

RGASC Writing Instructor Explains Why You Should Book an Appointment

Dr. Patti Luedecke has been helping students understand and ace assignments for four years.

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Right now, students can book an appointment with a writing instructor to provide personalized assistance with a writing assignment. Among the staff you might be paired up with is Dr. Patti Luedecke, a writing instructor who has been with the RGASC for four years and who has seen hundreds of students in that time.

“We mostly focus on argumentation, structure, big things that are going to make a big impact on the clarity of your writing,” says Luedecke.

Luedecke holds a PhD in English from Western University and has studied writing in Toronto Metropolitan University’s publishing program. She provides writing skills support at teaching centres across UofT’s campuses and currently works at the RGASC every Monday.

Her work is split between one-on-one and group appointments. These sessions are built around the specific needs of the students. They bring in an assignment that they need help with, and she helps the student achieve what is being asked of them. This begins with the deceptively simple process of understanding what exactly is being asked of them.

“Often professors will have fairly lengthy assignment descriptions, so just the fact of coming in and sitting down and parsing out the assignment description into actual tasks is a pretty important

first step,” says Luedecke. “Just going through the assignment description can be quite illuminating for everyone.”

After that, Luedecke and fellow writing instructors get a sense for how far the student has progressed. Sometimes, that means finding out they haven’t got past the brainstorming phase. But the instructors are equipped to help out with every portion of an assignment, whether it’s developing a research question, taking a pass over a draft, refining paragraphs, or polishing a final copy.

“We usually talk about what the priorities are for the meeting. Do you want to focus on structure? Do you want to focus on paragraph development? Do you want to focus on refining the thesis even further? Do you want to talk about conclusions?”

Luedecke makes it clear that writing appointments are guided by the student and the parameters of their assignment. The RGASC does not offer pre-determined tutoring sessions; it supports students in the present. Luedecke praises this aspect of the appointments as “invaluable,” because students are able to learn through experience directly related to them and work they need to complete, rather than generalized lessons.

The RGASC has been offering writing appointments for many years, long before Luedecke joined the staff. The operations have expanded significantly since the 1990s when the centre first opened, as the RGASC settled into a large space in the MN building with several rooms dedicated to one-on-one and group appointments. Though the scope of the centre has expanded, the writing appointments themselves haven’t changed much.

“That core offering of the one-on-one to really help people internalize things and develop as writers hasn't changed, and I think that the interest in that and the usefulness of that will be ongoing,” Luedecke says.

There is also a fair bit of challenge involved in these writing appointments for the instructor. Luedecke says that parsing out lengthy and complicated assignment descriptions can often get confusing, with the student and instructor struggling to decipher guidelines and how to prioritize them. This sort of back and forth is an important part of the process to her though, as it gives the student a separate perspective to work through things and figure out what they need to do.

The writing appointments foster this dynamic between student and instructor, which is why Luedecke hasn't run into any troubles with AI generated work or students with below average literacy. The RGASC is built on students taking the initiative to come to them with their academic struggles, and it encourages anybody who needs support to take the first step towards their own improvement.

“I work with students across four writing centers at U of T, and you know, I'm busy from 9 in the morning till 6 at night every day. So I haven't particularly noticed challenges in that way. Students seem to be very active and very interested in developing their writing skills.”

Students can book in-person or online writing appointments through a portal available on the RGASC website.