

# **Downey High School Writing Center**

# **Tutors Talk!**

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Volume 3**



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## **What a Year**

**Kelly Crespo**

The third volume of Tutors Talk follows what will likely be one of the biggest events of our lifetimes. COVID-19 closed Downey High School on Friday, March 13, 2020. This event without a doubt rattled our program, and it would've been understandable for us to just close for the school year.

However, we didn't.

In fact, the Downey High School Writing Center is such an important part of our campus that following Mr. Houts' announcement that school would be closed, we still had students coming by after school to attend a workshop and make appointments.

Over that scary, surreal weekend, we had tutors volunteer to become a part of our emergency online tutoring team—training quickly yet enthusiastically. Because of these tutors, we still were able to help nearly 250 students with their writing as well as provide some certainty and stability in an otherwise incredibly uncertain and unstable time.

What follows here are writers who once again volunteered their time to write advice to future tutors. They wrote these essays while finishing up their distance learning classes, studying for their AP exams, figuring out what graduation and college were going to look like, mourning the traditions and celebrations of the end of the school year, and for many of them, the end of high school.

These writers somehow mustered the motivation to contribute to this journal despite all of the noise, chaos, and worry, so I invite you to listen to their stories, reflections, and advice as we approach another unforgettable year.

# The Right Mindset

## **Hailey Harris: Trusting Yourself in the Face of Uncertainty**

*Hailey Harris writes about three important tenets of being a successful, reflective tutor—even when circumstances are unpredictable.*

## **Lily Nguyen: Being Memorable: A Memoir**

*Lily Nguyen writes a candid reflection about being remembered, peppered with some helpful tips on helping students remember what you show them.*

## **Natalia Trujillo: Storm Incoming**

*Natalia Trujillo lays out a really clear, easy-to-follow introductory outline of what a tutorial should look like, helping new and returning tutors see what we do.*

## **Trusting Yourself in the Face of Uncertainty**

### **Hailey Harris**

As a new tutor, a lot can feel uncertain as you prepare to engage in tutorials from the other side of the desk. The fear surrounding stepping into new territories might make some want to hesitate or give up, but I have learned that us tutors become masters at facing new challenges and using our determination to succeed.

One of the most difficult tasks I experienced in my first year tutoring was having to step out of my comfort zone in the Writing Center and into the world of online tutorials during the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. While this was all completely new and uncertain to me, my adaptability and will to help others lead me to complete numerous successful tutorials over the course of two months. As you prepare to face a variety of tasks while tutoring, remember these qualities that live inside you and know they will drive you to be able to handle anything thrown your way!

### **Caring**

First, it is always important to remember why you chose to be a Writing Center tutor. Although the reasons may vary slightly from tutor to tutor, I can guarantee that deep inside every one of us is a large and caring heart that yearns to help others. It is the joining of our passion for writing and our will to assist our fellow students that enables us to be the positive impacting humans we are. Regardless of any possible obstacles you may encounter, you WILL get it done because you want to do it for all the right reasons.

### **Flexible**

Next, as a Writing Center tutor, you will learn to develop and showcase your ability to be flexible by adapting to any new task. Whether you're being asked to conduct online tutorials, look at a different prompt, or answer a new question, you can be confident in your capabilities to navigate any unknown using your experiences and problem solving skills. Remember that we're all learning as we go and there is no one, perfect way to handle any given situation. No matter what new task is asked of you, be confident in how you choose to handle it because you CAN handle anything.

### **Determined**

Last, your determination to help your fellow students through writing tutorials will carry you towards success. The pandemic that we all experienced can be seen as proof that no matter what circumstances we are under, we are determined to succeed. Whether you're operating virtually or able to conduct tutorials face to face, the tenacity you possess will make you a tremendous tutor regardless of the situation. So when a new challenge does present itself, be prepared to give it your best because you CAN and WILL do anything you set your mind to.

In summary, I encourage you to embrace every characteristic that makes you who you are as a tutor and face any new situation with confidence in yourself. I have seen many of us tutors adapt to all kinds of new circumstances, including the big transition to online tutoring, and we always found a way to succeed. Remember, you were chosen to be a part of this program for a reason and there are lots of people around you willing to lend a helping hand if you need it. No matter what type of change you might have to experience along the way, know that you are cut out for it and you have all the necessary qualities inside you to push you towards success.

## **Being Memorable: A Memoir**

### **Lily Nguyen**

Out of all the tutees I have worked with, only 2 remembered me. Only one remembered my name. The others probably could pinpoint me by appearance, but what I've taught them was a blur. However, it was this one student who remembered me that has me thinking: what can I do to make sure my tutees actually learn something from me, or at least my name?

This student visited me about every week or so for one and a half months. Every time she came back, it made me so happy; in hindsight, I wasn't sure what was so special about me specifically. "Hey," I asked one day, "Why do you keep coming back?" After all, there was only so much extra credit she could get.

The answer was so simple.

Writing.

Not lecturing, not listing, not marking.

Writing.

Sounds obvious, right? Well, every time I introduced a new rhetorical move or concept to her, I had her write only a sentence or two applying such concepts. If I did list something, I had her repeat it to me a minute later; then, 5 minutes later. It's this process of active recall that somehow allows the information to take root in her mind.

Repeating this process week after week strengthened her writing and her reflexes; at some point, she even anticipated my questions and answered them before I opened my mouth. Near the end of the month, she developed an eye for writing so thoroughly that, before I could suggest feedback, she would exclaim: "Oh, yeah! This needs clarity. It's too sloppy."

Being honest, a lot of the tutees we teach will forget the lesson as soon as they zip up their backpack. How does that make you feel? Probably sad? Insignificant? Like a waste of time? Active recall can make that time worth it for both you and the tutee.

In the thirty minutes we have with our tutees, I recommend picking the ideas they need help developing the most; then, have them practice it over and over and over again... until they can do it before you even mention it. First, have them recall the concept right after you explain it. When they seem to understand it, ask them again in 5 minutes-- or whenever you see the same mistake in their writing. Make sure they can use the concept without being told to.

Again, being honest: even after practicing active recall with them, chances are they'll forget what you showed them. But it will take longer for them to forget. We can't read their minds nor control them, but using this technique will transform the number of tutees who remember you and what they've learned by at least twofold. Sure, they might only go once a semester, but if you happened to open their eyes with a game-changing concept-- more importantly, one they can apply continuously-- they will come back to you.

So now I ask you: how can you make tutorials memorable?

## **Storm Incoming**

### **Natalia Trujillo**

When you begin to tutor you'll realize every tutee comes in during a different stage of the writing process. There will be the ones who have written their entire essay, the ones who need help writing a conclusion, or the ones who have only their MLA heading on the top of the paper. But don't be anxious if a tutee walks in with nothing complete because instead, they walk in with a storm of ideas, ready to be poured onto paper.

As a tutor, you begin the session as you normally would, by asking the tutee to take out their prompt and one separate sheet of paper—I'll explain the use later. You unpack the prompt together, so the tutee is refreshed about the task and you can get an understanding of the task you're about to brainstorm for. Even if the book or article is one you have already read or worked with, ask the tutee to give you a summary of the piece, it helps the tutee get back into the mindset. Once these two steps are done, you ask the tutee to craft a thesis. The thesis is vital to the brainstorming process because every idea the tutee proposes will be based around it.

With the thesis done it's time for the deluge of ideas to finally pour out. Using the extra piece of paper you asked them to take out at the beginning of the session, you're going to have the tutee write every idea down. It doesn't have to be immaculate, hence the name: brainstorming. Have them provide at least three pieces of evidence that will support their thesis on the paper. If they are having trouble recalling evidence, begin to ask questions asking if there are any specific characters or events that relate to the thesis. If they can list more—perfect—but you're ultimately only going to have them pick three. Those three choices should be the best three pieces they believe strongly supports their thesis, so make sure to reiterate that to them. With that complete, take the time to organize their essay. They'll list the first paragraph as the intro, place the evidence into their respective body paragraphs, and label their conclusion. In the end, the tutee would have come in with only their prompt and leave with a solid layout of their essay.

Together, you both would have completed a rough outline of the tutee's essay within one session. It's totally fine to not have any part of the actual essay written. You only have 30 minutes with them and the writing process is meticulous. This is why at the end of every session you're encouraged to remind them that they can make another appointment if necessary. They'll come for the first time during stage one, brainstorming, and come in the next time on a different step in the writing process to tackle.

# Tricks of the Trade

## **Briana Garcia: Give Them A Minute, They're Thinking**

*In this sincere, reflective article, Briana Garcia discusses how remembering to pause and let students think can be an effective tool to getting students to open up and contribute during tutorials.*

## **Daniella Gomez: So Uh.. What School Do You Go to?**

*In this concise piece on the importance of getting to know students, Daniella Gomez gives relatable pointers on how to make students feel more comfortable.*

## **Terra Duron: What to do with an "I don't know"**

*Using her years of experience and calm, patient voice, Terra Duron pens a comprehensive outline on what to do in a variety of tutorial situations.*

## **Hannah Hong: Why is Communication Important?**

*Hannah Hong discusses the need for clear but supportive communication—whether you're giving feedback in person or online.*

## **Joan Moci: Dealing With an Unfamiliar Book**

*Joan Moci gives practical and helpful advice on what to do when you encounter a book that you haven't read before.*

## **Amanda Bardales: Say "NO" To Being Snape or '80s Cop**

*In an irreverent and witty voice, Amanda Bardales gives tips on how to use questions to get students thinking and talking.*

## **Melina De La Rosa & Kaylor Wragg: What Do You Get When You Cross a Joke with a Rhetorical Question?**

*Melina and Kaylor put together a relatable, helpful compilation of questions that can help tutors keep the conversation dialogic rather than directive.*

## **Kat Arriaga: I Finished Reviewing the Essay in 15 Minutes, What Now?**

*Kat Arriaga humbly advises tutors who may not see themselves as honors students while pointing out strategies to making sure tutorials fill the whole thirty minutes.*



## **Give Them A Minute, They're Thinking**

**Briana Garcia**

As a Writing Center tutor, your personality will surely affect your style of helping tutees. I get incredibly excited to help others with their writing skills and I talk - a lot. I tend to give tutees mini-lessons, ask them questions about the text they're analyzing, or simply try to make a friendly conversation. After tutoring for two years, though, I have found that too much guidance or too much talking is possible.

When I ask guiding questions, tutees sometimes light up and immediately know the direction they need to go. Other times, the kids need time to think or collect their thoughts. I am guilty of feeling awkward with the silence and rephrasing the question or hinting at the answer before the tutee has time to answer. As an experienced tutor, I have a genuine piece of advice for you, *do not feel awkward!* Not everyone can think of an answer on the spot and if a tutee is silent, it is likely because they are thinking and *not* because they are giving you the silent treatment. If you interrupt them too quickly, they may not have the opportunity to learn as much on their own if they would have been given enough quiet time. As a tutor, your role in the Writing Center is to create a warm environment that fosters growth and learning from the tutee - try not to talk prematurely and make them feel uncomfortable. If they're completely lost, a guided conversation is incredibly effective. If they've given solid answers thus far, give them moments of silence to come to an answer on their own.

Talking and being friendly when your tutee walks in is a great way to break the ice, don't shy away from conversation! However, try not to rely too heavily on it; just because you're not talking, does not mean they're not learning. Learning through self-reflection can be just as beneficial for a tutee as learning through talking. As a tutor, do not be afraid to allow your tutee to take the reins for a bit and collect their ideas on their own. You got this, don't fear a few moments of silence. I'm glad to welcome you to the Writing Center family, good luck!

**So uh.. What school do you go to?**  
**By Daniella Gomez**

Every tutor experiences this kind of tutee: the one who gives little to zero feedback. As a tutor this may put you in panic mode as the awkwardness continues, several questions may arise: What do I do? Did I do something wrong? Is it me, do they not like me? Let me make this proposition for you, most of the time it is not your fault, and even if it is it's an easy fix.

Some tutees just need a little bit of an extra push to be open about their writing. You may experience tutees who fear reading their writing aloud. It's not that these students don't want to improve their writing, it's that they are scared to share their writing to others, scared that it's not good enough, scared that it will only be criticized. It's up to you as a tutor to get these kinds of tutees out of this headspace and feel comfortable in the writing center.

You will receive this tip from everyone, when introducing yourself to your tutee, make sure to mention their name. For example, "Hi Daniella, I'm Gomez" (Ha ha, very creative, I know). This is especially crucial because it makes the tutee that they aren't sitting with a complete stranger for a session. So now, you've warmed them up just a little bit, now it's time for the tutorial.

In any tutorial it's important for the tutee to be involved as much as possible. In this situation it may be challenging, so this is when the tips and guidelines should be flashing in your memory. Remember that these are the students who are insecure about their writing, they need encouragement and praise to feel comfortable. Like any other student, you can't badger them with criticism, no matter how much work the paper needs. Make sure to balance out the praise and constructive criticism, and in questions to talk about what you feel might need some help. In this way, they should feel comfortable to bounce their ideas off of you and hopefully improve their writing and future writing center experiences.

When working with tutees it's up to you as the tutor to control the direction of the tutorial. Make sure to be approachable and try your best with every single tutee and the tutorial should turn out just fine. No stress, you got this.

## **What to do with an "I don't know"**

### **Terra Duron**

As a tutor, you are sure to meet a variety of students, and while some will grace you with a prepared plan for their essays, you may also face a few who answer each question with a simple, "I don't know". While these types of appointments can be a little frustrating, nothing can't be fixed with some careful planning. So, when facing an "I don't know", it's important to step back, take a breath, and prepare with the student you are tutoring.

To start, as with most tutorials, gather your supplies. Sometimes, you may not need more than some sticky notes and a pen. If you're starting from scratch, you might need extra paper to make a detailed essay plan that your tutee can take with them. Once that is out of the way, make sure that the student takes out all their materials related to the tutorial, such as a class outline, the books they are using, a possible rough draft, or even their own personal notes. After, there are two ways you can approach the tutorial.

If you are starting from a blank, then you'll need to make an outline by creating and using the thesis. Since the thesis acts as a guide for the rest of the essay, it is important that the "I don't know" has a direct thesis to help them get started. All essays are different, but for the most part, you can think of the thesis as a math equation, where you have three or more topics that all draw into one claim. This will take the most time, but if you as a tutor help the student organize quotes and evidence using a specific thesis, the tutee will most likely have an easier time organizing their own analysis. Here, it's still important that you collaborate with the student, and frequently have them update you on their ideas and work, so that they can use their original ideas as a familiar source for their analysis. In this process, be sure to ask questions, and discuss the student's ideas and focus for their essay.

If your tutee already has a rough draft for their assignment, you'll have to combine what they already have with new ideas. To gain a clear idea of what the student is trying to say in their writing, it's wise to ask them to summarize what they have so far. Even if they don't know how to finish their thoughts, simply asking questions helps you figure out what direction they are aiming for. With this general idea, ask them where they got stuck. If they have a starting idea already, then using their thesis as a guide, you can help the student fill in the blanks. Still, be sure to ask questions and accept their new ideas as you continue.

Finally, similar to other tutorials, you should have a small recap over what you and the student worked on. Ask the student what they need to develop. If they give a vague answer, try to add in some extra suggestions. If they have a better idea of how to approach their remaining work, congratulations! You have successfully guided a student out of an "I don't know" situation.

## **Why is Communication Important?**

**Hannah Hong**

During the time of distance learning, I continued to conduct tutorials as a part of the online Writing Center team. While I was expecting a huge change to how tutorials were conducted, I found that it was relatively the same as in-person tutorials. As more time went on, I realized that what allowed me to feel stable in this transition was my ability to communicate. Communication is what most new tutors often struggle with but eventually becomes the foundation to holding successful tutorials. Communication is important for two reasons: it sets the tone for the tutorial and determines the level to which tutee's understand the writing process.

One important part of communicating with your tutee is to be aware of how you deliver your thoughts, comments, and criticism. When conducting in-person tutorials, we think that we are helping students by simply suggesting various changes, but the slightest shift in our delivery (or tone) could easily change the meaning of our words. In online tutorials, tutors lose the privilege of voice and tone so extra caution had to be taken to maintain a friendly approach. Online or in-person, it is important that tutors maintain a friendly tone and positive/optimistic approach towards a tutee and their work. Those new to DHS—especially freshmen—are intimidated by upperclassmen tutors. As tutors, we have a responsibility to carry out the Writing Center's vision and create a comfortable environment where tutees can freely speak. How we communicate with our tutees is the environment we create for them and this environment determines the degree to which the tutee will talk to you. At times, it can be difficult to word criticisms and suggestions in the nicest way possible without losing the point, but my best advice is to just talk it out with the tutee (remember Press/Address/Bless). If they come to the same conclusion as you on their own, you will be to avoid the possible miscommunication.

Another important part of the tutorial where communication is key is when brainstorming possible changes and new ideas *with* the tutee. As an upperclassmen, it can be a little difficult to resist the urge to take over and rewrite the entire paper. This is especially true when first starting as a tutor. Instead of straight out revising and "fixing" the assignment, be subtle and guide the student to come up with their own conclusion. No two tutorials are the same so your approach to each tutorial will be a little different. Rather than explicitly stating the changes you would make, ask insightful questions and walk the tutee through the writing process. If it helps, maybe even walk them through your thought process. If not, use analogies or examples to help explain your thoughts. Try drawing it out (ex. mind maps). Maybe even act it out if you have to...I have. Be creative! Do whatever it takes to help the tutee understand even if you only accomplish that one task in a 30 minute session.

Communication isn't just about being able to effectively convey your thoughts/ideas to the tutee. It's about bouncing ideas off of each other, listening to what the tutee has to say, and helping them put *their* ideas into words. The hope is that over time, we will be able to instill a part of our confidence as writers into our peers.

## **Dealing with an Unfamiliar Book**

### **By Joan Moci**

As Writing Center tutors we encounter tutees from all different grade levels and English classes. Usually when a tutee comes to the Writing Center it is for help on an essay about a book or article that they read. Given all the different English classes, it's highly likely that you come across a book that you have never even heard of before. But have no fear; this is a problem that can easily be solved.

Usually after greeting an incoming tutee and asking them about their prompt, I would suggest asking them what their book or article is about. This is a good way to begin a tutorial, as it makes the tutee feel comfortable and less nervous about the experience. It also gets them thinking about writing which is something that might not be on their mind early in the morning or after a long day of school. Asking them for a short summary is key for dealing with an unfamiliar book because it gives you a preview of what to expect from their writing and helps you get a better idea of the points they will be making. By being more familiar with their book you will be able to ask better questions and give better suggestions, allowing for a much more successful tutorial. I would still recommend asking them for a brief summary even if you have read and are familiar with their book as well. Having a tutee explain their book to you helps them to better consolidate their ideas and be more focused on what they really want to write about. That's why they say teaching is the best form of learning.

By asking questions about their book you are also likely to uncover some of the areas where the tutee might be struggling in his or her writing. Depending on where they are in the writing process, a tutee may be trying to find pieces of evidence to prove their point or trying to figure out how to analyze a piece of evidence that they already selected. By asking a few questions about their book you will be more familiar with their topic and know how to better guide them in finding what they are looking for. Even more importantly though, asking questions about their book can prompt a tutee into making more insightful connections. This ultimately is the goal of any Writing Center Tutorial.

All in all, when dealing with an unfamiliar book or article, don't be afraid to ask questions about the book. Even if it seems like you are losing some time, spending that time to get set for the tutorial goes a long way into making it into a truly successful one.

## **Say “NO” To Being Snape or ‘80s Cop**

**Amanda Bardales**

Hello tutors of the future (or whoever you may be reading this),

My name is Amanda and I was a two year tutor at this very Writing Center at Downey (I’m also a slytherin). Over the two years I’d like to think that I learned a few things. But before I get into all the tips and tricks: welcome to tutoring, this will genuinely be one of the best things you choose to do in high school. It is so rewarding. Okay mushy feely stuff out of the way, let me pass on some of my knowledge to you.

In my time I’d like to think that I became very fluent in a certain art. No, this art won’t teach you to bottle fame and brew glory like a potions class, but it’s just as hard. It’s the art of asking questions (without it feeling like an interrogation). Now I know you may think I’m absolutely insane -you wouldn’t be wrong- but I’m here to tell you, it truly is an art. When tutoring you’ll be very tempted to do two things: grab your tuttee’s paper and do it for them or give them this spiel of advice and information. These are both big NO NOs in our writing center. This is not your paper and remember:: you are not a teacher. You are there to make them better writers, not to be their editors. This is all to say that the true way to make sure that you stay away from being editor or teacher is to ask questions in order for you to help your tutee understand and come to their conclusion when it comes to the outcome of their paper. We don’t need any black billowing capes or large moustaches with donut crumbs hanging out in the Writing Center.

Now it is super important not to bombard them with questions as if they’re being interrogated, but don’t sit there in complete silence. The correct way to do this is to start simple; ask them what they want addressed specifically in this session. This opens the gate for you to gauge where your question should be directed and warms you up to generate more interesting questions. The key: how you phrase it. After they tell you what they wish to talk about, it is your job to work with them to get them to see their own mishaps or misleadings in their writing. In order to do this start with a question like: “when reading this portion did you notice anything off or out of place?”. Now feel free to make it your own and don’t feel obligated to regurgitate the questions I offer here. At the writing center everyone has their own style of tutoring that goes with their personality so make these questions fit you.

If they think they’re writing is beautiful and magnificent and they can’t find a flaw, try another question: “ Did you notice anything that didn’t click?” If this in itself does not work kindly (emphasis on kindly) point out something you noticed that didn’t click, but do it with a question such as:” when reading I noticed... did you mean ...?” or, “when reading I was confused by... can you explain?” This opens their eyes to possible confusion in their writing and kind of lifts their veil of perfection without being mean. This also helps to build a bridge between you and the tutee. The conversation will start to flow and anytime there’s a lull, try another question- kind of like a date. This keeps it from feeling like you’re lecturing or interrogating them. Make sure these questions have to do with the writing and make sure they’re specific to what the tutee is looking to have addressed or to a specific part of the piece. Do not ask broad questions like “well what did that mean?,” not only does that sound rude but you aren’t addressing anything.

The most important part of perfecting the art of question asking is (queue drumroll) waiting. Don’t overload them with questions. Don’t fire off questions and don’t be aggressive. They aren’t criminals and you aren’t a weird ‘80s cop with a bad moustache. And they aren’t the love of your life’s child, that they had with another person that you hate but have been sworn to protect. Once you ask a question, breathe and give it a few seconds, they need to process and think about an answer. Wait maybe twenty to thirty seconds. The clearest way to know they don’t have an answer is “The Look” (patent not pending, I have to pay for college). “The Look” is one of a sheepish nature with hunched shoulders and them looking you through their eyelashes

embarrassed. Here is where you reword your question to make it more accessible and more specific. Reword it with more context. Be more specific. Instead of talking about a whole paragraph choose a sentence. Another giveaway is the “Minute of Awkward Silence” (patent also not pending). If after you ask your question you’re both sitting there and their “thinking” and a minute or what feels like five has passed, now it time to change up the question (same as above). This shows a more understanding nature of tutors and once again keeps us from looking like we’re judging them.

Now some may need more questions, some people need less questions. You'll know this at the very start of your session. Why did I wait to put it down here? So you'll remember it! When asking them what they'd like to look at in their paper you'll get one of two answers. One, “I would like to work on... or could you just like look it over?” The first person will generally not need that many questions; they know what they want to work on, they know their ‘weaknesses’ in that paper, and they have a clear mindset. However, the art of question asking is most practiced with the second answer. They are unsure and maybe afraid. This is okay because you got this. Here, it is your job to read through the paper with them and start to ask questions to figure out what they think is their ‘weakness’.

This is not all there is to the subtle art of question asking but it is the basics that you can build your own style off of. Remember to be yourself and remain calm. We don’t need any Professor Snape’s or ‘80s cops in the Writing Center. Once you get the hang of it, questions will be your best friend to get your tutee to use their own knowledge with a sprinkling of your advice in it. So, in all remember this will take some time to master completely but you’ll gain your own style and I hope you have fun tutoring (I know I did). I hope you appreciated me acting as your Dumbledore or sheriff here; but now it is your turn to take the role as new head master or sheriff in town.

Sincerely and endearingly,  
Amanda Bardales.

## **What Do You Get When You Cross a Joke with a Rhetorical Question?**

**Melina De La Rosa & Kaylor Wragg**

Developing your ability to ask questions is essential for a Writing Center tutor because questions are the paddles that guide your boat through the turbulent waters of conducting a tutorial. You don't want to ask questions that eventually lead nowhere (the title of this piece is an excellent example). Therefore, whether the tutee has a plan for the tutorial or not, always begin by asking what process/stage he or she is on. By doing so, you will know whether they completed or are only starting to formulate their thoughts (and might consider changing stances). Then, ask the tutee to reword the prompt and answer it before reading their work to see if he or she has responded to the prompt successfully. Afterward, the questions to be asked must be solely based on what the tutee wants to accomplish and to elaborate more on specific thoughts to solidify his or her arguments. To ask questions efficiently, try to understand the tutee's perspective, and don't feel awkward if there is an awkward silence. Silence is entirely natural to allow the tutee to develop his or her thoughts. Also, **ASK THE MOST OBVIOUS QUESTIONS!!** The tutee needs to be able to answer every aspect of the prompt. Answering the prompt and clarifying his or her thoughts are the most critical aspects to accomplish in every tutorial for the tutees.

Here are some questions/stems you could use:

For a completed work:

- Would you clarify this part for me?
- How does your work answer the prompt?
- Did you consider the opposing argument in your piece?

For a work in process:

- What bigger idea do you believe the author is trying to convey?
- Do you agree with \_\_\_\_? Why or why not?
- Some may argue \_\_\_\_ (opposing opinion). How would you defend your position?
- What is the intended effect of this rhetorical device? How does this enhance the prose?
- Who might be the works/ your intended audience, why?
- What themes immediately stood out to you?
- When you were reading the piece, why did you pick out this specific textual evidence?

Some extra tips:

- Make sure you or the tutee is taking notes on the discussion.
- If the silence becomes too much for either you or the tutee to handle, guide them with your own thoughts.
- Don't get too side-tracked. Keep a focused discussion, but allow some off-topic moments.



## **I Finished Reviewing the Essay in 15 Minutes, What Now?**

**By Kat Arriaga**

I admit you will definitely come across essays that seem perfect and sparkling. Their essay seems flawless and to top it off, they are an honors and AP student. As a student that never really took AP and Honors English classes until senior year, I was recruited into the Writing Center fearing the worst of tutorials with honors and AP kids especially when their essays were complete. So how do you fill the entire thirty minutes of a tutorial with a perfect paper?

First off, a paper may seem perfect already but there is always something else that can be tweaked. I figured out this strategy based on years of being in English classes as we all have. I always noticed that teachers can spend a good chunk of time on one sentence. The sentence was usually complex and well written and they might have gone off on a tangent which is totally fine because it makes the atmosphere more welcoming and less uptight.

An essay is as good as its individual sentences, if the sentences are strong individually, the stronger the essay is as a whole. If I was done reviewing the essay very early in the tutorial I would go back and focus on each sentence individually. Did the sentence flow with the next? Could words be changed to make the essay more sophisticated by using a stronger vocabulary? Could it be combined with the next sentence so that the essay would flow better? These are a few questions I asked myself and the tutee when I reviewed their essay a second time. However, do not fix these sentences yourself, instead guide them in rewriting the sentence in a better way so that they gain something out of the tutorial. Feel free to take note of what you say to them on paper so that they can take it with them when it comes to rewriting or reviewing the paper on their own.

Usually, the process of reviewing the sentences will take plenty of time and it can be beneficial to the tutee. I have used this strategy plenty of times to make sure they make the most of their time at the Writing Center. The goal is not only to make a writing piece better, but it is also to make the tutee a better writer themselves. With that said, welcome to the Writing Center and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

# Specific Populations

## **Diego Martinez: Patience and Understanding with Special Need Students**

*Diego gives us an empathetic, thoughtful reminder on how to help students who learn differently.*

## **Lani Sanchez: Tutoring an APLAC Student**

*Lani Sanchez gives advice to second year tutors who will tutor students enrolled in AP Language and Composition.*

## **Patience and Understanding with Special Need Students**

### **Diego E. Martinez**

Maintaining a positive learning environment for students coming into the Writing Center is our mission, and it is a given that every student will be unique in their own way. It is also important to note that some students do require more needs than most do not. And like everyone else, students in special education programs deserve to be tutored and receive the same respect and diligence. And with that, here are a few tips in helping a special needs student at the Writing Center.

#### **Have Patience**

It may be challenging to get a grip on the things your tutee needs specifically needs, but as a general rule, have even more patience. For me, it was easier to go into a tutorial starting slowly and understanding their assignment and the issues they are having with it. Sometimes it will be hard for them to communicate these ideas, but like with everyone else, read through the work they have already done and communicate in a way you deem best.

#### **Have Empathy**

The old saying works here, you know the “put yourself in someone else’s shoes” one? Remember that their struggles are being faced with the tenacity we have when facing difficult issues. Remember to understand that it may take your tutee a while to comprehend what you are suggesting. If it works, ask questions and suggest things simply. Ask questions on how they think something needs to be redone or reworded like usual, but remember to ask even more stimulating questions. The answers to a problem may seem obvious to us, but it is not for them, so keep in mind that every issue they have has an answer. And these answers should be given in a way that is easy to understand and easy to process.

#### **Comfort and Reassure**

When your thirty minutes is nearing its end, remember to comfort any anxiety or worry they may have for when it comes to their leaving. Outline and suggest the things on a piece of paper for things they should work on when they get home, as it will hopefully stimulate ideas and help give them the remembrance of things you talked about earlier.

Overall, our main goal is to make your tutee feel safe and at home so they can learn as efficiently as possible. Working with special needs students will offer you a new perspective, but remember to always keep an open mind, and remember to make your tutee feel welcome. Patience goes a long way, and empathy will take you very far in your work as a tutor.

## **Tutoring an APLAC Student**

**Lani Sanchez**

Tutoring an honors student is always a bit nerve wracking, but how do you deal with tutoring an APLAC student? AP Language and Composition students are only tutored by previous APLAC students, or our college tutors, only adding more pressure to the tutorial. Unless you're requested as a tutor, you never know walking into your shift who you'll be tutoring, or what you'll be working on. Although you may not always be mentally prepared for an APLAC tutorial, it's important to remember to keep the same calm, welcoming environment that the Writing Center encourages.

It'll have been about a year since you've taken the class, so your worries may be that you've forgotten the material or that you aren't confident in your ability to help the tutee in a way that will benefit them. In these cases, it's okay to remind the tutee that it's been a year since you've taken the class, and can then ask them to summarize the prompt for you.

Additionally, it may be easy to feel intimidated while tutoring an AP student, but keep in mind that you've taken and passed the class. There's a reason why you're one of the limited number of tutors that is qualified to tutor the tutee.

More often than not, you'll be working on an FRQ with APLAC students, so read the comments left by the teachers and try to elaborate on the meaning. Give recommendations, remind them to be specific in their writing, and try to give examples of what to include and what not to include. There are about two times during the year that APLAC students are required to come to the Writing Center, meaning that for about two weeks or more, almost all of your shifts will consist of APLAC and FRQs. While it may be stressful knowing that your shift will be tutoring APLAC students on FRQs you don't remember, know that you can always ask for clarification, and will have teachers comments at your disposal if necessary.

Remember to focus on answering the prompt and adding any details that may help the tutee get a better score. A lot of times, the students have already had time to think over the comments from their teachers, and have already learned what they should add or take out, so the tutorial may not be as lengthy as others. In situations such as these, you can take notes on what was learned, what to remember for the next timed write, or go over strategies to help the tutee for the next time.

Tutoring an APLAC student may be intimidating, but the Writing Center offers a casual and welcoming environment to help calm your nerves. APLAC students are very strong writers, but every writer has something to bring to the table and talent that will be helpful to the tutee. Enjoy every tutorial. You'll meet great writers and friends all while helping your fellow students.

# Being Reflective

## **Jesenia Pale: Growth**

*Jesenia Pale reflects on the major lessons she learned moving from her first year to her second year as a writing center tutor.*

## **Monica Ulloa: Confidence Is Key**

*In the final essay of this volume, Monica Ulloa reminds tutors in an honest reflection that they were not chosen by accident, that they earned their spot as a tutor.*

## **Growth**

### **Jesenia Pale**

Being a part of the Writing Center has been very welcoming and eye opening. The program does not shy away from different techniques used during the tutoring session but instead wants to learn and understand it. This is going to be about the difference I have seen personally during my first year and second year of being a Writing Center Tutor.

My junior year of high school I had many more different writing prompts than I did my senior year. The course I was taking had exposed me to writing and was learning more writing skills. My confidence throughout the year went up as the year went on. In the beginning of my first year I was shy and did not know how to give tutoring sessions. I was figuring out how I can be a tutor, how I can give sessions which will give the tutees at least one skill to take away from. Once I did, the sessions became easier and I was able to properly let the skills I had been taught throughout the school year be passed on throughout the sessions.

My senior year of high school was more calming. The experience I had gained from my first year gave me the opportunity to know what methods or techniques to use in a situation I had already been. I learned how to give sessions from introverted to extroverted people. For the introverted types I figured that if I found some sort of connection between us, like recalling doing that assignment, they would open up more about their prompt and will not be as shy as they first were when we exchanged names. As for the extroverted ones it was more of keeping up with them but making sure we were getting work done.

No matter how many years I have been a part of this program I am not going to lie, sometimes I end sessions feeling like it could have gone better. There were about two sessions where I was left not feeling accomplished or like maybe if I knew how to handle a situation where the person did not really want help it could have gone better. My sessions were in the morning so I only had 10 minutes to reflect on it before heading to the first period. At times like these I was disappointed but I would tell myself to do better next time. I also made mental notes of methods to try out if I were to ever be in a situation like that again.

Being a tutor is pretty nice. We are helping one another improve in our writing. In some cases we as students feel better asking another student for help. It feels different than asking a teacher and for some it leaves them feeling less anxious. Overall, some first years may have trouble finding a way to giving tutoring sessions and for others it might be easier. No matter how different we are giving the sessions as long as it helps the tutees I call that a success.

## **Confidence is Key**

**Monica Ulloa**

It's your first shift at the writing center, the advisor calls your name, and you are about to take on your first tutorial ever. Am I even cut out for this? Am I worthy of this? Am I smart enough? Am I a good enough writer? Do I belong with all these incredible writers? These are the thoughts that consumed me up until my very first tutorial.

I neglected my strengths as a writer and highlighted my weaknesses. In my mind, my fellow tutors were amazingly talented writers and I convinced myself I did not fit into that definition. This is commonly known as imposters syndrome. I feared that I wasn't smart enough to withhold a position as a tutor at the writing center alongside these intelligent tutors. What I did not understand is that no one is a perfect writer, and even my fellow tutors are still growing and evolving their writing abilities. We are all on our own unique paths to becoming better writers. You should never compare yourself to your peers.

Self-doubt will consume you if you allow it to. Instead of neglecting your strengths, embrace them. Acknowledge your weaknesses and work to better them, but do not let them define you. Feed your mind with positive thoughts and be confident in yourself and your abilities as a writer.

Don't degrade yourself into thinking you can't conduct a tutorial. Although at first it may seem frightening to lead a 30-minute one on one tutorial, it is actually a lot easier than you think. I constantly worried about not having enough feedback for the tutee, thus resulting in awkward silence. This was never the case for me. On the contrary, I was usually running out of time because I had plenty to say. Most of my fears stemmed from my lack of confidence. In other words, I worried about anything and everything because I lacked confidence. Always trust yourself and believe that you are capable... because you are!

I convinced myself that I made it here by luck. However, that is false. We are all here because we are capable of leading a tutorial and helping our fellow peers. We went through an interview process and we were *chosen* to be apart of this program.

Moreover, even if you are feeling nervous always present yourself with confidence. If you radiate nervous vibes, your tutee will also sense your uncertainty and will be hesitant to take your advice.

Lastly, remember that you are usually not the only one feeling nervous. Your tutee is, more likely than not, also feeling intimidated. Step up and create the low-pressure atmosphere you both want. Setting the tone is crucial for both the tutee and the tutor to have a successful laid back tutorial. Never jump straight into the tutorial. Instead, ask them if they play a sport, or have any hobbies. Befriend them before you begin the tutorial.

As your first day of tutoring approaches remember this... You are cut out for this. You are worthy of being a tutor. You are smart enough. You are a talented writer. You do belong alongside these incredible writers. You were not chosen by accident.