

Assistance with Papers in a Foreign Language: Writing Center versus Language Learning Center

It has come to the attention of the Writing Center and the Language Learning Center that students writing papers in foreign languages might be confused as to which Center they can go for assistance.

We therefore thought it would be helpful to summarize how each Center can help these particular students. We hope this in turn helps you refer your students to the right place. Feel free to share this document with other professors and students, if you think that would be useful.

For papers in a foreign language, the Writing Center can help with:

Brainstorming

Writing Center consultants can discuss a writing assignment with a student and how to respond to it, what to write about, and how to begin writing. Consultants can use a variety of brainstorming activities to help students develop their ideas before beginning to write.

Organizing & Developing

Writing Center consultants can help students narrow the focus of the paper, develop an outline and/or thesis statement, and talk about introductions, conclusions, and overall structure. These important steps to the writing process can be achieved before a student begins writing in their chosen language.

Note Regarding Structure

If the professor expects a non-American academic structure, then the student should be prepared to inform the consultant of those expectations. It would be ideal if the student could bring something in writing that describes the expected structure. (For example, in France, the last point in a paper often raises a larger theoretical question, whereas in an American paper the final sentence is often still directly related to the thesis. Being shown a professor's guidelines on this French structure will help prevent the consultant from misguiding the student.)

For papers in a foreign language, the Language Learning Center can help with:

Basic Brainstorming, Thesis Statements, Organizing & Developing

As of Fall 2007, our more experienced LLC tutors will receive special training in basic Writing Center tutoring areas. Student writing papers will be asked to specify if they need paper assistance, when making an appointment. This training should help in particular those advanced students who are highly proficient in a language and who are seeking a conversation in that language about a topic. For these initial stages of more complex or lengthy papers, it is still recommended that students first visit the Writing Center.

Editing

This can be a wonderful learning tool. The tutor will go through a paper slowly and see what errors exist at the student's level. The tutor will NOT skim a paper and make blanket corrections without the student's participation. The tutor will see if the student can identify and fix gross errors with some assistance. If still not, the tutor will guide the student to an understanding of the grammatical topic(s) with which the student demonstrates the least comfort. For example, if a 201 student throughout a paper is not using the subjunctive, and the instructor has required such use, the tutor might focus on that grammatical topic in the session. However, if a 101 student isn't using the subjunctive, the tutor won't even mention that topic, since those students haven't learned that yet. It is therefore best if the student brings the instructor's written instructions to the session.

Grammar Workshops

Held periodically throughout the semester, these are optional opportunities for students to get more in-depth training on harder topics. Tutors pick an issue for which they get many tutoring requests and prepare a special hour-long group session. Students have expressed great enthusiasm for this. While workshops tend to cover issues raised in 101, 102, and 201, details can be forgotten in higher levels. Thus, all students are always welcome. (Note: The Writing Center also offers Grammar Workshops in Standard American English topics.)

Note Regarding Online Translators

Tutors do not look at papers translated by an online software program.

For papers in a foreign language, it is the student's responsibility to do:

Proofreading

Neither Center offers this service, because this would entail someone looking for grammar mistakes and changing them without the student's participation (think of a copy editor). Our mission statements support active learning and developing skills. Also, since learning to write papers and to use correct grammar is part of the university learning process, it is the student's responsibility to proofread papers for spelling, grammar, and any accents. If students have specific questions, they are welcome to talk to a WC consultant or LLC tutor about those issues; such a discussion would fall readily into one of the areas above.

Planning Ahead & Coming Back

Sometimes the student has an expectation that the appointment will solve all their problems and make their paper ready to turn in. However, we like to say to the students that we're not 'fix-it shops'; we are there to empower and educate them, which often means taking the whole appointment to talk about one or two key issues and areas of confusion. So, we encourage planning ahead and repeat visits!

Hilary S. Comerchero
Language Learning Center Director
760-750-4197
hcomerch@csusm.edu
www.csusm.edu/llc

Erin Goldin
Writing Center Director
760-750-4192
egoldin@csusm.edu
www.csusm.edu/writing_center