How to Have a Productive Writing Conference

Below I've listed some tips for how to get the most out of the twenty minutes we spend discussing your essays in conferences. The key thing to remember is that, though I am here to push you, to challenge you, and to help you clarify your ideas, you are the one in control of your writing of your essay. Take ownership of your writing by coming to the conference with your own agenda and ideas for what you would like to work on. Though the tips listed here are specifically tailored to the organization of this course, most of them are applicable to any type of office meeting with an instructor.

1. Show up on time! Twenty minutes is not a long period of time. If you show up five minutes late you've already wasted a fourth of our time. If you are unsure where my office is, give yourself a few extra minutes to find it.

2. Read your paper beforehand. Make sure all of your ideas are clear in your head before you come to discuss it.

3. Be prepared to answer questions about what you think are the strongest and weakest parts of your paper, why you structured it in the way that you did, what your peer reviewers had to say about it, &c.

4. Have some revision ideas already planned out. This way we can discuss not only your draft itself, but your future goals for your paper.

5. Be prepared to engage in major revisions. This may include cutting out large sections of your draft. My own writing experiences have taught me that removing sections of a paper that you worked so carefully on may feel as excruciating as removing a body part. However, jettisoning weak parts of a paper in order to replace them with stronger ones is an important practice for all mature writers, and one that is generally satisfying in the end.

6. Take notes during the conference! Nobody's memory is perfect. Our discussion is intended to help you generate new ideas and to formulate a plan to bring the paper to completion. You want to make sure these goals remain clear when you are revising your paper in the days following our conference.