

Downey High School Writing Center

Tutors Talk!

**2022-2023
Volume 5**



Preface

The DHS Writing Center staff of 2021-2022 brought us back to campus, but just because we were back didn't mean that everything was back to "normal." No, in fact, our staff had to adjust to being back on campus as students and as tutors along with the various changes in policies, COVID-19 rates and safety procedures, and a plethora of events totally out of our control. Despite all of this, however, we managed to complete over 1,300 tutorials. Our in-person and online tutoring teams, once again, rose to the occasion to provide an important resource to our students to help shape them into stronger, more confident writers.

In this volume of *Tutors Talk*, you will find guidance from real tutors who tutored in the ever-shifting contexts described above. They are the real people who did the real work, so they can provide you with unique and authentic guidance. They were the ones in the chairs talking to real students, so please listen to their stories, advice, and observations as we approach another year where we will surely need to continue to be patient and flexible as a staff.

As many of these tutors echo in their articles, you were chosen for this program for a reason, and though you may be starting this year with nerves and doubt, you'll eventually shake off that imposter syndrome, find your tutoring style, and see how much of a difference you can make. You may not always get to know exactly how much you affect the students that you help. Look for the lightbulb moment you have with a tutee or that genuine smirk you coax out of the shy student who hadn't said more than two words or that "Oh, wow, I get it..." you might get from the student who wanted to be anywhere else but the writing center that afternoon. However, also know that you won't always get a clear moment of validation, and that's okay too. If you approached the session with your full attention and effort, you did something, and that something mattered.

I am looking forward to continuing what will be our tenth year in the program with all of you. The Downey High School Writing Center only works because we have the most amazing young people running it.

Mrs. Crespo

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The Power of a Confident Tutor By Kailani Fletcher

Hello! Welcome to the Writing Center staff. How are you? Are you excited to be a tutor? Well, I hope so. Like all of the *Tutors Talk* articles, this piece is meant to be a reassuring and helpful tool for your time as a tutor. I hope you do feel comfortable and welcome, as that was the point of the flurry of cheerfulness at the beginning. Those ice breakers are obviously better said than written. Which leads to my first piece of advice: *always* make a little small talk. Although not everyone is a fan of it, small talk is “small” because it’s easy, predictable, and can make tutorials a little less intimidating for tutees *and* for tutors. Your comfort as a tutor is also a priority. Make yourself a little script if you have to until it comes naturally!

An effective tutoring session is contingent on the tutee gaining comfortability with their tutor, but what happens when the tutor is not comfortable and relaxed? Well, nothing terrible happens so don't get worried about being worried about tutoring. This situation just leaves room for improvement in tutorials. When you enter a tutoring session tense, your own mindset can limit how well you bring the tutee out of their shell and can also affect the kind of advice you give and warp the environment you create. You are undoubtedly a skilled writer and an amicable person, or you would not have been selected for this role. Those two traits combined make a strong Writing Center tutor, so don't question yourself. If you are a naturally shy person—the type that takes some time warming up to people—there's no need to fret! You should still start every tutorial with an introduction to break the ice for both you and your tutee. I promise you, the tutee is more afraid of you than you are of them which is why it is important for you to come off as friendly and open. You can also calm your nerves by reminding yourself that mistakes are part of the learning process! We are all human and are all prone to error. Mistakes come with the role, but it is also important to try to catch those mistakes and rectify them as best as you can.

The main goal is to have our tutees walking away with more confidence in their writing abilities. Remember that the focus of each tutorial is the tutee and their work. Not you or anything that you are worried about doing wrong yourself, so try and loosen up. Tutoring is supposed to be a fun and enlightening experience. Personally, I have made new friends and experienced meaningful conversations that I would have otherwise missed out on if I failed to open up to tutees. Decentering myself during tutorials helped me realize that I am not under scrutiny and there is no reason to be so hard on myself or so nervous. Many will be extremely grateful for your help and will fail to notice any blunders. Most importantly, remember that you are wanted and *needed*.

Positivity

By Alyssa Mayer

When I first became a writing center tutor I felt very nervous about how my appointments were going to go. I was unsure if I was going to ask the right questions or leave a positive experience with the students I was tutoring. When I was talking to other tutors at the beginning of the year, they shared a great piece of advice that I like to pass down to other tutors. It is important to have a positive attitude.

It can be a little tricky during appointments to connect with new students every visit. Everyone has a different mindset when they come in. Some have their whole essay prepared while others need help to brainstorm. The one constant in my appointments is to have a positive attitude toward the students and their writing. It can be a nice way to break the ice and create a friendly environment for the students. Even as a tutor I feel more relaxed and prepared to help when I have a positive mindset. I have had a couple of appointments that weren't entirely ideal so it was a little harder to have that positive mindset. It is okay if you have a not-so-great day or appointment, but bringing positivity into your session will help. There are some students that need a little bit more of a push and that is also okay. Take your time and remember this is challenging for them too.

It can be helpful to get to know the students you are tutoring. It is a little challenging when you have a 30-minute time frame, but it is worth it. By knowing the student you can develop an understanding of their writing style and their writing needs. Once they feel comfortable talking to you, they can then open up about their uncertainties in their writing. Students can also feel more comfortable sharing their exciting ideas and it is a lot of fun. One of my favorite appointments was when I got to help a student write a paper about a book we both read and enjoyed. We got to talk and write about our favorite parts and it was great to see someone excited by writing.

Overall the one tip I have for enjoying a great appointment is having a positive attitude. Students will be more responsive to what you have to suggest and they will feel more comfortable. Another thing to remember is that a lot of students are first-timers so this might be a very intimidating appointment. To help them and yourself, keep that positive attitude and you both will have a great time. So with that in mind, good luck and stay positive.

The Importance of Patience

By Terry Kim

As a tutor in the first year back in person after a global pandemic, it was very nerve-racking to experience human interaction, especially in the form of tutoring someone in a one-on-one setting.

During my experience attempting to return to conformity, I've realized the significance of an ever-so-basic phrase, "Patience is key." This phrase is found everywhere in our lives but truly has great importance, especially considering that it consists of only three words.

Throughout the course of the school year, there will be many students to tutor and many unique experiences. There will be students, either full of enthusiasm and motivation, or students with dread and anxiety. Through it all, it is important to try your best to help assist them in whatever they need.

This is where patience comes into play. Patience is necessary to maintain the mindset best needed to effectively aid in a student's growth as a writer. After multiple attempts and failures to reach the student on a personal level, Instead of simply explaining their mistakes to them and fixing them, a tutor's goal should be to help them grow and learn to fix their mistakes themselves in the future by asking questions and being interactive. A simple fix in the present is just that, a fix. We, as tutors, don't possess the role of fixing others or their writing. Instead, we help them by guiding them to become better writers through self-discovery or even simply answering their questions, providing them with anything that they want to know.

Patience is filled with various meanings and interpretations. Another way to interpret the word is the amount of effort one puts into a specific stimulus. For example, you can generally measure the patience one has through the amount of effort one put in.

As a tutor, you make an effort not to simply fix what's wrong or make a piece better but also try to enhance one's journey with writing, assisting in their growth as a writer.

Furthermore, it takes a lot of effort to be patient but in the end, patience not only benefits us but others around us as well, which is typically the very reason why we became tutors in the first place, to help those around us.

Reciprocal Behavior Creates Momentous Experiences

By Emily Nuñez

If anyone were to ask what I have taken away from actively being a part of the Writing Center, I would say I have learned how to become more verbal about writing itself.

The experiences I have created within the Writing Center have been wonderful and positive due to the environment provided. This environment has influenced me to become more comfortable with being vocal about issues and questions that may transpire in the writing process.

I came to a realization that every appointment I had was both genuinely interesting and nerve wracking. This was because I was able to work with someone different at each appointment. Being both new to tutoring and helping new people allowed me to become aware and open to different levels and styles of writing. I too was personally intrigued by some of the topics students had brought into the Writing Center, as they were all seen and interpreted in different sets of eyes. Overtime I began to gain confidence and comfort in tutoring!

Although there are many actively participating tutees, there are some tutees that are tentative to respond, but when this happens I would advise that you simply try your best to continue the conversation. This can possibly be done by asking about older writing assignments to use as examples in order to spark an idea. The ability to start a conversation is an essential part of being a tutor, so it is vital that one knows how to create good conversation correlating to the writing topic.

Reciprocated behavior is a process of exchanging behaviors with other people in order to gain a mutual benefit or build an equivalent behavior between sets of people. This behavioral practice is key in order for two different parties to build a comfortable environment, leading to comfortable conversations on a writing piece. Writing is both expressive and personal. Meaning that some people may have anxiety in showing others their personal writing, so it is important that you establish comfort through conversation in hopes to receive reciprocated communication.

Although a partner appointment may sound intimidating, it is actually beneficial toward the engagement of the conversation. The first time I worked with a partner assignment I found that I really enjoyed it! Having two students work on a joint assignment made both the tutees become noticeably more comfortable and talkative. An experience of my own resulted in the tutees being able to bounce ideas off of each other, therefore making me feel both confident and happy that they were engaged in the process of writing.

Some of the most conversational appointments are the ones you tend to remember, which makes tutoring all worthwhile, as you feel like you have genuinely impacted someone's future writing skills and confidence.

The Psychology in Writing - Smile!

By Mathew Martinez

If you haven't already read Tutors Talk Volume 4, "The Math in Writing" by Naomi Villescas, then you probably don't see the appeal for my interest in psychology. I hope the title caught your attention as much as Naomi's title caught mine!

Don't worry I will try to stay away from the notorious Sigmund Freud - trust me, he's a weirdo... please don't search him up. Now that I have your attention I would love to commend your willingness and desire to help others along their writing process. Not only is this organization a place where we are able to help our fellow peers, but it is a place where you can meet new people and make mistakes - yes, even as a tutor!

I remember how I felt throughout my first few sessions: anxious, unprepared, incompetent and to be frank, feeling like I was about to puke. Anxiety can stem from feeling uncomfortable - even from fear - and the anxiety I felt was rooted from this uneasiness of being unprepared, along with this feeling of incompetence. Emotions, emotions, emotions! Do NOT let them take over, instead, OWN them. Try this out: smile right now, how are you feeling? Okay, now smile harder - yes, with your teeth! - how do you feel now? According to the facial feedback response we are more likely to feel more happy if we force ourselves to put on a smile just as we tried to do. In response to this, we can practice the feel-good, do-good phenomenon where we are more likely to be helpful when we feel good! See what I did there, now you are ready to take on any tutee with that beautiful smile and good attitude!

Remember its okay to have off days, we all have them. Again, don't get caught up in your emotions, your tutee has booked you for 30 minutes, try to utilize this time to the best of your ability by helping them out as much as you can - you're doing great! At times, it might feel like you're not capable of helping them with their writing - trust me I've been there! I tend to feel like an imposter, AKA imposter syndrome, where you feel like a fraud and force yourself to believe you can't do this - remember, yes you can! You were chosen for a reason.

Communication is another thing I would like to stress. Please be mindful of your own schedule and be prepared to search around for other possible tutors to cover your shift. It's okay to have days where you may not make it, just try to talk to Mrs. Crespo ahead of time to let her know - she loves and encourages this, it helps her, yourself, and everyone out in the long run!

I hope this piece has served you as a way to help with first day jitters, learn that you're more than competent and that your emotions are valid! If you ever find yourself struggling in anyway, don't be afraid to ask for help - hey, feel free to ask me too - it's more than okay to ask for help sometimes, we are human, we all struggle. Good luck, and remember to smile! :)

The Kingdom of Downey High School: A Tutor at Writing Center Court Victoria Garcia

Court is an environment where royalty resides and imagination runs wild. An invitation to Court is not easily given. One can not just run into the castle, but you are not just anyone. In the entire Kingdom of Downey High School, you were specifically chosen to serve her subjects from within Court. Given with great honor, this authorization in no right consents to you running amuck within the castle walls. Although the feeling of being at Court is exhilarating, you were chosen for a reason, and nevertheless, you have responsibilities. Responsibilities of all shapes and sizes, but deriving from the same birthplace, helping the citizens of our grand kingdom become better writers.

With great power comes great responsibility as few say, and it accommodates great truth. Whilst prioritizing the writing of the citizens, do not overlook the amount of influence you have on them. You have the ability to ease their apprehensiveness due to their assigned task. You also have the ability to transform not only their day, but their skills. Whether big or small, that amount of power lies within your grasp, and you have been entrusted with the responsibilities tethered to it.

I can only guide you to a certain extent before you begin to fully make your own decisions, but until then, I offer advice to facilitate your transition into life at Court and the weight accompanying it. To begin, it is fair to say for most, meeting a random person for the first time can cause a shiver down one's spine. Surpassing this feeling is having to show them your work, which is even worse. Insecurities and questions arise such as, "What if my work is bad?", "What if the tutor thinks I'm stupid?". As a tutor, these questions are heartbreaking to hear as we are simply here to assist in any manner possible. It is our responsibility to put the student at ease.

Breaking the ice in a short span of time is difficult, but here are some tips to guide you. Always greet your tutee with a big welcoming smile and a gesture of some kind. While they are walking over, do a little wave, pat or pull out the chair, even shake their hand when they have sat down. Ask them questions about their day, or compliment their clothing. Let them know you are friendly and genuinely there to help and not judge. Body language also says a lot. During the appointment, do not daze off, or look away. Always be alert and active. Never give the tutee a reason to retreat into their shell, "Oh, I'm boring them," "Is it that bad?" Although this may seem like general knowledge, us tutees are also citizens of this extraordinary Kingdom. A day in the Kingdom is very tiresome, and when we enter Court, that mental and physical burnout follows. Unintentionally, actions such as daydreaming can occur, but remember, you are in Court and you have responsibilities. My last and most important piece of advice is this, throughout the appointment, make sure to give the tutee compliments on their work. REMEMBER, you are benefiting THEIR already written work, you are NOT changing it to your own writing style. This is the responsibility that maintains the most weight in Court. You shall never forget it.

I now deem you properly trained and adequately prepared to enter and serve in Writing Center Court of the Kingdom of Downey High School.

Doubt is Normal

By Jocelyn Gonzalez

Nervous? Anxious? Now you are a Writing Center tutor with the responsibility to come to your shift and aid a tutee by changing their “okay” paper into “an A+” paper. Scary, isn't it? Let me tell you right now, feeling doubtful at this moment is normal and part of the process.

Now that you have been accepted to be a Writing Center tutor, the nerves will kick in, especially when you have your first shift, and that is okay. That doubt within you, making you feel like you are not capable of tutoring, will only be there for the first days of your shift. Trust me, it will leave. Everything will be okay and will be fine.

I know this will be a challenge, an obstacle that you have to overcome. Most former and current tutors have experienced doubt and they have surpassed that, just like you will too. Doubt is only a mental challenge that you will have to fight against but with a few weeks of tutoring, you will win that fight.

Right now, do not feel pressure that you have to know every detail regarding tutoring. Even when you are in your first month of tutoring, do not pressure yourself because that will only create an insecurity on yourself and on the tutees as they will sense that doubtfulness. Your attitude will reflect upon your tutees so if you feel doubtful about your tutoring/writing capabilities, then so will your tutee.

There will be instances where the tutee will have a well done piece and you'll start to formulate a way to revise that perfect, well done piece. You'll start to question and, possibly, become doubtful and unsure if you are capable of tutoring. Do not lead yourself to thinking that. Everyone has their own, unique writing skills, there is no exact right or wrong way to write.

Do not doubt yourself and your capabilities to tutor, you are selected to be a Writing Center tutor for a reason. Mrs. Crespo sees the potential you have so do not fear your nerves. There is always much support around the Writing Center from the advisors to the other tutors. You are capable of being a Writing Center tutor.

Basic Writing Tips to Prepare for Tutoring By Ateka Shakir

You've been accepted to the Writing Center because you have a talent for writing! However, even though writing your own essays and papers may come natural to you, tutoring someone requires a different sort of mindset. Once you get handed another student's paper, you might not know exactly what you should be looking for. Writing is not like math — there is no set answer for anything. There's about a hundred different ways for the author to convey their intended message to the reader, depending on what kind of writing assignment it is: argumentative, persuasive, narrative, explanatory, etc. The type of writing assignment influences things such as the tone of the writing, the structure, the choice of words, etc.

And so, taking all of these factors into consideration,

What should one look for in other students' writing?

In argumentative and persuasive writing, one of the most important things to look for is a strong, debatable thesis, with a clear two sides to the argument. From then on, every paragraph should somehow support or tie back to the thesis statement. The thesis determines the whole direction of the essay. Speaking of support, another thing to identify is a concise, effective choice of quotes. The quotes should make sense in relation to what the tutee is arguing for or against in their essay, as they contribute to creating strong reasoning. There is nothing to analyze or elaborate on if the quote doesn't have much substance to it in the first place.

In narrative writing, choice of diction (AKA words) is important. Narratives are all about telling stories, so diction is crucial to get one's audience engaged. Diction can convey the mood or the atmosphere of the story. For example, words such as “beamed,” “exhilarating,” “jovial,” and “danced,” reflect a mood of energy and warmth, while the words “murmured,” “shadowed,” “dragged,” and “hunched” reflect a mood of dejectedness and introversion. If your tutee feels as though they are not being descriptive enough in their narrative writing, ask them to establish a mood they want to portray, then help them brainstorm words to support the mood.

In explanatory writing, structure is prominent. It determines the order in which the reader's mind will process the information given to them. The structure must be easy to follow so that the reader can better comprehend the ideas the tutee is presenting. The ideas must flow into one another and connect, rather than jump all over the place. An appropriate tone is also important; in this case, neutral. The phrase “explanatory writing” is self-*explanatory*: it is explaining something, not persuading or arguing. Therefore, the reader doesn't need to be convinced to hypothetically support one side or the other using appealing diction.

These key concepts can apply to more than one type of writing, but these are just the types of writing I believe they apply to the most. Even if you know a lot of this information already, these tips can serve as a small reminder right before you have a tutoring session, and can help you, the tutor, bring out the full potential of your tutee's writing ability.

Be the Sidekick

By Mirela Guzman

We've all seen at least one Disney movie, so I'm sure you're familiar with the concept of every protagonist having some kind of sidekick. They follow the protagonist around and typically provide a helping hand whenever they're on a new adventure. That's what it's like to be a tutor! Tutoring is so much more than fixing grammar and punctuation; as a tutor, you're helping your tutees become better writers. In all honesty, we just nudge them in the right direction so that they feel confident in their work! Think of yourself as their Jiminy Cricket! Here are some tips on how you can be the best tutor/sidekick possible :)

As a tutor, you'll hear it a lot, but it's important to greet your tutee. Introduce yourself and engage in small talk; discuss hobbies, favorite movies, or anything else that will get them talking (it's super important)! Even if you're apprehensive, keep your head up! As humans, we're observational learners, so if you start a tutorial confidently and welcomingly, your tutee will reciprocate your attitude and will be a lot more likely to open up. Whether you're tutoring online or in person, it's best to start your tutorials by asking what *they* want to focus on, what *they* feel the least confident about, and just work from there. Every one of us has felt the nervousness, twitchiness, and anxiety that ensues an approaching deadline. You know what it's like to be in their shoes, use that to sympathize with your tutees.

Above all, don't forget to compliment them, but make sure it's genuine; there's nothing worse than receiving phony praises. Try not to be interrogative when you ask them questions, too. Ask for clarification or new ways to answer a prompt and get them to jot down their ideas! While it may be difficult for you to let your student take the wheel and ride shotgun, it will make an immense difference in your tutee as a writer in the future!

Don't underestimate your potential as a tutor; after all, you're here right now because you're more than capable of being a part of this program. Online or in person, know that you're making a difference by helping your tutee become the best writer they can be, one step at a time. Every writer brings something new and unique, so channel your inner Jiminy Cricket and go be an awesome tutor!

Having a Nervous Student

By Sophia Berger

Being a writing center tutor is a challenge on its own. To be able to give recommendations on how to improve someone else writing isn't always easy. Getting a tutee who may not be so outgoing is always going to be a challenge. When they have already worked up the courage to show up, it's important that as the tutor we take the initiative to get them to speak up. Meaning, take a few minutes while you get situated to ask about how they are doing and strike up a casual conversation before beginning to ensure they don't feel intimidated. Personally, I tend to struggle with this but that's okay! We all have things to improve on. I normally find myself asking about what we are working on that day instead of asking how their day has been.

As time goes on, you get accustomed to the time crunch that is only having 30 mins to revise and give suggestions on someone's entire paper. Yes, having specific things to work on will help but often adjustments in those areas will call for adjustments elsewhere as well. Making sure that your tutee feels comfortable from the start will help with making them feel safer and more open to revising other areas of their work without feeling insecure about their writing.

In other words, getting each student to open up and feel comfortable with you from the beginning with a simple conversation starter, will lead to an overall more pleasant experience and having them look to return.

Waging War Against a Tutor's Common Enemy

By Annaleise Caballero

The comfort of bed. It can be said that it is a student's worst enemy, or in this case a writing tutor's worst enemy. Before you can wake up to the light of the sun, before you can finish those last problems you told yourself you would finish in the morning, you will have to be dressed, motivated, and ready to help revise a three page essay on a story from 9th grade (which you might or might not have read). It would be a lie to deny that becoming a writing center tutor is an easy task that requires little effort. However, it would also be a lie to deny the pride you will feel after seeing a tutee 's eye flash with ideas of how they can improve their sentence after offering advice.

At the start of the battle, you will be successful in defeating the remaining sleepiness which lures you to stay just, "five more minutes". This part is the easiest part of the war. It is not until a few months of school, extracurriculars, or simply life issues thrown at you, will you begin to feel impending defeat. You will want to stay in bed. Thoughts sounding like, "why are you going at 7am to no scheduled appointment"? Wonder if completing your "last math problems are more important?" It is easy to forget your true reasons for becoming a writing tutor warrior after not having a few appointments. However, the fight is worth it.

Warrior, you must always keep your motivation close to you. You are not just an insignificant foot soldier, but a general. Sure there will be tough battles, but the spoils of war are much more valuable. Only you can see someone insecure about their writing leave with a smile on their face. Only you can help someone whose feelings of procrastination overwhelm them and instead replace these feelings with confidence in their progress. Only you can help others learn new writing techniques which will shape their writing for the following years. When the battle feels like it is turning for the worse, always remember; you will be the one to put a smile on many faces.

CONFIDENT
Andrea Suresh

Dear fellow tutee,

Congratulations!! It is quite an honor to be selected to be a part of this amazing program where you have the ability to share your love for writing and aiding others. It's hard to not feel like you don't belong here. That you doubt yourself and question whether you could ever give advice to another, but I assure you that you were chosen to be here for a reason.

C.O.N.F.I.D.E.N.T.

Caring. As a tutee, being caring comes with the job. Giving advice is one thing but having a compelling tone is what truly sells it. Showing that you care about the piece of writing and the student helps tear down that nervous wall you may have, tutoring the first time, and them, being tutored by an equal.

On-time. Being on-time is a must. It shows responsibility and accountability. As a writing center tutor, you pick certain hours, whether that is in the morning or in the afternoon. Being on-time and even early sets you apart from your peers who may be rushing. It's important that you give yourself leisure time to prepare for your appointment and make sure you're focused.

Neutral. Tutoring is a neutral task. One has to be very open-minded and inviting to ideas the tutee drafts. Yes, it is more than okay to provide tips and advice on what can better their piece of writing, but it is key to not force them to change it. There are times where you'll give advice and they aren't really sure about it, and so in that case, being neutral and reassuring them that they do not have to take the changes in full, but maybe in grains.

Fantastic. You are fantastic. It is very hard not to doubt yourself or feel like you shouldn't be there but you are more than qualified. You did the interview and you proved it, so now, trust yourself. Trust that you have the ability to help your peers and make their and your writing so much better.

Imagination. It's difficult to forget you have a job when you tutor and so you feel like you have to be strict with yourself 100% of the time but you don't. It's important to remember that having an imagination makes writing so much more unique and fun. Sticking to the book can sometimes be boring and so use the stylistic devices and have fun with sentence structure. Don't feel like you need to have simple sentences and no pizzazz.

Determined. Tutors must have determination to push through appointments. Each appointment is different and approaching each in the same way may make the job more difficult or easier. Be sure to adjust with each student and be determined to help in the best way possible.

Enticing. Each student has a different personality. Some are more nervous and take a minute to open up and others are very talkative and open. It's important to present yourself in an enticing form so that they feel comfortable grasping your advice and watch the tone in which you say things too because some are more sensitive than others.

Nice. A smile goes a long way when tutoring. Being accepting and open with questions, making conversation and being interested helps your tutee relax as well as yourself. Sharing names and finding a common interest amongst the two helps smooth the appointment.

Trust. Trusting yourself is a feeling all tutors struggle with when we first start. We doubt and self-criticize, feeling like we do not have the ability to help another student with their piece of writing. That helping is for authority figures who maybe have an idea of what they're doing, but trust yourself. Trust your smarts and know you are more than qualified to be in the position you're in.

Tutoring Online: The Obstacles and Benefits

By Iris Vargas

Last year in 2020/21, the Writing Center experienced a shift in how we would tutor. Because of COVID-19, everyone needed to know how to sufficiently tutor online. That was my first year of tutoring, so of course it was a shock to learn that I would have to tutor someone on a screen instead of face-to-face. It was a lot to learn, not only having to learn how to navigate our online program, but learning how to communicate efficiently to someone through a screen about their writing. While this was challenging at first, I slowly adapted to this unexpected way of tutoring. To my surprise, we continued online tutoring in the 21/22 school year, and I chose to keep doing it this way. While it is different from in-person tutoring, it still shares the same foundations the Writing Center is about. If you are new to tutoring and online tutoring is still an option, do not be afraid of it! There are a few tips that can make tutoring online easier to a beginner.

The first and simplest things you should make sure of is to have a quiet space to work with your tutee. While you can tutor anywhere, make sure it is somewhere appropriate for a tutoring session. The second and most crucial thing in my opinion is to get familiar with your tutee's paper before you meet with your tutee. This has been a major benefit for me with online tutoring. Most times when a tutee schedules their appointment they will attach their draft. I like to read their paper before I meet with them and mark points in my head I might want to address with them during our session. While this isn't required, it is something that has worked to my benefit and aids me to help my tutee more efficiently. That way, when our session begins I already have some pointers to address with the tutee.

Tutoring online has its obstacles as well. A lot of times I found myself tutoring black screens. This was definitely something that made me a little discouraged at times. While I was still able to communicate with the tutee, it still felt quite awkward to tutor this way. Sometimes these tutees were very quiet, and that is understandable. Coming to an online session is a bit nerve-racking, especially to a lot of tutees that were learning from home; which was a majority of the tutees I got. For a lot of them this is the only time they get verbal help with an assignment. It helps to know this though, and it helped me gain motivation for those that were quiet during the session. Sometimes you cannot always make a tutee speak outwardly towards their writing, and that is fine. As long as you help them to your best ability and they feel better at the end, you become a better tutor, online or not.

Do's and Don'ts by Andy Garcia

Do's: First things first: Welcome to the Writing Center!! You'll be great!! A few tips for tutoring in the writing center would be to always start off by asking your tutee how they are doing, how are their classes, what's the assignment about, questions like that. Also ask the tutee if they have anything in particular that they need help with (e.j. Thesis, Body Paragraph, Conclusion, etc) and what they have questions on. A great (highly recommended) way to spot mistakes easily is to ask the tutee if they can read their work to you, but ask if they are okay with reading it outloud before telling them to do so because a goal in the Writing Center is to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere for tutees (and tutors) to learn and become better writers. If you don't know how to fix something specific (e.j. how to format a paper), ask for help. I understand, asking for help makes one look like they don't know what they are doing but, we learn through our mistakes and asking questions, so there is no shame whatsoever in asking for help. Oh and a very big thing that you should do is this: Bring your Vibe Vibe!!! (Also check up on your co-tutors, make sure they are good; spread kindness wherever you go!!!). And as always have fun!!

Don'ts: Once you understand your tutee's assignment, don't make them share the doc and do the work for them. It sounds easy and simple, but what will your tutee learn? No. You can't do the work for them, you as a tutor must guide the tutee, give them a push to start thinking and getting ideas to fix their thesis or body paragraphs, and by a push I mean asking them questions (e.j. What type of relationship does Lennie have with George?). Also, don't completely change the writing of the tutee, otherwise you'll make them feel insecure about their writing. In other words, don't make the tutee feel like their writing isn't good enough, don't just tell the tutee what they could do better, tell them what they did great, give feedback (with kindness).

Concluding message: Not every tutoring session will be the same and that's okay, different sessions give you different feedback which you can use for the future. Don't feel discouraged, but feel empowered, realizing that you're shaping the future. I want to leave you with this quote by Kamand Kojouri, **“Do not give them a candle to light the way, teach them how to make fire instead. That is the meaning of enlightenment.”**

The Recipe to Tutoring

By Lorelei Hart

Tutoring is like a hamburger. And yes, I know this analogy seems a little cheesy (pun intended), but please stick with me.

When one typically imagines a hamburger, they often imagine the loaded, glowing delicacy presented in advertisements. In the same way, many new tutors stress themselves out over the worry that they need to be the perfect tutor right off the bat. Realistically speaking though, the burger didn't start out that way. It started simply as a bun and patty.

Right now, new tutors who have little to no experience are like a plain burger: you've got a general idea and some writing experience. As new tutors begin to research and prepare for tutoring, they are adding a new layer to their burger. After the first couple of tutoring sessions, tutors will have picked up their own personal "do"s and "don't"s, successfully adding a couple more layers to their burger. Maybe the fresh tutors watch someone more experienced help a student with their writing and, from that, they pick up a new skill. You guessed it; the burger gets another layer.

New tutors, like the plain burger, have not had a multitude of chances to decorate your tutoring sandwich with techniques and add all the perfect little condiments. I promise that with time and the coming experience, you new tutors will become well-seasoned tutors who know just what to say when a tutee asks a hard question or when a particularly shy writer comes for help.

So for now, don't stress over what you do not have yet and focus on preparing yourself and your tutoring burger for the journey ahead by talking to current tutors or reading through these advice passages. Good luck on your tutoring-burger-building journey!

Living up to the expectations

By: Julianna Arias

The title is a lie. There are no expectations as to how you should tutor. Well, of course, there are some rules that should be pretty obvious. Be respectful to the tutee (the person you are tutoring), make sure the advice you are giving them is beneficial and will actually help them, etc. What I mean to say is to be yourself and be friendly! This makes your tutee feel less nervous and it also relieves the pressure on you too.

At the writing center, you'll be expected to come in on your assigned day ready to tutor and be prepared on what exactly you are going to be helping your tutee with. A couple of minutes before your shift, or even the day before, look at the writing form your tutee filled out. Read the assignment, how they feel about their writing and what areas they want to work on. If you're lucky, you may even know the assignment from past English classes. If not, take a look at what they need to work on and figure out how you can help them in an efficient manner. Not only does this help you become better prepared and organized, the appointment is much smoother once you know what you are doing.

Having doubts? Don't worry, almost every tutor was at the same place as you are right now. The best thing to remember is to not put so much pressure on yourself and that you were chosen for a reason. Try your best! It is easier said than done, but once you get through the first appointment, it gets easier. It's worth it when your tutee thanks you after the appointment or comes back to get your advice again. Being a writing center tutor comes with many benefits. Aside from the community hours, you get the opportunity to meet new people and work together with other classmates. Even better, being a tutor prepares you to manage your time well which is something you'll need in the future. Be yourself! As much as a cliché it is, it's true. After all, clichés became clichés for a reason.

Everyone writes differently. Remember that. While you are helping someone with their assignment, don't edit it in a way that YOU would write it. You are there to fix any errors, help the tutee with their analysis, etc. But you shouldn't take away sentences or techniques that they use just because you wouldn't use it. A way to avoid this is to propose an idea and ask the tutee how they would go along writing it.

Don't let all this information scare you. Being a writing center tutor is great and you'll love doing it!

Creating Your Formula

By Danial Zebarjedi

The greatest problem and question that occurred with most new tutors and especially myself is “how do I tutor?” This is a loaded question with no definite answer and after an entire school year of tutoring, I still wouldn’t know how to give a proper answer. While I may not be able to answer this question, I do have a general idea of what to do when it comes to tutoring and supporting students with varying writing skills. This formula I’ve created may not be the most efficient way to tutor, but it is a set of bullet points that gets the job done in a way that I prefer and that you could apply. This formula came through months of experience and I’ve noticed that every tutor's formula is drastically unique. So how do you create your own formula?

The greatest factor in creating your own formula is getting to know your tutee. When you first introduce yourself it’s going to be awkward so it’s important to help the tutee be comfortable or else the entire session will be awkward which makes it harder to communicate with each other. Once you and your tutee start on the assignment, there are endless possibilities of what the tutee wants and what you think should be edited on their assignment.

After your introduction is where you can start to get creative with your formula. I would highly recommend asking a lot of questions about the assignment so that you can understand what you will be helping them with. I would highly recommend asking if they have a rubric for the assignment. Then ask if the tutee has any major concerns that they would like you to look for. These don’t have to be the exact questions you ask them, but anything that helps you understand what the assignment is about and what the tutee wants are a vital part of helping the tutee in the best way possible.

Once you have a rough idea of what you’re going to read and look for, start reading their work. If the tutee doesn’t have anything written down, just start brainstorming and asking them questions to get something down and just branch out from there. If the tutee does have something written down, which is most of the time, start reading the assignment out loud so they can follow you and so there isn’t an awkward silence for five minutes. While reading just try to find any obvious problems such as grammar and focus on what the tutee wants you to focus on. Always compliment the tutee on small things such as sentence structures or strong pieces of evidence so the tutee doesn’t feel like they are getting flamed on their writing skills for thirty minutes. Once you see everything looks good ask the tutee if they have any more concerns, if not, then you fill out a completion form for them, and you are done.

Something to note about this process is that this is my formula for helping students. While this should give you an idea of what to do, you’ll find your own formula and it may completely vary from mine and that is okay. Just enjoy the process, be yourself, and you’ll be fine!

