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# Faculty Handbook

for

# *The Writing Assistants Program*

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Michael Matto, Coordinator of University-Wide Writing · [matto@adelphi.edu](mailto:matto@adelphi.edu) · ext. 4165  
Matt Lavery, Writing Center Director · [mlavery@adelphi.edu](mailto:mlavery@adelphi.edu) · ext. 3202

# **WRITING ASSISTANTS PROGRAM**

## **MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE WRITING ASSISTANT**

Thank you for your interest in the Writing Assistant Program (WAP) at Adelphi, an exciting initiative designed to improve writing and communication skills across the University. This guide is for faculty who will be using a Writing Assistant (WA) in their courses. We will cover the expectations we have of participants in the program, and suggest some pedagogical ideas that will help faculty make good use of WAs.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF THE PROGRAM**

The Writing Assistants Program (WAP) has been designed around a few central pedagogical principles. **First**, we assume that all writers, of whatever background and capability, benefit greatly from a thoughtful response to a draft of their writing. Indeed, good writers almost by definition understand the value of feedback and actively seek it out. **Second**, we are convinced that writing itself is a cognitive act central to learning, and that writing can be used fruitfully within any discipline as a tool of instruction. **Third**, we value improving the writing habits and processes of student writers more than ensuring the production of perfect papers. **Finally**, we believe firmly in the effectiveness of peer-assisted learning and the value of collaboration.

For these reasons, faculty using WAs should not expect every paper turned in to be perfect, but rather should share our goal of improving the writing ability of each student in the class. Finally, faculty using WAs must agree from the outset to make the WAP an integral, required part of their course for *all* students and not to “exempt” some students from working with the WA because they are already good writers.

### **THE WRITING ASSISTANTS**

Writing Assistants are either nominated directly by faculty who want to use them, or else appointed by the Writing Center. All new WAs are required to attend a comprehensive orientation before the term, followed by ongoing pedagogical instruction through the semester where the many challenges specific to working as a Writing Assistant are addressed.

Each Writing Assistant will receive a stipend for the semester’s work: \$850 for undergraduates and \$1350 for graduates. This amount is based on approximately 5 hours of work per week, over the course of a 15-week semester. While WAs may spend, say, seven hours working during a busy week and then spend only four the next two weeks, the goal should be five hours of work per week all semester long.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACULTY USING WAS**

Working with a Writing Assistant is a new experience for most faculty, and all faculty benefit from hearing about the ideas and experiences of others. We therefore expect participants to stay in contact with the program directors and to accept some guidance in developing strategies for using WAs well in a course.

### Meetings

At minimum, we will schedule

- One meeting with the Writing Program and Writing Center Directors for all faculty using WAs, to be held before or at the start of the semester.
- One additional meeting with the Directors, to be scheduled approximately one month into the semester.
- One end-of-term evaluation of the program, either in person or in writing.

In addition faculty should give a copy of the course syllabus, including a clear indication of how the WA is to be used week by week, to Michael Matto (the Writing Program Director) no later than the first full week of the semester--preferably before, to allow for possible revision of the syllabus.

Along with staying in contact with the directors, faculty should expect to be in constant communication with their WAs through some combination of meetings (during office hours or otherwise), email, or other communication. Please plan for at least one contact per week at minimum.

### Appropriate use of the WA

The Writing Assistant's job is to help students with their writing processes; to help them devise strategies for tackling your assignments; to offer a reader's informed feedback on drafts of essays; and to build on the work of English 107 or any other writing classes the students have taken. WAs can hold regular office hours to discuss writing with students, and students can be required to meet with them.

- WAs are to work 5 hours/week. That time includes preparing for meetings, working with students, reading papers and writing comments, meeting with the faculty, coming to class (when desired), and any other work they do.
- Please respect the WA's time constraints. For instance, the WA is likely unable to meet individually with each of 20 students during a single week. If a WA is to conference with all students for a given paper, please either allow enough time (weeks, not days), or have a rolling due date for the assignment, or set up "writing groups" (see below).

- At minimum, please schedule a sequence of drafting deadlines for each large assignment to allow students to do meaningful work with the WA before turning in a final draft. WAs should not be expected simply to proofread or edit student papers—they are capable of far more advance writing instruction than that (see below, under “Course Planning and Assignment Design”).
- WAs differ from TAs in a number of ways. WAs must not be asked to grade student work (though they can provide some written feedback). Nor are they necessarily well-versed in the content of your course, so they should not be asked to hold content-based “discussion sections” of the material.
- While WAs can and should be used for in-class workshops or other class-time activities, please do not use the WA as an emergency substitute teacher.

All students in your class should have the same requirements involving the WA: *please do not send the message to your class that the WA is only for students who need remedial help.*

## **COURSE PLANNING AND ASSIGNMENT DESIGN**

Courses with WAs should be considered writing intensive. For this reason, WAs expect to be kept busy all semester long, not just when drafts come due. The best approach is to plan a semester around a series of writing-related activities for which the WA can take some responsibility and which form a coherent instructional strategy in writing. The WA should have clear, weekly responsibilities or activities related to the course. For some faculty this will mean a bit of syllabus re-design as they reconsider the role of writing in their classes.

To this end, all faculty using Writing Assistants will have a copy of *The St. Martin's Manual for Writing in the Disciplines*, a brief compendium of principles and strategies for incorporating writing into courses in various disciplines. We encourage you to look through this book, adopt any ideas that strike you as useful, and to contact the Directors with any questions. In addition, the following strategies may prove useful for the WAP program in particular.

### Scaffolding

Likely to be the most useful strategy for teachers using WAs, “scaffolding” is a method for designing assignments that requires students to build up to large writing or research projects in stages, with check-ins along the way. The basic strategy is to 1. imagine the final product you want students to produce; 2. list the skills or tasks a student would have to master to do well on the project; 3. create a series of assignments, staggered over a number of weeks, that ask students to practice or produce short pieces that address those skills or tasks. These assignments can be ungraded but still required, or graded as a group at the end of the sequence. Such assignments are perfect for students to bring to a meeting with the WA. For instance, an assignment to write a “book review” might follow the following steps:

1. Description and summary  
students write a short, relatively objective description of the contents of book to be reviewed.
2. Analysis of Purpose  
students determine the author's purpose for writing, the intended audience, the context in which it was written, the genre, etc.
3. Establishment of Criteria  
students determine what makes a "good" and "bad" example of this kind of book, based on what they determined in #2.
4. Review  
students now incorporate the above parts into an essay that has the format, structure and argument of other reviews.

At the end of this handbook is a fleshed-out example of an assignment sequence from a Freshman Seminar as handed out to students. Also, chapters 4 and 5 of your *St. Martin's Manual for Writing in the Disciplines* offer a number of small assignments that can be used as part of a larger scaffolded progression. You can consult with the Writing Program Director for help creating a specific assignment.

### Writing Groups

At the beginning of the term, you might establish student writing groups of four or five students each, organized by available free time for meetings with the WA. (The WA could even be asked to coordinate this organization, based on his or her own availability.) The WA would then arrange to meet with the groups rather than individually to go over specific writing-related topics as the term progresses:

- how to plan a writing strategy
- strategies for generating good ideas
- use of library resources
- how to revise
- specific grammar or usage issues
- improvement of writing style
- citation style and formatting
- group workshops on essay drafts

Many of these topics will be covered in English 107 (The Art and Craft of Writing), but not necessarily in a way specific to your course. Also, students need direct exposure to such topics more than once to become practiced in them. Ideally, such meetings would be scheduled into the syllabus from the start.

### In-class Writing

Writing can be incorporated into your course syllabus not only in assignments, but as in-class activity. For example, there is no better introduction to a discipline than a discussion of the forms its scholarship takes (for instance, the structure of a “lab report” can be used to teach the scientific method itself). Discussion of the rhetorical strategies and form of a model essay within your discipline can be a productive use of a class day. WAs can assist in, or even lead, such discussions.

Also, in-class writing can be used fruitfully in short activities. Even a five-minute exercise can lead to livelier discussions and better retention of course material. Some in-class activities that your WA can assist in or lead:

- Walk-through of a model essay
- Short discussion of how to develop an effective research question or thesis
- a report on strengths and weaknesses of the class’s essays as a whole
- instruction in incorporating theoretical models with specific examples
- demonstration of effective revision practices
- facilitation of “writing to learn” activity: freewriting, clustering, 30-minute essay, etc.

See chapter 4 and 5 of your *St. Martin's Manual for Writing in the Disciplines* for more ways of getting writing and your WA into class meetings.

### Moodle and Email

If you use Moodle, or set up other electronic communication with your class, consider ways to use the WA to help moderate and respond to discussion. A “writing issues” discussion thread in Moodle could be useful, for instance. Email can also be used to facilitate turning papers in to both the WA and the instructor. Please contact Astrid Palm in the Faculty Center for Professional Excellence for more information on getting your WA access to your Moodle.

## **RESOURCES**

Faculty using WAs should feel free to contact the Directors at any time for any reason:

Michael Matto, Writing Program Director  
matto@adelphi.edu  
ext. 4165

Matt Lavery, Writing Center Director  
mlavery@adelphi.edu  
ext. 3202

## APPENDIX 1: Do's and Don't's

### DO:

Before the term begins

- Map out your planned WA use (most every week, 5 hours/week)
- remember that your course must incorporate writing instruction and tasks *throughout the term* (not just for two or three weeks when essays are due)
- Discuss this plan with the WA
- Put WA contact info on your syllabus
- include a paragraph on the syllabus explaining the WA's central role in your course
- explain clearly the penalties for not meeting WA-related requirements (docked grades, etc.)
- give those penalties teeth

### During the term

- meet regularly with the WA
- give the WA samples of the kinds of writing you are assigning
- require ALL students (not just "bad writers") to use the WA
- give ample opportunities to students to revise in light of comments

### DON'T:

- excuse some students from using the WA (any more than you excuse smart students from exams)
- make the WA "optional"
- require only that students use WAs "at least twice" (or three times, or whatever) during the term (instead, make clear which students meet with the WA, and when, or else most students put it off until the end)
- tell the WA "I won't need you for the next three weeks"
- have floating deadlines

### WAP Faculty Administrative Requirements:

- Attend a new WA Faculty Orientation meeting (or, consult individually with either Michael Matto or Matt Lavery) to discuss your initial plans for working with a WA and review program goals.
- Submit both your week by week plan for working with your WA AND near final draft of course syllabus to Michael Matto or Matt Lavery before the start of the term to confirm course meets the programmatic goals of Writing Assistant Program. This also allows us time to work with you if your plan requires minor "tweaking."
- Meet with your Writing Assistant at a meet-up sessions scheduled before the term following WA training. This one hour meeting helps prepare both you and your WA for the rich and rewarding working-relationship you're both about to embark on.
- At the end of the term complete an evaluation reflecting on your experience working with your WA and incorporating writing instruction and tasks throughout the semester.

**Appendix 2: TWO SAMPLE SCAFFOLDED ASSIGNMENTS**  
*from the Freshman Seminar syllabus of Prof. Lahney Preston-Matto, English dept.*

**Unit One: Medieval Traditions**

***Writing Exercise 1.1***

For *both* stories we have read, follow these steps:

1. Write out what you think the idea of the story is in a short paragraph. This is not a plot recap in one paragraph, but what the story is *about*, what idea it's trying to get across through the plot. It's possible that there are several ideas that the story is interested in transmitting.
2. Why do you think this idea is important in terms of the culture that's being portrayed in the story? Does this idea still have relevance in today's world? How and why? These questions should be answered in another short paragraph.

***Writing Exercises 1.2 and 1.3***

First read the assigned stories for the general plot and the thrill of trying to follow the medieval story-telling pattern. Then, go back through and write up an idea summary for each story (pick two for the *Before the Táin* reading) following the steps in WE 1.1.

***Writing Exercise 1.4***

Of the stories you summarized in WE 1.1 – 1.3, choose the one that you feel the greatest interest in, the one that has ideas in it that you would like to think more about. Look over that story again and pick out at least three passages that you find especially thought-provoking (these passages can be as short as a sentence or as long as a paragraph).

Next, choose a friend (not in this class) with whom you discuss matters important to you. This must be a real person that you know well. Write a letter to this person in which you tell him or her about the story you have chosen, and what you have been thinking about it. To do this, you should do two things in the course of the letter:

1. Discuss the key passages you have already picked out when describing the story;
2. Bring other evidence of your own to bear when writing about your thinking.

The letter should be about two pages long.

Remember, your friend will have no idea why you are writing unless you make it clear in your letter. You need to convince your friend of the importance or compelling nature of the ideas you are trying to discuss. Thus, telling your friend that you are fulfilling a requirement for a course will not do; find another way to get him or her interested in what you have to say.

***Essay One***

Your job now is to bring together the writing and thinking you have been doing into an essay. Your goal is to help your reader to understand the idea that you have become interested in, using both evidence from the text and your own evidence. Take your reader through your thinking. You may re-use material from your WEs.

The final essay should be 3 – 4 pages; the first draft 2 – 3 pages. Both versions should be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Because this is an essay, it requires documentation. It is your responsibility to follow the guidelines you will find in *A Writer's Reference* (section M, 323 – 360). Come to me or our Writing Tutor with any specific questions after consulting *A Writer's Reference*.

## **Unit Two: Modern Traditions**

### ***Writing Exercise 2.1***

For this WE, you may refer to *The Táin, Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, or any of the stories we've read in Neeson. Pick two of the texts, and write a brief, one-paragraph summary of the idea of each text. Then, focus specifically on the mis/use of power. You'll need to provide a definition of power: is it physical power such as that possessed by Cú Chulainn or Lugh? Or political power such as it is wielded by Fionn or the Bodb Dearg? Or propagandistic power as commandeered by Patrick and Caoilte? How is power being mis/used in these tales? By whom? To what ends? What does this mis/use of power tell us about the culture that the story was written in, and how does understanding its mis/use help us understand the story better?

This should be about two pages in length.

### ***Writing Exercise 2.2***

You may use any of the stories in Glassie or O'Sullivan for this WE. Pick two of the stories, and write a brief, one-paragraph summary of the idea of each text. Then, for each of the stories, analyze one element of the story in terms of its importance both to the story and to folklore in general. To illustrate: most of the stories about religious faith and the fairies have in common a belief in another world which is not the one most of us inhabit. What does this belief reveal about the people who tell these stories and their audience, and what role does this belief play in the stories they tell? Another example: many of the stories contain characters who have access to untold stores of wealth. What anxiety do these characters feed upon, and what role do they play in this story and others like it? Essentially, you're trying to explore specific folkloric elements of the stories and explain that element's function within the story itself and in Irish folklore in general.

This should be about two pages in length.

### ***Essay Two***

In this essay, you're going to explore an idea about thematic elements illustrated within the stories that we have read in this unit. You will use the stories as evidence for your idea, but this is not an essay about the stories. It is an essay about elements that the stories have in common, issues that are larger than the plot of the stories themselves, and your analysis of why these elements are important, not only to the story itself, but to Irish culture in general, and, beyond that, to folklore in general.

You should cite at least three stories in your essay. You can also use your experiences to help develop your idea.

4 – 6 page final draft; 3 – 5 page first draft. Both typed, double-space, with one inch margins. Because this is an essay, it requires documentation. It is your responsibility to follow the guidelines you will find in *A Writer's Reference* (section M, 323 – 360). Come to me or our Writing Tutor with any specific questions after consulting *A Writer's Reference*.

## Appendix 3: SAMPLE WEEK-BY-WEEK WA ACTIVITY

### CALENDAR

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignments</u>	<u>WA</u>
W 1/23	Introductions		<i>ATTEND CLASS, lead in-class writing exercise</i>
F 1/25	Iconography and Narratology of Villains		
M 1/28	Iconography and Narratology of Villains	Due: Informal Writing 1	<i>Read &amp; respond to Student Writing</i>

#### **PART ONE: Monsters and Heroes**

W 1/30	<i>Beowulf</i>		
F 2/1	<i>Beowulf</i>		
M 2/4	<i>Beowulf</i>		<i>Sort out groups</i>
W 2/6	<i>Beowulf</i>		
F 2/8	Gardner - <i>Grendel</i>	Due: Informal Writing 2	
M 2/11	Gardner - <i>Grendel</i>		<i>MEET w/ STUDENTS in GROUPS to PREPARE THEM to WRITE QUIZ</i>
W 2/13	Gardner - <i>Grendel</i>		
F 2/15	Gardner - <i>Grendel</i>		
M 2/18	Movies	<b>QUIZ 1</b>	<i>Read &amp; respond to Student Writing</i>
W 2/20	Movies	Due: Informal Writing 3	
F 2/22	Movies		
M 2/25	Movies	<b>First draft essay 1 due</b>	<i>Meet students individually, during this week and next, to discuss papers.</i>
W 2/27	<i>Paper workshopping</i>		
F 2/29	<i>Paper workshopping</i>		

#### **PART TWO: Villains and Tragedy**

M 3/3	Shakespeare - <i>Othello</i>		<i>Meetings with students continued</i>
W 3/5	Shakespeare - <i>Othello</i>		
F 3/7	Shakespeare - <i>Othello</i>	<b>Final draft essay 1 due</b>	
3/10-3/14	SPRING BREAK		
M 3/17	Shakespeare - <i>Othello</i>		<i>Read &amp; respond to Student Writing</i>
W 3/19	Shakespeare - <i>Othello</i>	Due: Informal Writing 4	
F 3/21	Shakespeare - <i>Othello</i>		
M 3/24	Stevenson - <i>Jekyll and Hyde</i>		<i>Office hrs: optional meetings to plan essay two.</i>
W 3/26	Stevenson - <i>Jekyll and Hyde</i>		
F 3/28	<i>Seven</i>		
M 3/31	<i>Seven</i>	<b>QUIZ 2</b>	<i>Meet students individually, during this week and next, to discuss papers</i>
W 4/2	<i>Seven</i>	<b>First draft essay 2 due</b>	
F 4/4	<i>Paper workshopping</i>		
M 4/7	<i>Paper workshopping</i>		

#### **PART THREE: Paranoia and Security**

W 4/9	Orwell - <i>1984</i>		<i>Meetings with students continued</i>
F 4/11	Orwell - <i>1984</i>	<b>Final draft essay 2 due</b>	
M 4/14	Orwell - <i>1984</i>	Due: Informal Writing 5	<b><i>Read &amp; respond to Student Writing</i></b>
W 4/16	Orwell - <i>1984</i>		
F 4/18	Orwell - <i>1984</i>		
M 4/21	DeLillo - <i>White Noise</i>		<b><i>Meet with students individually or groups: topic for final paper</i></b>
W 4/23	RESEARCH DAY - No Classes		
F 4/25	DeLillo - <i>White Noise</i>	Due: Informal Writing 6	
M 4/28	DeLillo - <i>White Noise</i>		<b><i>OPTIONAL MEETINGS w/ STUDENTS</i></b>
W 4/30	DeLillo - <i>White Noise</i>		
F 5/2	DeLillo - <i>White Noise</i>		
M 5/5	<i>Paper workshopping</i>	<b>First draft essay 3 due</b>	<b><i>Meet with students individually, during these class hours and outside, to discuss papers</i></b>
W 5/7	Conclusions		
M 5/12	FINAL EXAM PERIOD - Class meets 10:30am - 12:30pm	<b>Final draft essay 3 due</b>	