

Downey High School Writing Center

Tutors Talk!

2023-2024
Volume 6



Preface

The tutors of 2022-2023 allowed the DHS Writing Center to figure out its new post-pandemic identity, resulting in one of the most positive, upbeat, eager teams of tutors the program has ever seen. Not only did the Writing Center celebrate its 10th anniversary this year, but we were also able to complete over 1,350 tutorials, pushing our way closer to our pre-pandemic numbers.

With the new late start schedule, we began offering tutoring 5 days a week and kept our online program going; both of which turned out to be choices that helped us continue to be a program that can reach as many students as possible, making us successful and equitable.

In the following collection, you will get to hear tutors' experiences and advice on a multitude of topics.

The first section contains articles about overcoming imposter syndrome and believing in yourself in your role as a tutor in the DHS Writing Center. These articles come from a place of empathy as each of these writers has also felt uncertain and doubtful of their own abilities, but they then offer reassurance and even some advice to help new tutors feel better about the role they have been chosen to fill.

In the second section, there are practical yet personal articles that offer advice on what to do in your sessions, how to create conversation, how to avoid cutting to the chase and just telling writers what's best. We aren't robots here; we're humans, and building that human connection to empower fellow writers rather than doing it for them is what our program is all about. These writers give you some excellent guidelines on what to do in your sessions.

The final section offers some guidance on specific tutorial situations that you may encounter and how to troubleshoot those situations. These writers elaborate on what to do if you encounter an essay about a story you haven't read or what to do if you're tutoring a pair of writers working on the same paper or what to do if your tutee is rude and judgmental. These writers use their specific experiences to shine light on some of the more unique situations you might find yourself in your work as a DHS Writing Center Tutor.

I look forward to working with the 2023-2024 staff; there is no doubt in my mind that you will continue what the tutors before you have done. Trust the process and trust yourself.

Let's make it another great year!
Mrs. Crespo

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Believe in Yourself!

Articles about Confidence

Confidence. What? Like it's hard? Mirela Guzman

I'll paint the picture for you: it's your first session of the year, you're anxious, your stomach feels funny, butterflies are flitting about in there, your hands feel clammy, and you start wondering, "Am I really cut out for this?"

Let me cut to the chase: you're meant to be here. End of story. Past, current, and future tutors can all attest to this. Imposter syndrome is real, and sometimes it's hard to really think you'd make a good tutor and help people with their writing, but you absolutely can. You're here because people believe in you!

Confidence is probably one of the most important aspects of being a tutor, but it's also one of the hardest to grasp. So here's what you do when that degrading voice in your head starts putting you down: breathe. Simple right?

You probably think I'm crazy, but seriously, breathe and regather yourself. Kick that little voice out and give yourself permission to take risks; show up to your appointment and give it your all. If it went well, that's awesome! If you think it could've gone better, learn from it. Nonetheless, good job! Be in the process; you're not going to be a perfect tutor, but that's okay! *You* applied, and people genuinely feel that *you* are a huge asset to the team. Remember that.

Personally, this sense of confidence didn't dawn on me right after my first appointment. To be honest, I half expected my tutees to be able to smell my fear and it took a handful of appointments before that breathing and collecting myself thing became second nature! Even after two years of tutoring, I still get a little nervous and queasy before an appointment, but I know I can get through it. It helps to find the good in appointments and in your abilities instead of knit picking at everything that went wrong. It's a tough habit to break but small compliments to yourself is a great place to start.

Here are some tips other tutors use to be confident:

1. Speak well to yourself (give yourself little compliments after an appointment)
 1. Ie. "I really did BLANK well"
2. Don't take your own criticism to heart, use it to grow
 1. Ie. "Man I really didn't do BLANK, I'll do it for my next appointment"
3. Remember that there's always another tutee, one slip up doesn't define you.
4. Your advisors are there to support you! (so is your staff team!) Talk to them :)

Having completed my last appointment, I can honestly say that I'll miss that feeling before a shift. And looking back at junior me, I don't think she'd ever fathom that statement. But maybe you'll feel the same way eventually! You have the potential to find the good in each appointment and people are here to support you when you feel like you can't do it. You're not alone, classes of tutors before you have felt this way, and your current peers feel this way too. Knock it out of the park! Go believe in yourself!

It's Okay
Jocelyn Gonzalez

You did it, you're a Writing Center tutor! Doesn't matter how many years you've been a Writing Center tutor, what matters is that you have the potential and are capable of mentoring others in their writing. That's not always easy. You were chosen to be a tutor and that says a lot.

Sometimes we don't think of what can happen until it happens. We don't think of the unexpected because we don't expect it. The confusion doesn't start until we have the writing assignment. Of course, some of these writing assignments are assignments we have done and majority of these are about analysis. The familiarity is there, but what happens when a tutee asks or comes in with a paper that you aren't too sure how to help.

First off, remember that you were chosen to be a tutor. Out of the many applicants, you were selected for your capability. You have the potential, but remember, we're not always going to know every answer to every question. It is okay to not know the exact answer or way to help. Remember that you're a tutor not an English teacher.

We're here to guide students through their paper to make them stronger and confident writers. We're here to help one another. Your thirty minute appointment isn't to teach nor instruct the tutee on how to write and fix their paper. Your thirty minute appointment is to allow each other to work on the paper and find ways it can be revised. The tutee will come in lost and seek revisions. That's where you will come in and look for some possible revisions together. Remember, both of you will be asking questions and finding answers.

It may feel rough to not know the answer to the question but it's okay. You're also learning how to be a more stronger and confident writer. Writing is a skill that everyone is improving on. There is no perfect way, method, or format. Writing comes in various forms; there is not a standardized form. Simply remember that you have the potential to tutor. You are capable to tutor a tutee with any writing assignment they have. You have the ability to tackle any obstacle that may come your way. You're a Writing Center tutor, you got this!

A Sanctuary Samantha Comley

Although writing has always been a haven for me, sharing it with others was an irrational fear of mine. I loved reading everyone's writing because of how diverse, informative, and fluctuating each was, yet I was terrified to share my own.

When I first applied to be a tutor, I had many doubts about my capabilities. Honestly, I never considered the possibility that I would get in. I wasn't nearly as confident as I should've been in my writing ability, even as I stared at the confirmation email. I thought there was an accident, maybe someone had made a mistake? I dreaded each appointment with a student because I didn't envision myself being social enough, intelligent enough, or even good enough.

My palms were sweaty, and my hands were cold by my first appointment. A cliché situation really, worried about my first appointment? Everyone had thought that way at some time in their life. Yet it didn't feel that way. It was as if I was the only person on the face of this earth to ever worry about teaching someone by showing what I can do as a writer; *my* talent. This was *my* talent that I nurtured and formed into *my* academic weapon over time. Realizing my talents and taking the extra step to stray away from my comfort zone was a huge moment for me. I find myself using those same talents daily without even realizing it.

Your comfort zone is something that never really disappears. It's always there, waiting for you to return on your own time. No one realizes how unhealthy it is to depend on your comfort zone. To depend on that sanctuary is to never grow. You cannot grow in the same environment that hurt you, or the same familiar environment you've known for so long. Change *changes* you. It sounds a little mindless and insanely cliché but I cannot stress enough how important it is to welcome change. It's an overwhelming situation at first, to welcome the uncertainty but it is so beneficial to you; as a student, educator, and human. That small little place you're familiar with doesn't allow you enough space to shine beyond expectations. Stepping out of there does. It opens new, untouched elements of yourself that you couldn't have imagined beforehand. Unlocking your full potential lets you blossom into an extraordinary writer, tutor, and person.

My final thought is to never limit yourself in your comfort zone. Allow yourself to receive the change, the future, and the new bits of knowledge; step out of that sanctuary.

Never Undermine Your Abilities

Aaliyah Bañuelos

Feeling Anxious? Worried? Or Thinking About the What if's? Thinking you have to suddenly become a superhero and make the tutees' essay into an A+ paper is nerve-racking. You are not alone, and know that it's okay to feel nervous because it shows that you care!

When I first started helping, I would be super anxious because I would tell myself, "What if I don't have anything to contribute to their paper" or "What if I look at their paper and it's beautifully written? I would feel useless." Don't ever think like that! Mrs. Crespo chose you for a reason. She is confident and sees potential in you, so don't cut yourself short.

The key to having confidence in your writing abilities and beyond is to build up your self-efficacy. Self-efficacy means a person's belief in their ability to complete a certain task or goal. Being willing to strive and experience new challenges despite setbacks builds your confidence and skills.

First impressions on your tutees are vital to having a successful session, but in order to do this, you need to believe in yourself! Have confidence in yourself and your past English teachers that they have given you all the tools to succeed. Undermining yourself can only lead to feeling insecure about your writing abilities, and tutees can feel when you're nervous. Your confidence will reflect on the tutees, so if you doubt your tutoring skills, then so will your tutee.

Know that you are not expected to become an expert right off the bat, as even returns are still learning how to become better tutors. Writing is powerful as it allows individuals to freely express their ideas, so don't be too hard on yourself to make it perfect. In writing, there is no "right" style.

What is great about tutoring in the Writing Center is that I am always learning from my tutees how I can improve my writing and learn about new topics. If you need anything, there are amazing tutors around to help on your shift too! You will become a phenomenal Writing Center tutor.

Balancing **Cristina Zaldivar**

It's hard to balance confidence and humility, for tutors and students alike. During your time working as a tutor, you are likely to come across overconfident and/or negative students who have yet to find their balance. They come in unresponsive to feedback and with a fixed mindset towards their writing.

To envision this situation, imagine a seesaw with their overconfidence weighing down one end and your confidence on the other end. How do you balance the seesaw?

On the surface level, adopting their overconfidence may balance the seesaw, but I will argue that it could break the beam entirely. So what do you do? Let's start by not engaging in a power struggle. While it might be tempting to come back with a witty retort, abstain for the sake of the appointment. Instead, address the idea that no piece of writing is perfect – not even Shakespeare's plays or John Steinbeck's novels. I have found that most underclassmen struggle with formatting, and while it's a small detail, it's not insignificant. Don't blatantly attempt to lower their confidence either, stick to your usual balance of compliments and advice.

Lowering your confidence would not balance the seesaw either. Don't let others dismiss your comments – this goes for tutoring and general life. Use irrefutable logic and personal experiences to persuade them to simply listen to your thoughts. Do not let go of your confidence or your amicability. You, as the tutor, can manipulate the tone, so continue to be respectful and animated and they may follow suit.

While 30 minutes may not seem like enough time to use your charisma to elicit a balanced attitude, your influence will have lasting effects. For their next appointment, they are more likely to walk in with an open mindset.

The Power of Perseverance and Trust

Jennifer Cervantes

Hello Future Writing Center Tutor! How are you feeling? I know how exciting and unknown the chapter on helping students regarding writing may seem. I was once in your spot, concerned if my insight would be meaningful. However, as soon as my first tutoring session began, I noted two essential qualities that provided the most effective results: trust and perseverance.

The essential quality of trust may flourish with a simple question: how are you? The simple question examines a state of mind beyond school, where one is empathetic towards another student's well being. Being social and connecting with people is an illustrious trait for a tutor when a tutee is vulnerable and enables your insight into their writing. Therefore, trust is necessary for the tutee to feel comfortable enough to establish the best effective outcome of the tutoring session. Creating an ambient environment where students can ask for help is empowering. With an ambient environment as a tutor and tutee, the session will run smoothly and enable any questions to emerge. The tutee will feel comfortable and fulfilled with trust to fully express themselves and create an eccentric piece of literature.

As an incoming tutor, I began to implement perseverance within myself. I would enter the writing center with a growth mindset manifesting how the tutoring session would be successful. I would attain a positive outlook and reassure myself that the session may be effective. This mindset of perseverance paved the way for the tutees. As a team, we conquered challenges within their writing and established goals. Within the grasp of perseverance, the tutees condemned what they perceived as impossible and made it possible. As a result, tutees began to explore outside of their fixed mindset and attain solutions with an optimistic attitude. The effects of perseverance as a trait regarding rhetoric are highly potent and can establish effective outcomes. Therefore, I recommend tutors to enable perseverance to be susceptible to a prosperous tutoring session.

As a concluding thought, trust and perseverance are two essential qualities I have seen with unsurpassed results and growth within my tutees regarding their writing. I would recommend every tutor establish a trusting environment and practice perseverance within themselves. Furthermore, once the tutor has attained perseverance within themselves, they can transpire this trait towards their tutees and inspire them to create the best result.

First Time Tutor

By Riley Femal

Feeling inexperienced or scared? English isn't your strongest subject? Usually, you would never think a Writing Center tutor could feel this way, but I did. I started liking English for the first time in my sophomore year with one of the best teachers on campus. English is now one of my favorite subjects because Mrs. Crespo changed the way I see the English language. Mrs. Crespo approached me about being a Writing Center tutor, but I was very anxious. It took me days to decide whether to be a tutor or not. I filled out the application and got a position as a tutor.

After meeting fellow tutors and receiving training, I felt more confident about tutoring until my first session. My first session was terrifying. I was tense, but it seemed that my tutee wasn't too nervous. I assisted her with passage analysis for a short story that I have never read before. This session birthed the style of tutoring that I found best for myself and the tutees.

I start by asking the tutee about the writing assignment: what class it's for, what the specific instructions are, what they need help with, and the due date. I have them read their whole article or a specific portion they need help with. Having the tutee read the article out loud helped them find rough spots and weird wording. I also introduce every tutee to my favorite software ever: Grammarly. Grammarly has helped me with my writing a ton, I know it will help other students.

Wrapping up my first session made me feel relief. In retrospect, I don't know why I was so scared. After a few sessions, I felt very comfortable with helping fellow students. I also adopted a system where I e-mail the tutee a few weeks after the session to ask if their assignment was graded. I only got one response, but no grade back. Keeping in touch with tutees is very important with letting them know you care and want them to thrive academically.

Well, here I am today, finishing my second semester of being a tutor at the Writing Center. Two semesters of trying to help students with their writing on Monday mornings. Even as a tutor, I still need help with writing sometimes. I became a tutor to help other students and learn from other tutors. Overall, my time as a Writing Center tutor has been great. I love being a part of the team, and I know you will too!

How Do I Do This Job?

Articles About Tutoring Basics

Guidelines to being a Writing Center Tutor

Kristin Conde

It is easy to get caught up in bad habits, so let's start with some basic do's and don'ts that will help prepare you for your next or first writing tutor session.

The first thing to remember is that you are helping the student find their voice through their writing and not just rewriting their essay to fit your standards. It's easy to tell your tutee exactly what to write, but what benefit does that have? How will they learn to write when you're not there? A better alternative is to ask them questions. (i.e. What do you think you need to work on? Where do you feel that your writing is lacking? What is a better way to get your point across?) Personally, what I like to do is have the tutee read their own writing out loud so that they can catch any mistakes on their own and listen to see if their writing flows.

Another don't would be don't solely criticize your tutee's writing. This can make them insecure about their writing and cause them to shut down when you are revising their writing. What I like to do when I'm giving feedback is find somewhere in their writing that I can praise so that I'm not solely talking about the negatives in their writing. Doing this creates more confidence within the tutee and typically helps to break them out of their shell in the limited time you two are working together.

What also helps me to better understand the tutee's assignment is having them explain the prompt to me and give me a quick summary of the book or piece of writing they read so that way I have a better understanding of what they are being asked to do. This ensures that I can catch when the tutee is writing off topic or if their evidence and reasoning are not following back to the main claim. Do not be afraid of not knowing the answer to everything! You are still learning as well and I promise it will not be the end of the world!

Good luck as you continue or start your journey as a Writing Center tutor! As long as you take this time to not only help others, but also help yourself grow as a writer. You will do amazing and help so many writers find their voice. It will not be easy, but nothing good ever comes easy.

Making Connections

Isabelle Martinez

When you enter a new room, you must get accustomed to the people in it. You'll walk into a room filled with new faces and essays during each appointment. Although your main objective is to give positive feedback on pieces of writing, to do so it's crucial that you feel comfortable with making connections in a matter of minutes.

Opening up is a skill that is not only imperative at the writing center but beyond high school. Often in the real world, you'll have to spark conversations and feel comfortable with total strangers. Luckily, in the writing center, the strangers you'll be encountering are your fellow Vikings. They are just as nervous in fact, probably more nervous than you might be. Therefore, to take full advantage of the Writing Center as a means of building on your skills, it's crucial to work towards being more sociable.

The first step in learning to open up more is to feel confident in your ideas. One naturally appears more comfortable and professional when they don't second guess themselves or take a while to chime in on a conversation. Don't forget that you've been selected to be a writing center tutor because you have an aptitude for writing. If you read a part of a tutee's essay and an idea pops into your head, elaborate and expand on it immediately. Learn to trust your judgment because the tutee will be grateful to get as much feedback as possible. They trust you to supply them with suggestions so you must trust yourself first to deliver. When you learn better to communicate your ideas for revision to your tutee, you'll find yourself getting into an editor's zone where you'll be more efficient and maintain exceptional conversations with your tutees.

Once you learn to carry an effective conversation in the writing center, the next important step is learning to make the tutee feel more at ease. One could give out the most excellent advice during a session but to excel as a writing center tutor, you must work on your delivery. Your goal is to cultivate an appointment the tutee will remember and smile at when they walk out the door. The tutee won't have this great experience when their tutor comes off as monotonous and robot-like. A student grasps a new concept more efficiently when the teacher is engaging. Therefore, be engaging in order to set your tutee up for more success in the long run.

This skill will build up naturally as you progress throughout the year and run through many writing pieces. You'll gradually get the hang of being a tutor and learn what keeps your tutees the most attentive and interactive. This can be as simple as asking a tutee why they decided to write a topic or even making fun of the characters in the book they're writing on. Truly, each and every student is different but, with time you'll learn to quickly grasp what interests each and every one of them and create wonderful memories for both yourself and your tutees.

Your Journey Awaits

Andy Garcia

First things first, welcome to the Writing Center! This is a great program, and you were chosen because you have what it takes to become a writing center tutor.

I understand that you may have some questions because I know I had a lot of questions that arose in my head when I first got the email that I would be a tutor in the writing center, for example: How exactly do I tutor? After tutoring for two years every Monday after school at the writing center, I figured out what the answer is to this question I had at the start of my writing center journey: How do I tutor? Well, that's the beautiful and creative part, you have to find out what works best for you. This was a bit challenging at first because I never tutored prior to the writing center, but in time I discovered what works best for me and so will you.

The best way to start any writing center appointment is greeting your tutee, asking them how they are doing and make them feel welcomed. From there ask questions about their assignment, what's the topic? What are they trying to prove? But keep in mind, you aren't doing their assignment for them, you are there to guide and tutor your tutee.

The metaphor I used is this: If our tutees came to us wanting to know how to make cookies, do we make the cookies for them? Or, do we give the tutees the tools and advice to make the cookies themselves? We give them the tools, which in this case is guidance in their writing. As a writing tutor you're expected to be able to work well with others, have ears to listen and process the information being told to you, as well as be caring. However, it took me many sessions to understand that not every writing center session will be the same. Some days your tutee will ask lots of questions to ask, other days your tutee just wants you to look over their work, other times they seek your advice to help them start their assignment, and some days you might not have a tutee to tutor. And even as a tutor ourselves, we have bad days, days where we have low energy, and days where everything is going our way and all of this is okay. No session will ever be perfect, each session will give you a different experience, so don't worry about not always knowing what to say, take in and absorb what you noticed worked well and what didn't to help you in your next session.

And lastly, have fun in this program. Talk to your co-tutors, supervisors and tutees! Forming that connection and bond with the people around you creates that community that is necessary to move forward through everything life has for you, from the trials to the victories. So, embrace your journey ahead, it won't always be easy but it's worth it. God bless!!

Talk! ..it helps a lot!
Vincent Velasco

Downey High School's Writing Center has played an amazing role in enhancing many students' writing skills and overall academic growth. From the short time I've been a part of this program, effective communication and the simple use of questions are two indispensable elements within the tutoring process. They help promote student engagement, encourage a deeper understanding, and stimulate critical thinking within the session.

Communication serves as the foundation for a successful tutoring session. A tutor's ability to establish a rapport with their tutee, in a short 30 minute meeting, through active listening and clear articulation, sets the stage for productive learning. By engaging in an open and supportive dialogue, a tutor can create an environment that encourages the tutee to express their thoughts, concerns, and writing challenges freely. This interaction promotes active learning and enables tutors to identify the tutee's individual needs.

In addition to this, *effective* communication within the tutoring session also facilitates the clarification and deepening of a student's understanding of writing concepts. Tutors can provide explanations, offer examples, and provide constructive feedback tailored to the student's needs. Through clear and concise communication, tutors can demystify complex writing techniques, grammar rules, and stylistic elements. This allows students to grasp these concepts more comprehensively, leading to an improved writing proficiency.

The art of questioning is an equally powerful tool that tutors can also employ to promote critical thinking and analytical skills. Thoughtful questions challenge the tutee to reflect on their writing choices, explore alternative perspectives, and evaluate the effectiveness of their piece. By asking probing questions, tutors encourage students to analyze their thought process, strengthen their arguments, and develop a deeper understanding of the writing process. This engagement with questions nurtures the student's ability to *think critically* and independently, further developing their growth as writers.

Communication and questions play a significant role in building students' confidence and self-efficacy. A supportive and constructive conversation throughout the meeting allows tutors to create a safe space where fellow students can express their concerns, share their writing experiences, and discuss their aspirations. By addressing the tutee's queries and by providing valuable feedback, tutors instill a sense of accomplishment and competence, bolstering fellow students' confidence in their writing abilities! This increased confidence motivates students to take risks, explore new writing techniques, and strive for continuous improvement even after leaving the Writing Center!

Communication and questions serve as catalysts for student engagement, understanding, critical thinking, and confidence building! By establishing an open and supportive dialogue, tutors can create an environment conducive to active learning, where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and seeking of guidance. Through targeted questions and thoughtful communication, tutors can guide students towards a deeper understanding of writing concepts, promoting their growth as writers. Emphasizing the importance of communication and questions as a future tutor in DHS's Writing Center can yield transformative results, empowering students to excel in all their writing endeavors and beyond!

Breaking the Ice

Khushi Bhagat

One of the biggest questions you may have about tutoring is “how do I start a tutoring session and how do I effectively support students” –well the first step is to just say hello and introduce yourself to the tutee. Tutees often feel nervous or are quiet when they come to the writing center, so as a tutor it is your job to make the student feel comfortable and safe in the tutoring environment. This may seem nerve racking but it is not as scary as it sounds.

As tutors, you need to take the first step and make the tutees feel comfortable and at ease. This can simply happen by starting out with a friendly greeting and introducing yourself. This way they might be more forthcoming to introducing themselves and feel free to talk. You can also share stories about your day or something interesting that happened relating with the tutee by talking about teachers/classes and interests.

Small talk can feel awkward to initiate. I, for one, am more on the reserved side, so I understand at times it can be difficult. Every appointment is different and I have found that I’ve gotten better at my tutoring method with each one. The starting step, as I mentioned, is to just say hello. It is normal for you to feel timid at first, but once you begin tutoring, it’ll begin to feel natural.

Breaking the ice is like breaking a barrier between you and the tutee. If the barrier is broken, then the tutee may feel more relaxed and at ease to talk about their assignment or things they would like to improve on. The more you talk, the more the conversation gets flowing and the tutee feels free to talk. In addition, the more they talk, the more you understand their writing and the tutee is more engaged in the tutoring experience.

Easing The Tension

Aileen Sanchez

As a preface, I want to acknowledge that, being a new tutor, it is entirely normal to have the jitters. Nevertheless, you will get the hang of it in time, and it will become second nature. If you ever doubt your ability and qualification to tutor others - Know that you deserve to be here among your peers.

Easing the tension starts with you. As you begin your tutoring session, it is easy to slip into the mindset of overthinking, "Did I come off too critical" or "Am I doing enough to create a welcoming environment". These negative thoughts can create tension within yourself as you begin to doubt your skills, hindering your tutoring ability, and these feelings can manifest in your tutoring session. When discouraging thoughts creep in, briefly pause to reassure yourself that you are doing your best and that the tutoring session will undoubtedly be a success. These affirmations can help deter thoughts of self-doubt and stop them from being expressed as tension in the tutoring session.

Easing the tension can be a challenging task. A simple greeting such as "Hi there, how is your day going," might not be enough to ease tension as this only scratches the surface. Instead, aim to forge a genuine connection with the tutee, which can be established by empathizing with your tutee and expressing interest in their writing - utilizing these strategies can make all the difference.

Empathize with the tutee. Try finding a part of yourself in them, such as having the same teacher or assignment. If your tutee has a teacher you had in the past, reflect on your experiences in the class and what the teacher emphasizes in writing, such as citations or creating stylistic elements. If you may not have had the same teacher as the tutee, you can empathize through an assignment. To do this, first reflect on these questions: How did you do on the assignment? If you were to redo the assignment, what would you improve on? Which aspects of your assignment did you perform well on? Do you remember which criteria the teacher emphasized most during the assignment? After a brief reflection, mention to the student that you have had the same teacher or assignment to be subject to relate to, and this can comfort the tutee by recognizing that they are in good hands. The reflection also tailors the tutoring session to the student's needs according to a teacher's preferences or an assignment's criteria to improve their writing. This method of a personalized approach showcases that you genuinely care for the tutee to do well on their assignment.

Expressing interest in your tutee's writing is essential because it eases the tension by showcasing that you genuinely care to improve the student's writing skills and better understand the message they are trying to convey. I employ expressing interest by complimenting an element of the tutee's writing, or if I need clarification on an aspect of their writing, such as context, I ask the tutee how they interpret the book or what information is necessary to understand the analysis. Expressing interest allows the student to feel heard and not criticized, comforting the student's unease of being 'judged' in their writing.

Remind yourself that it is okay if there is still tension in the session - it takes two to tango - a successful tutoring lesson requires both parties to reciprocate the conversation. So, it is entirely normal if there is still tension, you have only met your tutee for thirty minutes which is not sufficient time to establish a relationship, or sometimes a tutee can be shy. If there is still tension at the end of a tutoring session, don't beat yourself up with "I wish I did better" because you did all you could. But don't worry because greatness is inevitable at the writing center!

Comfort Creates Conversation!

Sol Alvarez

The Writing Center is an extremely helpful place for all students to get assistance with their writing! However, because of the diverse pool of students that seek help from the Writing Center, tutors are bound to encounter all types of personalities. The main aspect that stays consistent for all tutors—despite all the differing personalities—is having quiet, uncomfortable clients.

While these feelings are understandable in tutees, it makes a tutor's job a bit more difficult. Since sharing one's writing to another is an extremely vulnerable process, students are reluctant to participate during appointments, seeing as they have ventured out of the bubble that is their classroom and into the unknown that is the Writing Center. Oftentimes, students are intimidated by the numerous gleaming tutors' faces, as they believe tutors are just waiting to rip their paper to shreds! Although tutors are aware that this is not the case when they receive a client, it is necessary to make an effort in order to show the client this as well. If the tutee sees their tutor as approachable, they will be in a comfortable state, making them more willing to actively engage in conversation during the appointment!

I think the most significant factor in seeming approachable and making a student more comfortable would be sparking up a conversation. Now, I don't say small talk because as writers, we should be able to go above and beyond mere small talk! We're writers for crying out loud, we always have something to say! Hence, I find that one of the most effective things to do during conversation with a client is to try and find common ground. Finding something in common and building upon that not only allows you to form a connection with your client, but it also results in them feeling less nervous and thus, more willing to share during the appointment. Moreover, you can even use the common ground found to smoothly segue into the assignment that is brought before you that day, further illustrating how largely comfort plays a role in appointments.

Furthermore, another talking point may be sharing a personal experience you've had with your own writing in an attempt to further ease the tutees nerves and provide them with a sense of reassurance. Most of the time, tutees come in with past assignments that tutors themselves have completed. It is effective to gauge where you think your client is at and depending on that, possibly provide a story on your own personal experience with that assignment or one similar to it. Reassuring a tutee that you as a tutor have also struggled and made mistakes makes them more comfortable and receptive to your advice.

Nevertheless, making someone feel comfortable is easier said than done! It takes a tutor with initiative, patience, and persistence to make a client feel more comfortable. Yet, I firmly believe that the new and special batch of tutors joining the Writing Center next school year are more than capable of doing this! The main goal of a Writing Center appointment is to get the tutee to openly engage in academic discussion, which can only be done if they feel comfortable with their tutor. Therefore, just remember that comfort creates conversation and conversation promotes participation, three things that every tutor wants during their appointments!

How AP Lit Helped Me Be a Better WC Tutor

Ateka Shakir

Hello! Whether you are a returning Writing Center tutor or have just gotten accepted into the program, I am certain you'll enjoy this year of tutoring; I know I did!

One thing that made this year particularly enjoyable was taking AP Literature with Mrs. Crespo. The class is full of lively discussions and intelligent people, which helped me greatly when it came to tutoring in the Writing Center.

Through my fellow classmates, I learned to be more open, sociable, and friendly to new people. This is especially easy to do when bonding over a mutual fondness for the reading material, and an essential part of being a Writing Center tutor.

During full class discussions, I have the privilege to listen to and think of responses to many interesting points:

What made this passage stand out to you?

How did this character's actions affect the actions of the other characters?

Which literary elements most strongly drive the emotional aspect of this chapter?

The level of depth in which we analyze elements such as character, setting, and diction tremendously improved my ability to connect to the material. Thus, I am capable of helping my tutees tap into their creative side. By exploring these different elements, I help them to better express their thoughts through writing.

Finally, something I have incorporated into all of my Writing Center appointments is a common phrase of Mrs. Crespo's: "So what?"

This helpful phrase prompts my tutees to question all parts of their writing and to view their product from multiple perspectives. A simple question of "why" can go a long way when it comes to improving written works.

If you are a junior reading this and are planning to take AP Literature next year, I know that with the constant encouragement and generosity from Mrs. Crespo, as well as the support and fresh ideas from your fellow classmates, you will find tutoring to be a breeze. I strongly recommend you take the class. It is genuinely one of the most fun classes I have had throughout my four years at Downey High School, and it will definitely be a big help to tutoring and future endeavors of the sort.

The Difference Between Editing and Advising

Dilsi Bhagat

As tutors, our tutees sometimes expect us to perfect their papers, as if we were their fairy godmothers, and completely transform their work in the next thirty minutes. From glamorizing their format to altering their spelling, tutees can hold high expectations for their tutors because they may be unconfident in themselves. However, our job is not to rewrite a tutee's paper for them. Instead, it is up to you to restore and clarify the tutee's voice in their own writing while also ensuring they understand what went wrong. Therefore, a tutor's responsibility is not to edit a tutee's work directly; rather, a tutor is responsible for *advising* a tutee. Let me explain.

To edit a tutee's work means to look at their paper under a figurative microscope, discern every minuscule error, and point them out to the tutee. I can understand the urge to correct misspelled words with red underlining in a few clicks, although, refrain from doing this during the tutorial. After all, you only have thirty minutes to spend with your tutee. Instead, if you notice repeated spelling, grammatical, or other technical errors, point them out only after you have finished reading a paragraph so that you understand what it is about. Leave it up to the student to rectify these errors—and learn from them—during the revision process by reminding them to read their entire work at least once before submitting it. Remember that it is not about *how* a student conveys a message but about *what* they are conveying. So, you shouldn't emphasize these superficial blunders as much as their analytical errors, which are harder for a tutee to identify on their own.

It is extremely helpful to identify discrepancies in a tutee's arrangement and line of reasoning through a process called advising. Analyzing and providing commentary can be difficult as students must think outside of what a source offers and form ideas themselves. Additionally, teachers typically penalize students for including logical gaps in their arguments more than incorrect formatting or grammar. The fact that you, a Writing Center Tutor, have completed at least 2 years of high school English is enough experience to talk to a tutee about their interpretation of a text and engage in meaningful conversations about the topic they are writing about, even if you are unfamiliar with it. For example, you can ask questions and discuss the choices a writer makes in a passage to get the student to think more deeply about their topic. Any thoughts that you provide during the tutorial can open a window of opportunity for the tutee to write a comprehensive, well-thought-out paper.

As you embark on your journey of becoming a Writing Center tutor, understand that despite the expectations your tutees may have of you, your job is to advise them by strengthening the *content* of their work, not just its presentation. So, in your next tutorial, allowing students to fix mistakes on their own will teach them how to revise their work independently rather than relying on someone else to do it for them, making them better writers overall.

But What If...

Articles about Troubleshooting

Tackling Teams

Lorelei Hart

For starters, I would like to say congratulations to all of you going into tutoring! It takes a special group of people full of talent, commitment, and kindness to be a part of a team such as this.

Moving into the reason you're here: tutoring teams! Occasionally, as a tutor, you will run into a pair coming in for help on a group paper/project. That is what the handy-dandy partner button on the forms is for! But, tutoring two is not all that much different from tutoring one, yet enough so that you may have some questions. So following will be some things to keep in mind while advising two in one and some advice as you go along as well.

The first thing: do not be alarmed! Like with any session, it is important to stay calm and relaxed so that your tutoring will therefore follow. Typically, tutees that come in pairs are acquainted and it may initially feel like 'you vs them', especially if they're talking to each other around you. But remember the session is more about all three of you vs the paper, or all three of you AND their paper, so communicate frequently with them! And if they happen to talk around you, no matter how embarrassing it may feel, insert yourself: more often than not one of them is confused and is trying to ask their partner a question, one that you could help them better understand.

Second thing you want to keep in mind is that, unlike tutoring one person where your attention is focused solely on them and their paper, you have to make sure you're dividing your attention and energy equally between the paper and both people. It can be easy to pick one of the partners, especially if they're more willing to talk to you, or even if they're closer to you than their counterpart. But making sure that you interact with them equally is imperative, not only to make sure they both feel seen and welcome but to make sure that you see the full mind behind the paper you're working with; it was written by two people after all!

Third thing to keep in mind is that you make sure your advice makes sense to not one tutee, but both. One of the fun parts about tutoring is making sure that your advice and instruction makes sense to all those on the receiving end. You may see that one of the tutees is nodding along and conclude that the nod covers both of them as it can be really easy to give advice and assume that both partners understand when only one of them does, or possibly neither. But asking both of them questions frequently and checking for understanding is a good way to counteract this and make sure that your words are reaching both sets of ears.

A fourth thing you'll want to look out for, something that especially pertains to a partner paper, is making sure that the paper flows. Occasionally when two people write a paper, they will write it by dividing up paragraphs or sentences, or may possibly assign every paragraph chunk type (intro/analysis/etc.) for one person to write on every paragraph. When one person writes, they typically write with the same voice, so the flow is more about blocky transitions. But when it comes to two people writing in one, you need to keep a keen eye out for, not only chunky and disconnected transitions but, sentences that skip over introduced ideas or missing sections of analysis all together. You'll also want to make sure that both writers are keeping a consistent and consecutive tone. If one sentence sounds more passionate about a topic than the next before switching back, it leads to a chunky and disconnected-sounding paper that may throw off readers or undermine the message/topic the pair is trying to write on.

To conclude, partner papers are not as daunting as they may seem, so give it your best shot and I'm sure you'll help them the best way you know how. Good luck!

Tutoring Unprecedented Topics

Jesse Tran

Being a new tutor with a group of people you may not know can be unnerving, especially when your tutee gives you a subject you have never done before. In moments like this, I would remind myself that I was chosen as a writing tutor for a reason. As a writing tutor, you are likely equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to improvise with a prompt and the tutee's understanding of the topic. After all, everyone has their own style of writing, there is no right or wrong answer as long as the prompt is answered. You can use this idea to calm yourself down during unfamiliar situations, benefitting you and your tutee.

As you spend more time as a tutor, devising advice will become second nature. In some cases, there may not even be a need to improvise if the tutee is asking for minor grammatical or syntactical help. Remember that you are not writing your tutee's assignment, you are giving them advice on how to better their writing with the knowledge that you have.

There have been multiple assignments I do not recall doing or have never done that I have tutored. In tutoring sessions such as these, I ask my tutee questions about the subject so that I can make appropriate suggestions to improve their assignment. It is true that some tutee's are unaware of the subject, in these situations, it is best to ask another tutor (that is not busy) for help or to google the topic.

You were chosen as a tutor for a reason, be confident in your abilities and apply them to help others. Congratulations to the new tutors and best of luck to all.

Approaching Apprehension

Sofia Hammond

Hey! If you're reading this then that means you're either Mrs. Crespo or an incoming Writing Center tutor. If you're the former, I say thank you for the amazing year, but if you're the latter, I say congratulations and welcome! Reading this article is the first step of many that are going to help prepare you to tutor the students of Downey High School. Since I've just finished a year of tutoring, I'd like to give some advice and talk about experiences I've had as a tutor. Particularly, how to tutor students who are shy or simply don't want to talk. This wasn't a situation I gave much thought to before I began, so it was something I had to learn how to deal with along the way. In this article, I'm gonna give some tips and tricks I used when tutoring silent students.

You can gauge the type of student you're going to be working with as soon as they sit down with you. Typically, I'd greet my students by saying hello and asking how their last period was. Usually, they would respond by saying "hi" and then briefly describing what they had just done in class. Usually. For some, however, they would either respond by saying a few short words, or on rare occasions, nothing at all. Just a quick glance, as if that were a response to my greeting, followed by immediately diverting their attention elsewhere. Now, in some instances, this type of behavior is present because the student just doesn't want to be there, yet *has* to go because it's a part of their grade. But much more often than not, a student behaves in this way because they are introverted. In either case, it's our job as tutors to try and make the student feel as welcome as possible and create a connection with them that will put them at ease.

When I encounter an apprehensive student, I try to either make them chuckle or find some common ground with them. I'll either recount something funny that happened to me or even make up some story just to put them at ease. Or, if I notice on their assignment that we've both had a certain English teacher, I'll start a conversation with them about that teacher and compare our opinions of them. Anything to bring their guard down and get them to see me as a peer rather than someone to be intimidated by.

Once the introduction is done, it's onto the hard part... actually helping them with their piece. After you read through what they've written, it's generally best to address weaker areas by asking them what their intended message is and what they can improve on to make that message clearer to their audience. If a student refuses to respond, you do not want to spoon-feed them the answer. This tells them that if they continue to stay silent, you'll just give them the "right answer" and fix their writing for them. This is something I had to refrain from, as I reminded myself, "It isn't your assignment, it's theirs." On the occasion of an event like this, try waiting them out. Sometimes uncomfortable silence *forces* them to try and come up with something. It's awkward but stick with it. It works. Most of the time. If it doesn't, allow them to type it out. Some kids do have good ideas or contributions and are simply afraid to say them out loud, so let them know they can jot down bullet points on the side of their document which they can come back to later. Lastly, if a student REALLY doesn't want to contribute, *then* you can offer some of your own suggestions. If your session does come to this, remember to give them general ideas and changes, don't change it for them. Simply plant the seed that they can come back to later and expand on. It may be difficult at first, but over time you learn how to work with reserved students. Each student is different, what may work with some may not work with others, and that's okay. The important thing is to try your best and have fun with the process!

I Feel Bad Today! How to Tutor on an Off Day

Giselle Reyes

Being a Writing Center tutor means having a responsibility, and unfortunately being responsible means powering through tough times. At some point, everyone's going to have a day where they can't perform at their best: maybe you have a nasty headache or something's going on at home. In times like these, it's commendable to try and follow through with your responsibilities anyways. As someone who's had many off days as a Writing Center tutor, this is my personal guide to you on how to power through an off-day.

1. **Drink water.** Really! It doesn't matter what you're going through as drinking water is a guaranteed brain booster. It'll improve your mindset emotionally, physically, and mentally. The brain is 85% water after all, to function it needs to get that water from somewhere! The Writing Center always has bottled water in its mini fridge— make use of it!
2. **If you can stomach it, eat something.** Things like stress, anxiety, sadness, and exhaustion are, well, exhausting! Cut yourself some slack and eat a snack. Food gives you a boost of energy that can even perk up your mood. The Writing Center always has snacks available in its cabinets so take one or more and refuel.
3. **Take your time setting up,** even if your student is here early. The staff will listen to you if you tell them you need time to prepare. Use it to drink that water and eat that snack from before, and most importantly, switch into tutor mode— that is, whatever mindset you're usually in when you tutor. In some cases, just food and water will be good enough, but if you're distracted, try implementing some refocusing strategies. For instance, I breathe in, hold my breath, and exhale for 8 seconds each until I feel calm. You can also identify 3 things you can hear, smell, touch, see, and taste. If those don't help, try making it sillier! Look for 3 things that would sound funny if you sat on them or would feel sticky if you touched them. Identifying your surroundings will help you focus on the present— not your thoughts— so you can be ready to do what you can.
4. **Make a plan.** It should follow what the student you're working with needs: did they come in having trouble with a particular part of their writing? If so, start with that and try to be brief and clear. If they don't have a particular problem they want addressed, then asking for a rubric or guiding assignment is a good backup plan. Prioritize skimming their essay or reading it aloud to make sure their writing meets requirements. If you see a major issue, shift focus to that instead; don't try to multitask or handle several parts of their writing at once. What if you get a student whose work is in top shape and there's not much for you to advise? Make sure to compliment them! Really gush about their work! This takes stress off both your shoulders. In situations like these, engaging the student about what they wrote can be helpful, ensuring they understand their topic didn't overlook important information in their writing.

The last step is the hardest one: **give yourself a pat on the back!** It's hard to work through a difficult day, so it's commendable that you followed through with your responsibilities. "Today was difficult, and I'm relieved, happy, or maybe even proud I got through it," are good thoughts to keep in mind. You deserve to give yourself some credit when things become too hard to handle.

You Won't Always Get Chosen to Be on the Dodgeball Team

By: Mikaela Cruz

What does dodgeball have to do with the Writing Center, you may ask. I'm sure we've all experienced that one game of dodgeball where you feel like nobody wants to choose you to be on their team until the last minute. Typically it's because they don't know who you are, or your strengths. I know I've been there! Being a new tutor can sometimes feel like this. There will be weeks, and sometimes months where you aren't chosen to be someone's Writing Center tutor, and that is 100% okay. More often than not, the tutees randomly choose their tutors, so this is not something to take personally. I remember for my first month and a half of being a tutor I had no appointments, but some of my fellow experienced tutors had tutees scheduling appointments left and right. It would cause me to question my abilities, because I felt like as a tutor, I wasn't doing my job if I didn't always have a tutee. I would sometimes think, "Well maybe you weren't meant to be a Writing Center tutor." And then, what I thought was the unthinkable, happened; someone made an appointment with me. To her it was probably just another assignment she had to complete, but to me, it felt like someone actually wanted to take a chance on me.

As anyone would be, I was nervous. My mind was flooded with questions like, "What if they get a bad grade? What if they don't want to come back again? What if I don't help them?" However, I did my best to help her. I made sure to be myself, make my tutee comfortable by talking to her, and tried to assist her in her areas of concern to my best ability. Always keep in mind, you are a student too, not an English professor, and you are not expected to have perfect writing. You're an extra set of trusted eyes to help someone improve in their writing!

As a result of trusting myself and my abilities, my tutee and I both made progress in her writing and in my work as a tutor. She shared that she improved her writing just with our one appointment. There is something so fulfilling in knowing you have the ability to make an impact on another student for the better. My experience with my first ever tutee reminded me of the reason why we became writing center tutors: to help other students feel more confident in their writing. I also reminded myself, which you should remind yourself of as well, that you were chosen to be a writing center tutor for a reason. You are completely capable of facilitating someone's writing process, and you will do great.

Was I a "chosen one" at first? No! When I was finally selected to be someone's Writing Center tutor, I showed them, and myself, that I was truly proficient in helping others. If initially, nobody picks you to be their tutor, please do not let that get you down because "all good things come to those who wait."

If there is one thing you should take away from this tutor talk, it is that you are more than competent at being a Writing Center tutor, so just have confidence in yourself and trust that you are in your position for a reason! This mindset will assist you in your future endeavors as a writing center tutor, a student, and just a human being navigating life.

So yes, you will sometimes be the kid who isn't chosen to be on the dodgeball team, but it is all worth it when one person decides to take a chance on you, and you let your strengths shine.

Tutees Pick the Time; Tutors Make the Most of It

Ivy Tobar

When you start at the writing center, I understand that you choose the days you are available to tutor—even the times. Though, it is the tutees' who book the appointments and how long to attend. That's what I mean by "tutees pick the time; tutors make the most of it." Why does this matter? Let's look at some examples written from an online tutor's view.

Hypothetically, a tutee has made an appointment. It is for 30 minutes and they have every box checked. They want help with introductions, hooks, transitions, conclusions, and overall analysis. Sometimes, the students mark all the boxes because they are looking for one more opinion; sometimes, they have nothing done, and it's due in a few hours. If I can look at the tutee's work early, I plan discussion points for the appointment. In other cases, I read through what's written with the student, ask what they want specifically looked at, and then give time estimates. Then they can share their priorities for us to work on.

Why can't we extend the meeting? First, that is only an option for online tutors with more than one appointment slot. Teachers supervising leave at a specific time and even the online tutors only have certain other times they can extend appointments. Also, as a tutor, it's not your responsibility to alter your schedule for a tutee. Don't feel pressured to stay on past your time because of their deadline. Now, if you have a free appointment slot another day, or know another tutor with one, you can let the tutee know, but it's the tutee's responsibility to schedule more time.

In another scenario, what if a student booked an hour-long appointment for a completed essay? Sometimes I see students come in because they are told to and they don't want help. Or they are confident in their finished piece and want reassurance. How do you use that time and is it too much? After reading the piece, I look out for any possible issues and if there are none, I ask questions. What did the rubric say, and how did you incorporate it in your essay? Why did you choose these quotes over others? If there is still more time, I have the student explain the topic to me, and if they mention anything significant that could benefit the essay, we can discuss whether or not to add it and, if so, how to add it.

Now, these are the extremes. What about a typical visit? The tutee signed up for a reasonable amount of time and you want to make the most of it. If their work is available, I leave comments with notes to review prior to the meeting. If the student becomes a no-show, this can be a great way to leave feedback for those who couldn't make it. If their document is unavailable, I'll start the meeting with information on how to share it and set up comments. Then I'll ask if they'd like the piece read by me (out loud or silently) or by themselves out loud. After, we discuss their priorities and go through the piece. During this, I leave comments to mark what they can go over in their free time and what should be looked at right now. About 5 minutes before our session is over we review what they will work on later, and I send them the completed form.

Tutors are not miracle workers. Instead, we make the most of the time Tutees pick.

The Art of Judgment

Hannah Drow

As a tutor, your job is to judge; check for grammar, find and replace for complexity, conceptualize another paragraph, and so on. You verbalize your concerns, are meticulous when reading others' papers, and note the positives and negatives you've come across—that's essentially the purpose of a tutor. But, you may come across other types of judgment.

It is in the rule book to start every appointment by breaking the ice: Hey, how are you? It has been so hot lately, hasn't it? What assignment are we working on today? – Small talk makes everyone more comfortable afterward and allows for the appointment to be the most beneficial possible. More reserved students may have more ice to break, while others may not. And for the ones that don't need as much small talk to feel comfortable, it is essential to understand the art of judgment.

There may be times when the one you're tutoring will judge you. I once had an appointment where the tutee brought up the career path they wanted to pursue. I was interested in that field as well, so I brought up my job (that is related to that field). It was small talk as a way to create more common ground—the key to every appointment for more effective communication. They made judgmental comments about my work and continued to make these comments throughout the appointment. To say the least, it was the most difficult appointment I had. At the time, it was upsetting because the comments, without their knowledge, were very personal.

But it's just that—it was without their knowledge. Their comments judged something that was very personal to me, but they had no idea. It was my mistake to take what they said to heart, as they were unaware that what they said was hurtful. You can't read their mind, just as they can't read yours.

Every appointment is different. Although small talk is important, it is crucial to judge first. Some may need a lot of small talk; others, too much may do more harm than good. And then move on to your role as a tutor: judge the paper, or rather critique. It will all come naturally to you. You're a tutor for a reason. At first, you're still not entirely sure. But, just as every appointment is different, every tutor is different. Over time, you'll develop your own method. You'll have great appointments and terrible ones too, but you will learn from each and every one. Judgment has a negative connotation, but it is so much more complex. Utilizing its benefits towards making a more positive, effective tutorial is the basics; afterward, you can give techniques to further enhance others' writing style. Knowing the good judgment can do is the first step before making a lasting impact on others' writing techniques.