

PEER TUTORING HANDBOOK

2021-2022



Undergraduate Writing Program



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Section 1: Introduction to ICT and PT

The **Undergraduate Writing Program** at Ashoka University aims to initiate students into active reading, critical thinking and reasoning, and analytical writing - all of which are fundamental to a liberal arts curriculum. In other words, along with cultivating strong writing and reading practices, students learn how to scrutinize their unstated assumptions, develop the ability to understand multiple perspectives, and recognize that asking thoughtful questions is often more intellectually productive than knowing a “correct” answer.

There are two types of Critical Thinking courses that require Peer Tutors:

Introduction to Critical Thinking (ICT) is a compulsory foundational course for students in the first year of college. Students are introduced to the basics of persuasive and argumentative writing in ICT classes, to the fundamentals of research, as well as to the various styles of citations. Emphasis is placed on how to make a persuasive argument by entering into conversation with other writers, including one’s fellow students.

In the process, the student learns how to respond appropriately to different kinds of writing situations, apply critical reading skills to support their writing, and integrate sources to make more effective arguments. That these courses are not associated with any particular majors allow students to experiment with a broad variety of writing genres (Personal Essays, Research Papers, Op-Eds, Reviews, etc.) and themes, drawing from a multitude of disciplines, thereby promoting the interdisciplinary approach which is central to the academic ethos at Ashoka.

The second kind of ICT classes are offered to students who require **English Language Training (ELT)**, who have worked with English as a second language in school. ELT classes aim to increase the students’ level of comfort with communication and writing in English. Peer Tutors and instructors in these courses focus on activities and assignments that ease students into the use of the language, not just in their academic lives, but in other settings too. The Centre for Writing and Communication (CWC) works closely with ELT students on their language skills. These courses also aim to nurture a close reading of material handed out to students and aim to develop academic writing and presentation skills they might require in other classes.

What is the Peer Tutor program?

The **Peer Tutor program** is a four-year old program that connects third and fourth-year students with incoming students, who have no idea what ICT will be like. As a Peer Tutor, you will be assigned to an ICT class and will work with that cohort, through tasks such as brainstorming for assignments, gauging student writing, and holding office hours. You will also work closely with the instructor, perhaps designing activities related to critical thinking/writing or even holding a

class or two, thus building your skills as a leader in the classroom. In other words, you are sharing your experience as a writer at Ashoka and helping others benefit from your journey. Being students yourselves, not only have you taken ICT and many other courses first-year students are taking, but you also keep the same hours as them, making you their peers as well as tutors. This ensures that your insights on academic writing and related struggles come from a space of empathy that leads students into becoming more confident writers. Testimonies from the past couple of years have proved that this bond makes the program an excellent resource for Ashokans. Developing this program allows us to cultivate more peer-led communities in Ashoka, which is ideal for a writing-intensive liberal arts curriculum.

Section 2: Eligibility Criteria, Application and Selection for the PT Program

To become a part of the PT Program, you - as a candidate - are required to fill in an application form released to the entire cohort of rising third and fourth-year students in the month of June. The form itself includes a sample paper for which you are required to give feedback, focusing on the aspects of writing you think are essential for a piece of critical analysis. You are asked to pay attention to the writer's unity of thought, coherence in structure, their claims, evidence and use of grammar and syntax. The purpose of the entire application process is to assess a candidate's performance across the following criteria that are essential for Peer Tutors:

1. The ability to analyze and close-read written material, and conduct textual criticism.
2. Familiarity with different forms of writing (Personal essays, Reviews, Argumentative and Academic essays) as well as prevalent writing formats (MLA/ APA/ Chicago).
3. Experience in making presentations with the competence to articulate ideas coherently and clearly.
4. Good and empathetic interpersonal skills.
5. The ability to provide extensive (and encouraging) feedback on writing and other academic work.

Apart from the requirements mentioned above, candidates may also be asked to design activities or sessions to be carried out in class. Candidates applying to the ELT program are required to possess certain skills, such as the ability to design activities outside the classroom to increase students' comfort with the use of the English language.

Candidates are shortlisted on the basis of these applications, after which they are to sit for a short interview with a panel comprising Instructors who head the PT program. Once you have gone through the two rounds of selection, you are required to submit a No Objection Certificate (NOC). A final list of candidates and a waitlist is decided upon, and finally, candidates and instructors are assigned to one another on the basis of compatibility between their schedules. In case there are issues with selected candidates being able to commit to the program or the instructors' schedule, they are replaced with candidates from the waitlist.

Section 3: Allotment of Peer Tutors to Instructors and Courses

Tutors will be allotted either ICT or ELT sections. You will be able to access section schedules and course descriptions for the upcoming semester on the official website of the Undergraduate Writing Program. Based on this, you must send across a list of three section preferences in descending order to the hiring panel, keeping in mind your own timetables and interests in course content.

The panel will proceed to assign tutors their sections after receiving preferences from the entire PT team. During the allotment process, if tutors are found to have the same section preferences at the same rank of priority, a process of randomization will be conducted to ensure a fair match.

For example, if there is an overlap in the first preference for a pool of tutors, the randomization will ensure that one candidate is assigned to that particular section; the rest of the tutors in the pool will now have their second preferences treated as their first. It is expected that exact overlaps will dwindle as one goes down the lists and three preferences from each tutor will allow the panel to carry out allotments without favor. In this manner, each tutor's preference can be accommodated fairly - you will be assigned classes based on both convenience and interest.

Section 4: Responsibilities of a Peer Tutor: Inside and Outside the Class

As a Peer Tutor, you are required to complete about five hours of work per week - this includes attending classes, holding office hours, and doing any other task as required. Remember that your job as a Peer Tutor is not to "fix" a student's paper. Rather, it is to show them the nature of their mistakes and offer solutions. In order to do that effectively, Peer Tutors must hold regular office hours for the following:

- 1. Ideation:** Brainstorm essay topics/help students formulate and narrow down ideas. You could suggest additional articles or critical essays that might help, from both offline sources and online journals and magazines such as JSTOR, *The Economist*, and *The New Yorker*. Then, even if students are struggling with writing and articulation, at least the arguments are still their own.
- 2. Feedback:** You must go over drafts and give students detailed feedback on their work, ranging from argument, structure and strength of analysis to grammar and syntax. However, refrain from editing a paper for content. This means that you may point out if their arguments aren't working in their current form, and suggest restructuring sentences, whole paragraphs, or suggest techniques, such as exploring an argument from a different point of view, if relevant. In other words, work only with what they have given you: do *not* suggest what *you* would have written. Return to grammatical basics if necessary, but avoid completely rewriting their work with your own. Finally, the most detailed feedback should typically be for first drafts, followed by briefer feedback thereafter.
- 3. Grading:** You are not required to do any grading of assignments. You may be required to give feedback to students for shorter class assignments that the instructor is not grading. Do not tell them what grade a paper is likely to receive. Not only can that dilute the focus on writing skills, but the instructor's expectations for certain grade boundaries might also differ from yours. The same applies for assignments graded by the instructor.

4. Citations: Reinforce the need for correct citations. One of the most daunting challenges for first-years is to learn how to properly cite their sources for an academic paper in order to avoid plagiarism. Tutors must not complete citations on behalf of a student. Instead, they should guide students towards resources, both, those available online - such as Purdue OWL and Chicago Manual - and the ones shared with them by their own instructors. Further, if needed, tutors should encourage instructors and CWC to hold workshops and address any subsequent concerns regarding citations during class hours as this would allow first-years to master the process by themselves.

5. Classes: Peer tutors are required to attend classes, and also to conduct a class every now and then, as per the instructor's need, for example, if they are on leave. Feel free to help students with doubts on material discussed in class as well.

6. Independent session: Peer tutors are encouraged to conduct a session for the class on a subject of their choosing. You can discuss this option with your instructor if interested, so that they can allot a date for your independently conducted class. The purpose of this exercise is not just to expose the students to new perspectives and information, but also to provide a teaching opportunity to PTs.

7. Further support: While you are not permitted to give feedback for papers from their other courses, feel free to suggest to students courses they could take in upcoming semesters. Students may also reach out to PTs for non-academic support, such as general concerns surrounding college. It is up to you to draw boundaries and determine the extent to which you are comfortable providing this support while remaining professional. Remember that this should not take precedence over your work for this course, and your own health and time.

Working in an ELT class

Peer tutors working in the ELT program are entrusted with additional responsibilities and it is possible that their involvement in improving their students' writing and communication skills can often go over and beyond that of Peer Tutors in regular ICTs. You may be required to design grammar building activities - such as short skits and games - with the instructors, to help ease students into use of the English language, which may often take place outside of class hours as well. You must also be familiar with additional resources that might be useful to students in the ELT program, for example, *High School Wren & Martin*.

Unlike standard assignment feedback, while Peer Tutors definitely have to look at grammar, style and syntax, you should not get too caught up in stylistic concerns. Instead, looking past these errors to help bring forth, as succinctly as possible, the idea and the arguments offered by the students are more beneficial. Most importantly, you must actively check your behavior to avoid being patronizing or condescending. Your job is simply to assist in bettering the articulation of their papers.

Meetings

The larger chunk of the recommended five hours of work per week should be devoted to holding office hours. You can set meeting slots as per your discretion -- typically, meetings of less than 15 minutes are held for either brain-storming before a paper, or to go over feedback ranging from content, argument, and strength of analysis to grammar, syntax and structure. Longer meetings, of greater than 15 mins, should be for exhaustive feedback, where students bring in completed drafts. We also recommend telling your students to mail their drafts to you a couple of hours or a day in advance so that you have sufficient time to skim through it, or give detailed feedback. Be clear in stating that students should not bombard you with drafts a few hours before an assignment is due! Rather, set a time limit - say, 24 to 36 hours before the deadline - after which you will not go over any writing.

Finally, all meetings MUST only be held in public spaces such as residence hall common rooms, Student Commons, or the mess. Holding office hours in one's room is strictly prohibited and can lead to disciplinary action.

In an online setting, this means that office hours should not be held late into the night or in any manner that may cause concern. Thus, the stipulated time during which office hours must be held is **9 am to 9 pm**, regardless of the day of the week. Exceptions can be made in case of working with an international student -- the time will be mutually decided upon by both parties to ensure maximum professionalism. A detailed code of conduct is outlined in the next section: 'Relationships with Students, Instructors and the PT Team.

Things to Avoid

1. **Working with students from other ICT sections/courses:** Avoid providing feedback to assignments students might bring you from courses apart from ICT, simply because you may not have the knowledge to adequately deal with their work, and it only adds to your workload. Further, it is advised that Peer Tutors do not work with students from other ICT sections as well. In such situations, tutors are advised to direct students towards the TAs/TFs/PTs assigned for that specific course. Important exemption: Students from ELT classes often ask for help in their coursework from other classes they are taking. This is mainly because TA/TFs have often ignored requests for extra assistance. Moreover, ELT students sometimes look to ICT PTs and Instructors as more reliable sources of help because they have spent long hours with them in intimate class-settings. In this case, please extend your support as far as possible, or even enlist the help of someone in the CWC to work on this together.
2. **Logistical/administrative work:** Peer Tutors should keep in mind that your role is not to perform administrative tasks on behalf of the instructor, such as fetching printouts, scanning readings etc. Instead, your primary task is to keep themselves informed of changing course requirements, familiarize yourselves with the grading rubric for the course, keep a note of specific judgment criteria for particular assignments shared with you and utilize this information in order to provide effective feedback to enhance students' learning.

Negotiable Nature of Responsibilities

While key details about a PT's responsibilities have been outlined in this handbook, it is possible that your experience may differ based on your relationship with the instructor and students. We recommend that you work with your instructor to establish clear terms of your work, whether that remains limited to the tasks mentioned in the handbook or surpasses them based on your personal willingness to do more. While there's a clear set of rules regarding what you are required to do and absolutely cannot be asked to do, other tasks may fall within a grey area, and you can choose for yourself whether or not you're comfortable taking them up. In an online setting this may include helping the instructor with Zoom meetings, sending out emails, etc. In case you feel uncertain navigating a new situation, feel free to reach out to the PT coordinators or discuss your quandary in the monthly meeting.

Section 5: Relationships with Students, Instructors and the PT Team

The effectiveness of the PT program hinges on the relationships developed between tutors and their students. While the nature of this relationship is mostly left to the discretion of individual tutors, the significance of this role dictates the need for some guidelines to help tutors navigate through their responsibilities and establish well-defined boundaries.

Code of Conduct:

1. Peer tutors are expected to maintain a **strictly professional relationship** with all their students. Office hours should be utilized to develop a relationship with students and other types of informal gatherings/interactions should be avoided. You should recognize that your job entails providing feedback for critical assignments: perceived partiality towards certain students will not only undermine a tutor's authority but will also reflect poorly on the authenticity of the PT program.
2. Office hours **must** be held between **9 am-9 pm** by all tutors. However, exceptions to this rule will arise if Peer Tutors are assigned international students, in which case the concerned tutor will have the discretion to set up slots at a time suitable for both parties.
3. All meetings must be held in **public spaces**. During the period that the semester is held online, tutors must hold meetings on platforms such as **Google Meet and Zoom**. Further, all correspondence related to Peer Tutoring should be carried out **via mail** and you are strongly advised against sharing their phone numbers with students, or connecting with them on social media. Maintaining only a formal channel of communication will help the panel map any transgressions if the need arises and thereby ensure an overtly professional space.
4. As a Peer Tutor, you must be cognizant of **language** use in engaging with students. While informal language usage is expected, tutors should ensure that conversations remain **professionally appropriate** throughout.

5. Transgressions on either front, that is either by a tutor or a student, should be **immediately disclosed to both the panel and the instructor**. This will allow for the address of any conflicts of interest and will also protect the tutor from accusations in the future. Once notified, the panel will step in to resolve the issue with the help of the instructor. This is further detailed in Section 6.
6. If a student shares **sensitive personal information** which the tutor believes could impact their well-being it must be **flagged immediately with the Peer Tutor panel**. This will be elaborated upon further in Section 6 and Section 8, which address frequently faced issues and redressal mechanisms respectively.
7. Finally, you must maintain **strict confidentiality regarding your students' grades and performance** in class. Tutors are also advised to refrain from expressing their own opinions regarding a students' performance in class or predict any grades for submitted assignments.

The relationship between Peer Tutors and their instructors is essential towards understanding the vision for the course and in particular the specific expectations from students enrolled in it. Without timely meetings and proper communication, it will be difficult for tutors to gauge specific requirements for each assignment, which will hamper the ability to provide useful feedback. Moreover, as peers, tutors are privy to important feedback which students may hesitate to share directly with their instructors. Thus, Peer Tutors facilitate an indirect channel of communication between the primary stakeholders in a classroom, thereby holding the potential to enhance the quality of classes for both parties.

All Peer Tutors shortlisted for a semester will form the PT team, which also includes the coordinators on the Peer Tutor panel. Monthly meetings with the PT team - elaborated upon in Section 8 - should be treated as an opportunity to engage with fellow tutors who are sharing this challenging experience. The motivation of the PT team should be to act as a support system for each other and therefore allow meetings to become a space to collectively come up with effective tutoring tactics that could enhance the efficiency of individual tutors and the PT program as a whole.

Section 6: Frequently Faced Issues: Mental Health, Time Management, Relevant Feedback, Regular Meetings, In-Class Presence

A couple of points to note regarding frequently faced issues:

1. **Mental health:** as mentioned earlier, it may occur that a student often confides in a Peer Tutor, sharing with them not just about their lives at Ashoka, but also sensitive information about themselves, their home situation and so on. Students' personal issues are not for you to take on, simply because you are not equipped to deal with serious situations, and it will take a toll on you as well. In the case that certain information may be detrimental to the student or others around them -- while you should encourage the student to speak to their Resident Assistant, or even direct them to the Ashoka Center for

Well Being (ACWB) -- you should **immediately** notify the Peer Tutor coordinators. They will employ the redressal mechanism and take it up with the relevant persons. The idea is not to compromise trust and confidentiality, but rather to avoid situations where you are the only holder of sensitive information, and should something go wrong, you may needlessly find yourself emotionally burdened. Needless to say, this information and the identities of persons concerned will not be disclosed to anyone outside of the panel and those directly involved in the matter.

3. **Time management:** as mentioned above, office hours can be held as per your convenience but strictly within the **9 am-9 pm** slot. Make sure that neither work nor health is compromised.
4. **Relevant feedback:** it would help to check with the instructor to make absolutely sure what they expect of a particular draft or assignment to avoid double feedback and further confusion. Make it a practice to meet with your instructor outside of class on a regular basis.
5. **Regular meetings:** Peer Tutors should meet students as often as needed, ideally a minimum of once a week. There may not be the need for this every week, but remember that often, their ICT deadlines might be close to or coincide with your own academic deadlines, leaving you caught between doing either one properly. It is recommended that you tell students to meet you regularly, such that neither you nor they have a large chunk of work to finish all at once for an assignment, especially around midterms and finals week.
6. **In-class presence:** you will be required to attend classes as per the instructor's requirement. In a semester, you can bill for no more than 15 classes, although you are free to attend more than that if you wish. However, it is important that you attend those classes in which important information is communicated, so that everyone is on the same page. This includes, but is not limited to, the first class of the semester, classes where assignments are outlined and so on.

Section 7: Logistics - Contracts, Logging in Hours and Salary Invoices

1. Contracts

Each Peer Tutor will be provided with a contract for their employment under the PT program. The contract will contain details of your employment including responsibilities and compensation, and will be made available through the Human Resources department of the University. Tutors are responsible for signing and returning the contract to the department within a stipulated time period. For classes in semesters conducted online, the Peer Tutors may be sent this contract virtually within the first ten days of the beginning of the semester.

2. Logging in Hours

All Peer Tutors are also required to log in the number of hours worked for the program on a Google sheet that will be provided. The sheet will record the number of hours spent with the students. It is important to fill this form on a weekly basis - this acts as corroboration of work hours for reimbursement, while ensuring that tutors do not lose track of work hours from week to week. The sheet will have two columns under which you can log hours - Prep hours and Office hours. Under Prep hours you can log in time spent preparing for office hours/ sessions, including but not limited to completing readings, research, and meeting with the instructor. Under office hours/ sessions you are required to list the students you have interacted with and the total time you spent with them. Limit weekly work hours to a maximum of 5 to ensure smooth reimbursement -- which is to say, working over the limit will not be compensated.

An extract from the sheet detailing required sections for any week is attached below:

Name	Class Hours	Prep Hours	Office Hours	Students Consulted	Total for week 1
X					

Keep in mind that all work you do for the PT program is billable. What matters is the total number of hours that you contribute - how you divide that time between prep work, class hours, and office hours is up to you.

3. Salary Invoices

Salary invoices are documents that Peer Tutors are required to submit to the program in order to receive reimbursement. All tutors are required to send in their invoices to the panel of coordinators by the 28th of each month, typically during the mandated monthly meetings. Coordinators will then be responsible for forwarding these invoices to the finance department and the tutors can expect to receive payment within 15 days of sending in their invoices.

In order to avoid payment delays and backlogs, all criteria on the invoices need to be carefully filled out including: the name of the concerned person, address details, active/ correct contact number, active/ correct email id, invoice submission date, invoice number, payment claimed details like from __ to __ months should be mentioned with the calculation on per hour basis as per contract, the total amount claimed in figures as well as in words, PAN details, bank details with payments to be made in favor of (Peer Tutor's bank account details only), signatures (digitally signed).

A sample of the invoice is attached on the next page:

Name of Student:

Date of Birth

Address:

Mobile No:

Email id:

CLIENT DETAIL

Ashoka University
Plot No. 2, Rajiv Gandhi Education City
Kundli, NCR, Haryana

Date:

Invoice No:

DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT (Rs.)
Remuneration for the month of :	
Description of Work : Peer Tutor Programme for ICT	
1) Partner with a writing-intensive course, e.g. a Critical Thinking Seminar or Foundation course (or others) 2) Work with faculty member to devise supplementary writing activities for the students 3) Provide writing mentorship to the students of the course, including: a) Meeting the students of that course (during class time or separately scheduled) to assist them with their work b) Enhancing student comprehension of the class material, to improve quality of written responses	Rate = Rs. 250/hour
	250 x (number of hours)
Total Amount (Rs.):	

PAN NO:

Please make a cheque/ payment in favour of: (your name)

Bank Details:-

Bank Name :

Account No :

IFSC Code :

Branch Add. :

Signature: (add electronic signature)

Date: 28.05.2020

Section 8: Redressal Systems - Monthly Meetings

We have **mandated monthly meetings** between all tutors and coordinators to ensure that the PT program is on track and is able to serve students better with each passing semester. These meetings will provide a platform for tutors to voice their grievances and also share experiences with each other. The meetings will be held on the 28th of each month and Peer Tutors are highly encouraged to participate in them as this is an important medium for the program to gauge the efficiency of its conduct. Peer tutors will also be required to **hand in their monthly invoices** on the same day.

These meetings also provide an opportunity for tutors to interact with the coordinators of the Undergraduate Writing Program who play an essential role in the redressal mechanism. It is encouraged that any transgressions made to the code of conduct by any individual involved in the Peer Tutoring program be at once reported to the panel of coordinators during the meetings or in private. The students will be encouraged by instructors to report any complaints they may have pertaining to their Peer Tutor to their instructors, who can then forward them to the panel. Upon receiving reports of transgressions, the panel will be responsible for carrying out required actions which might include:

1. Changing the class slot given to a Peer Tutor
2. Forwarding complaints to relevant disciplinary committees on campus.
3. Dismissing tutors from the Undergraduate Writing Program entirely

Section 9: PT Coordinators

The Undergraduate Writing Program mandates the formation of a panel of coordinators who are to assist tutors with any confusion they might have in relation to the program, or any logistical support they might need. Coordinators also carry out a range of administrative duties for the program such as checking and filing invoices, conducting workshops, updating the program's documentation such as the handbook, organizing orientations and workshops on the PT code-of-conduct (August), advising in hiring processes and employing necessary redressal mechanisms when required.

Coordinators are typically picked from the 4th year batch of the Undergraduate student body and are most likely to be individuals who have had previous experience working with the program. In order to apply as a coordinator, interested candidates must register their interest in a form which is circulated at the end of every spring semester and open to aspiring 4th-year candidates. Coordinators are chosen by a panel of UWP instructors and previous coordinators. The selection is typically based on questions that assess their commitment to the program and their ideas to improve the program.

Section 10: Concluding Remarks

The Peer Tutor Handbook aims to provide an overview of your position as a Peer Tutor working under Ashoka University's Undergraduate Writing Program. We have tried to be as exhaustive as possible while detailing the code of conduct and your responsibilities in the program, but of course, it is not within anyone's capacity to account for the many ways interactions with instructors or peers could go. We trust in you to hold this position with the utmost professionalism and dedication, meanwhile not forgetting to enjoy yourself in what could easily be one of the most rewarding roles you play in your time at the university. If you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to us via email, we will get back to you at the earliest.

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