Q: Where is the Writing Center located?
A: In the Academic Services Center, Library 107, right behind the café. There are large signs to direct students there.

Q: Who is the director of the Writing Center?
A: I am: Dr. Rita Malenczyk, Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program. My office is Webb Hall 254, though I will also be spending a fair amount of time in the Writing Center. My e-mail address is malenczykr@easternct.edu, phone is 465-4573.

Q: How do students make appointments?
A: The best way for students to make appointments is online. They can do this by going to the Writing Center webpage at www.easternct.edu/writingcenter. They will need to go to the site, register and set up a password for themselves before they can log in (but the system walks them through this—it’s easy to do). The system will send them e-mail messages reminding them of their appointments. Because the system was upgraded over the summer, any students who have used the Writing Center before will have to re-register.

Another way for students to make appointments is by dropping in to the Writing Center or by calling 465-0382. There is no Writing Center secretary or regular UA to answer that phone—if one of the tutors is free, he or she can set up an appointment for the student. If the student gets voicemail, he or she should leave contact information and a tutor will call him or her back.

NOTE WELL: Student appointment requests made to me directly by phone or e-mail will not be returned.

Q: How long are tutoring sessions?
A: 45 minutes maximum. I will keep faculty and students informed of changes in this policy.

Q: Who should visit the Writing Center?
A: Everybody. Composing is a social act, and all writers, not just weak ones, benefit from feedback. Please let your students know that visiting the Writing Center is a normal, not a “remedial,” activity and encourage them to come see us.

Q: How often may a student come to the Writing Center?
A: Right now, as often as he or she wants.

Q: What should the student bring to the session?
A: It’s very, very helpful if the student has a copy of the assignment and a copy of the paper-in-progress. Our data shows that last year, one of the major things students needed help with was understanding assignments. Sometimes students will come to a Writing Center because they can’t get started, and we can help with that too.

Q: How do the tutors set priorities in a session?
A: Tutors are trained to go global-to-local: first to address whether or not the student is fulfilling the assignment, then to look at large issues such as organization, focus, argument, and citation, and finally to address issues such as sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, proofreading. The reason for this
is that a poorly argued paper, say, is still a poorly argued paper even if it is well-punctuated. Of course, we are also flexible depending on the needs of the particular writer.

Q: How do I know the student did his or her own work?
A: Because our tutors are trained that Writing Centers should make better writers, not better writing, though it’s nice if they can do both. We do not, for example, edit or proofread students’ work; if a student has particular issues in that area, we will show them editing and/or proofreading skills. Ultimately, the whole point of tutoring writing is to provide writers with strategies they can use on their own.

Q: My student went to the Writing Center and the paper is still poor. Why is that?
A: Sometimes students need more than one session to address all the issues in a paper; sometimes students don’t follow tutors’ advice. Sometimes professors have unrealistic expectations of what a Writing Center can do, and often students take much longer to improve their writing than professors feel they should. The thing to remember is that it is the student’s job, not the tutor’s, to improve his or her own writing, and the rate of improvement varies from student to student.

Q: My student complained about the Writing Center session she had, saying the tutor didn’t help her with what she wanted help on or what I thought she needed help on. I’m annoyed about this. What should I do?
A: I think that, as faculty, many if not all of us have been on the receiving end of student complaints to our chair; I think, too, that many or all of us would recognize that some student complaints are valid while others are not; that students have many and varied motives for making complaints; and that we appreciate a chair’s giving us the opportunity to tell our side of the story. I extend the same respect to the Writing Center tutors that I expect my chair to extend to me, and don’t assume that what students say happened in the Writing Center is necessarily the complete truth. After Writing Center sessions, each tutor is expected to fill out a report on the session; I have found that in several of the complaints I’ve received, the tutor’s report contradicts the student’s. In one memorable instance, a student said that he had not received help on grammar when the tutor’s report clearly indicated that he had.

So, what should you do? Call or e-mail me, please—do not contact the tutor or the Writing Center directly—and explain your concerns so I can look at the tutor’s report and you and I can discuss the matter. Sometimes I will need to speak with the tutor; sometimes you may need to speak with your student.

Q: I’m a Psychology professor. Can you help with APA style?
A: Yes! We have acquired lots of handbooks (new MLA, APA, Turabian) and can work with students who seem to have issues with different styles, if only to help them understand where to find the answers to the problems they’re having. In the future, I’m hoping to provide workshops for students on discipline-specific issues, and something like style could be one of them. If you would like to request a workshop, e-mail me or give me a call.

Q: Can I require my students to visit the Writing Center?
A: You can, but that has its drawbacks. On the one hand, requiring students to visit the center can be a good way of showing them what the center can do—particularly good for shy or reluctant students who need an extra push or who just don’t realize how helpful a Writing Center can be. On the other hand, some students resist such a requirement; they’ll come to the Writing Center, plop themselves down in front of the tutor, and exhibit an “I’m-only-here-because-the-teacher-made-me-come” attitude,
expecting the tutor to do all the work. I feel students should come to the Writing Center because they want to, not because they’re required—that makes for more productive sessions, and the whole point of a Writing Center, anyway, is to make students more responsible for and engaged in their own writing.

My recommendation is that if faculty want to require students to visit the Writing Center, they require them to do so once, early in the semester, and strongly encourage them to do so on their own time after that. That would help students to see what goes on in the Writing Center, and hopefully lead them to come on their own at other times.

Q: Can I find out if my student visited the Writing Center?
A: Yes! We have stamps the tutors can use; they say “I visited the Writing Center on....” And the tutor supplies the date and signs it. The tutor can either stamp the draft, the student’s assignment sheet, or however. Please remember, though, that it’s the student’s job to ask the tutor for this documentation to give you.

Q: I’ve told my students that they can improve their paper grades one full grade—for example, go from a C to a B—by working on their papers in the Writing Center. Is that okay?
A: No. Please don’t do that—it puts an unfair amount of pressure on the tutor. We don’t make guarantees of grade improvement, we don’t judge professors’ grading systems, and we don’t estimate what grade a paper will receive. If you want to give credit for visiting the Writing Center, make it a percentage of their grade in some other way (e.g., make it a part of their class participation grade).

Q: Who are the tutors?
A: The tutors are trained undergraduate peer tutors from the English Department’s Writing Associates Tutoring Program. These tutors have in the past been assigned to our ENG 100P (developmental writing) course, and now some are being assigned to the Writing Center as well. Many are English majors, others are not. We also have writing tutors who are Psychology, Biology, Communications, and Sports and Leisure Management majors, for example.

Q: How are tutors chosen?
A: Tutors are accepted into the program based on a professor’s recommendation, a writing sample, and letter of application, as well as interview process. We do not hire everyone who applies.

Q: How are the tutors trained?
A: At a minimum, tutors are required to take ENG 275: Tutoring Writing, a one-credit course taught by English department faculty. Some also take ENG 370: Composition Theory and Pedagogy, a three-credit course in the theory and practice of teaching writing. In addition, all Writing Center tutors are required to attend regular staff development meetings and engage in other staff development activities.

Q: Does the student’s major make any difference? How can an English major help a Biology student with a lab report, for instance?
A: At the moment, we don’t have the resources to assure writers that the tutor they see will share their major. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing, since sometimes a tutor who shares the same major as the tutee will inadvertently focus on subject matter (understanding the material) instead of on the quality of the writing. All the tutors are trained to recognize that different disciplines have different writing expectations and to respect that while tutoring.

Q: Okay, so, exactly what happens if my Biology student goes to the Writing Center for help with a lab report and gets a tutor who’s an English major?
A: Typically, the tutor will ask the writer to explain the assignment and the writing expectations of the discipline. This requires the writer to articulate his/her understanding of what he/she is expected to do. The tutor will then proceed from there, setting priorities as indicated above. If it becomes clear in the course of the session that the writer does not understand the assignment or the material, then the tutors are advised to send the writer back to the professor’s office hours for more clarification or instruction, because obviously a different kind of help is needed.

Q: I have a number of students for whom English is not a first language. Can you help them with their writing?
A: Yes. This is part of the tutors’ training.

Q: Do you provide online tutoring?
A: Not yet, though it’s something we’re thinking about for the future.

Q: What are the Writing Center hours?
A: The same as the ASC hours: M-T 9-9, F 9-5, Sundays 2-9. We are closed when the University is closed. For most of our open hours, there is at least one tutor present, though occasionally there is some unstaffed time. Now that the online registration system is set up, students are advised to make appointments and not trust to drop-ins, particularly toward the middle and end of the semester. We provide some limited tutoring during finals week.

Q: Can I contact you if I have questions you have not addressed here?
A: But of course. I look forward to speaking with you.