success in English 101, English 102, and beyond.

Look for and expect these characteristics from your tutor.

**INSIST THAT YOUR IDEAS MATTER** Try to find a tutor who encourages you toward independent thought. Look for a tutor who is interested in your ideas and your thoughts on the direction of your paper.

**EXPECT PROFESSIONALISM** You should expect both punctuality and professionalism from your tutor.

**FIND A TUTOR, NOT AN EDITOR** At times, you may want help with grammar and other surface features of writing, but there’s much more to good writing and good tutoring. Look for a tutor who wants to help you with your ideas, organization, style, and voice.

Tutoring is about learning, not correcting. Don't let your tutoring session turn into an editing session. If your tutor devotes the session to marking grammar mistakes, you probably aren't learning much. Tutoring is not about "correcting" a paper; it's about learning.

**EXPECT POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING FEEDBACK** All students seek tutoring aid at some time; tutoring is not simply for those who are not an expert in a particular subject. Tutoring helps students who want to improve their performance in a class or specific subject. In fact, the most successful students are frequently those that seek out tutoring. Your tutor should offer you instruction that is positive and encouraging, not merely correctional.

Find the right tutor. Find a tutor who will work *with* you and your ideas, not someone who takes over.

## Responsibilities—Making the Most of Your Session

You, not your tutor, are ultimately responsible, for your work.

**KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN APPROPRIATE AND TOO MUCH HELP** Trained tutors understand the difference, but many well-intentioned tutors might not. Make sure the work is your work and ideas are yours.

**MAKE TIME** Arrange tutoring sessions with enough time to allow for reworking the assignment, so that you can incorporate the skills and suggestions learned from the session.

**ARRIVE ON TIME** Show your tutor that you're serious by arriving on time.

**BE ACTIVE** Tutoring is not a one-way street. Tutors are there to encourage and help students discover the questions, answers, and skills on their own. Do not attend a tutoring session expecting the tutor to “fix” your paper while you wait.

**COME PREPARED** Spend some time thinking about your work, the assignment, and what you hope to accomplish during the session. Bring all the materials that might help you and your tutor understand what your teacher expects and what you hope to accomplish.

- **Specific questions and concerns.** Every tutoring session should begin by ensuring that tutor understands what the student hopes to accomplish. Come with questions ready for your tutoring session. Make sure the questions are specific and can be directly linked to a specific issue.  
For instance, if you are working on an “informal” paper, let your tutor know that you do not need to focus on surface features (grammar, punctuation, etc.), but on the development of your ideas (thesis, organization, etc.).
- **The complete assignment,** including your instructor’s explanation of how the assignment will be graded. English 101 and 102 teachers *always* explain, in writing, what they want you to focus on by describing how they’ve evaluate your work.
- **Bring the written assignment.** If your teacher uses WebCT, print it out beforehand.

For informal papers, this may just be a sentence or two specifying what you should focus on. For formal papers, English 101 and 102 teachers *always* provide a “grading rubric,” which is a more thorough and formal explanation of grading criteria and the characteristics of writing to focus on. These are usually expressed in terms of the particular

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Help your tutor help you.  
Take control of your tutoring session. Be prepared, and understand your role.

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Don't ask your tutor about grades.  
Never ask your tutor what grade they would assign. Professional tutors will refuse to answer, but they can help you understand what your teacher is looking for if you bring the assignment with you.

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Twenty-Four/Seven Tutoring.  
UNM Something about SmartThinking or whatever it's called offered through CAPS.

learning outcomes you should be working toward. (The final section of this pamphlet details the English 101 and 102 learning outcomes.)

- **Working or rough drafts of the assignment.** Help your tutor understand what you've been up to.
- **Textbooks.** Bring your textbooks to help you tutor understand the language you're using in the classroom. If you're an English 101 or 102 student and want to work on grammar and punctuation, be sure to bring your copy of *A Pocket Style Manual*. (CAPS tutors have the English 101 and 102 textbooks on hand.)

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT POINT(S) IN THE WRITING PROCESS** Schedule a tutoring session at the appropriate times during the writing process. You may need to meet with a tutor more than once for a writing project. Of course, you should leave plenty of time between your tutoring session and the due date for making revisions or meeting with your tutor a second time.

## For Mentors & Tutors

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Tutoring can be a daunting task, especially if you have never been a tutor before. Because your writing abilities are more advanced than your student's, it can be difficult to refrain from taking over. Your role as a tutor is to facilitate a student's own writing and learning, to help him or her achieve their best, not your best.

Remember your overall purpose.

Your goal is helping your student improve his or her overall writing skills by working on the skills needed for improving the paper at hand. Making a particular paper stronger and helping your student earn a better grade—that's a happy consequence of this learning process.

## Fundamental Tips for Tutors

**LISTEN: INSIST THAT YOUR STUDENT TAKES RESPONSIBILITY** First, make sure you understand what your student wants from the session. If your student can't explain that, ask leading questions, examine the assignment with the student, or list some possibilities to focus on.

**UNDERSTAND WHERE THE STUDENT IS IN THE WRITING PROCESS** English 101 and 102 teachers teach assignment "sequences," which comprise at least three distinct assignments built around a central topic or theme ("education," for example). The first two or more assignments are "informal" essay assignments, which are designed to help students develop their ideas and arguments. The final "formal" essay asks for more polished writing.

For informal essays, students should focus *not*

A sports analogy for "coaching" writing. Developing writers can focus on only a limited number of issues. This is similar to coaching a developing baseball player who needs to master one or two issues at a time. You wouldn't ask the ballplayer to focus on all fifty characteristics of a good swing. Rather, you might focus first on footwork and balance. Once the player has mastered that aspect, you might then move on to issues such as arm and head position, or follow through.

on polishing the paper but on higher-order concerns such as thesis development, summarizing ideas from outside reading, developing paragraphs, and so forth. In fact, it can be counterproductive to spend time on surface features since the student will significantly alter their drafts as they progress toward the “formal” assignment. For their formal papers, you would probably encourage the student to set aside sufficient time for addressing surface features.

**PROMPT THE STUDENT TO SET AN AGENDA** *Begin* the session by working with the student to set an agenda. Ask open-ended questions to help the student articulate the issues he or she wants to work on. Then you can work out options for proceeding, keeping in mind realistic time constraints. It often helps to “draw a map” or plan of the session to come; try to get this down in writing, or draw a diagram.

**REFUSE TO DIAGNOSE A PAPER’S PROBLEMS** Instead of telling a student what’s wrong, help them discover it on their own by asking leading questions.

**SIT NEXT TO THE STUDENT** When you sit beside (not across from) your student, you can keep the paper in front of the student and not in your hands as you read it.

**AVOID MARKING THE DRAFT** As much as possible, avoid making any marks on the student’s paper. In fact, avoid holding a pen at all. The best tutors leave their pens at home!

**ASK LEADING QUESTIONS** Don’t tell the student what’s wrong. Your students need to learn to recognize problems themselves, even when you’re not around. You can lead them toward asking the right questions by using language like this:

- “Can you show me your thesis?” not, “You don’t have a thesis...”
- “Is there a clearer way of wording this?” not, “You need to reword this sentence...”
- “How do you see this paragraph proving your thesis?” not, “This paragraph is off-topic...”
- “Tell me why you arranged your paragraphs in this order?” not, “Your organization needs work....”

**PROVIDE AMPLE POSITIVE FEEDBACK** Compliment your students. When your students have succeeded, let them know so that they’ll do it again in the future. Struggling students are sometimes easily discouraged, and too much criticism might lead them to throw in the towel. Many tutors *begin* by explaining what works, so the student is prepared to take in what doesn’t.

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### Need help with writing lingo?

English 101 and 102 employ terms that may not be familiar to you. Consult your student’s textbooks. The UNM edition of *A Pocket Style Manual* (a required textbook) includes a 32-page description of the goals and procedures of UNM’s first-year writing program. *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing* will help you understand ideas such as “thesis with tension” or “wallowing in complexity.” We’ve chosen these textbooks because they align with UNM’s learning outcomes.

## Surface Features: Grammar, Usage, Spelling, Punctuation, etc.

When we recommend that you attend to higher-order concerns beyond surface features, we're not suggesting you ignore them entirely—just that you help your student understand that writing involves more than surface correctness. Indeed, a grammatically perfect paper will receive a failing grade if the higher-order issues (thesis, organization, use of sources, etc.) are unsatisfactory.

Students learn to master surface features when they're working on ideas they care about communicating. Therefore, do attend to surface issues but do so in the context of other issues.

### Tips for addressing surface features

**STAY ON TASK** Avoid interrupting discussion of other issues to bring up surface errors. Help your student focus on one thing at a time. Wait for right time to change gears and talk about surface error.

**FIRST THINGS FIRST** Work first on grammatical “errors” that interfere most with a reader’s comprehension or that occur the most often in the student’s essay.

**POINT OUT, DON'T CORRECT** You can point out that an error exists in a certain place or area, but avoid being too specific. If the time is right for discussing punctuation, ask the student to examine a particular sentence for surface issues. If he or she still has difficulty, ask leading questions that will help the student diagnose the problem.

Hands off! Students learn by doing. You can teach usage principles, but let students make the changes themselves.

**EXPLAIN PRINCIPLES, BUT HAVE THE STUDENT APPLY THOSE PRINCIPLES** Explain the reasoning behind any grammatical changes that you directly suggest. You might even provide examples, but not examples from the student’s paper. However, leave it to the student to apply those principles to the writing at hand.

**HELP THE STUDENT FIND THEIR OWN ANSWERS** Use textbooks and web sites to help teach grammar. If you and your student consult the handbook or website together, the student will know where to find that explanation again—and will develop the empowering habit of using these resources.

Got Internet? Try an online writing lab. There are numerous online writing labs (or OWLs). The oldest and most comprehensive is the Purdue OWL.

**ASK THE STUDENT TO READ ALOUD** Research shows that at least half of the errors in undergraduate essays result from inattentive reading and proofreading. When students read passages aloud, they often spot errors themselves.

## Tutoring ESL Students

Second language learners often have certain distinctive difficulties and tutoring needs. This section addresses issues specific to tutoring ESL students.

A university like UNM has many students who are learning English as a second or third language (sometimes called “ESL Students”). Some teachers and tutors wonder how to adjust their teaching techniques to meet the needs of such students. The following tips offer suggestions about working effectively with ESL students while still giving students “ownership” of the writing process.

Here are some tips on working with students on improving their grammar.

**FOCUS FIRST ON HIGHER-ORDER CONCERNS** Focus first on major concerns such as thesis statement, ideas, organization of ideas and use of research. Some ESL students aren’t familiar enough with lingo such as “thesis statement” or “organization” to ask for help with other areas of their writing, or they may think grammar is the most important concern. If a student only asks for grammatical help, you may want to approach the tutoring session the same way you would with a first-language speaker who only asks for grammatical help.

**FOCUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT GRAMMATICAL ISSUES** For students who are struggling with English, focus on errors that prevent the reader from understanding. Lesser grammar mistakes can wait.

**PROVIDE CULTURAL CONTEXT WHEN APPROPRIATE** Non-American students sometimes have trouble understanding ideas because they don’t understand American culture. For instance, they may need some background about how American education works. Help fill in the gaps.

**GIVE STUDENTS THE CHANCE TO EDIT THEIR OWN WORK** Sometimes indicating simply the number of “errors” in a line or sentence may be enough to help some students significantly edit their own papers. In other cases, offer specific prompts that still require a student to think about their grammar. For instance, you may say, “You need a pronoun in this sentence,” “This sentence is missing an article,” or “Look at this verb tense.”

**HAVE THE STUDENT “SPEAK” THE WRITING** If the writing style is difficult for others to understand, ask the student how they would speak an idea if discussing it with a friend. Try a prompt like, “How else can you write this?” or “Tell me more about what you mean here.” You may wish to write down what they say. Although this technique may give students’ writing a casual tone, it will be comprehensible to others.

**ADVISE THEM TO USE TRANSLATION DICTIONARIES CAUTIOUSLY** Advise students to only use words from translation dictionaries if they already have some familiarity with the word or if they can find other uses of the word in context. Use prompts like “What other word can you use here?”

**BEWARE THE THESAURUS** All students, ESL or not, should avoid overusing thesauri. Advise them against using a word they haven't heard before—even if the thesaurus says it is a synonym, it may not mean quite the same thing.

**IN SOME CASES, JUST TELL THEM WHICH WORD IS CORRECT** Non-native speakers and writers often have trouble with articles (*an, a, some, the, those, etc.*), prepositions (*at, on, for, etc.*), or certain words (e.g., when to use *make* and when to use *do*). Because such usage issues are almost entirely idiomatic, it can be impossible to articulate a rationale for English usage. For instance, why do English speakers say “The party is *at* seven o'clock,” but not “The party is *at* Sunday”? In cases like this, it's certainly okay to simply tell the student which word is correct.

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Help with ESL-specific issues.  
Consult the required textbook *A Pocket Style Manual*, which includes an excellent section on common ESL problems (pages 55–62).

## Helping Students Who Seem Under-prepared

You might be working with a student who has only been learning English for a few years and who is at the early stages of writing. These students often genuinely want to do well in college and may put a great deal of effort into their studies. It may be tempting to help such students write their essays with more direct help than you would otherwise give. Here are some tips for working with students who seem unprepared for college English.

**MAINTAIN HIGH EXPECTATIONS** Students are often capable of more than they initially seem to be.

**BRAINSTORM SUPPORT SYSTEMS** Help the student brainstorm all possible support systems including all available tutoring services, student support groups, friends, a teacher's office hours, resource books, useful web pages, and other types of support.

**MEET OFTEN** Meet multiple times to work on the different steps needed to write a passing paper. This may allow a student to write a passing paper that is still primarily their work.

## What is “Acceptable” Help?

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Students and tutors alike often have difficulty understanding the line between acceptable help and too much help. Here are some guidelines for acceptable and non-acceptable tutoring. All students and tutors should familiarize themselves with these guidelines.

**POINTING OUT/MARKING IS OKAY, BUT NOT CORRECTING** Marking grammatical mistakes on an essay is acceptable; correcting mistakes is not. Tutors may sometimes mark grammatical mistakes, but should leave the corrections to the student. If a student does not understand why something is marked, he or she should ask the tutor.

**NEVER PROVIDE THE WORDS** A tutor should not add or provide words for a student. If a sentence is unclear or the wording is awkward in an essay, the tutor should point this

out to and help the student create a clearer wording. The tutor should not provide the words for the student. Ask leading questions; let the student do the heavy lifting.

**LEAVE THE IDEAS TO THE STUDENT** The student should always be the sole producer of a paper's content. A tutor can help expand on ideas and offer new angles from which to view a topic, but the topic and all main points should come from the student.

**LET THE STUDENT ORGANIZE** The organization of an essay is the student's responsibility. A tutor should let a student know if certain parts of the essay seem out of order; they should not re-order the essay.

## First-Year Writing Learning Outcomes

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Write an intro about the rationale behind these, how they're used in the classroom, rubrics, etc.

### English 101 Outcomes

The following outcomes are the skills that the Department of English expects students in English 101 to achieve.

#### Process and Revision

**Revision.** Uses collaboration from peers, feedback from instructor, and self-assessment to revise drafts substantively.

**Invention.** Uses a variety of activities and strategies throughout the assignment sequence to develop their arguments and ideas, as well as their rhetorical awareness (purpose, audience, genre).

**Peer Critique.** Provides helpful and thoughtful formative criticism of peers' work, both in class and outside class.

#### Purpose and Development

**Purpose and thesis.** Makes essay's purpose is clear and appropriate to the assignment, and the thesis has "tension."

**Problem articulation and development.** Articulates a problematic question and explains why the problem is significant

**Context.** Essay's genre and tone are appropriate to audience and purpose; uses an appropriate tone.

**Development and complexity of ideas.** Shows sensitivity to multi-sidedness of issues and addresses the issue's complexity

### **Reading and Working with Texts**

**Summarizing or paraphrasing texts.** Essay accurately and thoroughly summarizes or paraphrases texts.

**Active reading & analysis.** As demonstrated in class work and in essays, reads texts “with and against the grain” and they specify the rhetorical strategies used.

**Conversation among texts and ideas of essay.** Synthesizes multiple texts, putting texts into conversation with each other and with ideas of author.

### **Presentation and Organization**

**Paragraphing.** Writes unified paragraphs that include transitions, topic sentences, and particulars.

**Overall organization and unity.** Develops a central point, idea, thesis, or claim that is clearly defined and supported by concrete, substantial, and relevant evidence.

**Grammar, mechanics, and other surface features.** Uses conventions of grammar, mechanics, and style associated with English dialects, with particular emphasis on standard written English.

**Responsible use of sources.** Uses at least one system of documentation (e.g. MLA or APA) competently

### **Style and Voice**

**Style and voice.** Uses Style and voice that are appropriate to the given audience, purpose, genre, and claims

## **English 102 Outcomes**

The outcomes for English 102 include all of those put forth for English 101 (see page 8) as well as the following additional goals. The Department of English expects all students who complete English 102 to have attained all of the skills included on these two lists.

### **Argumentation and Rhetorical Strategies**

**Analysis using rhetorical strategies.** Understands how rhetorical strategies—such as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*—create effective arguments, and uses this terminology to analyze texts.

**Use of rhetorical strategies.** Uses rhetorical strategies to shape different modes of argumentation—arguments by “definition,” “causal,” “evaluation,” etc.—that fit specific rhetorical situations.

## Research

**Use of outside sources.** Finds and selects materials outside of class materials that are appropriate to the rhetorical situation, considering carefully what your readers need to know in order to follow lines of good reasoning

# Resources for Writing Students and Tutors

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## UNM Tutoring Services

**CAPS**

**What else???**

## Books and Online Writing Labs

[Smartthinking URL](#)

[Purdue OWL](#)

[UNM CAPS](#)