Teachers:
How to Help Your Students to Use SMARTHINKING's OWL

SMARTHINKING's Online Writing Lab (OWL) is a great resource for students writing at all levels of proficiency in many different disciplines. The OWL supports college-level writing and complements on-campus Writing Centers. If your campus does not have a Writing Center, SMARTHINKING's professional writing tutors and resources can help fill the gap, encouraging your students to succeed.

If students sign on early and use the OWL regularly, their writing can develop more fully by the end of a term. Our experience is that the most successful way to get students using the OWL is through their professors’ encouragement. We’ve found that when students use the OWL once, they tend to return.

The OWL offers four basic types of service:

1. **Essay Center:** The "Essay Center," an asynchronous service, allows students to send an essay draft to e-structors for response. E-structors do not edit, proofread, or "fix," papers. Instead, they coach writers, providing responses that probe, question, and encourage students to strengthen their drafts. Students can access the "Essay Center" from their SMARTHINKING homepages by clicking "Submit your writing." They fill in required course and assignment information, and select the kinds of help they want; then they attach their papers to the submission form. Returned papers go to the students' homepage Inboxes for review and archiving. In their responses, tutors emphasize "higher order concerns" such as ideas, content development, focus, and organization. Second, as appropriate, tutors address one or two significant "lower order concerns," such as sentence structure, mechanics, or punctuation. Often, tutors will model a sentence-level correction that will enable the student to find and correct a similar pattern of problems throughout the essay. If a student has visited the OWL before, his/her "writer's history" is available to e-structors, enabling the tutors to create a more contextualized response.

2. **Live Writing:** is a synchronous service that allows students to work one-to-one in "real time" with e-structors. In this modality, students can ask e-structors for assistance in developing an idea, a thesis, content, organizing concepts, assistance with phrase, sentence and paragraph-level issues such as punctuation, run-on or fragmented sentences, and phrasing. Students and e-structors work on a "whiteboard,"(which resembles a chalkboard). Ideally, the tutorials become study aids for developing student writing. Students can access the "Live Writing Center" from their SMARTHINKING homepages by selecting the “writing” designation from the toolbar below the "Connect With an E-structor Now" icon. Directly after the tutorial is completed, students can print the whiteboard interaction. After e-structors have "post processed" tutorials, a copy will be archived in students' homepage Inboxes for future review.

3. **Asynchronous Help Center:** The "Asynchronous Help Center" enables students to submit questions to e-structors by "mailing" them. From their home page, students can send a question, by selecting the appropriate subject from the pull-down menu beneath the “Submit a Question” icon. E-structors will respond usually within 24 hours. Students can return to their homepages and review e-structors' comments. Their questions and answers will be stored for review and archiving in their homepage Inboxes.
4. **Student Writer's Handbooks:** Finally, the OWL offers students unlimited access to its "Student Writer's Handbook," a series of interactive learning modules focused on the writing process (e.g., Purpose, Audience, Process [forthcoming], Style, and Grammar). A second handbook, the "ESL Writer's Handbook," includes modules especially written for ESL students: Sentence-level Problems and Writing in American Colleges (forthcoming).

Here are some suggestions for integrating the OWL's services into your classes:

- Schedule time at the end of a class to go to the computer lab and walk your students through a live tutorial session. Students can create an account, orient themselves to the site, and see which areas are most relevant to your course.

- Remind students about SMARTHINKING at the end of a class period, and give extra encouragement to those students who are unhappy with their status after midterms. You can even monitor their extra efforts to improve grades by requesting to see the work they are doing with our e-structors.

- Encourage students with failing grades to visit SMARTHINKING e-structors and bring in a copy of their interactions. This can help both the student and the instructor to understand better the areas in which the student needs extra attention.

- Reward students who write more than one draft for an upcoming writing assignment by giving extra credit to those students who submit their first draft to the OWL. On-campus students might attach e-structor comments with their first draft when turning in the final draft, and distance-learning students might email the document to you as an attachment.

- Build use of SMARTHINKING's services into your syllabus.

- Tell students that they can receive live help with grammar questions in our "Grammar Center," or get started on an essay in our "Brainstorming Center." Students who are stumped on how to begin assignments such as their humanities papers or journalism stories can find direction by working synchronously with an e-structor.

- Dispel the notion that SMARTHINKING's OWL is only for students having trouble with course material. All students need learning support at one time or another, and writing tutorials can help them to see their writing as a dialogue taking place with real readers, responding individually to their work.