

Working with Alternative File Formats

Overview

Starting September 2026, WriteAway tutors will now accept and provide feedback on assignments sent in alternative file formats. We hope this change will help reduce barriers for students and create a more seamless experience when accessing WriteAway. This short training update provides the process for working with a submission when the assignment is in an alternative file format.

Note: The information in this update presumes that you are familiar with the WriteAway response structure and process for working with a ticket. New tutors should [review the training](#) on how to use the WriteAway tutoring response structure first.

What is an alternative file format?

The most common alternative file format you will encounter is PDF, but you may also receive PowerPoint files and image files (e.g., .jpg, .png). Some image files may be photographs of handwritten assignments. As long as they are legible, you may treat them the same as a PDF file and go ahead with providing feedback. The process outlined in this training may also be followed if you receive a document that you can view but are unable to edit for any other reason.

How is the response process different?

Current WriteAway tutors are familiar with working with document files that can be opened and edited with a word processor, including Word documents (.doc and .docx files) and other document files such as OpenDocument (.odt) and plain text (.txt). The tutoring approach for alternative formats follows the same response structure and similar process as with text documents, but there are some key differences:

- One key difference is that you will create a separate document that contains your feedback.
- The second key difference is if you are unable to edit a document, as with a PDF or image file, you will not create embedded comments and instead add more detail and examples in the Concerns to Consider section.
- For PowerPoint files, you may use your discretion on a case-by-case basis to determine whether you can easily add embedded comments.

Process

These are the steps to follow when you claim a ticket with an alternative file format.

Claim the ticket

1. You'll begin by claiming the ticket as normal and downloading the student's assignment file and assignment guidelines, if included.

Create your feedback document

2. For all alternative file format submissions, create a new document file to hold your feedback (in any of the following formats: .doc, .docx, .odt, or .txt).
3. Save the document with a new name.

We recommend this naming convention: feedback_studentname_yourinitials

4. Copy your response template framework into your new feedback document file (greeting, strengths, concerns, next steps, and closing).
5. Include the [Alternative Format script](#) in your opening letter and remember to update any language about embedded comments in your Response template.

"I see you've submitted a **[file type]** document, which is a file format that doesn't allow me to insert comments directly. The next time you submit, I recommend you submit your writing in a .doc, .docx, .odt, or .txt file format. This will allow the tutor to add comments directly to your document. For now, I'll provide feedback in this separate document with examples from your writing."

Review student submission

6. Continue reviewing the student's submission and providing your feedback.

If you are unable to add embedded comments, include examples with comments in the Concerns to Consider section. Provide 1-2 specific examples for each strength and issue you've identified.

Tip: As you read through the student's assignment, make notes in your feedback document indicating where the Strengths, HOCs and LOCs that you identify are located and any examples.

Examples:

- You identify that the student's thesis statement could be strengthened. In this case, indicate which sentence you've identified as the thesis statement, and what you suggest may be done to improve it. You might write something like,

It seems like this last sentence of the first paragraph of your essay is your current thesis statement: [paste thesis statement sentence here]

It appears you are writing an argumentative essay. Words like "perhaps" can weaken your argument. Consider, how might you rephrase your thesis statement to help you take a stronger position on the subject?

- If you identify issues with paragraph structure, indicate the specific page number and paragraph number where you see opportunities for improvement. You might write something like,

In the second paragraph of page three, starting with the words " Lastly is the number of ... ", the topic sentence seemed clear to me, but the connection to that idea in the rest of the paragraph is a bit confusing to me. How could you clarify the ideas within the paragraph to make the connection between them and the topic sentence clearer?

7. Once you've skimmed the student paper and identified 2-3 HOCs (and 1-2 LOCs, if there are no HOCs) continue completing your response in your feedback document by building out the explanations in your Concerns section and adjusting any placeholder language as needed.
8. Revise the next steps to align with your Concerns section, and check that your closing note has been personalized.
9. Lastly, finalize your feedback document by proofreading and confirming that your links work.

Submit your ticket

10. Return to the ticket page and upload your feedback document. If this assignment was a PowerPoint and you were able to include embedded comments, make sure to attach this file as well.
11. Preview your response, complete the analytics, and then submit the ticket as closed.