

“A word to the wise ain't necessary, it's the stupid ones who need the advice.”

David Boardman

Before I offend anyone with my title, let me clarify that it is not directed towards the learners to imply that they are stupid and need advice. It is actually directed towards you.

But, I'm not calling you stupid either. On the contrary, you are very wise which is why you made it to this point and why I agree with the quote by Bill Cosby that says I don't need to offer you a lot of advice. However I have to offer some of what I learned through the experience of being a writing consultant because that's the purpose of the prompt. So here are a few simple lessons that I learned that I believe you will find helpful:

“Whatever advice you give, be brief.” – Horace

Honestly this one is more of a reminder to me not to ramble in this paper, yet it is a valuable piece of advice for you too. You only have 30 minutes a session, which is not a lot of time. Keep your advice brief and to the point, after all the session should be focused on the learner and not on you talking.

“If I had to give young writers advice, I would say don't listen to writers talking about writing or themselves.” -Lillian Hellman

This is actually a great piece of advice for the learners, but at first glance it may seem like the exact opposite of what you thought you would be doing as a writing consultant. You will work with writers that are at all different levels ranging from the elementary school level to writers preparing for graduate school and everywhere in between. All these writers have one thing in common; they all have their own writing styles. But you will find many of these writers have been limited by what they have learned from other writers. For example, some learners that I have worked with never knew that they could write an essay other than in a five paragraph format, or that they could sometimes use 1st person in a paper etc. Just because a writer might have a different style from yours doesn't mean it's wrong. Instead create a collaborative environment where you are listening to the writer about their writing and working together to develop their own style, not vice versa.

“[Students] don't need much advice but they really do need to be listened to and not just with half an ear.”- Emma Thompson

This piece of advice is related to the previous one. As a writing consultant you should find yourself listening most of the time rather than talking for most of the session. Many of the learners that you help may have never sat down and talked about their writing with someone. When you start sessions, ask questions to get to know your learners and establish a level of trust. Continue to ask about what they are writing about. After seeing their writing you should ask more questions specifically about their writing. Often times if someone has writer's block or you find something that needs to be changed, that person will figure it out if you ask questions and they are able to talk it through.

“The only thing to do with good advice is pass it on. It is never any use to oneself.” -Oscar Wilde

Even though you should be listening most of the time, never be afraid to pass along knowledge you have that will help the learner. You will learn about different tutoring techniques during practicum and when to be more “directive” or be more “hands-off.” If you ever have “insider knowledge” about a course or writing at the college level, then share it. Some learners have never written a research paper before or are from another country and have a different culture and language. No matter how many times you ask questions to help them figure it out themselves, they still may not know the answer. In those situations you will have to model how to apply your “insider knowledge,” and then find opportunities for the learner to attempt the new skill they learned.

“It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”-Mark Twain

This witty statement is valuable for anyone in any circumstance. For this particular situation, it is a reminder to be empathetic towards your learner. You will encounter many learners who follow this piece of advice and therefore do not talk or are afraid to share their ideas and writing. The learner is putting themselves in a vulnerable situation by allowing you to work with them. Be conscious of this fact and put yourself in their shoes. This is another reason

why it is important to develop a relationship with a learner to gain their trust, especially your '57s who you will work with every week.

“Advice is one of those things it is far more blessed to give than to receive.” -Carolyn Wells

Similar to the last piece of advice, this is to remind you of why you are in the position of being trusted to be a writing consultant. Chances are you came from a decent high school, maybe had a great English teacher in high school or college, parents or a sibling who could help you with your writing because they went to college, or perhaps you are a gifted student and do well in all of your classes. Because of some of these reasons or maybe another, you are in the position where you are able to assist others with their writing. Unfortunately many of the learners you work with have not been so fortunate and have never had any of these opportunities. I learned in one of my very first sessions with a walk-in student to not take for granted that a student has a specific skill. In this session I was working with a learner on his research paper. I didn't feel like the session was productive and couldn't figure out why. Halfway through the session, it all made sense to me when he disclosed to me that he had never written a research paper before. I will be honest: my initial thought was how could someone be in college that has never written a research paper? But like I stated above I had to remember that not every student had certain opportunities to develop their skills as a writer. Remember you are fortunate to be in the position you are in and that the learners receiving advice from you may or may not have had the same opportunities you had.

“Skill to do comes of doing.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Just a heads up, you will begin having sessions relatively early into the practicum class and you are going to be scared. Don't be ashamed to be nervous, that's actually a good thing because it means you care. After your first session you will lose your nerves and continue to build your skills as a writing consultant as you practice more.

“What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you take anything away from this paper please let it be this advice. You will work with students that everyone else, including teachers, parents and/or peers, saw as a “weed.” You might even think they are a “weed” the first time you meet them. I honestly believe that everyone has potential and that they might just need someone to trust in them and help them unlock their potential. As a writing consultant you are given this incredible opportunity to intimately work with students on their writing and essential college skills. You may never know how much you affect someone, but I promise that it is one of the most gratifying feelings in the world when you have the chance to work with a “weed” and help them discover their potential that no one else ever saw.

“Whatever you are, be a good one.” -Abraham Lincoln

There is no way I could write a paper based on quotes and not include one from my idol, Abraham Lincoln. There is no right way, script, or structure that can be given to you on how to be a writing consultant. After many sessions and with the help from Mo and Paul and collaboration with your classmates, you will develop your own style. And I am sure that whatever that style is, it will be a good one.