Writing Mentors: because writers need readers...
Hmmm...is this what I mean? Should this sentence go first? Do I need this sentence? Did I define x? Do I need to? Is this word better? Do I need this paragraph? Should this word be capitalised?

When you write, you likely ask similar questions as you read your own drafts. Better writers read their own writing critically, and the more experienced a writer is, the more naturally they assume the reader’s stance and question what they have written from the reader’s perspective. As a Writing Mentor, you are the student’s critical reader, modelling what you would do if it were your own writing: ask a lot of questions!

1. **Writing Mentors are critical readers**
   Writing Mentors don’t judge or evaluate what they read; they help writers find their own answers. To do this, you read critically and engage your students in discussions of their topics so they can develop their ideas and practise the kinds of discourses they will be writing. You may offer feedback, ask questions about what you have read or verbally rephrase it to see if that was the meaning the student intended.

2. **Writing Mentors read writing from a variety of courses and levels**
   No matter what your area or level of study, you can help students from other disciplines and levels and give feedback on writing of any form (lab reports, essays, law documents). In fact, the less you know about a topic, the easier it may be to ask useful questions: What is the assignment asking you to do? What is an x? Where do you define it?

3. **Writing Mentors help students at any level of writing proficiency**
   Even professional writers have others read their work and give feedback before publishing because writing is about communicating as clearly as possible, and it is very difficult for anyone—even experienced writers—to know how different people will ‘interpret’ what they have written. The more feedback a writer can get from good readers, the better.

4. **Writing Mentors focus on a student’s individual needs**
   To start a session, find out what the student needs or wants. You should consider the student’s present situation, assignment requirements, past writing history, general writing habits and approaches to learning, attitudes, motivation, and whatever else is needed to determine how to proceed. Encourage the student to help set the agenda for their session, but use your own knowledge if necessary to guide them down the most helpful path.

5. **Writing Mentors help students understand academic writing expectations**
   Many students are unaware of audience and may not understand why they are being asked to write (e.g., to show they understand the topic rather than have perfect grammar). Looking at assignment instructions, rubric or criteria, or discussing your own experiences can help.
6. The student writer’s success is not the Writing Mentor’s responsibility
The student you are helping is 100% responsible for their own writing, and, therefore, ‘own’ any success (or failure). You are an objective, knowledgeable, outside reader who discusses, points out, asks questions, etc., but it is the student writer’s responsibility to make decisions based on the session and make (or not make) any changes to their writing.

7. The student writer keeps control of their writing
Use proven techniques to ensure you don’t take over your student’s paper; for example, don’t write on it—it’s their paper and theirs to revise. If you can’t resist writing, then don’t hold a pen! Try not to take the paper from your student—they can read their paper aloud to you. If you want to read it silently, keep it on the table. Or you can read the paper aloud so the student can hear what they wrote. Give feedback that keeps the student in control by asking questions rather than making statements. Also, uncertain language is gold: This appears to be... This may... Is it possible that...? Have you thought about...? What if this...?

8. Experimentation and practise are encouraged
Because learning to write involves practise, risk taking and revising, you may want to encourage the student to experiment or try something new during the session, which is a safe, non-evaluative space away from assessment. This trying-out can be verbal or silent, with the student formulating ideas aloud or in writing.

9. It’s about improvement, not perfection
Writing is complex. There are assignment instructions, organisation, analysis, support, word count limitations, research needs, format requirements, grammar, spelling, etc. etc. There is so much to know! How can anyone know it all? Well...they don’t, you included. Even if you (or someone) did, there would not be enough time to sort out all the possible issues in a session. Experienced Writing Mentors listen to and interpret what the student writer wants, see their writing and use this information to focus on one or two relevant, important points for the session. As this does not overwhelm the student, it helps them to better understand how to improve their own writing. Prioritising is essential—is there any point in looking at grammar if the paper is not even answering the question?

10. It’s about writing, not an assignment
Although students usually ask for help on a specific assignment, your ultimate goal is to help them develop writing skills they can apply to other assignments and situations—peer support is about fostering independence. Using the assignment the student presents is an excellent way to help them learn: an immediate, assessable paper is timely, relevant and highly important to the student, so their focus and willingness to learn will be high. (Students do not need to know this, but it is important for Writing Mentors to understand.)

11. Writing Mentors are not proof readers
Student writers often ask Writing Mentors to help with proofreading. While it is not your role to proofread, there are times when proofreading should be discussed, and student writers may benefit from finding out how to best check their own work.

12. Writing Mentors continue developing and growing
Although you are trained to be a Writing Mentor to ensure you understand your role as a critical reader, peer model and ‘explorer’ of other students’ writing, that is just the start. Enjoy your role, forgive yourself any ‘mistakes’ and be aware that your own learning as a Peer Writer has just begun.