

Tutor.com's Writing Support Methodology

Synchronous, on-demand tutoring for essay writing

Available in real time, 24/7, this modality allows students to connect to an expert essay-writing tutor in the **Online Classroom** anytime for help with writing projects. As with other synchronous, on-demand subject offerings, students complete a pre-session survey outlining their objectives for the session, which is used to match students with the tutor addressing their specific needs. Students may attach a document to their pre-session surveys in a variety of formats, including Microsoft Word, Rich Text, Adobe Acrobat, etc. Students may also connect directly to their favorite essay-writing tutors for an on-demand session anytime these tutors are online. On average, students are connected to on-demand essay-writing tutors within two minutes.

Synchronous, scheduled tutoring for writing

Also available 24/7, this modality allows students to browse tutor profiles and request appointments with specific tutors at the date and time of their choosing. After selecting a tutor and timeslot, students complete a post-session survey to let their chosen tutor know what they intend to discuss during the session. As with on-demand sessions, students may attach a document to their pre-session surveys as needed in a variety of formats.

Students are reminded of upcoming scheduled sessions via email and on their **My Sessions page**. When a scheduled session begins, students may leverage the full functionality of the Online Classroom to work on their writing projects with their selected tutors.

Asynchronous writing review

Also available 24/7, this modality allows students to complete a pre-session survey, upload a writing assignment in a variety of supported formats, and have it reviewed by a tutor within 12 hours. When essay reviews are completed, students receive email reminders to visit their *My Sessions* page, where they may access their original document, a version of the document with in-line comments from the tutor who conducted the review, and a **Summary Feedback Form** containing the tutor's analysis of the document's strengths and weaknesses and recommended next steps.

To ensure we are meeting a wider variety of students' needs, we also have **English Language Learning (ELL) tutors** available for synchronous and scheduled modalities. These tutors are prepared to assist English Language Learners with the acquisition of written and verbal skills needed to communicate in the English language. Tutoring can be provided in English language use, writing skills, reading skills, and speaking skills. Tutors are able to recognize, identify, and instruct ELL students in a variety of strategies proven successful for students who are working to build their knowledge of the English language. Tutors can provide assistance to non-native English speakers at the basic language acquisition level to those ready to prepare full English essays or presentations.

Given our screening process, we are confident that our writing tutors can support students in a variety of content areas. The subject exams ensure tutors have both the appropriate breadth and depth of understanding of the writing process, so they can support students' writing across disciplines. They demonstrate success tutoring students' writing in economics, history, science, and a variety of other subjects.

This combination of essay-review modalities and diversity of tutoring support helps all students through **all phases of the writing process** by allowing them to get expert essay-writing feedback when and how they need it. Learners seeking immediate help can connect with an on-demand essay-writing tutor anytime and review their writing together on the Online Classroom's shared whiteboard, where both parties in the session can see and discuss changes to the document in real time. The same Online Classroom tools are available for scheduled essay-writing sessions, which allow students to work with the tutor of their choice.

Our holistic approach

A holistic approach encompasses an awareness of all levels of criteria for essay development and evaluation: content, organization, thesis statement, paragraph development, topic sentences, source material, transitions, stylistics, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.

For both synchronous and asynchronous sessions, tutors follow these guidelines to ensure that the student's needs are met and that the tutor is approaching the essay holistically:

- Tutors consider both the desires of the student, where they are in the writing process, and the goals of good writing. A complete essay review focuses on both the overall content and organization of the writing (higher order concerns) and the flow and

sentence structure of the writing (lower order concerns), including grammar, punctuation, mechanics and word choice.

- Asynchronous session reviews are written with sufficient detail to allow the student author to understand and act upon the tutor's feedback.
- The session summary evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the essay and suggests ways to bring the writing up to accepted standards and next steps. The session summary should also provide clear next steps depending on where the student is in the writing process and the quality of the essay submitted.

When taking a holistic approach in a synchronous session, a tutor quickly skims and evaluates the essay to determine if both higher-order and lower-order concerns need to be addressed. **The tutor considers the following questions when reviewing the essays for higher-order concerns:**

- Is the introduction clear and coherent? Does the thesis statement provide a comprehensive "roadmap" to the development of the essay?
- Is each paragraph unified under one topic sentence which is directly related to an aspect of the thesis statement? Does each paragraph include sufficient material – examples, quotations, discussion – to support the topic sentence? Should some paragraphs be divided into two or more separate paragraphs?
- Is the development of the essay, its overall organization, logical? Would the essay benefit from a reorganization of the paragraphs?
- Does the conclusion sufficiently "wrap-up" the entire essay?

Working together, the student and tutor address these higher-order concerns in the student's essay. Once higher-order concerns have been addressed, and the student feels confident about the overall content and organization of the paper, lower-order concerns may need to be addressed. **The tutor considers the following questions when reviewing the paper for lower-order concerns:**

- Does the essay "flow" well? Do all areas of discussion flow logically into the next point? Are there abrupt transitions between paragraphs or within paragraphs? Are there abrupt transitions between sentences?
- Are ideas clearly presented? Would some discussion benefit from rewording for clarity? Are some areas of discussion vague and would benefit from expansion of content or improved specificity?

- Are sources and quotations presented accurately using the correct documentation style?
- Is the essay written using a variety of sentence structures? If not, how could sentence structures be improved?
- Is the essay written using effective and appropriate words and phrases? Is the tone of the essay consistent?
- Is the essay essentially free from errors in grammar, punctuation and mechanics?

Using our **Stop and Talk method**, on-demand and scheduled essay-writing tutors highlight areas of student writing that require revision and encourage students to identify what the issue is, review underlying rules, propose possible rewrites, discuss options for developing their ideas, create supporting paragraphs, draw logical conclusions, and present information in a clear and coherent manner. The tutor may use a **scaffolding technique** to support student understanding, providing examples and suggestions the first time a concern is identified, but prompting the student with leading or open questions when later instances of the same concern are noted. Tutors work with students to produce writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

During asynchronous essay reviews, tutors take the same holistic approach to the students' essays as described above but provide their feedback in detailed comments and a summary. Since the student is not present in the classroom for an asynchronous session, the tutor's understanding of what the student would like the tutor to focus on is dependent upon the information the student provides in the Pre-Session details. If the student selects "Still working on it - not ready to turn in," the tutor understands that the student is still in the drafting phase of the writing process and will focus primarily on higher-order concerns. However, the tutor also comments on specific patterns of lower-order concerns in the paper. If the student selects "Ready to turn in - just need a final review," the tutor understands that the student is in the "fine-tuning" stage of the writing process and will focus primarily on lower-order concerns. However, if the tutor identifies specific higher-order concerns, such as a weak thesis statement, the tutor will bring these concerns to the student's attention through the Word Comment feature or the Summary Feedback Form.