

Downey High School Writing Center



Tutors Talk!

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Section 1: First, Some General Advice

*In this section, tutors give general advice and share their experiences, providing a helpful overview on what it is like to be a tutor working with such a wide variety of students and writing assignments. **Jessica Nunez** discusses her anxieties about protecting a student's ability to be creative and how she set out to make sure that the student felt ownership over his/her ideas. **Jamie Elias's** introduction shares her very relatable combination of excitement and self-doubt while highlighting a specific experience with a student who seemed even more doubtful of his abilities. Finally, the semi-anonymous **J.F.** pens a letter to new tutors that provides a helpful overview of what being a tutor is all about, including ways some tutors choose to go above and beyond to help particularly motivated students.*

Tutors Talk

Jessica Nunez

When entering the writing center, you don't know what to expect. I know when I get in there, I look like a mess because, well, it's Monday afternoon. But once I receive my tutee and discuss the prompt for a while, the session runs smoothly. But sometimes, I do see a similar pattern in prompts. In those cases, I discuss what kind of routes the essay can go in. I also base it off what the person has brought in and discuss their ideas.

For many of the students that come to a session with no ideas or draft, I feel it's best to get creative with the student and lead them towards a path they feel comfortable with. For example, I once tutored two students the same day on the same prompt. With my second appointment, I was able to let them know how other students are handling their essay, they can either go in a similar direction or realize that that's not for them.

In hindsight, I believe looking at others accomplishments and creativity helps the student who either is at a lost of words or is having a difficult time developing their thoughts. Obviously these students will not use other students ideas, but structure in the essay can be incorporated with the help of others. I initially hear the students opinions about which route they want to go towards, and follow their plan.

Most of the students are going down the same path, but once I start to work with them, I go more into depth with what they really feel about the prompt.

In a session, the importance is based on the student and what they will be satisfied with, also effectively answering the prompt.

In discussing ideas for a paper, I tend to have a comfortable conversation with the student about their ideas in case they take the criticism as a loss of creativity. Meaning, they may perceive someone offering different ideas as their creativity isn't good enough thus, developing a fear of being creative. This is something I would not want to create, so in order to prevent this I have a system that allows me to critique the students but also show them that their work is on the right track.

I first begin with discussing the prompt and analyze what is being asked.

Then I proceed to ask, "Have you brainstormed any ideas before this?". If they have, I review what they already have constructed. If I feel like it can be elaborated on, we work from there. If not, I discuss their ideas and provide positive feedback on what is good and suggest what we can do to better the ideas.

I feel when students go into the writing center, they are very vulnerable, mainly freshman. They perceive the writing center as a place to get feedback from people who aren't your teacher and have been able to get through high school and similar assignments. Freshman and other underclassmen should feel accepted with all their ideas and regarding a prompt, should have their own creativity show through their work; after all, it is their essay.

Qualities of a Tutor

Jamie Elias

I applied for the writing center, the end of my sophomore year. I was immediately excited to be accepted but I had no idea of what to expect. Would I be able to provide the proper aid that previous tutors were able to provide for me? I decided that my main goal was making sure I was able to help tutees in anyway possible; all while making sure they were comfortable being there.

One of my earlier experiences taught me the importance of being patient and understanding. I took an appointment after school for a sophomore who was an immigrant from Mexico. He had been attending Downey High School for no longer than a month and after reading his essay, I was instantly impressed. I complimented him for following the CQT format correctly and for thoroughly analyzing the quotes he choose from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. But despite his best efforts, he had a lot of trouble with grammar and spelling. My initial response was to fix everything for him, but that would make it hard for him to learn or understand. I followed with offering him constructive criticism, but he kept apologizing for every little mistake. It is important to make sure that the tutees stay confident in their writing, so I helped him fix the errors and told him that he didn't have to apologize. There are no such things as only first drafts. A writer becomes better by writing more. He left that day satisfied with his pieces and told me that he was definitely going to come again. It was important to stay patient and to be understanding of the level at which he was writing. Because of this, he left the writing center pleased and confident in returning.

To Whomever This May Concern,

You might be anxious, even worried to start tutorials. I know I was; it feels as if the weight of this student's grade, life, and future hinges on the advice you give them in that thirty minute window. Nevertheless, I am here to assure you that your task gets much easier over time as you develop a system and a method to your madness.

Truth be told, you're going to encounter students from all walks of life. From ones who are completely confident in their work to ones who need a little bit of a nudge, every tutorial is unique and no two are the same—regardless of the same *To Kill A Mockingbird* prompt you've seen every day for the past month and a half. The joys of the writing center lie in its peer-based tutoring system which is often a lot less daunting to tutees and tutors alike. However, our focus is to make this center accessible to *everyone*, even those who might need more help than others. Included are English learners or students with special needs.

As with every tutorial, it is important to help the student feel comfortable and welcomed—who knows if they're super self-conscious about their work and don't accept constructive criticism as well as others. Through experience, I've found my best introductions to begin with a small conversation about their day. From there, you'll be able to pick a few details from that small exchange and develop it into a quick, full-fledged conversation as they're pulling out prompts and drafts. It is important to recognize interpreters as well, should one be present. My friend and fellow Monday tutor, Mikaela, often tutored a deaf student with an interpreter and told me of the banter they three had despite the speaking barrier. The circumstance may seem challenging, but isolating your tutee would be a lot more injurious than it would be advantageous. Remember to be patient, put yourself in the shoes of your fellow student, and give the tutorial everything you can offer.

Similarly, offer the student help outside of the center should your schedule allow for tutoring outside your assigned tutoring hours. Though encouraging students to make extra appointments at the end of a tutorial could end in success, some students have such jam-packed schedules that it just is not possible. Rather, because you and your tutee have already started working in whatever area they need help in, maintaining that connection might help your student further understand their prompt or assignment. Simply trading emails or numbers could boost your tutee's confidence, especially if the thirty minute window is too short for the both of you to deliberate about *all* aspects of the assignment. I have particularly offered extra help to those tutees of mine that might struggle with assignments more than others as it is sometimes easier to communicate out of the tutoring hours than to try and squeeze your tutee into the writing center's often busy schedule.

I am confident you will be able to figure out what to do. Clearly, your social and writing skills secured you a spot on the writing center's list—you've got this under control. Happy tutoring!

J.F., '19

Section 2: Prompts, Papers, and Process

*In this section, tutors write about navigating different types of assignments. Tutors write about what it's like to work with a student who comes in with a whole draft completed as opposed to brainstorming from scratch. **Mikaela Posada** provides a practical guide on how to avoid making the tutorial all about editing grammar and conventions by showing how to keep the focus on the much more valuable higher order concerns. **Dylan Ly and Mona Makhoul** echo Stephen North's philosophy about writing centers, discussing that we need to make better writers and not better writing; they also emphasize the importance of patience and collaboration with the student.*

*Because the Downey High School Writing Center provides guidance for all English students, it is common that tutors will tutor on an assignment or even piece of writing unknown to them. In their essay, **Marcelo Martir and Neysa Moncada** urge tutors not to panic if they are unfamiliar with the source material and to use the tutee's knowledge about the article or book to help give them a frame of reference for the rest of the tutorial. **Jeremy Park and German Espinosa** provide very clear, straightforward advice on how to navigate this situation, reminding tutors to be confident, patient, and to utilize other resources to help support both the tutor and the student.*

*Finally, with all courses on campus assigning common assessments to support our school-wide focus of Critical Thinking through Writing (aka Think with Ink!), many English students will come in with the same prompt at the same time. This might be an unexpected situation for new tutors, but **Aarti Patel and Alex Sepulveda** acknowledge that though tutoring on the same prompt over and over again might cause tutors to go into autopilot, it is important to keep the tutorial tailored to that specific student. **Ninfa Penaloza and Jennifer Guardado** echo that sentiment and remind tutors to stay fresh for each writer and each essay even though it might feel a little tedious. **Emalissa Rodriguez**, then, provides a very clear, upbeat guide of what to do in this situation, reminding tutors of the basic tenets of a tutorial even if they've seen the prompt dozens of times already.*

Tutoring Session with a Completed Draft

Mikaela Posada

Students often come into the writing center with variants of a draft or versions of their ideas. A common case is that students come into the center with a completed draft. This situation is different than many other in that a completed draft already has all of a student's ideas down on paper.

To begin the session, ask the student to bring out their prompt, or describe to the best of their abilities what their writing task is. Then ask what concerns they have and what specific areas of the paper they would like to work on. If they have certain concerns, make sure to focus on these areas seeing as it is the tutee's paper. But also, do not neglect other parts of the paper that need addressing. When focusing on the specific part of a tutee's paper, make sure to emphasize building writing skills rather than just correcting the individual paper. Once their specific concerns have been addressed, make sure to review the rest of the assignment.

When reviewing and editing a completed draft, make sure to address any writing convention errors but do not make this the bulk of the session. The tutoring session should focus on improving certain skills such as analysis of thesis statements. Throughout the essay keep in mind that a key purpose of the writing is to address the prompt.

In a completed draft, the student's voice and style of writing are already expressed. Make sure not to limit or inhibit their voice but it is always helpful to provide lessons and information that can better their future writing. Lessons that the tutee has not learned can also be incorporated for future reference.

Once the writing is purged of errors, it is time to assist the tutee in ways that their writing style can be improved. Reviewing the structure of the piece is a good place to start. Make sure the paper follows correct structure as follows within the thesis by including a hook, background information, and a thesis. Then continue with body paragraphs including the topic sentence, then backing the claim up with evidence. If the paper is not correctly structured, be sure to teach the tutee the basic structural rules and assist them in rearranging their paper to meet the structural requirements. Another way to improve a writing piece to start "making music" would be to include rhetorical devices throughout the paper. These rhetorical devices such as metaphors can help take the writing to the next level and help provide the reader with a better understanding of the writer's purpose. Including rhetorical devices throughout the paper is one of the best aspects and techniques to learn to improve papers in the future. Once the rhetorical devices are integrated into the writing, keeping a consistent tone throughout the paper is a key component. The diction of the piece can affect the tone, so it is important that the word choice matches the tone that is being used. Having a strong diction is important, but is not necessary to spend a lot of time reviewing during a session, as time is limited. Improving word choice is something that can be done easily at home, but using certain words to achieve a purpose can be taught and practiced within a session.

When a student comes in with a completed draft the key components to remember are making sure the prompt is addressed, maintaining the author's voice throughout the writing, and improving writing techniques to better the student's skills.

Tutoring Someone With a Completed Draft

Dylan Ly and Mona Makhoul

There is an exciting anticipation sitting in the writing center as a tutor because a student from any grade can come in with any prompt at any stage in the writing process. A tutor needs to be flexible and adaptive - ready for anything.

In some cases, students will come in with a completed draft. Typically, these students have just recently completed the essay without looking back on it or revising. The goals of these students vary but generally there is one common goal: to improve and work on a specific aspect of their draft. The tutee may already have a preset idea of what they seek to work on but in other cases they come in with the question, "how can I make this better". In either case, revision and tutoring should be addressed the same way - with the goal of creating a better writer not a better writing assignment.

After introducing yourself to your tutee and making small conversation, ask the tutee if there is any specific part of their essay they are looking to improve. If they do have a specific aspect of their essay in mind, such as their analysis or thesis, ask them what their doubts about it are. Give them suggestions on ways to improve that area of their essay and have them try coming up with new ideas. Remember that it is *their* paper so if they have areas of focus, make sure there is a discussion between you and the tutee, not a lecture or lesson. Be supportive and patient with the tutee and complement them on their strengths and effort.

There are instances in which the tutee is not struggling with any specific part of their essay and wants overall edits. In cases like these, go through each paragraph with them making sure to pay special attention to their thesis and analysis. Fixing grammar and syntax along the way is important, but it is not as essential as the general ideas of the sentences. When the opportunity arises, make sure to mention general concepts about writing and anchor them with examples in the student's essay. For example, lessons about how to write an introduction (a sort of funnel with general context getting more specific to a thesis) can be intertwined with the student's paper. Moving through the paper a major aspect to focus on is whether the student addresses the prompt.

A completed draft is different from any other situation in that the writer's voice and ideas have already been expressed. Thus the purpose of the session is to improve the skills that are already apparent in the tutee. In the case of the tutee having a rough draft or no draft, the tutor must have a discussion of theoretical concepts and ideas that should be written about; however, in a completed working draft, the purpose is fine tuning skills and bringing forth skills that are lacking.

Although it may seem like a challenging task, as you complete more sessions, the tutoring process will become easier. Tutees are not only looking for help, but they also want reassurance. Send off tutees with a final review of what they should be working on but make sure to also emphasize what they are doing right. Help them build their confidence as writers by making the writing center a welcoming and accepting place.

If You Haven't Read

Marcelo Martir, Neysa Moncada

It is nearly impossible for every tutor to have read every book and every article that they will be asked to assist on. They might not have had the teacher that assigned the book. They might not have had time to read for fun with that book or article. Regardless of the reason, tutors must be equipped to handle this problem. This is a common issue, after all, encountered by most tutors at the Writing Center; not knowing how to start assisting your tutee when you haven't even read the source that the student is drawing their information from. We, the tutors, seek to mend this issue before it becomes a problem for you, the next wave of tutors that will take the reins after we graduate from high school. It is important to remember that you should not fret too much. In fact, you should be excited as this will not only be an opportunity for you to test your skills as a tutor but also an opportunity to aid with the persuasions of your own previous preconceptions. The best method in a scenario such as this is to simply ask what the student knows about their book, allowing them to explain to you, the tutor, who will gain some comprehension on what they're writing about. The tutee explaining the book to you would allow have an interesting perspective as the audience of their paper, not knowing what their subject or main idea is on, only having the writer's information to go off of, would be represented by you.

Now, on the other hand, if neither you or the student requesting tutoring have read the book, this can lead to some difficulties in comprehending and maintaining the prompt. Take the time (after encouraging them to go home and read as they should still have more background information to continue their writing) to focus on the structure, diction, and purpose of their works; for example, if it were a CQT, discuss with them what the goals of each paragraph should be, such as the context or tie-in of their passages. Always get them started with some idea on how to continue; don't let this tricky situation discourage you. A productive and helpful tutorial is still very possible, no matter the circumstances. Just make sure that they will eventually try to read the source material.

Tutoring's great and all, but what if it's on a book you haven't read?

German Espinosa and Jeremy Park

Tutoring in general can seem like a daunting task, but tutoring about something you have not read is even more unsettling. You may feel that the tutee will lose respect for you, or that he or she will simply dismiss your ideas. However, make sure to remain calm and follow these steps:

1. Introduce Yourself

Treat this session like you would treat any other. Introduce yourself to the student and try to make a connection. If you notice that he or she has a sports bag, break the ice and talk about that sport. If he or she is carrying textbooks, talk about any nostalgic moment when you took that class.

2. Shift to the Writing Assignment

After spending a few moments breaking the ice and creating a hospitable environment, ask the student what you will be working on. At this moment, you will realize whether you have worked on the same assignment or read the same book. Guide the student, allowing him or her to form their own ideas – only making suggestions. Answer the prompt, but let the student fill in the blanks.

3. Ask about the Book

Start off by asking the student to provide a short summary of the book. In addition, ask for any significant themes that shape the story as a whole. Hopefully, the student is capable of providing this information; however, students may sometimes show up unprepared and have no knowledge regarding the book they are writing about. If this is the case, try not to appear agitated and find an online summary (Don't be embarrassed to pull out your phone). If the supervising teacher seems surprised as you pull out your phone, simply explain the situation. After either hearing a summary from the student or finding one online, proceed with the session and help as you see fit.

4. Focus on the Prompt

Use the prompt to guide the session. You haven't read the book, so there's very little you can actually say about the book - so use the prompt! Ask the tutee useful questions that develop the essay. The tutee will be able to develop the essay by answering the questions that you ask. For example: if asked to write on how John Proctor is a tragic hero, ask questions on what John Proctor does that make him a "hero," and what he does that leads to his downfall.

5. Perhaps the most important of all: be patient!

Students come from all kinds of academic backgrounds – some are not as motivated as others, some may not be as good at writing as others. However, all tutees are deserving of our best. There once was a tutee who neither read the book, nor had any notes, and the paper was already a week late. However, his tutor still used whatever resources (such as online summaries and notes) to set up the essay as best he could. There is never any reason to "give up."

6. End the Session

As stated earlier, treat the session like any other before. Ask the tutee if he has any last questions regarding the assignment or writing in general. Be amicable and give the student a reason to return to the writing center. Even after going through the session, some students simply feel as if they're incapable of writing well. If that's the case, cheer the student up and remind them of their greatness. Like always, stamp the yellow slip and wish the student goodluck on all future assignments.

Not Again!

Dear tutor,

There will be several times in the school year where you will receive a swarm of students needing help with the same prompt. But don't fret we're here to help. This will have its ups and downs. On the negative side, after seeing a prompt for the millionth time you will go on autopilot and talk at the student and not to them. On the positive side, by working with multiple students, we can see what the common struggle is and what techniques help them best in regards to the specific prompt.

Autopilot: This is when you lack enthusiasm and just dive into the prompt. The problem with this is that instead of being engaging, challenging, and interactive with the student, you simply talk at them and give them a checklist of things to fix. This may make a better paper but it does not make a better writer. To avoid autopilot, train yourself to always begin with a friendly greeting to get yourself in the mental gear to be enthusiastic and engaging for the student. Also, be sure to ask what they personally feel *they* need help on, and make that the focus of the session. One prompt you will see a lot is the decades project, in which students had to write a persuasive paper convincing the reader on why that decade should receive a specific title. At first I (Aarti) began making a checklist in my mind of key elements of the paper (did the thesis have the title of the decade, did the student use their own voice and not just list evidence, did the student tie the body paragraphs back to the title of the decade). However, I was able to stop myself from simply going through this checklist by asking the student what she needed help with, which was analyzing and tying back to the thesis, so we made that the focus of the discussion. We are not tutoring prompts, we are tutoring students.

Talking at the student: basically just giving them the "right" answer. When you notice a student might have misread a passage, it is tempting to just explain what you think it means. However, this does not allow the student to develop their comprehension and analytical skills. One way to guide the students on the right path without telling them the answer is asking *a lot* of questions. Or if the student has a shallow analysis, instead of spoon feeding them the deeper significance of the story you can challenge their thinking by having them explain their answer [good questions include: how does this go back to your thesis, why did you include this, how so/ elaborate, what does the author mean by this, how might the passage be different without this (lit device), what does this (lit device) do?]. So just remember we are trying to make better writers, not just better writing. When working on a *To Kill a Mockingbird* many students wrote about the character growth of Scout. After seeing the same prompt for the third time in one day I (Alex) had a whole list of adjectives to describe Scout. When the student came in and we brainstormed I noticed I was doing most of the talking. After this I took a step back and asked them what *they* thought Scout was like. The student had new and fresh ideas.

Common struggle/Common technique: This is a paper that everyone has a hard time with and usually for one or two key reasons. It might be that they don't understand the prompt, they have difficulty with analyzing a certain element of writing (syntax), or they don't know where to start. This is where the groans of frustration turn into sighs of relief. After tackling this problem several times it becomes easier. You will start to notice from trial and error what works in helping students overcome the challenge. For example, the "When are You an Adult" paper was a prompt even tutors struggled with. The prompt gave the students several articles of evidence and asked them how the author uses ethos, logos, or pathos to make a compelling argument. Most students had difficulty with actually analyzing the author's use of these elements, instead they just identified where the author used these elements. To guide students down the easiest path of analysis, we brainstormed with the students about the instances where the rhetorical devices were used to see which of the three was most prevalent. From there, we chose a random quote that we knew that student would not be using in their essay or made our own example and went through the process of breaking down the quote and analyzing it for the rhetorical device. In this way, we ensured that the student understood *how* to analyze.

Being faced with the same prompt over a million times can be draining and numbing. This can leave you susceptible to falling into the pitfalls of going on autopilot and talking at the student. However, if you make an effort to make each tutorial unique to the individual, each session can be new and engaging. So when you see a prompt for the hundredth time, instead of saying "Not again!" take advantage of this opportunity. You already know what works well with your fellow students. If you just remember a writing session is a conversation where both the student and the tutor bring ideas to the table and work *together*, then the student can grow.

Sincerely, Alex Sepulveda and Aarti Patel

What To Do When It's The Same Prompt

Ninfa Penaloza, Jennifer Guardado

When are Adults Really Adults?, *The Odyssey*, and *How to Kill a Mockingbird* has forever registered in our minds and we will forever remember how some days became tedious because our minds would begin to merge all the essays together. It is important to remember that every student has their own unique voice and ways of formatting their work and do not let previous essays have influence over the way you tutor. Remember to ask for clarification and act as if this is the first time you're ever seeing the essay. It is fine to suggest but remember that the students have the final decision over their work. It is essential to take a breather and have patience before the beginning of a session, every session is a new learning experience and a new essay.

Remember that every student is unique, they have different interpretations and ways of formulating their ideas so communication is key. Many students are understandable shy as they are being thrown into talking to upperclassmen, which in itself can be intimidating, and they are having someone read their essay which can be nerve wracking as it is extremely personal. Be understanding even if you are tired of reading multiple essays about the same topic, use more examples and expand upon their ideas, make it interesting because if you are tired of reading the same formulaic essay repeatedly imagine how the teachers feel. Do not write the essay for the student but give suggestion or hint at some ideas you believe they could benefit from.

Tutoring With a Prompt You've Seen Dozens of Times

Emalissa Rodriguez

As a new tutor, you'll deal with plenty of situations that will frustrate you, enlighten you, and may even lead you to find your passion in life. While everyone enjoys sessions with students who are both engaged and participate in the discussion, it is not likely that every tutee will meet these expectations. After all, writing is a difficult thing that takes time and patience so do your best to find the method that works for your tutee.

One of the most important things to remember is to have patience and be friendly. Try to think back on your first writing center experience. Remember how it was like to share your writing with a stranger? Did their positive attitude put you at ease? It can be helpful to put yourself in their shoes when thinking about ways to make the tutorial as productive as possible. And when you're dealing with a repeated prompt, patience is key. Even though the topic may be the same, try to keep in mind that everyone's writing style is different. You may need to discuss various parts of the paper, which will make each appointment seem less repetitive. Here are some helpful tips when dealing with a repeated prompt.

1. Greet the Tutee
 - a. It is important to break the ice by introducing yourself. Small talk goes a long way in easing the session along. It especially helps in this situation, so that your tutorials don't start blending together. It is a good way to avoid having a "robotic" like presence at the writing center. Soon, you'll find that there are tons of interesting and hilarious students at Downey.
2. Start the session by asking questions
 - a. If you find that your tutee is more reserved and shy, this is a great way to get your tutee to participate and come up with some great ideas on their own. Lead them in a certain direction if they're having trouble but ultimately they should come up with it without too much help.
3. Read the piece multiple times for different purposes
 - a. Sometimes there's too much to take on with one reading. Especially when it's a research paper or an analysis. By going over the paper multiple times, you can ensure you're doing the best job you can.
4. Compliment Sandwich
 - a. It can be difficult to discuss the weaker elements of the paper without sounding too critical. This method involves giving a compliment, a suggestion, then another compliment. It's a better way to get the ideas across without being harsh.
5. Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help
 - a. We've all had a brain fart every once in a while and sometimes it's hard to get the tutee to understand what you are trying to explain. In this case, it is best to ask another tutor for help. You don't want the student to leave the writing center feeling confused. It shows that you are a dedicated tutor.

Overall, tutoring is something that gets better with new experiences. Over time, you will find that it gets easier to get students to open up and you'll be able to direct the tutorial in the direction that you want. The most important thing, however, is to have fun! The Writing Center is all about helping others in a more easy going environment so don't feel like you have to remain serious and professional. Be you!

Section 3: All Students Welcome!

In this section, tutors write about the wide array of students we encounter in the writing center.

***Adrian Soto** begins with a discussion of the diverse population of students he has worked with, including a very touching and honest narrative about one student in particular. **Marcia Gonzalez** uses her experience with a differently-abled student to discuss the importance of patience in all tutorials regardless of the student's abilities.*

*In his conversational and witty essay, **Andrew Garcia** narrates a tutorial he had with a particularly difficult and distracted student and provides some advice on how to navigate this frustrating situation. Similarly, **Hanna Choi** and **Adrian Henriquez** discuss the importance of staying calm, patient, and positive when working with students who'd rather not be in the writing center, advising that expressing negativity will only make the situation worse.*

***Amy Wong** kicks off the topic of how to tutor a student who is shy or quiet by offering advice that focuses on empathy and putting ourselves in the position of the tutee. **Alexandra Rapalo** and **Dyana Jocol** provide a narrative and some instructions on how to approach a student who may not open up and talk as easily as others. **Hector Palma** shares some ways he personally was able to get students to come out of their shells and stay focused on improving writers and their writing. Finally, **Dennise Reynoso** personalizes the issue by sharing her own experiences as a shy student and some very clear guidelines on what tutors can do to make the student feel more comfortable.*

*To wrap up this section, we have two essays from two writers on working with AP and Honors students. Both writers openly admit that they don't categorize themselves as AP/Honors English students, yet they found valid and reassuring ways to approach what might be an intimidating type of student. In **Kimberly Montanez's** essay, she encourages the tutor to stop believing that AP/Honors students are flawless because they certainly are not, and then she provides several pieces of very helpful and relatable advice. **Anais Macias** also seeks to boost the confidence of tutors working with AP/Honors students by advising that working with them isn't all that different from working with anyone else and that tutors should remember that they were chosen for this job for a reason.*

Success in Diversity

Adrian Soto

Being a tutor has a ton of highlights; seeing someone grow more confident after the tutorial, discussing how to word an essay, and sometimes just tweaking a paper but also making them smile. At times, however, these highlights of what would be often called successful Writing Center Tutorials are at first seen as inaccessible when it comes to some difficulties in communication. Even in these irregular tutorials where communication may not hit its peak, they may show these 'highlights' and prove to be successful tutorials for one to find pride in.

As one sees whenever stepping on campus, the school is very diverse with a giant variety of students from different backgrounds. This diversity is always present in the tutees that come to the Writing Center, in the way they talk, act, and especially write. On some occasions, this diversity can lead to some uncomfortability as with diverse culture comes diverse languages (for some their cultural language was their only language until reaching Downey High). When tutoring these students, a tutor might find a bump on the road to an effectual tutorial. I recall two times in which I worked with students who were "English learners"(kinda). The first was a girl who due to her background had only known Spanish and some English. At first we experienced some latency issues with our communication as English isn't her first language. In positions like this, I suggest trying to express yourself as clearly as possible and when directing your tutee make sure you don't just say where something may be improved but show, point, write, pull out post-its or a piece of paper to write down some notes to show areas of improvement too. With this tutorial, I made sure to be clear with her in a moderate tone and treated her as any other tutee (something you always do no matter the person). At some points I talked a little Spanglish—a mix of Spanish and English— to ease the tutee and make her comfortable. In a case where you have an English Learner and you possess the language skills to talk to them, use them but don't purely rely on them as you do a big disservice in not speaking English.

In another occasion, I ended up working with a member of the deaf culture and community who presented a clear barrier of language between tutor and tutee. She was a deaf student in the sophomore class and seemed really nervous to be at the Writing Center based on how she was holding herself in line. Still being in line I used a bit of sign I know to help her communicate why she was here. Similar to before, I made sure to mix my english with my sign (she had a cochlear implant so she could partially hear me). Once her interpreter showed up, we really started to make good progress as I made sure to talk clearly and jot down some notes for her to keep in mind when still revising her work at home. Having knowledge of sign, I may have shown some ability that not all possess but in all fairness a person that doesn't know any sign can write things out for the tutee to comprehend.

Additionally, when working in the Writing Center, students from all diverse groups, including those that have special needs end up popping by for a tutorial. I have yet to have experience a tutorial such as this but I have tutored students with special needs in other occasions. The best piece of advice I have for a tutor tutoring a student with special is to treat them like everyone else but also express yourself with clarity. They may have some special needs but don't let that halt the tutorial or change up how you regularly handle tutorials.

Overall, when handling any and all students at the Writing Center as a tutor remember to be clear, take some initiative (such as notes), and always treat everyone with respect no matter the case. We all face a bumpy road when it comes to facing and executing tutorials, maybe not only this communication issue, maybe also a lack of tutee involvement or having too many similar tutorials; however together and with some new perspectives, the bumpy road turns into a smooth ride.

Working with Some Difficulties

Marcia Gonzalez

The Writing Center has led me to explore more beyond just my writing, it has led me on a path of getting to know people of whom I would have never met or talked to. The Writing Center has taught me how to be more accepting of different people and help many people despite their differences in writing abilities or their differences in their physical matters. Tutoring people with these differences was not a necessarily difficult, but different experience. As a tutor, one has to be prepared to be patient, to have a calm manner, and to work out problems whenever they arise. I learned this through working with a particular student. He had come to the Writing Center simply to work on his essay, but he was situated in a wheelchair, had trouble interpreting some of the ideas that I had presented and needed an interpreter. This tutee was the first person I had tutored that needed a little more help than other tutees might have needed. Tutoring him, I realize how much patience I needed to get the tutee on board with my ideas. I was lucky enough that the tutee had good energy and was better able to connect with me on the ideas I pitched. This tutee's session was filled with some confusions about how to exactly word or understand the concept of the themes that he was writing about. This was something that I could not avoid, but it was not something that did not enable me to help him fix his writing. This tutee also had been slow to come up with concepts and gather enough words to tell the interpreter and relate the information to me. This is what made the session a little more difficult to work with, mainly because there was not that one on one connection that is normally present in other sessions. But, that did not stop the tutee from being able to understand the concept of writing and better his writing throughout the tutorial. Throughout this session, I experienced moments where I knew I was growing impatient because I felt like I was not making myself clear enough for him and had doubts that I was not helping him improve in his writing. But, as I got more used to connecting with the interpreter and finding ways to explain my points in a much more simple manner, I became more used to talking with the interpreter and he became better able to capture my ideas. The idea of tutoring someone with special needs was something that I was not prepared for and I had no idea how to handle the session. But, going through this tutorial enabled me to connect more with the sessions that did not include these barriers. I learned a lot about being patient and trusting someone else with the words I wanted to express to my tutee. The Writing Center most definitely helped me become better aware of these situations and how to deal with them at a short moment's notice.

On Navigating a Poor Tutorial

Andrew Garcia

So you're apprehensive about that student; the bumbling student. The one dragging his/her feet through the Writing Center doors, whose only purpose is to plump down for twenty minutes, if that, and coast through a tutorial in order to win that golden strip of paper which will earn him/her a measly, easily made handful of points. The same student who, lacking intrinsic motivation, won't think twice about sending a few text messages, answering a phone call, or even disrupting other tutorials should his or her friend be in the Writing Center on the same day. Yes, you're worried about *that* student—but if you weren't prior to reading this, then you may be now, and you have my apologies.

My experience with one of those students was delivered by a seemingly sweet girl who was like a jalapeno amongst pickles in a Subway sandwich: I didn't know what was awaiting me until I started the tutorial and was overcome by that unpleasant, peppery surprise. About five minutes into the tutorial I noticed her constant distraction with her phone: every thirty seconds or so she would pick up her phone—unlock her phone—check her text message—send a reply—put her phone down—pick it up yet again. Then she abandoned subtlety.

“Excuse me”,

And she answered her mother's call, which is odd since I don't know anyone who lists his/her mother's contact name as “Kevin”. Of course, I decided to be patient and give this student the benefit of the doubt, for how can I—a high school student not so different from the one sitting beside me—have the audacity to judge this mother for having a male's name when in reality, she never chose to be “Kevin the mom” just like I never chose to have the weakness of

insinuating sarcasm effectively in narrative writing. Jokes aside, I actually did stay patient instead of falling to frustration because a tutor's responsibility is to guide and focus students into becoming better writers—there are more appropriate ways to navigate through poor tutorials like this one, which brings me to my thoughts about effectively getting the student on task.

As I mentioned prior, while poor tutorials with disruptive students are frustrating, the tutor is ultimately there to guide the tutee to improvement—that's what you signed up for. So be patient, politely ask the tutee to put his/her phone away, ask the tutee questions about his/her writing so they do not leave the Writing Center without *thinking*. You are a student and, chances are, you do not choose to dedicate your time to the Writing Center every week just to create unnecessary conflict with disruptive students, so remember supervisors are there to help as well. If a student is too disruptive, I guarantee asking Mrs. Crespo or any other supervisor over for questions would get that student back on track without hesitation. After all, *that* student is not so different from you.

The Reluctant Student

Hanna Choi, Adrian Henriquez

Although you have gone through the Writing Center recruitment process, you still have a lot of preparing and learning ahead of you. The Writing Center provides a fun experience in a welcoming and caring environment. Not only is it the tutor's job to help their tutee flourish in their writing skills, but also to exemplify characteristics such as patience and kindness. Students of varying skills and confidence levels walk in through the Writing Center doors, and as tutors, we must try our best to help all of our tutees. In this case, if you receive a reluctant student, what do you do? We have received several tutees who clearly did not want our advice and were only at the Writing Center because they are required to attend. Through a couple sessions with reluctant tutees we have come up with some advice to help steer you in the right direction. One huge piece of advice is to never express frustration or annoyance because they do not share the same passions in writing as you do. Visibly showing frustration or annoyance can drive students even further away from appreciating your advice. Instead, we should be patient and show them that we understand that writing is not everyone's forte. By showing this level of understanding, we can connect to our tutees. Your introduction to your tutee can also change their reluctance to willingness. Our introduction is a way of connecting to our tutees. If we do not spend time introducing ourselves and trying to get to know our tutee for a minute or two, we do not create a connection. This connection is very important because a strong connection can totally change their attitude about being at the Writing Center. However make sure not to get too carried away in your conversation and don't spend the majority of your session getting to know one another! If you receive a reluctant student, make sure to also express that you want to help your tutee better his or her writing. Sometimes students can enter a tutoring session thinking that their tutor does not really care about helping them. However, if students know that we are ready and willing to give advice about anything they are struggling on, they feel genuinely relieved and content at the end of their session. A tutor's attitude can reflect and rub off on our tutees. This attitude will contribute to the welcoming and caring environment that the Writing Center has always had. Another helpful tip is to always welcome your tutee back to the Writing Center even if they are reluctant to be there in the first place. This helps students know that even though they would rather be elsewhere, they are always welcome back. This may affect their attitude in future tutoring sessions. There is an endless list of tips and tricks we can provide for you, but ultimately it is up to you to decide how to best approach a tutoring session with a reluctant student. The best way to have a successful tutoring session is to go head-first and give one-hundred percent of your effort, patience, and kindness.

Tutoring a Shy Student

Amy Wong

Being a shy student myself, I remember the slight fear I felt whenever I visited the Writing Center as a tutee. As a young freshman/sophomore, I felt that my writing was inadequate and worried that I would not know how to interact with my tutor. I would not really initiate conversation or actively engage myself in the seemingly long thirty minutes of tutoring. Fortunately, my past tutors have been kind, welcoming, and friendly. Because of the friendly atmosphere, I was able to open up about my writing and my ideas regardless of my quiet nature. While receiving shy students as a tutor may seem awkward or difficult, creating a safe environment to work in will lead both the tutee and the tutorial to success.

When you first greet your tutee, you might already begin to predict if this student is shy. If he/she speaks softly, does not seem to talk much, or does not make much eye contact, then this may be a quiet student; I did these myself as a freshman and sophomore. Understanding the nature of this student is the most important step you can take. Think of how he/she might be feeling: perhaps nervous, reluctant to be here, or eager but afraid to show it. Discerning the tutee's attitude will help you as a tutor make the right approach to this student. You may choose to adopt a gentle manner in order to make the tutee feel more comfortable with you or become more energetic so that the tutee might match your enthusiasm. You could talk more so that the student does not feel uncomfortable with the thought of having to lead the discussion. Personally, I try to be gentle and talkative (a balance of the two) so that I will not potentially overwhelm the tutee. That way, the student does not feel intruded and uneasy, giving the tutorial a strong start already.

During the tutorial, maintaining the attitude you chose and carrying the welcoming atmosphere is crucial. You may have to be the one constantly initiating the next action. For example, you may be the one that transitions from the casual introductions to the actual writing. Doing this may help guide the tutee since it'll be easier for him/her to follow your guidance rather than initiate the transition themselves, a daunting task for some of the quieter students. Following the pace of the tutee is important too; often you will not have to initiate as much. If the tutee immediately pulls out their work after the introductions and conversation, then allow him/her set the pace. Working at the tutee's pace throughout the entire tutorial is critical because as an older and more experienced writer, you may possibly be moving too fast for your tutee. As you read over the papers, brainstorm ideas, and help them write, keep the shy student engaged by constantly asking questions. Since this student may not talk as much, you asking questions will not only lead the student to talk more, but it will also show that your interest as a tutor since you show that you care about their work and are devoting your full attention to them. While the student may not talk much throughout the tutorial, continue to show your interest and eagerness and do not give the impression that you are disinterested. After completing the tutorial, end on a positive, encouraging note so that the student will feel empowered. For example, complimenting something specific about the student's writing will show that you were attentive as an older writer. By doing this, the student will be able to feel comfortable and the productive, warm environment created earlier will bring the tutorial to a successful close.

Topic: Tutoring a very quiet/shy student

Alexandra Rapalo

Dyana Jocol

(Dyana) In the first few weeks of working as a Writing Center Tutor, I was able to maintain a smooth and successful session with each and every student I tutored. Those students were talkative and not afraid to ask questions whatsoever which made it easier for me to tutor them. One afternoon at the Writing Center, I was assigned a student whom was in 10th grade with an assignment on the novel *The Lord of the Flies*. After introducing myself, I realized this student was very shy and quiet (or so I thought) and I was hardly getting any words out of the student; this made me a little scared because I was afraid we would not be able to get anything done. While I was asking the student what they wanted to focus on in the paper, I stopped and talked a little about myself and got to know them a bit as well. As soon as we paused to get to know each other, the student felt comfortable and was able to finally open up. It does not take longer than 5 minutes to get to know the student a tutor is tutoring. With this being done, the student opened up so much and was making great discoveries and ideas for their paper. Not only was the student able to pick up on great ideas for his paper enthusiastically, the student felt so much better to know that I was not as intimidating as a shy person might think. The tutor session was then filled with spontaneous and successful ideas, laughter, and a great connection between myself and the student.

How To:

As a tutor in this situation, you may be caught off guard and unsure of how to handle it, but here are a few tips & tricks of how to go about a shy and quiet tutee:

- Begin the session by introducing yourself to them and making light conversation (ex: asking about how their day is going, complimenting them etc.)
-In doing this the tutee will hopefully be a bit more relaxed and realize that you are a student just like them.
- It is important to note that dealing with a shy student is going to require a bit more work on your part so remember to remain patient.
-For Dyana's tutee, the student was able to open up, but this may not always be the case. Make sure you understand that not every student is the same and not everyone is going to be as quick to get comfortable.
- Lead them into engaging ideas about their essay.
-A lot of time they have many ideas in their head, but it hard for them to get the words out; take the time to encourage them and "dig out" the words and ideas bouncing around in their brains.

Follow these simple tips & tricks and your next encounter with a shy and quiet tutee is sure to be a breeze!

Untitled by Hector Palma

Working in the Writing Center, you are bound to run into many personalities, from extremely reserved to wildly energetic. As a tutor, it is one of many of your jobs to adapt and accommodate to all students, all with different needs. Reserved tutees are often the hardest to get the ball rolling with. However, with these proper steps, these shells shall be shed.

To begin with, introduction is key. Make your tutee feel welcome and comfortable from the very beginning. Start with some small talk and appear open in both body language and in your speech, of course without coming off as too overbearing. Remember, the tutee has to feel as your equal. This is to loosen up and dissuade tutees from seeing you as an unquestionable authority figure. And we want to be questioned don't we?

After the small talk, you can proceed to serious tutoring. Keep in mind that the tutee, even if they are shy, should be doing at least half the talking. Ask the tutee what assignment they're here to be assisted on. If they have a physical prompt, you're off to a good start. If not, you may have to rely on them for direction. This will be the point at which you may notice if your tutee has a shy, reserved demeanor. If they are as such, you will have to take the lead in the discussion. Ask for clarification the prompt, and make sure that they properly understand it. If not, explain. And if so, we go on to the next step.

The discussion on the writing itself, whether it be a brainstorm or a revision of a rough draft, will depend on how you lead. Ask questions pertaining to their ideas on their chosen text/quote. For example, if covering a quote from *To Kill A Mockingbird*, you can ask them how the quote pertains to Scout's or Jem's character development, or how it relate to a theme such as familial love. Similarly, if covering a rough draft, ask them of what their interpretation of a quote is and how they have analyzed it in the writing. In both cases, you have to continue asking questions if they seem confused. Going through all of the essay chronologically (if they brought a rough draft), usually helps with covering the tutee's concerns.

One important must is to keep track of what the tutee struggles with, whether it be theses, topic sentences, or analyses. Make mental notes and make sure to cover the basic idea and provide examples on how to do them correctly. However, be weary if doing their work for them. You want to provide guidance, but they have to do the work themselves. Guide them through big steps, like a thesis, but do not try and write an essay on the spot. From experience, drafting and discussing big ideas and clearing up confusion helps tutees the most.

At the end, once again, ask if there is anything to clarify. Answer their questions with patience and preciseness. Then go over all of what was discussed, preferably have them tell you what you covered. Make sure all ends are tied up. Then, proceed to make a last good impression. Make them feel comfortable coming back and make sure to make the Writing Center a comfortable place for them to come back to.

A Guide on How to Tutor a Shy Student—From a Shy Student

Dennise Reynoso

I think we've all been in a similar situation as students. Getting to your writing center appointment for the first time as a freshman and facing the daunting task of having your writing picked apart by someone more experienced. Of course, having experienced being a tutee yourself, you understand that the writing center doesn't work this way, or at least it shouldn't. As tutors, we have to build up—not break down their ability as a writer. A tutor's job is to help and develop the potential in every student.

Understanding this, it's even more important that we follow this idea when tutoring a shy student. Being a shy student myself in the past, I can relate to this difficulty with presenting work and seeking help. So, I have compiled the following tips which should ensure a successful session with a tutee that's having a particularly hard time opening up.

One, greet the tutee with friendly enthusiasm. A tutor should start their session with a friendly greeting, whether the student is shy or not. Maybe ask about their day and speak politely with them for a few seconds before beginning the session. This creates a comfortable atmosphere that will allow the tutee to speak more freely and confide in you, which is especially helpful when tutoring a particularly shy student. Students who are typically shy have trouble speaking to their teachers which is oddly why the writing center is so great. Students are interacting with their peers, not someone of authority which definitely lowers their nervousness. Although a tutor is essentially taking on a role of a teacher, you might find that maintaining this balance between an instructor and a fellow student may go a long way in terms of opening up a student for discussion.

Second, maintain a conversation throughout and keep them engaging along with you. As you slip into a conversation with your tutee, you may see a shy student shut down a bit as you talk about the writing assignment. Try to stay aware of these moments throughout the session and remember to ask questions. Whether these questions are about components of their essay or about the novel they're doing their report on, it will urge them to engage. Personally, I like to start by asking them to give me a short summary of the book they've read for the assignment which informs me as well as gets them in the headspace to learn. Another tactic I use is to have them read their essay out loud, this is great because they can thoroughly read their assignment themselves and mark any grammar or syntactical errors along the way.

Lastly, dot your conversation with praise on what the tutee does well. This tip is probably one of the most important, at least in my experience. A simple praise such as complimenting their word choice or their cool closing statement can go a long way in boosting their confidence and lessening their nervousness. This tactic can also help in the long run. Before joining the Writing Center, the most memorable and helpful session I had with a tutor included this effort to praise what I did well. I believe I've singled out this appointment because it definitely helped in establishing my own belief in my potential. After this session, I grew confident in my skills and felt encouraged to grow and challenge myself. So although it seems insignificant -it feels really great when an upperclassman praises your work- I would advise keeping this in mind as you go along with your session.

I hope you consider some of these suggestions when instructing a quiet student or any student in the future. I advise all of you incoming tutors to keep in mind that you can have a major impact by opening up and revealing a great writer in even the most introverted of tutees. You'll be successful so long as you treat your tutee with respect and teach them to the best of your ability.

DHS Tutors Talk: “How-To Tutor an AP/ Honors Student”

Kimberly Montanez

Tutoring any student is difficult, it doesn't matter what the subject is, communicating your knowledge to someone in a way that they can understand what you're trying to express can be a rocky road. Tutoring someone in their writing is no easy task. Everyone has a unique voice and you will see that early on, everyone has their own style to writing and what they want from their writing. Same with teachers. Not only do you have to accommodate yourself to the tutee but the teacher that the tutees' have. Then there is that unique moment you have when you tutor a student and there's an immediate bond and you had the teacher previously. It's a great moment. Then there's the moments when a student puts down their paper in front of you and from the MLA heading you see that they're either in an honors or AP English class. I know that dreadful feeling better than anyone. I did have Honors English 10 but I did not have AP Language and Composition. It is a class full of geniuses and students with highly developed writing skills; even though that is true, and you feel like freaking out, do not. I have simple and easy tips and tricks to help you tutor an AP/ Honors student.

1. Stop thinking that because they are an AP or honors student, their writing has no faults. That is not true; every student needs help on their writing, no one is perfect.
2. Stop thinking that you will ruin their paper or give them bad advice, everyone has good advice to give and that includes you.
3. Yes they are a student taking an advanced class in English, but they are still a student, they have doubts about their writing, that is why they are there.
4. Ask them what exactly they want from their essay. Like I said before, everyone has different a unique voice, everyone has different expectations for themselves and their writing. Their weakness might be your strength in writing.
5. Think over everything you have ever learned from your English teachers. Even though English teachers vary in their wants, all English teachers want the same thing, an essay that answers the prompt.
6. Lastly, BE CONFIDENT; you were chosen as a tutor for a reason, you are no chump.

Freaking out or putting yourself down benefits no one. Remember that they are a student, you are a student, they know you are a student and not the teacher.

Remind yourself you are a tutor, you hold knowledge and have decent writing. The writing center welcomes everyone, it is a place where students can help each other out. A student will come into the writing center and will learn something new every single time, but so will you as a tutor. Be open to everything and everyone, that advice will carry you throughout the writing center. And always remember to be kind, all English students are going through the same problem: trying to answer the prompt and get an A.

Tutoring 101: AP and Honors Students

Anais Macias

Welcome to the writing center! As a tutor, you will spend many hours helping your fellow students with their writing. The material you will be working with ranges from a blank piece of paper to a complete essay. Students from all four grade levels come to the writing center for help with their assignments, whether that be Regular, Honors English, ERWC, or AP Literature. During your time at the writing center you will tutor a student from each of these classes, regardless of the class you have been enrolled in.

Tutoring Honor students was a little nerve wrecking for me because I had never taken Honors or AP English. When I was first assigned a tutee from an Honors class, I was surprised and I thought I wasn't qualified to tutor them. I thought I would be of no use to my tutee. I thought that their level of writing was more advanced than mine. Now as a senior and second year writing center tutor, I have found that tutoring AP and Honors students has helped me improve as a writer. It does not matter what level of English you have taken. Tutoring is such a great learning experience not just for your tutee, but yourself. The writing center is a place where you can help others improve their writing skills while improving their writing assignment.

Tutoring Honors and AP students are also my favorite types of tutees because when they come to the writing center they usually have an idea and just need help developing it or re-wording. They are the most responsive types of tutees and some are there because they honestly want the help, while others feel as if it is just another thing to cross off their list. When I tutor these students they mostly need help with their transitions and word choice to make their statement clearer.

The majority of the tutees I have dealt with during my time at the writing center have been honors and AP students. Let me give you a glimpse of what I do to make the most out of my session with my tutee: When they arrive I greet them and ask them how their day is going. I make sure to break the ice and get comfortable. After that, I transition to the assignment. I ask which English they are taking and who their teacher is (I ask this because teachers have different criteria for their students writing). Then I ask them what specifically they need help in, whether they have already begun the writing process, finished, or need help starting their writing assignment. For the most part AP and Honors students have their assignment written and are at the writing center to improve their essay or continue their ideas. Before I even start reading or editing, I ask them questions on the book or article they are referencing for their assignment and ask them questions that connect to their writing prompt. That is when we begin brainstorming ideas and then begin the writing process. If you ever get a difficult/unresponsive student ask them questions and try giving them bits of ideas. Resist your desire to feed them information! Here at the writing center, we believe that better writing makes better writers, but that is not possible if they aren't critically thinkers! Good luck!