Emma Bourassa Writing Center Workshop for Volunteer Tutors Spring 2009

Tutoring ESL students:

1. Find out what the main concern is. Don’t accept “Is this okay?” Ask them to identify one area that they need work on. This makes it manageable for you and hopefully they will *learn* to be able to edit/revise on their own:

“ What is the most important thing you want me to comment on?”

“ What have you already checked, that you want me to confirm?”

“ What is one thing you want to improve?”

“What is one thing that will make your paper fit the professor’s criteria better?”

1. If possible, look at the assignment criteria. At the very least, have the student identify the purpose of the assignment. Students may be applying known skills as opposed to trying to figure out the necessary work. E.g. 2 students asked for a grammar check on an assignment. After looking at the criteria, neither had done an analysis of the writing- they had both summarized!
2. Remind students that you are not their teacher, and although the writing may look fine to you, the students should take the time to meet with their instructor. Many times students don’t use office hours- the more people who encourage this, the more likely they will do it which may make the center volunteers’ job much easier and effective.
3. Checking for plagiarism: Ask the student to tell you about the paper, without looking at it. Ask what kinds of support they have used (specific examples- don’t accept “statistics” or vague answers) and what authors they have quoted. You could also ask what the article/book chapter is about (from the bibliography). If you suspect plagiarism, tell the student. This can be a very difficult area for students to understand- remember that not all ESL students go through the ESL program. In fact, about 75% are direct entry to academics. Culturally, plagiarism is a concept that comes from the western educational tradition so it may not even exist in other contexts- expectations are not always the same; common sense is also not necessarily common (from a Canadian perspective) .
4. As much as possible have the student do the work:

Problem: subject/verb agreement: have the student circle the verb and point back to the subject. This may wind up needing support if the subject is more complex.

Problem: verb tense: have the student underline the verb and then verbally tell you what verb tense it is and why it was chosen.

Problem : sentence structure: have the student identify all the subjects and verbs and ask how many complete ideas are there. Identify independent and dependent clauses. A key here is to have the correct subordinating/coordinating words for the *meaning*.

Other items?

Key words that cause challenges:

Examples of concept checking questions:

1. If Lucia has enough vacation time and money, she will go to Hawaii for a vacation.
2. Does Lucia have enough money now? \_\_
3. Will she go to Hawaii for a vacation? \_\_
4. What is the time expressed in the statement? \_\_
5. If Jim were 16 years old, he would be able to drive.
6. Is Jim 16? \_\_\_
7. Can he drive? \_\_\_
8. What is the time expressed in the statement?
9. If my co-worker had not asked me to keep the news a secret, I would have told you that she had gotten another job and is leaving Kamloops.
10. Did the co-worker ask to have the news kept a secret? \_\_\_ or,
11. What did the co-worker ask? \_\_\_\_
12. Did I tell you her news? \_\_\_\_
13. What is the time expressed in the statement? \_\_\_

Examples to work with: Identify correct, explain why, using time and meaning. Identify incorrect and explain why, using time and meaning. Use concept checking questions:

1. If I have a car, I would not ask my friends to take me shopping.
2. If Margaret had slept more, she would not have trouble staying awake during the chemistry lecture yesterday.
3. When it is hot outside, I drink plenty of water.
4. If I will go to Los Angeles next week, I will see all my friends.
5. If Peter went to the bookstore later today, he can buy two tapes for the price of one.
6. If the weather is nice, marcella always took a walk after dinner.
7. If I could found a ride home this weekend, I would give my parents a surprise visit.
8. If the teacher had not stopped us right at 10:00, I would have been able to finish the test.
9. If Edith had not had to turn in her paper today, she would had skipped class.
10. If I were going to TRU, I would be living at my parents’ home.

From: Writing Clearly An Editing Guide Second Edition by Janet Lane and Ellen Lange, Heinle and Heinle1999 USA