

Running head: TRAINING DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC PEER WRITING TUTORS

Designing and Evaluating Training for Discipline-Specific Peer Writing Tutors

by

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### Abstract

This qualitative empirical study develops a set of theory-supported criteria for designing effective training programs for peer tutors in discipline-specific writing centres. It then assesses whether the criteria are present in a writing tutor-training program at an Eastern Ontario law school. The study draws on theories about writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective training for peer writing tutors in developing the criteria. Measuring the law school's writing tutor-training program against the theory-supported criteria reveals the presence of most of the criteria. The only significant shortcomings identified are that the law school's program does not select tutors on the basis of their personal attributes, focuses more on practice than theory, and does not include regular observation and self-evaluation activities. These findings suggest that the program is effective in training law-student tutors to provide discipline-specific writing support to their peers.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Research Questions .....	4
Thesis Overview .....	4
<b>Chapter 2: Contextual Background on Legal Writing</b> .....	<b>5</b>
The Perceived Quality of Lawyers' Writing .....	5
Legal Writing Education in Canada .....	6
Impetus for the Study .....	8
<b>Chapter 3: Analytical Framework</b> .....	<b>10</b>
1. Theoretical Foundations of the Role of Writing Tutors .....	10
2. Factors Contributing to the Success of Peer Writing Conferences .....	14
3. Common Approaches to, and Features of, Effective Tutor Training .....	24
<b>Chapter 4: Method</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Research Approach .....	30
My Role as the Researcher .....	30
Study Participants .....	32
Study Data .....	33
<b>Chapter 5: Results and Discussion</b> .....	<b>35</b>
The Tutor Training Criteria .....	36
Presence of the Tutor Training Criteria in the LWA Tutor Training Program .....	39
Summary of Study Findings .....	71
Measuring the LWA Tutor Training Program Against the Tutor Training Criteria .....	73
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>76</b>
Study Results and Limitations .....	76
Improvements to the LWA Tutor Training Program Resulting from this Study .....	77
Directions for Future Research .....	78
<b>References</b> .....	<b>81</b>

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Student Participants' Background Information.....	33
Table 2. The Tutor Training Criteria and Related Themes in the Supporting Literature ..	36
Table 3. Presence of Tutor Training Criteria in the Class and Supplemental Training.....	49
Table 4. Breakdown of Study Participants by Writing Community Group.....	54
Table 5. Examples of Tutoring Strategies Cynthia used in her Written Feedback.....	58
Table 6. Examples of Tutoring Strategies Sandy used in her Written Feedback .....	60
Table 7. Examples of Tutoring Strategies Patti used in her Written Feedback .....	62
Table 8. Examples of Tutoring Strategies Robin used in her Written Feedback.....	66
Table 9. The Tutor Training Criteria and the LWA Tutor Training Program .....	72

**List of Appendices**

Appendix A. Ethics Clearance Form .....80

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Peer feedback is an integral part of academic writing instruction in North American universities. Writing centre conferences, in-class tutoring, peer writing groups, and writing fellows<sup>1</sup> are now common features of many undergraduate and graduate writing programs (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). These collaborative learning approaches to writing instruction actively involve students in their own learning and aim to help writers enter new discourse communities.

Evolved from the grammar "fix-it shops" of the 1970s, writing centres offering individualized academic writing instruction have become fixtures at most North American universities (Carino, 1995). During writing centre conferences, students trained as writing tutors<sup>2</sup> offer personalized writing support to their peers primarily through Socratic questioning and active listening techniques. These techniques help tutors guide student writers in recalling knowledge they already have, but have trouble accessing, as well as in constructing new knowledge. Typically, these discovery-based "one-to-one writing conferences" (Harris, 1986), focus on helping students become better writers rather than only on fixing a particular piece of writing (e.g., North, 1984).

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<sup>1</sup> Writing fellows are students who tutor their peers "in specific courses, often in collaboration with the instructors of these courses" (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 157) Writing fellows "are probably most likely to work continuously and in depth with disciplinary genres" (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 157).

<sup>2</sup> Some Canadian university writing centres employ professional writing instructors (e.g., University of Toronto).

Most campus writing centres are open to the entire student population. In these general writing centres, tutors<sup>3</sup> work with a variety of writers and types of writing. During one shift at a campus-wide writing centre, a tutor might conference with an undergraduate Political Science student about how to start a research essay, a Legal Studies student about structuring a case brief<sup>4</sup>, and a graduate student about developing an argument in a theoretically complex dissertation. To be of greatest benefit to all students, these writing centre tutors must be knowledgeable about a range of genres and disciplinary conventions.

Some other campus writing centres, however, are restricted to students studying specific disciplines. For example, the University of Toronto houses a variety of discipline-specific writing centres such as: college and campus centres for Arts and Sciences students; and separate specialized centres for French, Philosophy, Architecture, Engineering, Health Sciences, and Education students. Tutors working in these discipline-specific writing centres must have specialized content knowledge and at least a Master's degree in the relevant discipline.

While talking about writing is "the lifeblood" (North, 1984, p. 444) of both general and discipline-specific writing centres, writing centre tutors do much more than engage their peers in casual conversations about writing. Common conferencing activities include: (a) identifying a writer's specific writing strengths and challenges; (b)

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<sup>3</sup> While I use the term "tutor" throughout this thesis, students offering personalized writing support to their peers are known by a variety of terms such as "coach, writing consultant, peer advisor, or writing assistant" (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 18).

<sup>4</sup> A case brief is a summary of a court decision organized around specific headings such as: Case Name, Procedural History, Material Facts, Key Issue(s), Decision, Reasons, and Comments.

offering a reader's response to a writer's work; (c) discussing different revision strategies, rhetorical choices, and approaches; and (d) advising writers on issues of clarity, style, and argument structure. Knowing when and how to carry out each of these activities requires effective training and thoughtful preparation.

But what does effective training for writing tutors working in campus writing centres involve? It depends, according to the writing-centre scholarship. Just as each writing centre serves a different population, exists for a different purpose, aims to meet different objectives, supports different programs, has access to different resources, and offers different services, each writing centre has different training needs for its tutors. The training that may be effective in preparing tutors to work in a campus-wide writing centre serving all students, for instance, will not necessarily be sufficient for tutors working in a writing centre servicing a 'writing-across-the-curriculum' program or in a small discipline-specific writing centre. And tutors providing written commentary on students' writing, or writing support in a classroom, may require more specialized training.

Despite these different tutor-training needs, much of the writing-centre literature suggests that most tutor training shares common features (e.g., Bannister-Wills, 1984; Bickford, 2006). Notwithstanding these commonalities, I am not aware of any empirical research that identifies particular criteria for either designing or evaluating training programs for discipline-specific writing tutors. This study strives to fill that research gap by being the first to develop a set of theory-supported criteria for designing and evaluating training for tutors in discipline-specific writing centres, and then assessing whether these criteria are present in a tutor-training program at an Eastern Ontario law

school.

### **Research Questions**

The study will address the following two main research questions:

1. What criteria can be derived from the writing-centre literature for use in designing and evaluating training for peer tutors in discipline-specific writing centres?
2. How does the existing training program for peer writing tutors at an Eastern Ontario law school measure up against these criteria?

I address these questions in a study that examines relevant writing-centre scholarship and analyzes documentary data from the Eastern Ontario law school's training program for its peer writing tutors. The analytical framework used in the study draws on theories in the literature regarding writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective training for peer writing tutors.

### **Thesis Overview**

This thesis includes six chapters. Chapter 2 provides background information on legal writing to situate the study. Chapter 3 presents the analytical framework employed in the study to review the relevant literature in order to develop a set of theory-supported criteria for designing and evaluating tutor-training programs in discipline-specific writing centres. This analytical framework comprises scholarship on writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective tutor training. Chapter 4 outlines the method used in the study. Chapter 5 describes my analysis of the study data and discusses the study results. Chapter 6 considers the significance of the study results, discusses the limitations of the study, and proposes directions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Contextual Background on Legal Writing

"Ask judges and senior lawyers to identify the most disturbing aspect about younger lawyers, and they will reply in one voice, *They can't write*" (Nelson & Simek, 2012).

In this chapter, I provide background information on legal writing to situate the study. In the first section, I briefly discuss the perceived quality of lawyers' writing. In the second section, I describe legal writing education in Canada. In the final section, I explain the impetus for the study.

### The Perceived Quality of Lawyers' Writing

Lawyers are professional writers. Virtually everything lawyers do, they do in writing—advising clients, commencing and supporting legal proceedings, negotiating, and communicating with colleagues. Although writing well is an essential part of being an effective lawyer, lawyers are often criticized for being poor writers. Even lawyers themselves complain about the quality of lawyers' writing (Kosse & ButleRitchie, 2003).

Most legal writing experts agree that the quality of a lawyer's writing depends on a number of inter-related elements. Of paramount importance are the lawyer's thorough and accurate understanding of the connection between the relevant facts and applicable law, the lawyer's sound analysis of the pertinent legal issues, the lawyer's appreciation of the various potential readers of the writing, and the lawyer's comprehensive understanding of both the writing's purpose and its social context. According to experts, common characteristics of good legal writing include: accuracy, clarity of thought and expression, conciseness, reader engagement, flow, structural organization, sound legal analysis, and proper adherence to formal conventions (Osbeck, 2012; Parker, 2010).

How do lawyers learn to do all that?

### **Legal Writing Education in Canada**

Currently, there are 23 law schools across Canada that offer professional degrees leading to the practice of law (Canadian Council of Law Deans, 2016). Various universities also offer undergraduate and graduate social science programs in Legal Studies - the interdisciplinary study of the interaction between law and society (e.g., Carleton University, Department of Law and Legal Studies). Legal Studies' graduates cannot practice law. In all common law provinces and territories there are three requirements for admission to the legal profession, often referred to as "being called to the bar": a three-year Canadian law degree (Juris Doctor or JD) or its equivalent from another country, successful completion of a bar admission or licensing program, and completion of an apprenticeship known as "articling" (Federation of Law Societies of Canada, 2009). Rather than training students to become experts in particular areas of the law, law schools focus on teaching students to "think like lawyers" using the Socratic case-dialogue method.

Despite calls for major reforms over the years, the curriculum at most Canadian law schools has remained the same since the 1950s (Sullivan, Colby, Wegner, Bond, & Shulman, 2007). All students are required to study constitutional law, contracts, criminal law, property law, and torts in their first year, and can then choose courses in other areas of substantive law in the subsequent two years. Practical skills training, such as in legal writing, has never been a major part of the standardized Canadian law school curriculum. Some law schools do allow certain students to work in legal clinics, argue hypothetical cases in moot court competitions, and edit law journal articles for academic credit, though (Federation of Law Societies of Canada, 2009).

While "everyone agrees that writing is the most important skill for recent law school graduates" (Barbri Group, 2015), Canadian law schools are not required to teach legal writing. In most first-year courses, the only writing requirement is the final examination. Upper-level writing instruction is often offered only as part of a larger research course, or in connection with the drafting of specific texts such as contracts, legislation, or court documents. As noted by Ontario Court of Appeal Justice Stephen Goudge, law students "are taught very little about how to become better writers because good writing is not seen as a separate, important and teachable skill" (Goudge, 2009).

Legal writing is taught very differently in the United States than it is in Canada. Because all accredited American law schools are required to teach a legal research and writing course in the first year of their programs, a "signature pedagogy of legal writing" (Parker, 2010, p. 466) has developed in the United States. This "signature pedagogy" is reflected in various 'writing-across-the-law-school-curriculum' programs offered by several American law schools. Some American law schools even have dedicated writing centres designed to initiate law students into the legal discourse community. There are no such writing centres in Canada.

The law school where I conducted this study stands apart from the rest of Canada's law schools in offering a variety of legal writing options throughout its entire three-year curriculum. An innovative initiative called the Legal Writing Academy provides writing instruction through: upper-year credit courses; writing units integrated into traditional first-, second-, and third-year courses; first-year writing workshops; and faculty-wide writing workshops and peer writing conferences.

**Impetus for the Study**

As a legal writing instructor and one of the Legal Writing Academy program co-directors, I spend an inordinate amount of time commenting on law students' writing. Believing that writing feedback is crucial to students' writing development, I also spend a lot of time thinking, reading, and talking about the most effective ways to respond to students' writing. How much writing feedback should I provide? When should I provide it? Should writing feedback be formative or summative, positive or negative, general or specific, written or oral? Every semester I experiment with different combinations of feedback techniques — rubrics, checklists, margin comments, end comments, in-class reviews, peer reviews, and one-on-one conferences.

Daunted by the seeming never-ending stream of assignments to read, comment on, and evaluate, I often question whether all my efforts are worthwhile. What do students do with my feedback? Do they read my comments? Do they understand them? Do they know what to do with them? Does my feedback help them become better legal writers?

Students tell me over and over again how much they learn during both our one-on-one conferences and during in-class peer review sessions. These comments reflect my personal experience working as a peer writing tutor at a university writing centre while completing the course work for my Master's degree. Day after day, disheartened, discouraged, and frustrated students shuffled into the writing centre. Fifty minutes later, these same students strode out of the centre, heads held high, eager to start, or continue, working on their writing assignments.

Hoping to extend these benefits to law students, in the spring of 2012 my two colleagues in the Legal Writing Academy and I created a program to train a cohort of upper-year law students to conduct peer writing conferences and provide their fellow students with frequent written feedback on their writing. The training program evolved from my colleagues' and my collective experiences teaching law and legal writing, my academic background in Writing Studies, and my work as a university writing tutor. The training program we created progressed through three phases over 16 months: (1) an initial instructional classroom course; (2) a variety of practical training events; and (3) a writing course delivered by writing tutors (the LWA Tutor Training Program).

While my Legal Writing Academy colleagues and I have received anecdotal information that the LWA Tutor Training Program is effective in preparing law students to provide writing support to their peers, no one has formally examined the program itself. One of the main purposes of this study is to conduct that examination by assessing the extent to which a set of theory-supported criteria for designing and evaluating tutor training in discipline-specific writing centres is present in the LWA Tutor Training Program.

In the next chapter, I describe the theories about writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective training for peer writing tutors that informed my thinking as I developed a set of criteria for designing and evaluating tutor training in discipline-specific writing centres (the Tutor Training Criteria).

### **Chapter 3: Analytical Framework**

In this chapter, I discuss the three most pertinent areas of the literature related to writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective training for peer writing tutors that I relied on in developing the Tutor Training Criteria, explaining what the literature offered in each case. In the first section, I explain the theoretical foundations of the role of writing tutors. In the second section, I outline the factors contributing to the success of peer writing conferences. In the third section, I describe the common approaches to, and features of, effective tutor training.

#### **1. Theoretical Foundations of the Role of Writing Tutors**

The literature concerning the theoretical grounding for the role of writing tutors provided me with essential background information to develop the Tutor Training Criteria. I also derived certain components of the criteria related to the writing and tutoring processes from this area of the literature.

Modern writing centres are grounded in expressivist, social constructionist, and collaborative learning theories. While not all writing centres interpret and apply these theories consistently, most North American university writing centres today share five main beliefs about teaching and learning writing: (1) individualized instruction is an effective way to teach writing (e.g., Bruffee, 1984); (2) interaction between two peers creates a "superior learning environment" (Babcock & Thonus, 2012, p. 146); (3) peer tutors can work more effectively with student writers than teachers because tutors are not grading or evaluating students' work; (4) all writers can benefit from a reader's response and reaction to their writing as it takes shape (Harris, 1995); and (5) the "generative

power of conversation" (Bruffee, 1984, p. 11) helps writers discover ways to improve their own writing.

**The three main theoretical underpinnings.** Early writing centres (or "labs") were built on a writing theory popular in the first half of the 20th century known as the current-traditional paradigm (Young, 1978). Underlying the current-traditional paradigm is the positivist view that knowledge is external and objective, and that writers should aim to convey that knowledge precisely and correctly (Hobson, 1992). Because of this product-centred perspective on writing, tutors in the first writing centres engaged in a lecturer/passive learner remedial approach to tutoring, focusing on creating mechanically correct documents.

As the writing process movement took hold, most North American university writing centres moved away from the traditionalist emphasis on error avoidance and toward expressivism, or neo-Romanticism (North, 1984). According to expressivist composition theorists, knowledge is internal and subjective; and writing is an inner-directed, goal-driven, recursive process of planning, translating, and reviewing performed by an individual (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981). Consistent with this view of writing as a solitary cognitive activity, writing centres started to focus less on written products and more on individual writers and their writing process, as well as on the connection between thinking and writing. Writing tutors were encouraged to use open-ended, or Socratic, questioning and other techniques to draw knowledge from writers and assist them "in learning how to tap into [their] latent repository" (Hobson, 1992, p. 67). Tutors were also urged to avoid proofreading and editing. Conferences were held at various

stages in the writing process and writing centres aspired to "produce better writers, not better writing" (North, 1984, p. 438).

Social constructionists questioned the expressivist view that knowledge resides solely within individuals. From the social constructionist perspective, knowledge arises from the interaction between individuals and society (Hobson, 1992). Writing from the social constructionist perspective "is social in its essence" (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p. 5) —a social process (Ede, 1989), rather than an individual activity, that "can only be understood in its community context" (Bizzell, 1982, p. 398). Since each "discourse community", or social group constituted through writing (Swales, 1990), has its own unwritten rules, conventions and practices, social constructionists believe that writing is shaped by the social and rhetorical contexts within which it occurs.

These social constructionist ideas laid the foundation for a collaborative learning approach to writing instruction, especially in writing centres. Unlike in the traditional teacher-dominated classroom, collaboration is key in modern writing centres. During most writing centre conferences, student writers and tutors learn from and with each other —"work[ing] together to create shared knowledge and a shared text" (Henning, 2001, p. 1). Tutors frequently use process-oriented strategies such as: asking writers open-ended, nondirective guiding questions and actively listening to their responses; addressing global writing concerns before sentence-level concerns; and intervening as little as possible. Through the generative power of this type of dialogue, writers maintain ownership of, and are encouraged to discover ways to improve, their own writing (Bruffee, 1984; Harris, 1986).

**Implications for tutor training.** Depending on the context in which they practice, writing tutors may be required to draw from any one, or a combination, of the three main theories outlined above. In the law school context, for example, peer writing tutors may need to draw on the current-traditional paradigm to explain the formal conventions of a legal document, expressivism to provide insight into a writer's composing process, or social constructionism to help one of their peers enter the legal discourse community. Understanding the theoretical foundations for effective writing-tutoring fosters a balanced and flexible approach to tutoring. Training for writing tutors should, therefore, provide tutors with the tools to develop that understanding.

For example, tutors should learn about the writing process and be able to apply that knowledge in their practices. This means that writing tutors, through their training, should: (a) understand writing as a process of investigation and discovery; (b) become aware of their own writing processes; and (c) gain insight into other writers' writing processes. Tutors should also be taught how to use nondirective tutoring strategies such as: building rapport, actively listening, asking open-ended questions, talking about the writing process, and addressing global writing concerns before sentence-level concerns.

All of the training elements related to the writing process and the tutoring process, as well as the tutoring strategies discussed in this section, are included in the Tutor Training Criteria. In the next section, I discuss the relevant literature related to conducting effective writing conferences that I relied on in including other tutoring strategies in the Tutor Training Criteria, and developing the training components related to the Tutor Selection Process and Disciplinary Knowledge.

## 2. Factors Contributing to the Success of Peer Writing Conferences

While collaborative learning, social constructionist, and expressivist theories presume that a successful writing conference is one in which a tutor uses nondirective or “minimalist” (Brooks, 1991) tutoring strategies — with the writer talking more than the tutor, and where the tutor and writer work together to create shared knowledge — these presumptions are not fully supported by empirical research. For example, Blau, Hall, and Strauss (1998) found that using too many minimalist tutoring strategies can result in unproductive and unfocused conferences. Other studies suggest that more directive tutoring strategies can be effective in discipline-specific conferences (Dinitz & Harrington, 2014), and in conferences with inexperienced and multilingual writers (e.g., Blau & Hall, 2002). These qualifications to the findings of mainstream research also proved relevant in developing criteria for designing and evaluating training for peer writing tutors.

**Three "key characteristics" of successful writing conferences.** From her analysis of empirical writing centre research, Henning (2001) identified the following three "key characteristics" of successful writing conferences: (1) the tutor and writer negotiate an agenda “that meets the writer's expectations” (p. 3); (2) the tutor helps the writer acquire and apply the knowledge he or she needs to move forward with his or her writing; and (3) the tutor establishes rapport with the writer. To achieve these characteristics, Henning argues, tutors are often required to use directive tutoring methods. For example, to negotiate an agenda successfully, tutors might need to dominate a conference from time to time. At other times, explicit instruction may be a more effective way for tutors to help writers acquire and apply the knowledge they need

than trying to elicit that information from writers through open-ended, probing questions. And, rigidly adhering to a nondirective question-and-answer tutoring style throughout their conferences may prevent tutors from both building and maintaining rapport with writers.

Henning's three key characteristics of successful writing conferences are included in the list of effective tutoring strategies that tutors learn when they are trained according to the Tutor Training Criteria.

Henning (2001) points out that her list of key characteristics "echoes" (p. 4) the views Muriel Harris expressed in 1995 (Harris, 1995) and, therefore, is neither new nor surprising. What is surprising to Henning is that, because tutors are often required to use both directive and nondirective methods in "reaching these characteristics", the "ideal" writing conference "may not always be non-directive, expressionist and collaborative" (p. 11).

A better indicator of writing conference success, then, may be a tutor's flexibility about different tutoring models and approaches (e.g., Blau et al., 1998). Blau et al. (1998) argue that this "informed flexibility" (p. 38) is "the most useful conferencing model" for the following reasons:

...it makes sense to use a non-directive approach for dealing with ideas, structure and voice, to help students figure out for themselves what they are trying to say and how best to say it. But it also makes sense to instruct when necessary, particularly on formal rules of grammar and mechanics.

We saw too many examples of tutors dancing around a direct question,

when they clearly knew the answer, wasting the already too-short time they had to spend with their clients. (p. 38)

Two essential components of effective tutor training can be derived from this reasoning: (1) helping tutors develop a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective tutoring strategies; and (2) teaching tutors how to adapt these strategies in a balanced and flexible way to address their peers' writing concerns. I was guided by these two principles in developing the overarching components of the Tutor Training Criteria related to the Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies.

**Writing tutors' personal attributes.** In addition to "informed flexibility" or "adaptability" (Sloan, 2007), writing centre scholars imply that certain personal attributes affect tutors' ability to conduct successful writing conferences. Freedman (1984), for example, identifies tutors' "warmth, ease, tact, [and] firmness" (p. 96) as "undefinable personality characteristics" (p.96) that contribute to writing conference success. Other important tutor attributes for Freedman are "curiosity, openness, flexibility, [and] tolerance" (p. 96) —"intellectual qualities that will make the tutors receptive to new learning" (p. 96). The following additional tutor attributes are frequently discussed in the writing centre literature: true concern for helping writers (e.g., North, 1982); good listening skills (e.g., Arfken, 1982); patience (e.g., Olson, 1984); ability to explain complex ideas and information accurately and clearly (e.g., Olson, 1984; Arfken, 1982); and adeptness at establishing and maintaining rapport (e.g., North, 1982).

More recently, researchers have identified three other tutor attributes that contribute to success in writing conferences. The first two additional attributes flow from Stonerock's (2005) examination of the relationship between tutor training and tutor

practice: (1) tutors' willingness to reflect on, and learn from, their failures; and (2) tutors' ability to transfer what they learn in tutor training to writing conference practice. The third additional attribute comes from Sloan's (2007) study of the relationship between writing centre theory and practice. In his study, Sloan found that "a vital component of effective tutoring" is an "intangible 'social keenness'" that is neither explicitly taught nor learned in tutor training. Sloan defines "social keenness" as "the ability to 'read' a writer and respond in a nurturing, productive way" (p. 104).

Whether tutors possess any of these three attributes would likely not be evident until tutors have had some tutoring practice. Conducting interviews with prospective tutors and checking their references, however, would likely reveal most of the other personal attributes listed above. These attributes are incorporated into the Tutor Selection Process components of the Tutor Training Criteria.

**Tutors' use of specific tutoring strategies.** Another factor that the writing-centre literature identifies as contributing to writing conference success is the way tutors use specific strategies to respond to writers' work. I relied on this area of the writing-centre scholarship to build the list of effective tutoring strategies included in the Tutor Training Criteria.

One popular tutor-training manual (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001) presents a variety of tutoring models and strategies organized around "higher order concerns (HOCs), lower order concerns (LOCs), and the piece as a whole" (p. 42). HOCs for McAndrew and Reigstad are "central" or global writing issues that weaken a paper as a whole "such as matters of thesis and focus, development, structure and organization, and voice" (p. 42). LOCs are sentence-level concerns or "matters related to surface

appearance, correctness, and standard rules of written English” (p. 56).

A particularly effective tutoring strategy, according to McAndrew and Reigstad, as well as authors of other popular tutor-training manuals (e.g., Gillespie & Learner, 2008), is to address global writing concerns before sentence-level concerns. Organizing conferences around global concerns helps writers recognize the all-important distinction between writing errors that interfere with communication, or with developing a clear line of argument in a paper, and those that do not. Another oft-cited reason for focusing conferences on global concerns is that writers can usually identify and correct their own sentence-level errors when they get some distance from their work and begin to see their writing from their readers' perspective.

Other frequently used strategies discussed in the writing-centre literature include “interpersonal (aimed at relationship building) and motivational (ways to engage writers)” (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 56) strategies such as: negotiating conference agendas that meet writers' expectations; asking open-ended questions and actively listening to the answers; giving authentic and specific praise; talking about the writing process; listening to writers read their texts aloud; teaching self-editing techniques; addressing a limited number of issues; focusing on patterns of error when addressing sentence-level concerns; providing a reader's perspective on a writer's work; and being flexible and reflective. Most writing centre scholars agree that knowing when and how to use each tutoring strategy is essential to effective tutoring.

In her comprehensive empirical study about the ways tutors use, and writers perceive, different tutoring strategies, Brown (2008) found that tutors' broad use of three main strategies to address both global and sentence-level concerns affects writers'

satisfaction with their conferences. The three main strategies Brown identified are: "Open-Ended Questioning", "Reader Response", and "Suggestion". According to Brown, tutors typically use Open-Ended Questioning when they want to elicit more detailed information from writers, employ Reader Response when they wish to demonstrate how they understand writers' texts and ideas about their texts, and apply Suggestion when they want writers to revise their writing in specific ways after their conferences. Brown also found that tutors use the Suggestion strategy in two different ways: (1) to identify and correct an error; and (2) to identify an error without correcting it, implying that the writer should correct the error (p. 40).

While the writers in Brown's study perceived Open-Ended Questioning as effective in helping them focus on global concerns, these same questions seemed "more leading" (p. 109) — and less effective — when tutors used them to address sentence-level concerns. Similarly, the writers perceived Reader Response as a more effective strategy when used to support tutors' suggestions to correct global rather than sentence-level issues.

The writing-centre scholarship related to tutors' use of specific tutoring strategies strongly suggests that effective writing tutors draw on most of the strategies discussed above. All of these strategies were considered in the development of, and are included in, the Tutor Training Criteria. In the next section, I discuss the relevant literature related to written commentary that I relied on in developing the Tutor Training Criteria components related to a tutor's ability to provide written comments on writers' texts.

**Written commentary.** In addition to conducting one-to-one writing conferences, some writing tutors, like the ones participating in this study, provide written commentary

on writers' texts. For example, certain writing centre tutors are required to read and comment on writers' texts before their conferences. Writing fellows, too, often provide written commentary on writers' work. While writing effective comments and conducting successful one-to-one conferences share many of the same tutoring strategies, several "hallmarks of the comment genre" (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 158), or "best practices" in providing written commentary, have evolved from the large body of scholarship on responding to students' writing. These "best practices" include: (a) writing both marginal and end comments, and explaining their relationship; (b) starting end comments with praise; (c) focusing on global issues; (d) selecting one or two patterns of sentence-level errors; (e) drawing on specific examples from writers' own texts; and (f) suggesting a limited number of substantive changes. All of these best practices were considered in the development of, and are included in, the Tutor Training Criteria.

In order to capture additional commenting practices unique to tutoring in discipline-specific contexts, I relied on a noteworthy study conducted by Enquist (1996). In her study, Enquist explored what law students consider effective "critiquing" of their writing. From her analysis of the study data, Enquist found that:

- end comments are essential;
- students want in-depth explanations, examples, or both;
- students need positive feedback;
- too many comments can overwhelm some students;
- the most effective comments identify a problem and suggest a solution, and may offer a rationale for the solution; and
- some students react negatively to comments phrased as questions.

At least one American law school writing centre has used Enquist's findings to develop guidelines for its tutors to follow in commenting on the texts writers submit to the centre before their writing conferences.<sup>5</sup>

Based on Enquist's study, I added two additional best practices for providing written commentary to the Tutor Training Criteria: (1) identify a problem and suggest a solution, and offer a rationale for the solution; and (2) limit the number of comments and questions. In the next section, I delve further into the writing-centre literature related to 'writing in the disciplines' to support the inclusion of the disciplinary knowledge component, and most of the directive tutoring strategies, in the Tutor Training Criteria.

**Disciplinary expertise.** The writing-centre literature suggests that a tutor's specialized knowledge and familiarity with discipline-specific discourse conventions may contribute to writing conference success (e.g., Dinitz & Harrington, 2014). While certain scholars caution that tutors with disciplinary expertise are more likely to appropriate writers' work and dominate their writing conferences (e.g., Hubbuch, 1988), others believe that a tutor's knowledge of writing in the discipline is fundamental to writing conference success (e.g., Dinitz & Harrington, 2014; McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001). McAndrew and Reigstad (2001), for example, believe that tutors' disciplinary knowledge can be particularly helpful because it enables tutors to read writers' work like their target audience — "experts in the discipline" (p. 73). And Dinitz and Harrington found a "strong connection" (2014, p. 73) between a tutor's knowledge of writing in the discipline and overall conference success.

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<sup>5</sup> The George Washington University Law School Writing Center, *Writing Fellow Manual 2014-2015*, copy on file with the author.

Because very few writing centre scholars have explored the role of disciplinary knowledge in writing conference success, I relied heavily on Dinitz and Harrington's (2014) study in developing the Disciplinary Knowledge element of the Tutor Training Criteria and in including most of the directive tutoring strategies.

In their small-scale study examining the role of tutors' disciplinary expertise in conferences with history and political science students, Dinitz and Harrington — and three faculty members from each discipline — analyzed a sample of students' papers and conference transcripts. Faculty members' analyses focused on the effectiveness of the conferences and the role played by the tutors' knowledge of writing in the discipline.

From their overall evaluation of the study data, Dinitz and Harrington found that tutors' disciplinary expertise played a pivotal role in writing conference success. More particularly, Dinitz and Harrington discovered that tutors' disciplinary expertise led to more productive and focused conferences because it enabled tutors to consistently:

- negotiate and follow an agenda focused on global writing concerns rather than sentence-level concerns;
- assess writers' work accurately;
- ask questions that help writers identify and address key issues;
- evaluate and challenge writers' ideas, perspectives, and opinions;
- provide important knowledge and guidance about disciplinary writing conventions necessary for writers to move forward with their writing;
- push writers to higher levels of thinking and writing ability; and
- use directive tutoring strategies to facilitate and enhance collaboration.

Dinitz and Harrington also identified “two signature moves” (p. 89) that tutors with disciplinary expertise made in successful conferences — first praising writers’ work, then pushing writers to do more.

Conferences with tutors lacking disciplinary expertise were less successful for the opposite reasons. For example, tutors without disciplinary expertise were often not directive enough, asked unhelpful questions, failed to recognize writers’ incorrect knowledge about writing in the discipline, “deferred too quickly to students’ inaccurate assessments and opinions” (p. 93), did not identify and focus on global writing concerns, and “too readily agreed to go through a paper sentence by sentence” (p. 93).

What Dinitz and Harrington found particularly “surprising and alarming” (p. 83) was that tutors lacking disciplinary expertise failed to draw on their past experience, training, and preparation. In attempting to explain this finding, Dinitz and Harrington suggest that tutors’ lack of disciplinary expertise prevented them “from accessing the full range of tutoring strategies they had at their disposal” (p. 93), while, in contrast, disciplinary expertise enabled tutors “to implement the core lessons from their tutor training” (p. 92)

Arguably, the fundamental factor contributing to writing conference success is a well-trained tutor (e.g., Goggin, 1988). Based on Dinitz and Harrington’s study, training for tutors providing discipline-specific writing support to their peers should help tutors develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, discipline-specific discourse conventions. Such training should also teach tutors how to use the directive strategies identified in Dinitz and Harrington’s study to facilitate and enhance collaboration. All of these training elements are included in the Tutor Training Criteria.

In the next section I outline the common approaches to, and features of, effective training for peer writing tutors discussed in the writing-centre literature. I drew on this area of the literature to develop many of the elements of the Tutor Training Criteria under the following topic headings: Training Format, Understanding of the Writing Process and Writing Development, and Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies.

### **3. Common Approaches to, and Features of, Effective Tutor Training**

The writing-centre literature offers a wide array of approaches to training for peer writing tutors. For example, some training programs revolve around a training manual, which can include readings about theory, practical exercises, and discussion questions to help bridge theory and practice. Some training programs emphasize conferencing strategies, and some programs concentrate on theory and research (Bickford, 2006). Certain writing-centre scholars believe that each tutor's unique personality, values, learning style, and past experiences as a writer influence that tutor's attitude toward both training and tutoring. As a result, according to these scholars, tutor training should be grounded in tutors' personal experiences. Brannon (1984), for instance, suggests that before tutors can help their peers become better writers, they should look inward to understand themselves as teachers, considering how they define their roles as tutors, and how their personalities affect the way they interact and are perceived in a conference. Other scholars believe that the first concern in tutor training should be teaching tutors to read rather than edit or correct the texts writers bring to their conferences (e.g., McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001).

Most writing-centre scholars do agree that tutor training cannot fully prepare tutors for every challenge they may face in their practices. There is also widespread agreement in the writing-centre scholarship that training should combine theory and practice, and be (a) ongoing (e.g., Gilwicz & Thonus, 2003); (b) based on more than a training manual (e.g., Bickford, 2006); and (c) "tailor-made" (Glassman, 1982, p. 129) to each particular writing centre. According to many writing-centre scholars, the overarching goal of tutor training should be the development of a 'well-rounded' tutor capable of addressing "writing issues while establishing rapport with the writer" (Bickford, 2006, p. 151). In Bickford's view (2006), the best way to achieve that goal is through a "magic combination" (p. 170) of making tutors aware of their writing processes, introducing them to current research and practices in writing instruction, and offering them practical suggestions and experience in tutoring.

The writing-centre scholarship related to common peer tutor-training approaches discussed above provided the basis for certain components of the Tutor Training Criteria under the following subject headings: Training Format, Understanding the Writing Process and Writing Development, and Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies. I found further support for these training elements in the literature related to common training formats, and practical training and reflection, discussed in the next two sections.

**Common training formats.** The two most common tutor-training formats are a structured credit-bearing classroom course and a less formal series of seminars or workshops (Bickford, 2006). Although training and tutoring may start simultaneously, training typically occurs at two specific times — before tutoring begins and while

tutoring is in progress (Arfken, 1982). One of the earliest and most influential writing centre tutor training programs was Bruffee's "Brooklyn Plan" (Bannister-Wills, 1984, p. 133). Structured within a credit-bearing classroom course, the Brooklyn Plan involved a series of collaborative peer writing-criticism tasks designed to both refine tutors' own writing skills and teach tutors how to help other students develop their writing skills. Brooklyn Plan tutors also read and discussed articles on the teaching of writing and recorded their tutoring experiences in a journal (Bannister-Wills, 1984).

Different classroom-based tutor-training programs have built on the Brooklyn Plan over the years (Bannister-Wills, 1984). While not every early tutor-training program required tutors to complete a credit course on composition and tutoring methods, most programs included some coursework (Bannister-Wills, 1984). Initial instruction was usually supplemented by one or more of the following techniques: tutoring, practicums, mentoring, weekly staff meetings, regular seminars or workshops, grading anonymous student papers, role playing exercises, self-evaluation, and the use of tutoring handbooks.

In her review of several early writing centre tutor-training programs, Bannister-Wills (1984) divided the programs into three main types (pp. 144-146) — "Training as Developmental Process", "Training by Doing", and "Communication Theory and Handbooks". Based on her review of these different types of training programs, Bannister-Wills presents a comprehensive "continuing education" (p. 142) training model encompassing both formal and informal training methods. Formal tutor training, according to Bannister-Wills' model, is essential and consists of "a practicum in tutorial methods" (p. 138); readings and group discussions about current research related to the teaching of writing, the operation of writing centres, and interpersonal communication;

and weekly or bi-weekly staff meetings. Informal training in Bannister-Wills' model includes team tutoring, tutor apprenticeships, and the use of "floating tutors" (p. 141) — former and current tutors who act as mentors for new tutors.

Currently, one of the most highly regarded and influential writing centers in the United States — the Purdue Writing Lab — trains its “consultants” through a combination of a credit-based course on peer tutoring, a mentoring program, regular staff meetings, and professional development activities (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 114). Many tutor-training programs now also cover topics like critical thinking and writing centre administration in addition to writing and interpersonal communication (Bickford, 2006, p. 11).

**Practical training and reflective activities.** Many writing-centre scholars suggest that tutor-training programs should encourage tutors to study the tutoring process and practice tutoring techniques (e.g., Garrett, 1984). Practical exercises — like role-playing, practice sessions, and simulations — allow tutors to explore the tutoring process and develop a repertoire of tutoring strategies to help them conduct successful writing conferences. Through these exercises and follow-up group discussions, tutors build their interpersonal communication skills, begin to understand how writing conferences differ from classroom instruction (Harris, 1986), and learn to work within time constraints (Harris, 1986). Engaging in practical exercises also helps tutors recognize the benefits of both focusing conferences on one or two major issues (e.g., Olson, 1984) and providing writers with a reader’s response to their texts (Harris, 1986). Perhaps most importantly, practical training exercises guide tutors in finding the right balance between writer-

centred and tutor-dominant tutoring — the hallmark of effective tutor training, according to several modern writing centre theorists.

Another key component of tutor training identified in the writing-centre literature is teaching tutors how to “proactively reflect” (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 52) on what they are learning and doing. Some of the more common reflective activities included in tutor-training programs are: (a) writing about and discussing personal impressions of course readings and activities, and participants' tutoring experiences; (b) observing conferences and completing post-observation reports; (c) performing self-evaluation; and (d) preparing reports after conducting writing conferences. According to Fitzgerald & Ianetta (2016), reflective activities are "essential" (p. 52) to active learning and tutoring because they help tutors better understand, develop, and hone their practice.

The final area of the writing-centre literature I relied on in developing the Tutor Training Criteria relates to discipline-specific tutor training. This scholarship reinforced the inclusion in the Tutor Training Criteria of certain training components related to Training Format, and Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies. These components apply to all tutors offering writing support in the disciplines — generalists and specialists alike.

**Discipline-specific tutor training.** While very little has been written about effective discipline-specific tutor training *per se*, the training literature related to tutoring across the curriculum offers some useful ideas. For example, Scanlon (1986) suggests that faculty conduct discipline-specific workshops for tutors lacking disciplinary expertise. Other ideas include teaching generalist tutors how to: (a) transfer their general tutoring knowledge to discipline-specific contexts; (b) resist abdicating responsibility to

writers too quickly; (c) avoid feeling intimidated when writers present views that conflict with their own; and (d) apply "a repertoire of possible polite and sophisticated push-back techniques used by tutors with disciplinary expertise" (Dinitz & Harrington, 2014, p. 95). To ensure that tutors with disciplinary expertise do not lose sight of their tutoring role, or forget their general tutoring knowledge, when conferencing with writers in their discipline, Fitzgerald & Ianetta (2016) suggest that specialist tutors learn to emphasize active listening and guided questioning techniques, and adopt a "provisional, less-than-absolutely-certain stance" (p. 152).

In one of the few American law-school writing centres<sup>6</sup>, tutor training is structured around a half-day orientation session and a week-to-week companion course (Murray, 2011). Before the orientation session, tutors read "The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference" (Murray, 1979) and "The Idea of a Writing Center" (North, 1984). The orientation session itself includes a lecture on preparing for and conducting conferences, as well as two simulation exercises. The session also introduces tutors to the law school's first-year legal research and writing program and the writing centre's mission. The companion course focuses on refining tutors' knowledge of the substantive law relevant to the major required first-year assignments and training tutors to work with the different types of writers with whom they will be conferencing.

I present the full set of criteria I derived from the literature in Chapter 5. In the next chapter, I describe the design of my study.

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<sup>6</sup> Of the 178 law schools that responded to a survey in 2014, only 33 offered a peer-staffed writing centre as part of their required legal writing programs (Association of Legal Writing Directors/Legal Writing Institute, 2015).

## **Chapter 4: Method**

In this chapter, I describe the method I used in the study. In the first section, I explain my general research approach. In the second section, I discuss my role and standpoint as the researcher. In the third section, I describe the study participants. In the final section, I outline the study data.

### **Research Approach**

The two main purposes of this qualitative empirical study were to: (1) develop a set of theory-supported criteria for designing and evaluating the training provided to peer tutors in discipline-specific writing centres; and (2) assess the extent to which the criteria are present in the LWA Tutor Training Program. I followed an 'emergent' approach to research design and data analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). This approach allowed me to identify thematic patterns that emerged as I analyzed the study data and gave me the flexibility I needed to change my focus and research questions as the study evolved (e.g. Dornyei, 2007).

All data was drawn from the three phases of the LWA Tutor Training Program: (1) the initial instructional classroom course (the Class); (2) the various practical training events that followed the Class (the Supplemental Training); and (3) the writing course delivered by the tutors (the Tutor-Guided Course). I describe the three phases of the LWA Tutor Training Program in detail in the next chapter.

### **My Role as the Researcher**

The study is based on my experience co-designing and co-teaching the LWA Tutor Training Program. My two Legal Writing Academy colleagues and I designed, developed, and conducted the Class and Supplemental Training. One of the Legal

Writing Academy co-directors and I designed the Tutor-Guided Course, selected the readings, and created the activities and assignments. During the Tutor-Guided Course, I met with the tutors as a group at the end of each week to support the work they were doing and discuss the upcoming week's readings, activities, and assignments. Between weekly meetings, I responded to the tutors' questions as needed either by email or phone. I did not teach any part of the Tutor-Guided Course and had no contact with any of the student participants during the course.

I would, therefore, characterize my role in the study as a retrospective participant-observer. "Retrospective" because I looked back on the LWA Tutor Training Program in collecting and analyzing the study data; "participant-observer" because I was neither fully active nor completely removed from the research setting (Adler & Adler, 1994).

I obtained ethics clearance from both Carleton University and the university where the LWA Tutor Training Program was conducted. The ethics clearance form from Carleton University is appended in Appendix A. After obtaining ethics clearance, I sent an email to the four tutors and nine students who completed the Tutor-Guided Course inviting them to participate in the study. Six students and the four tutors agreed to participate by executing the relevant consent forms.

**My standpoint as the researcher.** Evaluating a tutor-training program that I was involved in designing and implementing — using criteria I developed — clearly raises concerns about potential bias. In order to address these concerns, I embraced my unique standpoint and drew on a skill I developed during my legal training, my work as a practicing lawyer, and my teaching experience — the ability to analyze problems

objectively and maintain an objective perspective. I also tried to view the data through a lens of critical inquiry, rather than evaluation.

Because my Legal Writing Academy colleagues and I developed many parts of the LWA Tutor Training Program under tight time constraints, I was particularly interested in discovering how the program measured up against objective criteria. As a result, I made a point of scrutinizing the study data to uncover shortcomings in the program.

### **Study Participants**

The study included ten participants — six students who completed the Tutor-Guided Course and the four tutors who completed all parts of the LWA Tutor Training Program. The six students consented to the use of their completed course assignments for the study. The four tutors consented to the use of the written commentary they provided on their students' assignments during the Tutor-Guided Course, as well as the written reports they provided to me of their weekly writing review meetings with their students (the Weekly Reports).

Of the six student participants, four were female and two were male. The two male students were non-native English speakers. Of the four female students, one was a native English speaker; one learned both English and another language simultaneously; and two were non-native English speakers. Before participating in the Tutor-Guided Course, four students had completed their second year of law school and two students had completed their first year. All but one of the second-year students had taken a legal writing course in law school. The only legal writing instruction the first-year students received before the Tutor-Guided Course was the required eleven hours allocated by their

Torts or Criminal Law and Procedure small group professors. All four tutors were female native English speakers who had completed either their second or third year of law school before participating in the Tutor-Guided Course.

Background information about the six student participants is summarized in

**Table 1.**

Table 1. *Student Participants’<sup>7</sup> Background Information*

Background Information	Adan	Erin	Liza	Jenn	Iris	Rick
Gender	M	F	F	F	F	M
Native English Speaker	No	Yes	Both	No	No	No
Year of Law School Completed	2	2	1	1	2	2
Other Legal Writing Courses Taken	1	0	0	0	1	1

**Study Data**

In order to assess how the LWA Tutor Training Program measures up against the Tutor Training Criteria, I collected and analyzed the following data: (1) the textual materials used to conduct both the Class and Supplemental Training — required readings, exercises, activities, assignments, instructions, and my personal notes; (2) the assignments students completed during the Tutor-Guided Course; (3) the written commentary tutors provided to their students’ during the Tutor-Guided Course; (4) the emails tutors sent to me and their students during the Tutor-Guided Course; and (5) the tutors' Weekly Reports.

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<sup>7</sup> The students’ names have been changed to protect their identities.

**Triangulation.** In order to view the study data from different perspectives, and enhance the credibility of my findings (Merriam, 2009), I used two of the three types of triangulation most often associated with composition research — data triangulation and theory triangulation (Lauer & Ash, 1988). First, I used a variety of data sources: course materials; the tutors who completed all parts of the LWA Tutor Training Program; and the texts created by both the tutors and the students who participated in the Tutor-Guided Course. Second, in developing the Tutor Training Criteria, I drew on theories about writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective training for peer writing tutors.

In the next chapter, I present my analysis of the study data and discuss the results of the study findings.

## Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the study data and discuss the results of the study findings in four main sections. In the first section, I present the Tutor Training Criteria — the set of criteria for designing and evaluating training for peer writing tutors that I derived from the literature discussed in Chapter 3. In the second section, I analyze the extent to which the Tutor Training Criteria are present in the LWA Tutor Training Program. In the third section, I summarize the study findings. In the final section, I discuss the study findings in relation to my second research question — how does the LWA Tutor Training Program measure up against the Tutor Training Criteria?

### The Tutor Training Criteria

In this section, I present the Tutor Training Criteria I developed by synthesizing the essential ideas from the literature related to writing-centre pedagogy, the writing process, and effective training for peer writing tutors discussed in Chapter 3. The Tutor Training Criteria is presented as a table and organized under six topic headings: (1) Tutor Selection Process; (2) Training Format; (3) Understanding of the Writing Process and Writing Development; (4) Disciplinary Knowledge; (5) Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies; and (6) Ability to Provide Written Commentary on Student Texts. **Table 2** lists the Tutor Training Criteria and indicates the related themes from the supporting literature as explained in Chapter 3.

Table 2. *The Tutor Training Criteria and Related Themes in the Supporting Literature*

<p><b>Criteria for Effective Training for Peer Writing Tutors</b></p>	<p><b>Themes in the Supporting Areas of the Literature</b></p>
<p><b>Tutor Selection Process</b> Tutors are chosen from a pool of current student applicants based on certain personal attributes, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> good listening skills;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> patience;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> adaptability;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> adeptness at establishing and maintaining rapport;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> receptivity to new learning; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> true concern for helping writers.</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ Writing Tutors' Personal Attributes</p>
<p><b>Training Format</b> Tutors receive training that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> customized to the particular writing centre;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> balanced between theory and practice;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> based on more than a training manual; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> ongoing.</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ Common Approaches to Training for Peer Writing Tutors Common Training Formats Discipline-Specific Tutor Training</p>
<p><b>Understanding of the Writing Process and Writing Development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tutors acquire and are able to apply knowledge about the writing process. For example, tutors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand writing as a process of investigation and discovery;</li> <li>• become aware of their own writing processes; and</li> <li>• gain insight into other writers' writing processes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Tutors are provided with the means of continuously (and self-reflexively) developing their own writing abilities.</li> </ol>	<p>⇒ Theoretical Foundations of Tutoring Writing</p> <p>⇒ Common Approaches to Training for Peer Writing Tutors Common training formats</p>
<p><b>Disciplinary Knowledge</b> Tutors develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, discipline-specific discourse conventions.</p>	<p>⇒ Disciplinary Expertise</p>
<p><b>Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies</b></p>	

<p>1.1 Tutors are introduced to current research and practices in writing instruction.</p> <p>1.2 Tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing.</p> <p>1.3 Tutors have ample opportunities to practice tutoring.</p> <p>1.4 Tutors regularly engage in reflective activities, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reflecting about course content and tutoring experiences;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> observing and analyzing conferences; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> performing self-evaluation.</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ Common Approaches to Training for Peer Writing Tutors Common Training Formats</p> <p>⇒ Theoretical Foundations of Tutoring Writing</p> <p>⇒ Common Approaches to Training for Peer Writing Tutors Common Training Formats Practical Training and Reflection</p> <p>⇒ Common Approaches to Training for Peer Writing Tutors Practical Training and Reflection</p>
<p>2. Tutors develop a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective strategies, and continuously adapt these strategies in a balanced and flexible way, to address their peers' writing concerns. For example, tutors demonstrate the ability to use the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build rapport;</li> <li>• actively listen;</li> <li>• ask open-ended questions;</li> <li>• give specific and authentic praise;</li> <li>• talk about the writing process;</li> <li>• teach self-editing techniques;</li> <li>• suggest revisions for writers to make on</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ Three Key Characteristics of Successful Writing Conferences</p> <p>⇒ Three Key Characteristics of Successful Writing Conferences</p> <p>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies Discipline-Specific Tutor Training</p> <p>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies Discipline-Specific Tutor Training</p> <p>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</p> <p>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</p> <p>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</p>

<p>their own;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offer a reader’s response to a writer's work;</li> <li>• negotiate conference agendas that meet writers’ expectations;</li> <li>• structure conferences around global writing concerns rather than sentence-level concerns;</li> <li>• focus on patterns of error when addressing sentence-level concerns;</li> <li>• address a limited number of issues;</li> <li>• evaluate and challenge writers’ ideas, perspectives, and opinions;</li> <li>• provide important information and guidance about disciplinary writing conventions necessary for writers to move forward with their writing;</li> <li>• push writers to higher levels of thinking and writing ability; and</li> <li>• praise writers' work, then push them to do more.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</li> <li>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</li> <li>⇒ Three Key Characteristics of Successful Writing Conferences Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies Disciplinary Expertise</li> <li>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies Disciplinary Expertise</li> <li>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</li> <li>⇒ Tutors' Use of Specific Tutoring Strategies</li> <li>⇒ Disciplinary Expertise</li> <li>⇒ Three Key Characteristics of Successful Writing Conferences Disciplinary Expertise</li> <li>⇒ Disciplinary Expertise</li> <li>⇒ Disciplinary Expertise</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ability to Provide Written Commentary on Student Texts</b> Tutors demonstrate the ability to follow best practices for providing written commentary, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• starting with the positive;</li> <li>• drawing on specific examples from writers’ own texts;</li> <li>• identifying a problem and suggesting a solution, and offering a rationale for the solution;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Written Commentary</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limiting the number of comments, substantive changes, and questions;</li> <li>• prioritizing global writing concerns over sentence-level concerns;</li> <li>• pointing out one or two patterns of sentence-level errors; and</li> <li>• providing marginal and end comments, and explaining the relationship between the two types of comments.</li> </ul>	
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### **Presence of the Tutor Training Criteria in the LWA Tutor Training Program**

In this section, I assess the extent to which the Tutor Training Criteria are present in the LWA Tutor Training Program by first describing the materials used to conduct the Class and Supplemental Training, and then analyzing the tutors' data from the Tutor-Guided Course.

**Materials from the Class and Supplemental Training.** I examined the materials used to conduct the Class and Supplemental Training looking for the presence of the applicable elements of the Tutor Training Criteria as listed below. I wanted to discover the extent to which the LWA Tutor Training Program reflected these components of the Tutor Training Criteria.

- Tutors are chosen from a pool of current students based on certain natural attributes.
- Tutors receive training that is ongoing, balanced between theory and practice, customized to the particular writing centre, and based on more than a training manual.
- Tutors acquire and are able to apply knowledge about the writing process
- Tutors are provided with the means of continuously (and self-reflexively) developing their own writing abilities.

- Tutors develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, discipline-specific discourse conventions.
- Tutors are introduced to current research and practices in writing instruction.
- Tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing.
- Tutors have ample opportunities to practice tutoring.
- Tutors regularly engage in reflective activities.
- Tutors develop a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective strategies, and continuously adapt these strategies in a balanced and flexible way, to address their peers' writing concerns.
- Tutors demonstrate the ability to follow best practices for providing written commentary.

***The Class.*** In the Spring 2012 Term, twenty law students working as summer research assistants were selected by the professors they were working for to participate in the Class. The Class was an intensive eight-day experiential and active learning pilot course designed to train a cohort of upper-year law students with strong writing and leadership skills to provide writing support to their peers. The Class's specific learning objectives included: (a) refining tutors' writing skills; (b) polishing tutors' self-editing techniques; (c) educating tutors about their writing process; (d) sharpening tutors' interpersonal and leadership skills; (e) teaching tutors how to talk about writing, identify their peers' writing needs, and respond to their peers' writing in a balanced way; and (f) practicing active listening, collaborative learning, and non-authoritative tutoring techniques.

To meet these learning objectives, the Class was divided into three general topic areas related to the learning and teaching of legal writing: (1) effective writing and editing; (2) law-specific discourse conventions; and (3) peer feedback principles and practices. Course content was delivered through assigned readings, lectures, presentations, graded assignments, exercises, activities, and class discussions. Assigned readings included a legal writing text (Buckley, 2012), sample legal documents, tip sheets prepared by the course instructors, and supplemental published articles. Tutors also answered daily reflection questions about what they were learning in the course. The three parts of the Class are described separately below.

*Effective writing and editing.* Approximately 19% of the Class was devoted to strengthening tutors' general writing and editing abilities. The main topics covered in this part of the Class were: (a) the writing process; (b) overcoming writer's block; (c) general principles of good writing; (d) the editing process; and (e) self-editing techniques. Along with lectures delivered by myself and the other Legal Writing Academy program co-director, assigned readings and class discussions related to each topic, the tutors completed a variety of exercises intended to help refine their general writing and editing abilities.

For example, at the beginning of the Class, tutors completed a Writing Self-Assessment in which they identified their writing strengths and challenges, and explained how they deal with their challenges. During the Class, tutors reflected on, and described, their writing processes in a Writing Process Exercise; completed several targeted writing exercises; and gave class presentations on selected grammar topics. The tutors also developed personal editing checklists, which they used to edit their own work.

*Law-specific discourse conventions.* Approximately 44% of the Class was devoted to expanding tutors' knowledge about, and familiarity with, law-specific discourse conventions. The main topics covered in this part of the Class were: (a) the key elements of effective legal writing; (b) differences between predictive and persuasive legal writing; (c) writing three specific legal documents — the legal memo, opinion letter, and factum (the Three Specific Legal Documents); and (d) using legal writing resources. Class lectures, assigned readings and class discussions related to each topic were supplemented by three practicing lawyers' document deconstruction presentations based on the Three Specific Legal Documents, a Court of Appeal judge's lecture about the general principles of good legal writing, and a factum overview writing exercise conducted by a senior Department of Justice lawyer.

In addition, tutors completed several specialized exercises and graded assignments aimed at expanding their knowledge about, and familiarity with, law-specific discourse conventions. Graded assignments included a legal memo, an opinion letter, and a factum. The tutors also researched and delivered class presentations on good legal writing samples and the Three Specific Legal Documents. At the end of the Class, tutors submitted an explanatory and descriptive list of their "top ten" legal writing principles (the Top Ten Exercise).

*Peer feedback principles and practices.* Approximately 31% of the Class was devoted to introducing tutors to peer feedback principles and practices. The main topics covered in this part of the Class were: (a) responding to student writing; (b) evaluating student writing; (c) tutoring principles and strategies; and (d) evaluation principles and techniques. The format of this part of the Class was quite different than the rest of the

course. Lectures were shorter and the readings were limited to two journal articles -“A Brief Guide to Responding to Student Writing” (Harvard College Writing Program, 2007) and “Mentoring New Legal Writers” (Kowalski, 2012). The exercises in this part of the Class were also more practice-oriented than the exercises in the other parts of the course. The main exercises tutors engaged in during the peer feedback principles and practices part of the Class involved:

- participating in a one-hour peer review session;
- observing a 15-minute mock writing conference;
- conducting a 30-minute practice writing conference;
- participating in a 30-minute individual writing conference with each of the course instructors about the tutor's legal memo assignments; and
- evaluating a classmate's work.

***The Supplemental Training.*** In the Fall 2012 Term, the tutors’ initial classroom instruction was supplemented by the following practical training events: (1) participating in a practice peer writing conference; (2) grading and providing personalized written commentary to first-year students on a pass/fail informal memorandum assignment; (3) leading workshop-style peer writing conferences with up to four students who exchanged and commented on each other's work, discussed specific writing issues, and shared improvement strategies; and (4) assisting Legal Writing Academy professors in delivering interactive workshops to large groups of law students about effective legal writing, writing for the legal reader, and self-editing.

In 2013, the tutors continued their practical training by grading and providing personalized written commentary to first-year students on a pass/fail client letter

assignment in the January Term. In the Winter 2013 Term, the tutors participated in the following three additional practical training events: (1) conducting one-on-one peer writing conferences with law students at all levels; (2) grading and providing personalized written commentary to upper-year students on a pass/fail formal memorandum assignment; and (3) assisting Legal Writing Academy professors in delivering interactive legal writing workshops to small groups of first-year law students.

After each of their conferences, tutors prepared a post-conference report in which they described all writing topics discussed, advice given, challenges faced, and tutoring strategies used (Writing Conference Summary).

Legal Writing Academy professors provided tutors with specific written instructions and training before the tutors commented on and graded their peers' assignments, closely supervised tutors during all marking sessions, reviewed tutors' grades and written comments, and were available during all conferences to answer tutors' questions and provide resources as needed. As part of their training for the first grading session, for instance, tutors were sent a set of written instructions advising them that the main purpose of their written commentary was to help students identify their writing strengths and develop improvement strategies. To achieve this purpose, tutors were instructed to provide specific, positive, and personal commentary, avoid "but" and "however", and offer suggestions to strengthen students' writing. These instructions were reinforced during both the pre-grading training session and the grading session itself.

***Findings from the Class and Supplemental Training.*** The foregoing description of the materials used to conduct the Class and Supplemental Training reveals the presence of the following applicable elements of the Tutor Training Criteria:

- Training is customized to the law school's writing centre, based on more than a training manual, and ongoing.
- Tutors acquire knowledge about the writing process.
- Tutors are provided with the means of continuously (and self-reflexively) developing their own writing abilities.
- Tutors develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, discipline-specific discourse conventions.
- Tutors are introduced to current practices in writing instruction.
- Tutors have ample opportunities to practice tutoring.
- Tutors regularly reflect about course content and tutoring experiences.

The description also indicates that the following criteria elements are missing from the first two phases of the LWA Tutor Training Program:

- Tutors are chosen from a pool of current students based on certain natural attributes.
- Training is balanced between theory and practice.
- Tutors are introduced to current research in writing instruction.
- Tutors regularly observe and analyze conferences, and perform self-evaluation.

Neither the materials used to conduct the Class nor the materials used to conduct the Supplemental Training were conducive to determining the presence of the criteria elements listed below:

- Tutors apply knowledge about the writing process.
- Tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing.

- Tutors develop a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective strategies, and continuously adapt these strategies in a balanced and flexible way, to address their peers' writing concerns.
- Tutors demonstrate the ability to follow best practices for providing written commentary.

Because many of the components of both the Class and Supplemental Training reflect more than one element of the Tutor Training Criteria, my presentation of the findings that follows is organized around the topic headings used in the Tutor Training Criteria.

*Tutor selection process.* While the tutors who completed both the Class and Supplemental Training were all law students, they did not apply for either part of the LWA Tutor Training Program. They participated in the training program because the law professors they were working for during the summer of 2012 agreed to allow them to participate in the Class.

*Training format.* The tutors' training started with the compulsory eight-day intensive Class that was designed specifically to train law students to provide writing support to their peers. Training continued for many months after the Class through a practice peer writing conference, several written commentary and grading training sessions, and various other practical training events. The content of the Class was delivered through assigned readings, lectures, presentations, graded assignments, exercises, activities, and class discussions. Assigned readings included a practical legal writing text, sample legal documents, tip sheets prepared by the course instructors, supplemental journal articles, but no training manual.

*Understanding of the writing process and writing development.* Class lectures, assigned readings, class discussions, the Writing Process Exercise, as well as developing and using personal editing checklists, provided tutors with the means to acquire knowledge about the writing process. Whether tutors applied this knowledge, however, is not evident from the materials used to conduct either the Class or the Supplemental Training.

Approximately 20% of the Class was devoted to strengthening tutors' general writing and editing abilities. The specific writing development opportunities afforded by the Class included: (a) lectures; (b) assigned readings; (c) class discussions; (d) daily reflection questions; (e) graded assignments; (f) the Writing Self-Assessment; (g) developing and using a personal editing checklist; (h) targeted writing exercises; (i) grammar presentations; (j) presentations about good legal writing samples and the Three Specific Legal Documents; and (k) feedback from, and writing conferences with, the course instructors. Conferencing, providing written commentary, grading, and assisting in delivering writing workshops during the Supplemental Training offered tutors additional writing development opportunities.

*Disciplinary knowledge.* Together, the Class and Supplemental Training offered tutors several ways to develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, law-specific discourse conventions. Many of the Class components focused on teaching the tutors how to write the Three Specific Legal Documents — all of the graded assignments and guest presentations; several lectures, readings, activities, exercises, and class discussions; and the two writing conferences with the course instructors. Other lectures, readings, activities, class discussions, and exercises — like the Top Ten Exercise — were

geared toward developing tutors' knowledge about, and familiarity with, general legal writing principles. Most of the tutors' written peer commentary, grading, conferencing, and workshop activities during the Supplemental Training revolved around different types of legal writing and discourse conventions.

*Understanding of the tutoring process and tutoring strategies.* While neither the Class nor the Supplemental Training introduced tutors to current research in writing instruction, both the course and training events exposed tutors to different writing instruction practices. During the Class, tutors were introduced to the peer review process, one-on-one writing conferencing with both their peers and their professors, written commentary, and written evaluation practices. During the Supplemental Training, tutors were introduced to an additional writing instruction practice — interactive writing workshops.

Concerning the tutors' understanding of the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing, the tutors were introduced to writing tutoring theory through a few brief Class lectures, assigned readings about responding to student writing and mentoring new legal writers, and three grading training sessions.

With respect to tutoring practice and reflective activities, the tutors did not have many opportunities to do either during the Class. Tutors conducted only one practice writing conference. And while participating in the two writing conferences with the course instructors could be viewed as observation opportunities, the tutors' only true opportunity to observe and analyze conferences was the brief in-class mock writing conference. The frequent class discussions and daily reflection questions did provide tutors with regular opportunities to reflect about course content, which included tutoring

experiences from time-to-time. However, the Class did not include any specific self-evaluation activities.

Although the Supplemental Training did not include any self-evaluation activities either, or offer any observation opportunities, tutors were able to regularly reflect on their tutoring experiences while completing their Writing Conference Summaries. The Supplemental Training also offered tutors many opportunities to practice tutoring while conducting both practice and real conferences, providing written commentary, and assisting in delivering writing workshops.

Concerning tutoring strategies, tutors were introduced to different tutoring strategies during the Class by first observing a short mock writing conference, and then conducting their own longer practice conference. Tutors had the opportunity to develop and adapt these strategies to address their peers' writing concerns while conferencing, providing written commentary, grading, and assisting in delivering writing workshops during the Supplemental Training.

The above findings are summarized in **Table 3**. In the next section, I examine the tutors' Weekly Reports, emails, and written commentary from the Tutor-Guided Course, looking for the missing elements of the Tutor Training Criteria.

Table 3. *Presence of the Tutor Training Criteria in the Class and Supplemental Training*

Tutor Training Criteria Element	Present ?
<b>Tutors are chosen from a pool of current student applicants based on certain natural attributes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Training is customized to the law school's writing centre</b> Most aspects of both the Class and Supplemental Training are customized	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Training is balanced between theory and practice</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Training is based on more than a training manual</b> No training manual	<b>Yes</b>

<p>Practical legal writing text                  Sample legal documents                  Tip sheets prepared by the course instructors                  Supplemental journal articles                  Lectures                  Presentations                  Graded assignments                  Exercises                  Activities                  Class discussions</p>	
<p><b>Training is ongoing</b>                  Training progressed over 16 months</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors acquire knowledge about the writing process</b>                  Lectures                  Assigned readings                  Class discussions                  Writing Process Exercise                  Personal editing checklist</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors are able to apply knowledge about the writing process</b></p>	<p><b>Unable to determine</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors are provided with the means of continuously (and self-reflexively) developing their own writing abilities</b>                  Lectures                  Assigned readings                  Class discussions                  Writing Self-Assessment                  Personal editing checklist                  Targeted writing exercises                  Grammar presentations                  Good legal writing sample presentations                  Daily reflection questions                  Legal memo presentation and assignment                  Opinion letter presentation and assignment                  Factum presentation and assignment                  Professor-led writing conferences                  Written professor feedback                  Written peer feedback                  Top Ten Exercise                  Grading                  Peer writing conferences                  Interactive writing workshops</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, discipline-specific discourse conventions</b>                  Lectures                  Assigned readings</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>

<p>Class discussions                  Specialized exercises                  Document deconstruction presentations by practicing lawyers                  Judge's lecture about general principles of good legal writing                  Factum overview exercise conducted by senior DOJ lawyer                  Good legal writing sample presentations                  Legal memo presentation and assignment                  Opinion letter presentation and assignment                  Factum presentation and assignment                  Professor-led writing conferences                  Written peer feedback                  Top Ten Exercise                  Grading                  Peer writing conferences                  Interactive writing workshops</p>	
<p><b>Tutors are introduced to current research in writing instruction</b></p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors are introduced to current practices in writing instruction</b>                  Peer review process                  Mock and practice peer writing conferences                  Peer writing conferences                  Professor-led writing conferences                  Interactive writing workshops                  Written peer feedback                  Grading</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing</b>                  Lectures                  Class discussions                  Two published articles:                  (1) Responding to student writing                  (2) Mentoring new legal writers</p>	<p><b>Unable to determine</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors have ample opportunities to practice tutoring</b>                  Practice writing conference                  Peer writing conferences                  Written commentary                  Interactive writing workshops</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors regularly reflect about course content and tutoring</b>                  Daily reflection questions                  Class discussions                  Writing Conference Summary forms</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors regularly observe and analyze conferences</b>                  Mock writing conference                  [Professor-led writing conferences]</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors regularly perform self-evaluation</b></p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p><b>Tutors develop a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective strategies, and continuously adapt these strategies in a balanced and</b></p>	<p><b>Unable to determine</b></p>

<p><b>flexible way, to address their peers’ writing concerns</b>                  Practice writing conferences                  Peer writing conferences                  Written peer feedback                  Grading                  Interactive writing workshops</p>	
<p><b>Tutors demonstrate the ability to follow best practices for providing written commentary</b></p>	<p><b>Unable to determine</b></p>

**Tutors’ data from the Tutor-Guided Course.** I examined the tutors’ Weekly Reports, emails, and written commentary from the Tutor-Guided Course searching for the applicable elements of the Tutor Training Criteria missing from the Class and Supplemental Training. In particular, I looked for signs that the tutors: (1) were able to apply knowledge about the writing process; (2) had developed a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective tutoring strategies; (3) had used their repertoire of strategies in a balanced and flexible way to address their peers’ writing concerns; and (4) had followed best practices for providing written commentary.

**The Tutor-Guided Course.** During the summer of 2013, four of the twenty tutors who completed the Class were selected by the Legal Writing Academy co-director to participate in the seven-week pilot experiential and active learning Tutor-Guided Course. The Tutor-Guided Course was designed around two main objectives: (1) develop materials to address foundation writing skill gaps of a sub-set of law students whose basic grammar and writing organization skills created a barrier to their writing at a professional level; and (2) evaluate a commercial online grammar course as an effective diagnostic and remedial teaching tool. The primary pedagogical objective of the Tutor-Guided Course for the student participants was to bolster their writing confidence by improving their core grammar, writing organization, and thinking skills. For the writing tutors, the Tutor-Guided Course offered a rare opportunity to synthesize what they had been

learning in the earlier parts of the LWA Tutor Training Program and further develop their peer tutoring skills.

The Tutor-Guided Course was not taught in the conventional sense. There were no course instructors. All course materials, assigned readings, activities, assignments, and written feedback comments were distributed through an electronic course management system. Students who participated in the course worked solely with the writing tutors, and each other, throughout the course.

The Tutor-Guided Course was organized around weekly topics, each focusing on a specific foundational legal skill: reading and analyzing statutes (Week One), reading and summarizing cases (Week Two/Three), synthesis and writing organization (Week Four), preparing to write a legal analysis (Week Five), and transforming a draft legal analysis into a final discussion paper (Week Six/Seven). During the final weeks of the Tutor-Guided Course, student participants reviewed and commented on each other's draft legal analyses. To help the student participants turn what they were learning into future writing strengths, and monitor their progress, they wrote a Writer's Note at the end of each week in which they reflected on the writing and thinking choices they made in completing the week's activities and assignments.

Thirty-seven students applied to participate in the Tutor-Guided Course — sixteen first-year students and twenty-one second-year students. Five first-year and seven second-year students were selected based on their grammar and writing organization needs as well as their motivation to participate in the course. The twelve students were divided into four "Writing Community Groups" for exchanging assignments, comments, strategies, and resources. One writing tutor led each Writing Community Group.

Students met with their writing tutors at least once a week— either individually or in small groups (face-to-face or virtually via Skype) — to discuss the assigned readings and what they were learning from the weekly activities and assignments. During these meetings, the tutors provided students with oral feedback on their writing strengths and challenges, and identified additional resources targeting the specific topics students wanted to improve on. At the end of each week, the tutors sent me a written report of their weekly writing review meetings with their students. The tutors also gave their students frequent written feedback on all course exercises and assignments.

Throughout the Tutor-Guided Course, students used group Discussion Boards and File Exchanges to post and exchange some of their work, and comment on the work of the other Writing Community Group members. Tutors monitored and participated in the Discussion Boards and File Exchanges.

All four tutors consented to the use of their Weekly Reports, as well as their emails and written commentary from the Tutor-Guided Course. Six students consented to the use of the assignments they completed during the course as well as the written commentary they received on those assignments. A breakdown of the study participants by Writing Community Group is set out in **Table 4**.

Table 4. *Breakdown of Study Participants by Writing Community Group*<sup>8</sup>

<b>Writing Community Group Tutor</b>	<b>Students</b>
Cynthia	Liza
Sandy	Adan & Iris
Patti	Ricky
Robin	Erin & Jenn

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<sup>8</sup> The study participants' names have been changed to protect their identities.

*Analysis.* In this section, I examine the tutor's Weekly Reports, emails, and written commentary from the Tutor-Guided Course, individually by tutor, looking for signs that each tutor: (1) applied her knowledge about the writing process; (2) developed a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective tutoring strategies; (3) used those strategies in a balanced and flexible way to address her students' writing concerns; and (4) followed best practices for providing written commentary. To avoid unnecessary repetition, I created defined terms for each of the 11 applicable tutoring strategies listed in the Tutor Training Criteria and discussed in the Supporting Literature Review section of this chapter (the Applicable Strategies).

The Applicable Strategies, and defined terms, are:

- build rapport (Rapport);
- ask open-ended questions (Question);
- give specific and authentic praise (Praise);
- talk about the writing process (Process);
- teach self-editing techniques (Self-Editing);
- suggest revisions for writers to make on their own (Suggestion);
- offer a reader's response to writers' work (RR);
- evaluate and challenge writers' ideas, perspectives, and opinions (Challenge);
- provide key knowledge and guidance about expectations of, and writing in, the discipline that writers need to move forward with their writing (WID);
- push writers to higher levels of understanding and writing ability (Push); and
- praise writers' work, then push them to do more (P & P)

While the meaning of each strategy may seem self-evident at first, as I analyzed the tutors' written commentary more closely, some of the strategies began to overlap. In order to clearly distinguish the strategies, I borrowed the following four definitions from Brown (2008): (1) "Rapport" refers to a tutor's use of an anecdote or confession that helps clarify a topic and reinforce the tutor's peer relationship; (2) "Question" refers to a question a tutor asks in order to elicit more detailed information; (3) "Praise" refers to a tutor's use of encouraging words to offer positive reinforcement; and (4) "Process" refers to a comment about either the writer's or tutor's writing process, such as sharing writing tips or "explaining unique elements of their writing process, such as drafting, planning, or proofreading habits" (Brown, 2008, p. 36).

For the purpose of the analysis that follows, I separated the 11 Applicable Strategies into two categories —nondirective and directive<sup>9</sup>. The five nondirective strategies are: Rapport, Question, Praise, Process, and RR. The six directive strategies are: Self-Editing, Suggestion, Challenge, WID, Push, and P & P. In measuring how often the tutors used each of the strategies, I applied a continuum. The continuum ranged from "always" to "never" with the following intervening elements:

- "most";
- "many"/"a lot"/ "a large number";
- "regularly"/"usually";
- "often"/"most of the time"/"frequently"/"sometimes";
- "from time-to-time"/"on occasion"; and

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<sup>9</sup> Recognizing that many strategies may be either nondirective or directive depending on the way they are used, or misused, in particular contexts (Brown, 2008).

- "a few"/"some".

*Cynthia.* All three of the students in Cynthia's Writing Community Group completed the Tutor-Guided Course. Only one of the students (Liza) consented to the use of her completed assignments and the written commentary she received from Cynthia. Overall, Cynthia's Weekly Reports were very detailed, her written commentary on Liza's assignments was quite extensive, directive and "teacherly", and she communicated with her students frequently between meetings, often sending them questions and discussion topics for their upcoming meetings.

Cynthia's Weekly Reports suggest that her meetings with Liza focused primarily on global issues, like point-first writing, the revision process, self-editing, differences between paraphrasing and summarizing, organizational choices, tone, and the requirements of a legal discussion paper. Cynthia addressed many of these global issues in her written commentary as well, and raised very few sentence-level concerns.

Cynthia provided both marginal and end comments on many of Liza's assignments, and explained the relationship between the two types of written commentary from time-to-time. She pointed out patterns of sentence-level errors in Liza's assignments on occasion, and used all of the Applicable Strategies at least once. Cynthia used the Praise strategy most often (sometimes followed by "but" or "however"), the Question strategy the least often, and the rest of the strategies relatively equally. As the Tutor-Guided Course progressed, Cynthia started to favour the directive Challenge, Push, and WID strategies, and corrected a few of Liza's writing errors without either identifying the error or explaining the correction.

**Table 5** contains brief examples of each type of strategy Cynthia used in her written commentary on Liza's assignments.

Table 5. *Examples of Tutoring Strategies Cynthia used in her Written Commentary*

Tutoring Strategy	Example from Cynthia's Written Commentary
Rapport	"I love this! Set fake deadlines to allow yourself time to edit as well as if you realize you will have lots of assignments due at one time. There is no reason why we have to finish something right when the professor tells us to do so"
Question	"Think about how you can make your sentences less rigid. For example, how can you discuss the topic without saying <i>the topic is</i> ? Reworking these type of sentences can make your writing seem more sophisticated."
Praise	"This is a good fact summary. You lay out the key points very clearly. It sets a good platform for understanding the issue."
Process	"Don't be too concerned when you are writing your first draft – just get the words down."
Self-Editing	"This is an example where you can think about tightening your sentences in the second revision (i.e.: editing at sentence level)."
Suggestion	"I think it would be stronger to first address potential liability and what a judge or mediator may consider (see s. 4(6)) and then move on to damages."
RR	"For example, right now, you have described the cases and tech world well individually, but, as the reader, I am left for a full page looking for the connections and trying to make these connections myself."
Challenge	"Consider whether this comparison is different from your discussion on page 7 and if you need both sections. Maybe the comparison on page 7 is

	extra?"
WID	"This information belongs in the fact section. You do not need to restate it here. Your analysis should only include facts that were previously described. It shouldn't introduce new facts."
Push	"Try reversing the order of this rule"
P & P	"This is a very clear answer. Good work! Would two short sentences be even more effective than one longer sentence?"

*Sandy.* Two of the three students in Sandy's Writing Community Group completed the Tutor-Guided Course — Adan and Iris. Both students consented to the use of their completed assignments and the written commentary they received from Sandy. Sandy's Weekly Reports suggest that her meetings with both Adan and Iris focused on a combination of global and sentence-level concerns. Concerns addressed with Adan included audience, organization, the relationship between headings and the content that follows, proofreading, and grammar. Concerns addressed with Iris included Iris' writing process, the structural requirements of different legal documents, and the use of articles. Sandy addressed many of these same issues in her written feedback as well, shifting her emphasis between global and sentence-level concerns.

Sandy provided Adan and Iris with both marginal and end comments on many of their assignments, regularly explained the relationship between the two types of written commentary to each student, and pointed out patterns of sentence-level errors in both students' assignments from time-to-time. She also frequently used the Suggestion strategy by physically highlighting grammar and proofreading errors directly on Adan's and Iris' assignments, without explanation. Sandy did not use all of the Applicable

Strategies — the Rapport, RR, and Self-Editing strategies were notably absent, as was the Praise strategy. Although she did not use either of the Praise or Rapport strategies on their own, many of Sandy's comments started with generic positive statements and words like, "Great work!!" and "good!".

Sandy used the Suggestion strategy most often with both Adan and Iris, and frequently corrected both students' sentence-level errors in her marginal comments without identifying the particular errors. Sandy also used the P & P strategy (sometimes followed by "but" or "however") quite frequently, especially on Adan's assignments. From time-to-time, she used the following strategies on both students' assignments: Question, Process, Challenge, WID, and Push. As the Tutor-Guided Course progressed, Sandy's comments became more directive, and she started using the Challenge strategy more frequently in her marginal comments on Iris' assignments.

**Table 6** contains brief examples of each type of strategy Sandy used in her written commentary on Adan's and Iris' assignments.

Table 6. *Examples of Tutoring Strategies Sandy Used in her Written Commentary*

Tutoring Strategy	Example from Sandy’s Written Commentary
Rapport	None
Question	"how is the standard of acceptability determined?"
Praise	None
Process	"When you go through the process of writing an analysis section it is important to constantly be asking yourself the question "why" - "why am I including this information?" "why did the court decide this way?" "why is this point significant?"

	etc. Although it might seem obvious to you, the answer might not be so clear to the reader. Try reading through one subsection of your analysis and ask yourself these "Why" questions after each sentence."
Self-Editing	None
Suggestion	"nominalization, try instead: All of the employees received a bonus, except Ian."
RR	None
Challenge	"based on the known facts, CAN he prove any of these elements?"
WID	"this is incorrect – it would likely be the complainant filing the initial complaint, and therefore probably the defendant or respondent filing the answer; try instead: “You must file an answer within 20 days after the filing of the complaint.”
Push	“what information is missing for you to make a complete conclusion here? ie. extent of injury, previous incidents...”
P & P	“good! what was the state of the law before the SCC set out this test? How does this test change or differ from the previous law on restrictive covenants?”

*Patti.* Only one of the three students in Patti's Writing Community Group completed the Tutor-Guided Course — Ricky — and he consented to the use of both his completed assignments and the written commentary he received from Patti. Overall, Patti's written commentary on Ricky's assignments was quite detailed and extensive.

Patti's Weekly Reports suggest that her meetings with Ricky revolved around a combination of global and sentence-level concerns, such as copying and pasting,

summarizing and paraphrasing, freewriting, explaining his thinking more fully, transitions, and word choice. Patti addressed many of these same issues in her written feedback as well, shifting her emphasis between global and sentence-level concerns.

Patti provided Ricky with both marginal and end comments on most of his assignments, regularly explained the relationship between the two types of written commentary, and often pointed out patterns of sentence-level errors in Ricky's assignments. Patti used all of the Applicable Strategies at least once, often combining several strategies in one comment and incorporating the RR strategy into many comments. Patti did not favour any one strategy, but used the following strategies more often than others: Rapport, Praise (sometimes followed by "but" or "however"), Suggestion, RR, Challenge, WID, Push, and P & P. The strategies she used least often were: Question, Process, and Self-Editing.

As the Tutor-Guided Course progressed, Patti's comments became shorter and more directive, she used the Suggestion strategy more often in her marginal comments, and frequently corrected Ricky's sentence-level errors in her marginal comments without identifying the particular errors.

**Table 7** contains brief examples of each type of strategy Patti used in her written commentary on Ricky's assignments.

*Table 7. Examples of Tutoring Strategies Patti Used in her Written Commentary*

<b>Tutoring Strategy</b>	<b>Example from Patti's Written Commentary</b>
Rapport	"I completely agree with your statement on being reminded about why statutes are made and how judicial decisions reflect them; it's something that I think law students often forget when they are reading statutes and cases."

Question	"When you brief you really want to make sure you are doing it in a manner that is the most effective for you; how can you organize and write your brief so information is easily accessible and understandable?"
Praise	"I think you have done a good job with this memo to file. Its great to see your own voice in the writing, and I think you did a good job with the analysis. Also, you are doing a great job using transitions, its really making your writing sound a lot "smoother"!
Process	"It may help you if you proofread in stages. The first time you go over the document, look for spelling errors, wrong words, capitalizations, etc. Mainly the more obvious errors. Then re-read the document again and only think about where commas need to be included. This does take more time, but having grammatical errors in your work takes away from the effectiveness of the memo and your reader can lose confidence in you."
Self-Editing	"Be really reflective and critical of you own work as you revise and edit and you may be able to find more sentences that you think could be better written. Think about finding sentences where you may need to completely reorder the words or write the sentence again from scratch. Finding sentences where changing a word or two will make it stronger is much easier and just as important, but dont stop there."
Suggestion	"I changed your comma to a semi-colon. Since there are two independent clauses, separating them by a comma creates a comma splice. Because they are on the same topic, a semi-colon is an easy way to fix the error."
RR	"I understand that some of the cases apply the same rule, but I think you need to briefly explain why they are similar or the same. As a reader, I'm unsure as to why two different cases are coming to the exact same conclusion. I can infer that the same rule is being applied, but I don't want to assume this."

Challenge	"Go back and carefully re-read the provision. This isn't what it says. Rather, it says that a lawyer can charge a contingency fee in all matters EXCEPT family law, criminal law, or quasi-criminal matters. Reading carefully will help ensure you don't mis-read a sentence and drastically change the meaning of a statute."
WID	"One thing to think about when constructing rules, it to understand how the courts applied the rules (and not just what they are), since facts are different the application may be different too. Keep this in mind when constructing rules in the future. This may be a little difficult to include here, but I think its worth a try, since you wouldn't want to get to your own analysis and not fully understand how the court applied the rules."
Push	"Can you explain this more? What kind of terms? Defined ones, ambiguous ones? Or did you mean something else?"
P & P	"It is good to see that you attempted to be neutral in your analysis: not just supporting Jill, but also demonstrating what else she could have done. Also, you took time to consider the fact situation; thinking about facts, and what is missing or could be explained more. The next step would be to take the facts and apply it to the statute itself. You mentioned a section of the statute that you felt was important, but you never demonstrated how the facts applied to it."

*Robin.* Two of the three students in Robin's Writing Community Group completed the Tutor-Guided Course — Erin and Jenn. Both students consented to the use of their completed assignments and the written commentary they received from Robin. Robin communicated with her students frequently by email, both before and after their meetings, often sending them resources related to specific topics they wanted to improve on. Robin also regularly encouraged collaboration between the students in her

Writing Community Group. For example, she asked each student to find a resource on a chosen grammar topic and explain the resource to the group; and she asked Erin to share her time management strategies with the group. Robin also exchanged emails with Erin as she worked through a few of her earlier assignments.

Robin's Weekly Reports suggest that her meetings with both Erin and Jenn focused on a combination of global and sentence-level concerns. Concerns addressed with Erin included: omitting relevant facts from time-to-time; providing lay, rather than lawyerly, advice; commas; and proofreading. Concerns addressed with Jenn included synthesizing, paraphrasing, identifying legal rules in cases, the passive voice, and subject/verb agreement. Robin addressed many of these same issues in her written feedback as well, shifting her emphasis between global and sentence-level concerns.

Robin provided Erin and Jenn with both marginal and end comments on many of their assignments, but did not explain the relationship between the two types of written commentary to either student. She often pointed out patterns of sentence-level errors in both students' assignments, and frequently used the Suggestion strategy by physically highlighting grammar and proofreading errors directly on Erin's and Jenn's assignments, without explanation. Overall, Robin used all but one of the Applicable Strategies — RR. Robin used the Rapport strategy most often with both students, and frequently corrected Erin's and Jenn's sentence-level errors in her marginal comments without identifying the particular errors. Robin also used the Process and Challenge strategies a few times with both students.

Concerning her written commentary on Jenn's assignments, Robin used the Question strategy most frequently, in addition to the Rapport strategy, and many of her

comments started with generic positive words like, "Great!" and "Excellent!". Robin also used the P & P strategy on a few of Jenn's assignments. From time-to-time, Robin used the WID strategy, and asked Jenn to "spot the error" in a specific part of her assignment (Spot the Error). For example, one of Robin's comments on Jenn's work included these questions:

“You are missing an article under section D, can you find it?  
There is also an issue with subject-verb agreement in section E, can you see where?”

In her written commentary on Erin's assignments, Robin used the Suggestion strategy most often, along with the Rapport strategy. As the Tutor-Guided Course progressed, Robin frequently used the Spot the Error strategy on Erin's assignments, especially when Erin used a comma incorrectly. Robin also used the WID and Self-Editing strategies on a few of Erin's assignments. **Table 8** contains brief examples of each type of strategy Robin used in her written commentary on Erin's and Jenn's assignments.

Table 8. *Examples of Tutoring Strategies Robin Used in her Written Commentary*

Tutoring Strategy	Example from Robin’s Written Commentary
Rapport	“My summaries are always long too, I just can't force myself to let go of the details! I think that comes with confidence and depth of understanding. Oh well!”
Question	“I know brochures are more point form - but do you think this sentence could use some added information? Does the sentence stand on its own?” (Erin)
Praise	“Well done! I've notice when you write in your own voice, there are generally no issues with commas.”

Process	"I find it's easier if I re-do the intro after I've written the conclusion."
Self-Editing	"There is a word missing in this sentence. This happens to me too, one trick I use is to read my work out loud when editing."
Suggestion	"Hence is a word that is somewhat outdated. Using "which" instead would also fix the issue of verb agreement."
RR	None
Challenge	"Are there legal implications for apologizing? Is it possibly an admission of guilt?"
WID	"As his lawyer, you could also stress the potential legal implications of his choice to continue driving despite knowing that this behaviour is unsafe. E.g. liability in tort or criminal law"
Push	"But what is the take away from the case? If you read this case brief in an exam or as you were writing a memo at work, you would want a two line description of why this case matters."
P & P	"Good use of short sentences, and the way you organized the facts makes sense. Can you think of any relevant facts that are missing? Is it relevant that the teens took off after scaring the dog?"

***Findings from the Tutor-Guided Course.*** The foregoing analysis of the tutor's Weekly Reports, emails, and written commentary from the Tutor-Guided Course suggests that: (1) all four tutors applied their knowledge about the writing process; (2) all four tutors developed a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective tutoring strategies; (3) three of the four tutors adapted those strategies in a relatively balanced and flexible way to address their students' writing concerns; and (4) all four tutors followed most of

the best practices for providing written commentary. I present my interpretation of the study data in support of each of these four findings in separate sections below.

*Applying knowledge about the writing process.* All four tutors applied their knowledge about the writing process during the Tutor-Guided Course. Cynthia discussed the revision process and self-editing with Liza, and used both the Process and Self-Editing strategies in her written commentary on Liza's assignments from time-to-time. Sandy discussed proofreading with Adan and the writing process with Iris, and used the Process strategy in a few of her comments on each student's assignments. Patti discussed freewriting with Ricky, and used both the Process and Self-Editing strategies in her written commentary on Ricky's assignments on occasion. Robin discussed proofreading with Erin, and used both the Process and Self-Editing strategies when commenting on some of Erin's assignments.

*Developing a repertoire of effective tutoring strategies.* While the tutors' written data from the Tutor-Guided Course did not lend itself to an analysis of the tutors' use of four strategies specific to oral writing conferences listed in the Tutor Training Criteria, all of the tutors demonstrated the ability to use a wide array of effective directive and nondirective tutoring strategies. The four strategies I was unable to assess are: (1) active listening (Listen); (2) negotiating conference agendas that meet writers' expectations (Negotiate); (3) when addressing sentence-level concerns, focus on patterns of error (Error Patterns); and (4) addressing a limited number of comments (Limit).

Cynthia used all the Applicable Strategies. From time-to-time, she also used two directive strategies not listed in the Tutor Training Criteria (Additional Strategies). These Additional Strategies were: Praise, But (the Praise strategy followed by "but" or

“however”); and Error Correction (correcting a sentence-level error without either identifying what the error is or explaining the correction). Sandy used seven of the 11 Applicable Strategies. From time-to-time, she also used the Praise, But and Error Correction strategies. Patti used all of the Applicable Strategies. From time-to-time, she also used the additional Praise, But and Error Correction strategies. Robin used all except one of the Applicable Strategies. From time-to-time, she also used two Additional Strategies: Error Correction and Spot the Error.

*Adapting tutoring strategies in a balanced and flexible way.* The study data suggest that three of the four tutors adapted their strategy repertoires in a relatively balanced and flexible way to address their students' writing concerns. One of the tutors used only seven of the 11 Applicable Strategies, most of which were directive. The other three tutors used either all or ten of the 11 Applicable Strategies relatively equally. Also, the two tutors working with more than one student often drew on different strategies with each student.

For example, Sandy frequently used the P & P strategy on Adan's assignments and the Challenge strategy on Iris' assignments. Cynthia softened her “teacherly” approach with a lot of authentic and specific praise. Patti incorporated the nondirective RR strategy into many of her comments. And Robin used different strategies with each of her students; she also included anecdotes and confessions to reinforce her peer relationship in many of her comments.

*Following best practices for providing written commentary.* The study data suggest that all four tutors followed most of the best practices for providing written commentary. Cynthia often started her comments with the positive; always drew on

specific examples from Liza's own texts; regularly identified a problem and sometimes suggested a solution; prioritized global writing concerns over sentence-level concerns most of the time; pointed out a few patterns of sentence-level errors; and often provided both marginal and end comments, and explained the relationship between the two types of comments on occasion.

Sandy often started her comments with the positive; always drew on specific examples from Adan's and Iris' own texts; regularly identified a problem and sometimes suggested a solution; limited the number of comments, substantive changes, and questions; often prioritized global writing concerns over sentence-level concerns; pointed out a few patterns of sentence-level errors; and often provided both marginal and end comments, and regularly explained the relationship between the two types of comments.

Patti often started her comments with the positive; always drew on specific examples from Ricky's own texts; regularly identified a problem and often suggested a solution; prioritized global writing concerns over sentence-level concerns most of the time; often pointed out patterns of sentence-level errors; and provided both marginal and end comments most of the time, and regularly explained the relationship between the two types of comments.

Robin frequently started her comments with the positive; always drew on specific examples from Erin's and Jenn's own texts; regularly identified a problem and often suggested a solution; limited the number of comments, substantive changes, and questions; often prioritized global writing concerns over sentence-level concerns; frequently pointed out patterns of sentence-level errors; and provided both marginal and end comments on many of Erin's and Jenn's assignments.

### **Summary of the Study Findings**

My examination of the materials used to conduct the Class, the materials used to conduct the Supplemental Training, and the Tutors' written data from the Tutor-Guided Course suggests that most of the substantive elements of the Tutor Training Criteria are present in the LWA Tutor Training Program. Five of the criteria elements are missing; and I was unable to assess one of the criteria elements, and four of the tutoring strategies, from the study data. Of the missing elements, three relate to training in respect of the tutoring process, one relates to the tutor selection process, and the other one relates to the training format.

The five missing elements are:

- Tutors are chosen from a pool of current students based on certain natural attributes.
- Training is balanced between theory and practice.
- Tutors are introduced to current research in writing instruction.
- Tutors regularly observe and analyze conferences.
- Tutors regularly undertake self-evaluation.

I was unable to assess whether tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing, or whether the tutors used the Listen, Negotiate, Error Patterns, and Limit strategies.

Taken together, the study findings suggest that the only significant discrepancies between the LWA Tutor Training Program and the Tutor Training Criteria are that the program does not select tutors on the basis of their personal attributes, focuses more on practice than theory, and does not include regular reflective activities. The study findings

are summarized in **Table 9**.

Table 9. *The Tutor Training Criteria and the LWA Tutor Training Program*

<b>The Tutor Training Criteria and the LWA Tutor Training Program</b>
<p><b>Tutor Selection Process</b> Tutors are chosen from a pool of current student applicants based on certain natural attributes, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good listening skills;</li> <li>• patience;</li> <li>• adaptability;</li> <li>• adeptness at establishing and maintaining rapport;</li> <li>• receptivity to new learning; and</li> <li>• true concern for helping writers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Training Format</b> Tutors receive training that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• customized to the particular writing centre;</li> <li>• balanced between theory and practice;</li> <li>• based on more than a training manual; and</li> <li>• ongoing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Understanding of the Writing Process and Writing Development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tutors acquire and are able to apply knowledge about the writing process. For example, tutors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand writing as a process of investigation and discovery;</li> <li>• become aware of their own writing processes; and</li> <li>• gain insight into other writers’ writing processes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Tutors are provided with the means of continuously (and self-reflexively) developing their own writing abilities.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Disciplinary Knowledge</b> Tutors develop specialized knowledge about, and familiarity with, discipline-specific discourse conventions.</p>
<p><b>Understanding of the Tutoring Process and Tutoring Strategies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Tutors are introduced to current research in writing instruction.</li> <li>1.2 Tutors are introduced to current practices in writing instruction.</li> <li>1.3 Tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing.</li> <li>1.4 Tutors have ample opportunities to practice tutoring.</li> <li>1.5 Tutors engage in regular reflective activities, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reflecting about course content and tutoring experiences;</li> <li>• observing and analyzing conferences; and</li> <li>• undertaking self-evaluation</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Tutors develop a repertoire of effective directive and nondirective strategies, and continuously adapt these strategies in a balanced and flexible way, to address their peers’ writing concerns. For example, tutors demonstrate the ability to use the</li> </ol>

following strategies:

- build rapport;
- **actively listen**;
- ask open-ended questions;
- give specific and authentic praise;
- talk about the writing process;
- teach self-editing techniques;
- suggest revisions for writers to make on their own;
- offer a reader's response to a writer's work;
- **negotiate conference agendas that meet writers' expectations**;
- structure conferences around global writing concerns rather than sentence-level concerns
- **focus on patterns of error when addressing sentence-level concerns**;
- **address a limited number of issues**;
- evaluate and challenge writers' ideas, perspectives, and opinions;
- provide important information and guidance about disciplinary writing conventions necessary for writers to move forward with their writing;
- push writers to higher levels of thinking and writing ability; and
- praise writers' work, then push them to do more.

#### **Ability to Provide Written Commentary on Student Texts**

Tutors follow best practices for providing written commentary, such as:

- starting with the positive;
- drawing on specific examples from writers' own texts;
- identifying a problem and suggesting a solution, and offering a rationale for the solution;
- limiting the number of comments, substantive changes, and questions;
- prioritizing global writing concerns over sentence-level concerns;
- pointing out one or two patterns of sentence-level errors; and
- providing marginal and end comments, and explaining the relationship between the two types of comments.

*Note.*

Criteria elements missing from the LWA Tutor Training Program are highlighted in **red**. Criteria elements or tutoring strategies I was unable to assess from the study data are highlighted in **blue**.

In the next section, I discuss the study findings in relation to my second research question — how does the LWA Tutor Training Program measure up against the Tutor Training Criteria?

### **Measuring the LWA Tutor Training Program against the Tutor Training Criteria**

Overall, my examination of the materials used to conduct the Class, the materials used to conduct the Supplemental Training, and the Tutors' written data from the Tutor-Guided Course suggests that the LWA Tutor Training Program measures up quite well against the Tutor Training Criteria. While the program may not exemplify Brown's "magic combination", the study findings point to only a few discrepancies between the LWA Tutor Training Program and the Tutor Training Criteria. In particular, the LWA Tutor Training Program does not select tutors on the basis of their personal attributes, focuses more on practice than theory, and does not include regular reflective activities.

***Selection process.*** The selection process for the Class was unique. The spring 2012 version of the Class was a pilot course. While subsequent versions of the Class contained many of the course components described in this study, the selection process changed completely. Tutors are now selected from a pool of current student applicants on the basis of their writing and interpersonal skills. As part of the application process, students must submit a cover letter, two references, their law school transcripts, their curriculum vitae, and a brief sample of their legal writing. Short-listed applicants are usually interviewed.

***Emphasis on practice and lack of reflective activities.*** My assessment that the LWA Tutor Training Program focuses more on practice than theory is based on two specific study findings: (1) the training program does not introduce tutors to current research in writing instruction; and (2) the study data was not sufficient to determine whether tutors understand the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing. Concerning the second finding, the LWA Tutor Training Program exposed tutors to writing tutoring theory through a few brief Class lectures, two assigned readings, and three grading

training sessions. I was not able to determine what the tutors learned about the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing from that exposure, though.

What the study data did reveal was that all four tutors followed most of the best practices for providing written commentary. This finding strongly suggests that the tutors understand the theoretical foundations of one type of writing tutoring — providing written commentary. Observing and analyzing tutors' conferences during the Supplemental Training and Tutor-Guided Course would have provided more insight into the tutors' understanding of the theories underlying the other type of writing tutoring — one-to-one writing conferences.

While most current writing centre scholars agree that tutor training should be balanced between theory and practice, the scholarship offers little guidance about how to achieve that balance. What the literature does suggest is that the weighting of these two training components should vary depending on the training needs of each writing centre, and that an emphasis on practice is better than an emphasis on theory. In order to avoid tipping the scales in favour of theory, current literature strongly recommends that tutor training programs do two things: (1) use training manuals and other forms of writing centre scholarship as supplemental resources only; and (2) provide tutors with frequent opportunities to observe and analyze both videotaped and live writing conferences. While the LWA Tutor Training Program does the former, it does not do the latter.

In the next chapter, I consider the significance of the study results, discuss the study limitations, and propose directions for future research.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I summarize the study results and discuss some limitations of the study. In the second section, I describe the improvements made to the LWA Tutor Training Program as a result of this study. In the final section, I propose directions for future research

### **Study Results and Limitations**

This study developed a set of theory-supported criteria for designing and evaluating effective tutor-training programs in discipline-specific writing centres. It then assessed whether the criteria are present in a tutor-training program at an Eastern Ontario law school.

The study results indicate that the law school's tutor-training program meets most of the criteria derived from the literature, strongly suggesting that the program is effective. The program's only significant shortcomings are that it does not select tutors on the basis of their personal attributes, it focuses more on practice than theory, and it does not include regular reflective activities.

While the study results are encouraging, my analysis was limited by the study data. In particular, I was not able to fully assess whether two components of the theory-supported criteria, as they relate to one-to-one conferences, are present in the law school's training program — the tutors' understanding of the theoretical foundations of tutoring writing, and the tutors' ability to use all of the effective tutoring strategies listed in the criteria. Although the nature of the Tutor-Guided Course did not allow for faculty observation of the tutors' conferences, with more time and foresight, I would have observed and analyzed some of the tutors' conferences during the Supplemental Training

in a more focused way, and conducted formal interviews with some of the writers who participated in those conferences. Collecting this additional data would have enriched my analysis and rounded out the results.

Another limitation with the study data is that it was drawn from a small sample of four tutors and six writers, not allowing me to make any generalizations about the study results.

### **Improvements to the LWA Tutor Training Program Resulting from this Study**

As a result of this study, we have made a few changes to the LWA Tutor Training Program. In addition to the new tutor selection process described in the previous chapter, the program introduces tutors to more theory, offers tutors more observation opportunities, and includes more reflective activities. A customized tutoring handbook is now a required reading during the Class, and a mandatory resource for the one-on-one conferences and grading sessions. The handbook contains guidelines for conducting writing conferences and providing written commentary; copies of theory-related journal articles and a bibliography of additional optional theoretical readings; legal writing resources for both tutors and writers; and suggestions for tutors' ongoing self-assessment (the Tutoring Handbook).

Self-assessment activities suggested in the Tutoring Handbook include: (a) keeping a conferencing journal to jot down personal impressions and observations of conferencing experiences as they arise; (b) completing a personal checklist of conferencing skills from time-to-time; and (c) completing a Conferencing Typology every now and again to help tutors become more aware of their personal conferencing styles as they evolve.

Before tutors begin to practice, they now analyze a videotaped demonstration conference, observe a live conference conducted by an experienced tutor, and complete a Writing Conference Observation Assignment. The Writing Conference Observation Assignment asks tutors to do four specific things: (1) summarize the conference they observed by identifying the main topics discussed and tutoring strategies used to address each topic; (2) analyze the experienced tutor's use of the strategies identified by answering several guiding questions; (3) explain how the conferencing process they observed reflects elements of the process described in the Tutoring Handbook and discussed in class; and (4) discuss their observation experience with me.

### **Directions for Future Research**

While analyzing the study data, I noticed that all of the four tutors demonstrated different tutoring styles and used a few tutoring strategies that were inconsistent with their training. For example, three of the tutors used the Praise, But strategy, all of the tutors used the Error Correction strategy, and one of the tutors used the Spot the Error strategy. I also noticed that two of the tutors' written comments were frequently fraught with proofreading errors.

These observations raised the following questions:

- What factors shape tutors' developing roles and practices?
- Why do tutors transfer some of the teachings from their training to their practices and not others?
- What steps can be taken to ensure tutors transfer the teachings from their training to their practices?

I hope this study will encourage others to explore these questions.

Despite the limitations with the data, I believe that this study makes a valuable contribution to the field of Writing Studies by being the first to provide a set of theory-supported criteria for designing and evaluating the training provided to peer tutors in discipline-specific writing centres. The study also describes a novel and innovative program for training law-student writing tutors. I hope that others will draw on both the training program and the set of criteria to help them design and evaluate their own unique approaches to training discipline-specific peer writing tutors.

## Appendix A

## Ethics Clearance Form



**Carleton University Research Office**  
 Research Ethics Board  
 1325 Dunton Tower  
 1125 Colonel By Drive  
 Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada  
 Tel: 613-520-2517  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

**Ethics Clearance Form**

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical clearance. The REB found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* and, the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

**X New clearance**
 **Renewal of original clearance**
**Original date of clearance:**

Date of clearance **20 March 2014**  
 Researcher **Shelley Appleby-Ostroff, Master's Student**  
 Department **School of Linguistics and Language Studies**  
 Supervisor **Prof. Graham Smart, School of Linguistics and Language Studies**  
 Project number **101217**  
 Title of project **Preparing for practice: How law students use writing feedback from their peers**

Clearance expires: **31 May 2015**

**All researchers are governed by the following conditions:**

**Annual Status Report:** You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

**Changes to the project:** Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

**Adverse events:** Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

**Suspension or termination of clearance:** Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

  
 Andy Adler, Chair  
 Carleton University Research Ethics Board

  
 Louise Heslop, Vice-Chair  
 Carleton University Research Ethics Board

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