The Tutoring Book

Fall 2012 Edition

By the CSUS University Reading and Writing Center Tutors

2001-2012
The Tutoring Book – Fall 2012 Edition

By the Tutors of the University Reading and Writing Center, 2001-2012

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**Academic Discourse and Writing across the Curriculum**
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Helpful Strategies

Tutoring is challenging and rewarding. Remember, before you actually tutor at the writing center, you will gain valuable information and advice that will help you by way of the weekly class meetings. You will learn techniques such as how to start a tutoring session and where to go from there. The articles that you will read and discuss in class are designed to help the tutor, so read them and try to integrate the ones that you feel fit your tutoring style. In this article I will be sharing some of those strategies I found helpful, such as how to start a tutoring session and other tips that worked for me and I hope they will be helpful for you.

Beginning the Session

When I first began to tutor at the writing center, I was nervous and unsure where to start in the tutoring process. I discovered, however, that students were just as nervous and uncomfortable about sharing their work with a stranger as I was about helping them with their paper. I found that introducing ourselves to each other was a good way to begin the session. Sounds easy enough but sometimes we become so focused on helping the student within the half-hour sessions that we forget to think about the person we are working with. Showing interest in the tutee helps to set the tone that you are interested in helping them and that this is going to require them to participate in the process. Asking questions, such as, what can I help you with today, what class is the paper for, have they chosen a topic, or how far along they are in the writing process for that particular paper? This not only helps the tutor to know what to focus on, but keeps the ownership of the paper with the student. This helps both the tutor and the tutee to know where to begin in the session and sets the expectations for the tutee to be an active participant. “I usually say, “Well let’s work together,” and put the paper between us and begin the next process, working with the tutee on their paper.

Guidelines for Student Assignments

Remind Students to keep those handouts that professors give them. Sometimes, writers don’t have a clue as what to write about when they come into the writing center. When that happens, we should start by asking them, what is the assignment? Can you show me the guidelines the professor gave you for your assignment? This is very important. I learned that from personal experience. The tutee was so sure she knew what the assignment was so we worked for a half hour on choosing a subject to write about, organizing how she could present the information and then the next week when she came back to the writing center, she showed me the handout with the guidelines on it. Unfortunately, the subject she chose didn’t fit the professor’s guidelines so we had to start all over again to find a topic that fit within those guidelines. I learned from that experience to encourage the tutee to keep the papers that discuss their assignment so we can refer to them before starting to write a paper.

Don’t Forget the Paper!

Sometimes students forget to bring in the paper they are working on or the assignment sheet with the guidelines. I worked out a method to help them remember. First, I would remind them to write it down in their notebook or write it on their calendar. Then I would say right before they left, “I’m looking forward to working on (whatever paper it was) next week with you.” I found that even with reminders some students forget to bring their papers in the next week. So I began to bring in my appointment calendar and tell them, “I’ll write it in my calendar too so we will be prepared to work on that paper together.” Not only does this reinforce the need to have the student bring in their paper for the next session but it lets them know that we are working together and it is team effort.

Finding Topics

When a writer is having a difficult time deciding on a topic to write about or doesn’t have a subject in mind, we need to help the writer. I tried different strategies listed in our tutoring book and found that
some worked well for me but others, even though they were great ideas, were too time consuming to use with the limited time we have. For instance, I tried a variation of the, “three-by-five card exercise” (Harris 35). What I like about this approach is that it helps the writer zero in on a topic and see the points he or she wants to use to support the main idea. It encourages the tutee to be an active participant in the tutoring session and to take control over their own paper. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that it was too time consuming to use at writing center. However, I still share that option once in awhile with the tutee to use at home when they have more time available. What seems to work the best for me is to just ask the tutee questions about their book or article they need to write about, talk about it and have them write down keywords that they think are important or relate to their writing prompt. Then discuss how they could be linked together and draw lines to the supporting ideas already written down. This approach is part of the mapping technique that you will learn about early on in the semester. One of my regular tutees tried mapping at the beginning of the semester and before long, she moved onto outlining her paper before she wrote it. This worked really well for the tutee and her writing improved dramatically. The bottom line, do whatever you find that works best for you and the tutee.

Focus on One or Two Things Only at Each Tutoring Session
Focus on one or two aspects of a paper to work on for each tutoring session. There are plenty of things to choose from, such as, clarity, focus, thesis, structure, organization, voice, sentence structure, grammar, word choice, spelling, and so forth. The list is long but shows that we must pick only one or more things to work on at a time. When I first began to tutor, I was overwhelmed and unsure about tutoring and thought to myself, where do I start. For me, the best way to start this process with the tutee is to remember to smile, be friendly, positive, and truly interested in helping them. Decide after talking with them what would be the best place to start and let them participate in that decision. So even if we may think to ourselves, “Help!” Just remind yourself that a paper can’t be made perfect in a half hour session.

Working Together to Find Solutions
Every person is unique in the way they learn so as tutors we need to find what works best for each individual tutee and to make sure the paper is written properly. That is when we need to converse with the writer, ask questions, and find out what is confusing them. Sometimes, a writer may be having a problem with the same thing every tutoring session. They become frustrated over making the same mistake over and over again and we as tutors may feel like we have failed them, so find out why a certain mistake keeps happening by listening to them. Let them talk and share what with you what confuses them.

When a student becomes frustrated over making the same mistake over and over again, I try to find out why that happens by asking them questions. An example of this is when a student was having trouble with the tenses, which can be difficult to keep straight for an ESL student; we worked out a way to help him remember. We need to remember that getting used to the English language takes time just like it takes time for any of us to learn another language. I discovered an interesting tidbit that I added to my list of “things to remember.” A student explained to me that in his country, the tenses were not addressed in each sentence. This tutee showed me the words or symbols that are written at the end of the initial sentence at the beginning of the paper. Those word symbols tells the reader whether the sentence is in the past, present, or future tense and until the tense changes again, there was no need to worry about changing the tense in their writing. He was so exasperated over the fact that he couldn’t remember to address the tenses in each sentence throughout the paper. So we worked together and made a list of words in the three tenses, past, present, future and listed them under the symbols he used in his own language. When he became confused over what tense should he use, we would go back to his list of words and symbols. This helped the tutee to gain control over his paper and gave him confidence by having something to refer back to when needed to. Our team effort paid off and we were both very excited when we found something that worked for him. Remember, this was a very specific technique that was used to help this one individual. So keep the handy tips you learn from the tutoring class and the books you will read in a notebook and try them to see what works best for each person you tutor.
Draw Upon Other Tutors Experiences and Class Readings and Discussions

You will meet once a week as a class and discuss the assigned readings and techniques that have helped yourself or others and discuss any questions or problems you need help with. So prepare for each class and participate in the discussions. You will learn from those discussions and begin to develop a network of fellow tutors that you can ask for advice. It is helpful to know that you are a part of a team and not alone as a tutor. When you tutor at the writing center, you will be able to experience the excitement of a tutee understanding the writing process better after you’ve worked with them or their gratitude when they return the next tutoring session and they tell you that they were successful at applying what they had learned in the previous tutoring session. Once in a while, you will have the opportunity to hear the excitement in a tutee’s voice when they say, “My professor said I’ve improved!” Then you know your work as a tutor has paid off and realize that you have helped someone to become better writer. That will make your day. Now I am not saying everything goes rosy each tutoring session, but enjoy those moments when that happens and remind yourself to glean as much information out of your class readings and discussions. Learn from others what they have found helpful and what they are having problems with. I guarantee that if one person is having a problem with something there will be someone else in the class that is too. So don’t be shy about sharing your experiences and ideas with each other.

Relax and Enjoy Your Tutoring Experience

When you are sitting at the table in the writing center for the first time, don’t let it scare you when the tutees arrive for their appointment. Just remember, they are just as nervous about meeting a stranger who is going to be looking at their writing. As the semester goes by, you will get to know each of your tutees and develop a comradely relationship with them and will enjoy working together as a team.

These are just a few of the many things I found to be helpful. Most importantly, the best advice I can give is to just relax and realize, “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” so don’t expect to become an expert at the blink of an eye; instead, enjoy the experience of working with fellow students to improve their writing and have fun being a tutor in the writing center.
Beginner’s Guide to Tutoring

When I started tutoring in the Writing Center, I found that learning how to tutor from the readings throughout the semester were helpful, but they were assigned too late. A lot of the articles in *The Tutoring Book* are focused on certain things, such as directive tutoring, non-directive tutoring, tutoring people with no draft, or tutoring ESL students. Though it is nice that each article goes into depth on each subject, when you start off as a writing tutor with no experience, like me, you might not know how to tutor and need a quick guide on how to tutoring. Here’s a quick beginner’s guide to main tutoring methods. I will also cover how to tutor students at different stages of writings.

**Difference between directive and non-directive tutoring**

When you start to tutor, you may ask yourself, “How do I tutor without telling the tutee what to do?” The answer is non-directive tutoring. By using non-directive tutoring, you can help your tutee without telling them what to write and also teach the tutee to become a better writer. But what exactly is “non-directive” tutoring? To know this, you must first learn about “directive tutoring.” Directive tutoring, as the name suggests, is being directive with your tutee. You tell what he or she should write. This is an immediately effective method of tutoring. You get fast results by correcting the tutee’s paper. The drawback to this method is that the tutee does not actually learn how to improve their own writing because they are not thinking about the errors in their paper if someone else is going to tell them the answer.

The more effective method of tutoring is non-directive tutoring. This is the opposite of what was stated above about directive tutoring. Instead of telling the tutee what to write, you make them think of what to write by asking them leading questions. This method includes asking the tutee questions so that he or she will be able to think and reason the errors in their paper and how to fix these errors. The main idea of this method of tutoring is to teach your tutee to be a better writer by not actually telling your student what to write, but having them learn what they should do on their own by asking leading questions or making leading comments.

Both these methods have positives and negatives. Directive tutoring may be helpful when the tutee has absolutely no idea how to fix their paper and they need someone to tell them what to do so they can get started. It is also very fast in helping the tutee. The downside is that the tutee does not learn how to revise their paper by themselves. For non-directive tutoring, the positive is that you actually teach the tutee how to revise their own paper and how to catch their errors by themselves. One of the downsides to this method of tutoring is that it is a slow process and the tutee might get frustrated. Both these methods have their own merits and flaws; the key is to figuring out which method works best with each tutee.
Tutoring at different stages of writing

Along with the different method of tutoring, you need to know how to tutor at different stages of writing. There are four ways to tutor depending on what the tutee has: no topic yet, a topic but no draft, a partial draft, and a draft or the final paper.

No topic yet

To start tutoring a tutee with no topic is to ask him or her about the assignment. Ask if they have the assignment and rubric with them and to see it. If they do not have it with them, then ask the tutee to explain the assignment as best as they can. If the tutee has absolutely no idea what to write about, you should ask the tutee what they have been learning in class. For most cases, they will decide on a topic when they think about what has been discussed and taught in their class.

Has a topic but no draft

When you get a tutee that has a topic already but no draft, you should ask to see the assignment and rubric. You should then talk about what the tutee plans to write their paper on. Once you get an understanding of the assignment and the tutee’s topic, you should use these brainstorming methods to help generate enough material for the tutee to start writing.

Conversation

The first thing you should do with your tutee is to converse with him or her about the topic they have chosen. Ask leading questions (this is where non-directive tutoring comes in!) to get the tutee talking about the topic. Once you guys start a conversation about the topic, both you and the tutee will generate material for the tutee to write about. Write down notes or have the tutee write the notes and go over the notes together.

Free writing

Another method that you can use with the tutee if conversing is not enough is free writing. Tell the tutee to write non-stop about the topic for 10 to 15 minutes. Even if they feel like there is nothing else they can write about, they should not stop. They can even write “I have no more ideas!” or something similar until they can think of something else to write. After the time is up, you should go over what the tutee has written with him or her.

Partial draft, draft, or final draft

When dealing with a partial draft, draft, or final draft, you can use the same methods for each situation. First thing you do is look over the draft and then by using your non-directive tutoring skills, you make comments about what needs more analysis and explanation. Look for flow in logic, argument, inconsistencies, and transitions. You and the tutee should also compare the essay to assignment and rubric to see if they have followed everything. One of the main
things to focus on is to teach the tutee how to revise their own draft. Some effective methods are reading out loud and also reading the essay backwards sentence by sentence.
What You Need to Know to be a Tutor

1. You are not alone.

One of the benefits of being a Writing Center tutor intern is becoming a member of the tutoring community. Whether in the lunch room or the classroom, the sharing of ideas and reflection of experiences is a rich environment for personal growth and skill development. The last few classes were especially rich, for each of us was overflowing with stories of tutoring encounters.

2. You do not need to be an expert in writing.

At the beginning of the semester, the theories were intriguing, lofty and ethereal ideals that without experience I could only gaze upon as magnificent works, unattainable to the ignorant masses. As each week passed, we read and discussed the tutoring book articles and put into practice some of the practical tips given by past tutors. These tips helped as we began to find our way through our own tutoring sessions. They reassured us as we encountered unfamiliar territory and found ourselves clueless as how to proceed. The tutoring community was there, whether physically or in print to encourage us that even just listening to a writer tell about their paper and discussing it with them is helpful.

3. You need to speak English even if you are proficient in Academia (Academese?).

Whilst it is not necessary to be an expert or even an English major to be a writing center tutor, it is necessary to be able to teach, model, explain what is needed for the students to succeed in their courses. To do this (and yes now I am speaking to the English majors) please use terms that are comprehensible to all students. Words like writing “conventions” may mean nothing to people. So if you are going to use impressive English terms, please have the courtesy to ensure your tutees know what you are talking about, especially the freshmen and ESL students.

4. You need to have an open mind.

The writing center is one of the most progressive and diverse places on the campus. Working in the writing center provides opportunities for getting to know and understand the lives, experiences and cultures of people from all over the world. Sacramento is considered an international city because of it’s diversity and Sac State is representative of that fact. The writing center is a place where tutors interact with people with different beliefs and views and it will come out in their work. This is the most important thing to know in working in the writing center, know what you believe but leave it at the door. You are here to encourage a writer, not to tell them what to write about or to have a debate. To help a tutee, they must feel comfortable with you, so be friendly, respectful and careful not to insult. Racial issues are still issues. If you are white then you may come across papers that deal with discrimination and civil rights. This can get uncomfortable for both the tutor and the tutee. I sensed discomfort with one of my tutees and we had been meeting for several weeks so we were able to talk it through. Mainly, I just told her that I understood that she was uncomfortable and asked her what was bothering her. She said she was just worried about how I would feel about what she wrote. Because we had already established a good tutoring relationship, we were able to work through the essay. There are going to be times that there is going to be differences in perspectives, this is a good thing, listen and learn.
5. Be patient as you learn your style of tutoring.

We all have a way of writing. It may be based on the elementary, five paragraph essay model, outlining, chunking or whatever you want to call it but it is based on years of experience. If you do not have experience in tutoring, then it will be awhile before you find your rhythm and just like a good writer, you will continue to develop it over time.

Finally, when you are done with your semester of tutoring, you will probably find, like me, that those lofty, ethereal, idealistic theories are just that, lofty, ethereal, and idealistic. Welcome to the writing center.
Tutor’s Block: Feedback to Inspire Dialogue

Just as writers can become paralyzed by writer’s block, tutors can also fall victim to “tutor’s block”. Tutor’s block is when a tutor simply cannot think of any other way to respond to a tutee’s writing or ideas. However, do not give up hope yet! There are many ways to respond while tutoring, but almost all of these methods fall under four general types of feedback. These categories can serve as inspiration, or as a good reminder of different ways one can respond to a tutee’s paper.

The Four General Types of Feedback
1. Asking for further information or clarity
2. Giving directions or suggestions, or requests for revision
3. Giving the student new information that will help him or her revise the paper
4. Giving positive feedback about what the student has done well
(from Dana Ferris and John S. Hedgcock’s Teaching ESL Composition)

The intent of this paper is to discuss various ways to provoke dialogue and tutees’ critical thinking skills, but the list above can also inspire your own creativity and ingenuity as a tutor, as well as a remind you to balance constructive criticism with positive feedback.

Dialogue
Many successful tutoring sessions hinge upon a sense of dialogue and ease of communication. A tutor can ask a series of questions to gain a better understanding of the tutee, the assignment and the class or professor that assigned it. However, as readers who not affiliated directly with that class or assignment, we as tutors must also ask ourselves questions as we read. The following is a short list of questions to ask yourself in response to the paper. You can also ask the writer some theses questions so that they can respond and clarify their ideas and thus further compel the tutorial dialogue. By discussing your response to their paper as a reader, dialogue concerning the paper can begin immediately.

Questions To Ask Yourself As A Tutor While Reading
Which sections seem most and least important?
Which sections seem most generative?
What words, passages or phrases stick in your mind?
What is implied but not said by the paper?
What do you want to hear more about?
What surprised you?
What met your expectations as a reader? What fell short of or surpassed them?
Are there original ideas in the paper? Are they supported?

Organization
One of the most common concerns that tutors at the Reading and Writing Center come across is that of clarity. Sometimes a tutee may be aware of how organized or disorganized his or her paper is, but sometimes this is not the case. Hypothetically, as tutors, we could inform a tutee of why and how his paper needs more organization. However, the temptation to either edit or to become too directive can be a slippery slope, and a tutee may not learn as much from this approach as they would if they analyzed their own paper with your help. It is better to guide them to reach their own conclusions about the paper by helping them do the analysis.

One especially useful technique is the Descriptive Outline. This technique calls for the tutee to write down two sentences that will adequately reflect each paragraph in their paper. The first sentence is
called the *says* sentence. This sentence, as the name implies, is a simple summary of the message that the paragraph intends to convey. The second sentence is called the *does* sentence, and is a bit more complex. This sentence describes what each paragraph is trying to accomplish with the reader. This is not the message; rather, it is what the paragraph intends to do by conveying that message. Unlike the *says* sentence, the *does* sentence should not even mention the actual content of the paragraph. Here is an example of each type of sentence, applied to a hypothetical paragraph concerning Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, The Scrivener”:

**Says:** Bartleby refuses his instructions, and how the Lawyer and the other scriveners respond adversely.

**Does:** It establishes the character’s stubbornness and refusal to conform to his workplace.

As you can see, this exercise makes the writer condense the ideas or arguments of each paragraph into two sentences that reflect both its content and its intent within the paper. If the tutee has difficulty condensing the ideas of a particular paragraph, it indicates that the paragraph may need more refining, or should be split into separate paragraphs in order to better encapsulate each idea. As a professor of mine once said, paragraphs are not shopping bags with odds and ends tossed in randomly. My analogy for proper paragraphs is that they are more like a flock of geese in a V-formation: composed of similar individuals (ideas or sentences), all of which share a common destination or goal. In this analogy, one might say that the geese are equivalent to the *says* sentence, while their goal is more like the *does* sentence.

The Descriptive Outline technique is useful for both tutors and tutees. In the context of the Reading and Writing Center, tutors may find this technique useful to help tutees gain their own objective perspective on the paper, rather than just hearing it from their tutor. However, these benefits do not just end at the end of the session. This technique can also be used by tutees at home for self-editing for structure and clarity when they are writing at home.

**Structure**

Sometimes the paragraphs in an essay are concise and well written, but the writer has arranged them in the essay like a collage rather than a structured essay. In this case, we as tutors must pull back from the individual paragraphs and ask them to describe the main point/argument/claim of their paper without looking at their thesis. The thesis is a bit like a boiled-down version of the *says* and *does* sentence, but it reflects the whole paper. Often times, the first step towards helping them to organize their paper is simply determining and refining their thesis.

**Organizational/Structural Questions:**
In a sentence, what does each paragraph say? (Descriptive Outline)
In a sentence, what does each paragraph do? (Descriptive Outline)
What examples could you use to support each paragraph?
Does each paragraph reflect the thesis? The prompt?
Does the paper progress from general claims to specific claims?

**Focus Questions:**
What is the dominant meaning/thesis of your paper?
What is the central tension of that meaning/thesis?

**Development Questions:**
How can this sentence/paragraph/section/paper be more specific?
Who says so? What is the authority of each claim?
How can this be more persuasive?
Is there a simpler way to say this?
Thesis Questions

Once a student’s thesis has been established, it can be helpful to further refine or clarify it using the following questions.

- Is the thesis contestable and defendable?
- Is the thesis relevant to the topic or prompt?
- Is the thesis original? Was it developed independently?
- Is the thesis a single sentence?

Things the reader might be thinking:

The following list can help both tutors and tutees keep the perspective of the average reader in mind. Simple confusion concerning the terminology or logic of an essay can be addressed using most of the responses on the following list.

- How come?
- How do you know that?
- Says who?
- I don’t get it.
- What do you mean?
- I’d like to know more about that.
- No kidding.
- Why’d she do that?
- What did he do then?
- Tell me more!
- Enough already.
- Get to the point!
Combating Anxieties and Misconceptions about Tutoring at the Writing Center

As a student in the 195A tutoring internship course I felt many anxieties towards the role of the writing center tutor. There are also misconceptions that I had to address about the writing center with my student writers who are first timers. If I had a simply guide or advice column about what to expect about tutoring and the writing center I would have less anxieties about being a writing center tutor.

The most common misconception of being a Writing Center tutor is that we are expected to be experts and know everything and anything about writing, including all writing styles and formats. This could also be seen as a new tutor anxiety because student writers may come in for help on specific items that the tutor may not be familiar with. Tutors should remember that they are also just students and are not required to know everything. There are resources that are available to help tutors and student writers find the answers and help they need, such as reference books as well internet accessible computers. If you need additional assistance you can always ask the front desk or the GACS (graduate associate coordinators). You are a student helping another student and working together results in the best results in end.

Intimidation is another anxiety you may feel when you meet a student writer who may look older than you. Don’t allow yourself to judge or find yourself comparing your authority to tutor the student writer. Many returning students are older generations and you must remember that they are students just like you. They came to the writing center to look for assistance in improving their writing and essays. You may once again be face with the question: “Am I going to be able to help this student and have all the answers he or she needs?” The answer is no you may not have all the right answer off the top of your head but there are resources that you and your student writer can use to help find the answer.

An incident where I was faced with anxiety and intimation in tutoring was when I had a student writer who was blind. I was nervous initially because I did not know whether I would be able to help the student without offending him in some way. Surprisingly the session felt natural and as normal as any other tutoring session I have had. The only difference was that because the student couldn’t see where mistakes or changes are needed in his essay we had an all verbal session. He had the entire session recorded on his tape recorder so he could listen back to comments or suggestions as well as changes we had made on his essays. The first step and the most important step was for me to read his prompt and essay guidelines out loud to know what he is expected to write about in his essay. Second step was for me to read his essay out loud. I was stopped by the student after every paragraph or main point because he wanted me to make sure he was following the essay guidelines as well as making sure it made sense and I could understand what he was trying convey in his essay. In the end we went over the essay very thoroughly because we had dissected the each paragraph or main idea/point. I felt imitated as well with the student writer because he when he spoke he was very mature and very intelligent. I felt like our roles should be reversed because I didn’t feel qualified enough to offer or help him improve his essay. Once the session started to go into a steady pace I realized that he simply wanted a second eye
and opinion on his essay. He had a well written essay I wanted to know whether he had accomplished and hit all the requirements of the prompt and guideline for the essay.

I learned through my tutoring session with the blind student writer that patient is a key component to how successful the session is. At the writing center we have students from all kinds of background, educational background and learning abilities/disabilities. Being patient not only worked for me while tutoring my blind student writer but it also helps with tutoring students who are not native speakers of the English language. There are many ESL students that come through the writing center for help on their essays. The most common problem I saw among these student writers is the LOCs (lower order concerns). Grammar, punctuation, and wording is the many concerns of the students in their essay. I learned that being patient and explaining why these errors are errors helps the students understand as well as improve their writing because they learn to know when it is right/wrong to use commas, semi-colons, etc. When it comes to looking for these errors though is trickier because I notice that when I have my ESL students read their essay out loud to me they read, they are correcting their wording in their head and saying the correct way instead of what is actually written on their essay. I often would have to stop them and have them notice what they said and what is actually written. Mostly the mistakes or errors of wording are wrong word tense or incorrect usage of singular/plural. In the end, being patient and no matter how many times you go over the same mistake/error it is worth it because I personally saw an improvement in my student in the amount of these errors as well as their ability to detect these errors on their own.

In addition to anxieties for tutors there are also misconceptions about the writing center from student writers. I have been faced with student writers who assume the writing center is an editing shop. Many students think that they can bring in an essay and the tutor will proof read and edit their essays for them and that is all. How I combat these misconceptions from student writers is explain to the students the purpose of a tutor and the writing center is not to edit or proof read. The goal of a tutor at the writing center is to help students improve their writing and help them work on the HOCs (the higher order concerns), such as thesis, organization/formatting, and cohesion of ideas and thoughts.

Keeping in mind that as a student tutor you are not expected to know everything or have all the answers especially about formatting and writing styles from all majors. In addition, patience with students is the important and beneficial which will help you become the best tutor you can be.
One Time Wonders: 30 Minutes to an Hour

I am going to illustrate for you a common occurrence in the writing center. You are sitting in the writing center lounge waiting for your next writer to arrive. They are late. It is now five minutes passed the time your writer was scheduled to appear. Fortunately, there is a system in place that aids tutors in just your predicament. This system will often produce for you a student who has not made an appointment. A student who is often arriving at the writing center mere minutes before their assignment is due. A student who is depending on you to do your best to save them from their state of panic. It may seem like a lot of pressure at first. However there are strategies you can use to make these drop-in sessions, not just less frightening, but fun!

Although there is not much probability for you to meet an hour long drop in, there is a high possibility that you can have a one-time hour appointment. Despite the fact that you do have that extra 30 minutes, remember that he/she is not your regular and the goal is to either convince him/her to become a writing center regular or give them tips to improve their overall writing so they understand what to be aware of as he/she continues to write. *Tutoring Writing* discusses many ways to approach and tutor a tutee. Although there are many methods to tutor, finding your own niche is highly recommended.

The following list contains advice that can be applied to both 30 min drop in sessions and 60 min one-time appointment sessions. This article is now twice as useful!

Positive Attitude-

More often than not, drop in writers will come into the writing center nervous about their assignment and worried about what you will tell them about it. In fact, most of the time, they will be far more nervous than you are. So try to relax! If you can maintain a friendly and positive demeanor as you approach the session, you will have better luck putting the student at ease. This will result in a more productive session. This will become easier over time as you become a more comfortable and experienced tutor. You must remember that drop in sessions are gifts to you from the writing center. Every drop-in session is a learning experience that will help you become a better tutor.

Personal Introductions-

Thankfully, Sacramento State is a diverse community, so each individual you will come across will be different; just start out by introducing yourself. Many may be nervous and/or embarrassed for even signing up for help. Approaching them with ease, as you would your own friends, can help create a comfortable environment for them to openly talk about their paper.

Prompt-

One of the biggest things you can do for a drop-in writer is to make sure that they understand and have followed the prompt for their assignment. If they have the prompt, read it over and do a quick check list of where they think they addressed it in the paper. Whether the writer has a prompt to show you or not, you should ask them questions about their assignment. What is the main focus of your paper? What goal do you think the professor is trying to accomplish by assigning this paper? The more they can explain to you about what they are supposed to be doing, the better chance you have of guiding them in the right direction.
Choose What to Focus on-
Before you start on the paper, always ask what they are looking to achieve today, it just may range from ideas, grammar, structure, examples. The Tutoring Book suggests that you address High Order Concentrations (HOCs) before Low Order Concentrations (LOCs), but I suggest that you should be aware of HOCs while keeping in mind what your tutee wants. If your tutee wants to focus on grammar, and the overall problem is the grammar, well, I’ll leave you to ponder on the answer. It may be a good idea to divide the session and focus on a couple different areas. The goal here is to spend some time dealing with the concerns of the writer so that they feel good about their major concerns, and also to cover areas that the writer might not have thought about.

Addressing Sentence Structure-
A good handful of students (if not all) will ask about sentence structure and grammar. Read the paper aloud for them. It helps to hear what your paper sounds like if someone else reads it as opposed to their brain accepting the paper the way that it is. During these times you can give a little grammar and syntax lesson to be aware of as you read throughout the rest of the paper.

Addressing a Concern-
Address any problems right after you finish a paragraph. This is your chance to address any concern about organization flow, supporting evidence, or even how the paragraph relates to the writing prompt. If you have a question about a body paragraph then ask questions. Stick with questions like “why did you say this?” “how does that relate to this?” That way the tutee can explain and understand what he/she is trying to achieve and if it is really working. Also, don’t be afraid to offer a few revising suggestions; you might have ideas they would have not thought about.
No Draft? No Problem!

Writing doesn’t just magically happen. You can’t just pop open your laptop or your notebook, think a happy thought, and have an A+ paper appear. Writing a successful essay takes careful planning. All sorts of different writers come into the Writing Center, each with an assignment that is in a different place. Some writers show up with a pretty polished third or fourth draft. Some come with what they think might be their final draft. And some come empty handed, with nothing but a flurry (or not!) of those happy thoughts in their heads. It is these writers who need to get those thoughts down on a manageable piece of paper—and you can help!

Early in the semester, I found that a few of my tutees knew exactly what they wanted to write about. They came with outlines, notes, and even the beginnings of a first draft. These writers had a clear idea of how to execute their professors’ prompt—sometimes because the prompt was pretty limiting, and other times because they had that “perfect” idea they just had to get down onto paper. But other writers…not so much. They, too, had prompts, but sometimes their prompts were of the open-ended variety, allowing the student a lot of latitude for choosing the direction of their paper. So it becomes the task of the tutor and tutee to help get some ideas down on paper for these kinds of assignments. This initial “getting it down on paper” can often become the foundation of a strong outline, a sturdy thesis, and eventually, that successful paper. With that in mind, you and the tutee have a few brainstorming tactics at your disposal.

Respect the Prompt

Probably the single most important thing to keep in mind when your tutee comes in without a draft (or even with a draft) is the professor’s writing prompt. Oftentimes, the prompt sets up specific instructions that the professor expects the paper to follow. The prompt might say something like, “compare and contrast such and such.” Or, “discuss and analyze this and that.” And maybe, “define,” “argue,” or “give examples.” Determining what the paper requires might help you and your tutee decide on a brainstorming strategy to use when coming up with ideas. If the paper is a compare/contrast essay, for example, then that might determine what sorts of things you and your tutee might find pertinent to the brainstorming session. Sometimes, however, the prompt is just not that easy to work with, so below are just a few brainstorming ideas you might use with your tutees when they have no idea where to begin.

I’m Free, Free Writin’

Free writing is a simple, yet effective tool for brainstorming. Free writing allows your tutee to just slap down on paper whatever comes into her head. Just have your tutee spend about five or ten minutes quietly writing down the words or ideas that relate to the paper topic. For the first few awkward minutes your tutee might just sit there and stall over what to write. Just remind your tutee that there’s no right or wrong when it comes to free writing. It might be helpful here to be quiet and give her some space to let her thoughts roam. There’s no judging or weighing over the “good” and “bad” at this point; it’s all about the words, associations, and maybe images that come to the tutee’s mind when she considers the topic. Before your tutee begins, you might look over any notes the tutee has taken in class on the subject in order to jumpstart the process. It may be that your tutor will be surprised by how much she really knows about the paper topic. After the five or ten minutes is up, look at what your tutee has come up with. Together you might find repeating themes or ideas, or a cluster of related ideas that your tutee keeps coming back to. Circle or highlight those—they could be the beginning of the paper’s outline.
Rubric’s Cube

Cubing is another brainstorming strategy that might appeal to you and your tutee. Cubing is when you look at the same topic from six different angles—like the six sides of a cube. Like free writing, cubing is a timed exercise. Have your tutee spend three to five minutes responding to each of these six prompts about the same topic:

1. Describe it.
2. Compare it.
3. Associate it.
4. Analyze it.
5. Apply it.
6. Argue for or against it.

Keeping the prompt in mind is important when using the cubing exercise. For instance, if the prompt asks the paper to compare and contrast some idea or theme, use what you’ve found in the “the cube” to isolate the ideas that are the most relevant to the assignment. Or, if the paper is pretty open-ended, you and the tutee might choose the “side” of the cube that interests the tutee the most, or on which the tutee has the most written and begin crafting an outline that reflects that “side.” Cubing works well when the tutee has to grapple with an abstract concept or when the tutee knows what topic she wants to address, but doesn’t know which “angle” of the topic would most suit her needs.

Hip to be Square

Many papers in lower division writing classes ask the students to reflect on some aspect—or all aspects—of the rhetorical square. The rhetorical square looks a little like this, only more “square”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Persona</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You and the student might begin looking at the paper’s topic with these ideas in mind. You might ask your tutee to consider what is the purpose—or goal—of the assignment or the chosen topic. Maybe look again at those specific “instructional” words in the prompt. Look also at the paper’s audience. Obviously, the first audience is usually the professor. Now might be a good time for you and your tutee to consider how the professor views his or her role. Is the professor asking the student to treat him/her as the paper’s sole audience? Does the professor expect the tutee to write as a member of a certain discourse community? Or does the professor want the tutee to write a more personal, reflective essay? Perhaps the professor has intimated that he or she would like to see certain things in the paper (such as no first-person pronouns). But depending on the assignment, the paper might be designed for other students (much like this paper) or for a specified group of people in a certain discipline. Many papers in 109 classes ask students to focus on the concept of the rhetorical square; this exercise might be perfectly suited to a student who is writing in such a context. Persona is also a good thing to review with your tutee. Persona is, in simplest terms, your tutee’s voice. Some papers lend themselves to a less formal sort of writing style; other papers require a more sophisticated vocabulary. But in all writing, your tutee will project a persona or voice. With your tutee, examine whether or not it is an appropriate voice given the context of the assignment.
Casual conversation is probably the easiest—and one of the most effective—tools you have for helping your tutee brainstorm. Like with the other exercises, start with the prompt. Read it and make sure all of the words and concepts make sense to your tutee. Then start asking questions. Ask your tutee what she thinks about the prompt, the topic, or the idea she’s supposed to be writing on. Ask what sort of ideas she’s already got kicking around in her head about the topic. Ask “why?,” “how?,” and “so what?” questions. The goal is to get your tutee talking and thinking out loud. Your job is mostly, as with the other techniques, as a facilitator. You’re keeping the conversation focused and moving. Since talking usually comes naturally for most of us (at least more naturally than writing), you might find this the best way to work with a tutor who is unsure of her blossoming skills as a writer. And because of time constraints, since most tutees only have about 30-60 minutes, conversation is a great way to generate some relatively quick results. Have a piece of paper and a pen handy so that you can take notes of what you and your tutee discuss (or have your tutee jot down ideas as you talk about them). When you and your tutee feel that you’ve exhausted the conversation, take a look at your notes. Can you and your tutee see a natural outline or thesis emerging from your conversation? Oftentimes, it’s there: related ideas, repeated phrases, and natural progressions of thought can easily wind up being a helpful working thesis for your tutee.

Slow Down to Hurry Up

Prewriting is a critical stage in the writing process. And unfortunately, many uncertain and unpracticed writers skip it. Sometimes, you might hear a tutee say she just sits down and starts typing. Generally (though not always), that’s a recipe for disaster. A paper crafted in such a way can lose focus, wander away from the prompt, and create logistical nightmares as the student later tries to revise. Though brainstorming takes time up front in the writing process, it’s an investment that usually pays off later. Brainstorming allows your tutee to take a step back and grapple with the assignment in a productive, but non-threatening manner. She can break down difficult, esoteric concepts into manageable pieces that lead naturally into other strong organizing and content-controlling tools: outlines and theses. As you can see from the examples above, there are many ways to approach a brainstorming session. Some of these techniques are more helpful than others, depending on the tutee and the situation. It might take a little trial-and-error to find the best brainstorming exercise for you and your tutee. If you have a shy, retiring sort of tutee, maybe the quiet free-writing exercise would suit her best. Conversely, if you have a tutee who is extroverted and excited about her topic, the conversation route might be your best bet. And sometimes, you just won’t have time to try one of the more time-consuming exercises, like cubing, with your tutee. That strategy might work best if you see that tutee on a regularly scheduled basis. Some techniques might work great one time and not so great another—but don’t give up! Remember, brainstorming pays off! So try one or more of these strategies when your tutee comes in scratching her head over her latest essay; you both just might surprise yourselves with the bones of a really great paper.
Tutoring Higher-Order versus Lower-Order Concerns

As a tutor, I've learned to look at the ideas of a paper, the high-order concerns (HOCs), rather than its grammar, the low-order concerns (LOCs). I look at students’ ideas and help them communicate and develop them. This practice seems to help the student more than simply focusing on grammar, but it is not without consequences. There are important factors to consider when deciding what topics to focus on in a tutoring session, including what the student wishes to focus on, what the professor expects from the student, and whether or not we are correct in assuming that an individual student would benefit more from higher-order concerns than from lower-order concerns.

*Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences* defines a higher-order concern as one related to “thesis and focus, development, structure and organization, and voice” (McAndrews and Reigstad 42). These concerns are considered the most important because changes in them could completely change the meaning and tone of the paper. Lower-order concerns are defined as those “related to surface appearance,” such as grammar, punctuation, and sentence-level errors (56). A writer can certainly learn and improve from being tutored about grammatical and sentence-level skills; our concern is deeper than that. The question is whether it is more important to allocate our time to HOCs or LOCs, and what we should allow to influence that decision.

The practice of emphasizing higher-order concerns over lower-order concerns is the usual, recommended method of tutoring discussed in our texts, and it is for a reason: it shows results. By focusing on the content of the paper, we help our students learn methods that help them develop their ideas and what sorts of points they should take into consideration when they attempt to communicate their message to their audience. It’s thought that emphasizing the rhetoric, content, and purpose of the paper helps our students learn the important, necessary parts of writing and communication. We are to develop and exercise our students’ rhetorical skills, which leads to their becoming not only better writers but better thinkers as well.

Lower-order concerns are considered less immediate because they improve the paper rather than the writer. While lower-order concerns are still important skills that writers need to know—and thus, are not skills that we should ignore completely—it’s recommended that we focus on the higher-order concerns instead because it’s generally agreed that our concern should be the improvement of our students’ writing and rhetorical ability. Thus, the paper itself can be seen as merely a tool or a platform that allows us to teach and practice using those abilities.

Many tutors, myself included, seem to become accustomed to focusing on HOCs rather than LOCs. I noticed that over the course of the semester, I became used to ignoring minor grammatical errors and sentence-level errors while reading through the papers. I didn’t stop noticing these errors; I just stopped pointing them out so as not to distract from more important issues, such as their theses and organization and success at reaching their audience. Not only did my method of approaching the paper change, but my way of thinking about how I should tutor did as well; namely, I began to understand some issues as being “more important.” So long as I understood the message being conveyed in that sentence, I was able to simply ignore errors and focus my student’s attention on any HOCs present in his or her paper.
Other tutors I talked to have had similar experiences in the Writing Center. One friend states, "the first thing I look at is, 'can I follow what they're saying?'" (Santana). He and others agreed that they simply stopped caring about LOCs when there were HOCs to worry about. He stated, "As writers, our responsibility is to... get our audience to understand the message we're trying to convey" (Santana), and while poor grammar may be a hindrance to that goal, the message and its context is considered more important than the way it is expressed. If this is our “responsibility as writers,” it only makes sense that we should teach that responsibility to our students. It appears the line is naturally drawn when the sentence cannot be understood; then we start addressing sentence-level errors.

Unfortunately, there are costs and consequences to focusing primarily on HOCs. There is only so much time in a session; we can only discuss a certain number of topics in a half-hour or hour. In order to make the session more focused and effective, it seems to be best to just focus on a few topics. The question is should we focus on a few HOCs, LOCs, or a combination of both? How should we allocate our time? What should we take into consideration when making that decision?

Many, perhaps most, students who come to the Writing Center want help with LOCs; they want us to help them with grammar, editing, sentences, word choice, etc. We could help with these, and doing so would certainly seem to improve our students’ writing at least to some degree, but if there are more important issues to address, should we not address those, even if it’s not what the student wants? Directing a session based on what the student wants to talk about is not a bad practice by any means; it may be laudable, even. But if the student needs help with organization and the development of her ideas as well as punctuation and verb tenses, and she would rather focus on the latter, should we not instead focus her attention on the former, on fixing the issues that would help her writing the most? It comes down to more than deciding on the principle to use to determine what to focus on in a session; this is about whether we believe our job as tutors is to assist the students with their concerns about their paper, or whether we should use the time we have with the student to try to develop their skills as much we can.

It may not only be the students we should worry about. Many students are referred to the Writing Centers by their professors. Almost all of the students that I tutored who mentioned that they were sent by their professors came for help with LOCs, and they said (or at least implied) that their professor expected us to, if not edit, focus on the grammar and sentences over the essay’s content and rhetorical skills. Professors often seem misinformed as to what we do; we are not an editing service, after all. Unfortunately, if they expect something from the Writing Center that we simply don’t do, it may reflect unfairly on the student. We can not be held responsible for such an occurrence, obviously, but perhaps we should take the expectations of the professor into account when we decide what to focus on in a session; professors often care about LOCs as much as, if not more than, the HOCs (which, clearly, varies by department, not to mention by professor). We, as tutors, often become accustomed to looking past minor errors; professors, however, sometimes allow these errors to decide the student’s grade. Again, the student’s grade is not our responsibility, but perhaps we should consider it.

There may even be ethical issues in ignoring LOCs. Many of the students that I tutored are multilingual. By and large, they understand how they should organize a paper, develop their ideas, and reach their audience; they simply don’t know how to do it in this language. They aren’t familiar with the conventions of English, and that’s what they actually need help with. Even if there are HOCs present in the paper, would it not benefit a multilingual student just as much, if not more, to focus the session on run-ons, verb tense, and use of articles, even if they
don’t immediately interfere with communication of their idea? We should remember that ignoring LOCs may be doing as much a disservice to our multilingual students as editing a paper for them.

There is no correct solution. The question of whether to focus on higher-order or lower-order concerns has no right answer. It is important to remember that every student is different. All students will have their own issues we should help them with, and we should refrain from generalizing about them as much as possible. Perhaps the answer is to stay flexible and adapt to the student as much as possible. Maybe it comes down to tutoring style. I know that as the semester progressed and as I tutored new students every week, my style of tutoring changed, though I also settled into certain patterns. Every tutor should decide for his and herself how to focus a session; it is, in the end, a personal choice.
As If Three Books Aren’t Enough!

I hope that by now you have familiarized yourselves with two textbooks and the tutoring book that supplement this course. I probably won’t be wrong if I assume that some of you have flipped through the chapters madly or skimmed the table of contents in hopes to ease your anxiety: we’ve all been there! As you go through the first few weeks of tutoring boot camp attempting to soak in as many tips, theories, and any other helpful advice as you can, let me tell you that you can’t prepare yourself for every possible tutoring session or cover all “what ifs” in such a short time frame; honestly, I don’t know if that task can be accomplished at all. Instead of giving you a pep talk and reassuring you that you’ll survive your first few weeks in the Writing Center just fine, I’d like to share additional resources you can turn to throughout the semester, if you find yourself looking for extra guidance.

One of the best and most accessible resources you have is your colleague. Take time to chat with your classmates, the GACs and other fellow tutors in the Writing Center. Chances are high that one of those people faced a similar challenge with his/her tutees, has some tutoring experience that could prove helpful to you, asked questions you struggle with, developed techniques that you might be interested in, or has ideas that could help you develop your own methods and ideologies. Introduce yourself to your colleagues and help create a collaborative environment in your class and the Writing Center. I also recommend that you get to know your GAC mentor early on in the semester, get his/her email, and turn to them as a handy resource; after all, they have assisted a wide range of tutees and tutors.

The other suggestion I have is for your class to invest time in starting your own class resource. Create a blog, or ask the professor to open an online discussion board in SacCT, where you can post freely at your convenience or need. You can use this space to share any practical information: successful experiences you’ve had in your sessions, helpful techniques you developed, any useful websites you came across, any tips you received from tutees, any MLA/APA/Chicago citation machines or pamphlets that are worth the time, any worksheets that prove helpful and effective, etc. (Just make sure that you title your posts with helpful headings, so everyone can easily find what they’re searching for.) I also advise you to take advantage of this blog or discussion board to post any questions you have. If everyone contributes once in a while, you will receive a few tips and different perspectives to help you overcome a challenging session or locate a needed resource.

In addition to your classmates and the three readers assigned for the course, the Writing Center has a collection of books available to tutors. There is a bookcase in the tutors’ lounge that holds sets of tutoring books from previous semesters. You have years’ worth of articles where tutors share their ideas and knowledge, so if your tutee is running late or you have a no show, flip through those articles for ideas; this resource may prove helpful as you begin your final assignment for this course: you can find interesting ideas, or possibly areas that weren’t explored, to address in your own tutoring article. That bookcase also has dictionaries, citation manuals, literary works and even novels. It won’t hurt you to familiarize yourself with the content and materials that bookshelf offers; it just might come in handy some day.

Another bookshelf, in the Writing Center, stands by the door across from the front desk. This one is smaller and holds books that both students and tutors can use. Although students aren’t allowed to take
them outside the Writing Center, these books proved to be helpful resources for both tutees and tutors. You will find grammar books, dictionaries, a thesaurus, and various citation handbooks available for referencing. As you begin tutoring, you will find that many students come asking for help with grammar. Since CSUS Writing Center focuses on higher order concerns (such as organization, thesis, etc.) first, many sessions will not provide time to address grammar and punctuation issues. Before ending such a session, you can provide your tutee with tools he/she can use to edit his/her essay independently; take a few minutes to walk those students over to the bookshelf and show them the grammar books and handbooks available for their use. You can also introduce your tutees to owl.english.purdue.edu: a website that offers free grammar exercises for students, if they want more practice (type “grammar” in the search box on the website).

The other thing you will find, as you begin tutoring, is that a lot of students come asking for help with MLA/ APA/ Chicago Style citations. Although you’re not expected to have every detail of each style committed to memory, your tutees will expect you to be able to help them with their works cited and reference pages. I suggest you grab the appropriate handbook from the bookshelf as soon as your tutee mentions needing help citing sources. Instead of doing the work for them, I recommend that you walk the student through the handbook and help him/her find the appropriate sections/pages as you work through the works cited page. This way students get used to using the handbook and leave the Writing Center with a new skill; hopefully, they’ll be able to apply those skills and complete their citations independently next time. If you’re not into handbooks or want your tutees to have a tool accessible to them anytime, recommend visiting owl.english.purdue.edu. This is a very user-friendly website that has rules and examples of proper MLA/APA/Chicago citations.

One last thing I will mention is the twirly-metal box you will see against the back wall of the Writing Center. Look through the handouts it has; you can actually give those to your tutees to keep and refer to. Another folder with handy worksheets and handouts is located on the computers in the Writing Center. You and the tutees should be able to access this folder from the desktop and will find that it offers a wide range of helpful handouts. Introduce your students to this folder, so they can take advantage of it early on in the semester. Keep in mind that if you’re equipped with a variety of tools and resources, you’ll be able to draw on them to be a more effective tutor; likewise, if you equip your tutees with resources and tools, they can draw on them to become better writers.
A Guide to the Many Web Resources for Tutors and Tutees

Your first couple of weeks as a tutor may be a little disorienting and, if you are like most of us, you will have the fear of not knowing enough to be a successful tutor. But chances are you are a competent writer and student, and when you do not know how to do something, you know where to go for resources. When you get a question from a tutee that you cannot answer, it is beneficial to share your resource finding strategies with them in order to make them independent writers.

Of course, you may not always know where to find resources for your tutee’s specific problems, especially if it is an issue you have never encountered (for example, formatting guidelines outside of your own major’s discourse). There are many resources a tutor or tutee can access for help with writing and this article is intended to be a guide to those resources. So, whenever you find yourself stuck, with no time to flip through each book on the Writing Center shelf or no time to read through multiple Web pages to find what you need, it may help to take a quick look at this list.

The following Web resources are provided in the Web Links section of SacCT. I will briefly describe what each page contains and how they might be used in the Writing Center.

CSUS University Reading and Writing Center (http://www.csus.edu/writingcenter)

This site provides concise and important information for both CSUS students and faculty.

To the left of the main page, there is a link to Resources for Students.
On this page, the top link leads to a PDF of the *Sacramento State Student Writing Handbook*. This is an invaluable resource for CSUS students, but for use in the Writing Center, this document is best used in print, which can be found on the Writing Center reference shelf.

Also on this web page is a list of links for specific help with:

- The Writing Process
- Grammar and Editing
- Research Processes and Citing Sources
- Reading Processes
- Writing For Specific Disciplines (English, Philosophy, Natural Sciences, Social Work, Sociology, and Theatre)
- Writing a Thesis or Project
- Writing Resumes and Cover Letters
- Writing Beyond Sac State

These resources have been created by Writing Center tutors and CSUS faculty, so the advice, tips, and guidelines found here represent the established CSUS writing program and should be a helpful site for tutees.

In the links that run across the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Web page, there is a link to the GWAR webpage. You will probably have tutees that need information on the GWAR and this is a great link to share with them.
It includes a detailed explanation of the process, FAQs, and something my own tutees have appreciated receiving, the GWAR Workshop Packet. Of course this packet is disseminated at the GWAR workshops, but for tutees unable to attend those workshops, this packet provides very helpful information including a sample WPJ, a grading rubric, and test dates.

Other Useful Sac State Web Links:
- List of Writing Intensive Courses (http://catalog.csus.edu/current/first%20100%20pages/ge.html) [Click on “Writing Intensive”]
- Writing Center Online Tutoring information (http://www.csus.edu/writingcenter/writingcenter/online_tutoring.html)
- Tutoring Book Archive (http://www.csus.edu/writingcenter/writingcenter/tutoringbook.html)
Every college student should be familiar with the Purdue Online Writing Lab. This Web site is abundant with topics relating to all things college writing:

- General Writing
- Research and Citation
- Teacher and Tutor Resources
- Subject Specific Writing
- Job Search Writing
- ESL (English as a Second Language)
- OWL Exercises

Links to some of the more popular resources that will no doubt be of use to tutees, can be found at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/.

Here is a list of the most popular resources:

- OWL Exercises
- APA Formatting and Style Guide
- MLA 2009 Formatting and Style Guide
- Avoiding Plagiarism
- Writing the Basic Business Letter
- Developing a Resume
WAC Resources from Colorado State OWL ([http://writing.colostate.edu/guides](http://writing.colostate.edu/guides))

The Writing@CSU Writing Guides Web page is very well built in that it includes descriptions for each subtopic allowing for quick navigation of the pages. The usual topics of academic writing are addressed in this site, but it additionally includes less touched on elements such as “Working Together” and “Designing Documents.” This site also includes in-depth guidelines for a variety of disciplines including business, science, and engineering. Altogether this is a helpful resource for students looking for specific instruction.

Here are some of the areas in this site you or your tutee may want to explore:

**Writing Processes**
- Preparing to Write
- Starting to Write
- Conducting Research
- Reading & Responding
- Working with Sources
- Planning, Drafting, & Organizing
- Designing Documents
- Working Together
- Revising & Editing

**Writing Documents**
- Composition & Academic Writing
WAC Resources from UNC Chapel Hill OWL (http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/index.html)

This site provides an index to the many helpful handouts and links the UNC Chapel Hill OWL has to offer. The assistance offered in these pages is in great depth, which may be a little overwhelming, but each resource on this page has a quick introductory paragraph allowing the user to quickly assess the usefulness of the resource. Also, this web site has done well by including resources to recurring issues brought up in the writing center.
I have included a few of the resources you may want to refer to in your sessions:

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This site includes the archived issues of *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (the current issue is only available through subscription). This newsletter focuses on the practices of writing centers with essays on tutoring theory and methodology, handling ESL issues, and using tutorial theory and pedagogy. Whether you are looking for quick tips, in-depth analysis, or more examples of actual writing center experiences, you will want to check out this site. The search box on this page makes finding specific information very easy, and chances are you will have large returns on your searches. You can search newsletters going all the back to 1976!

**International Writing Centers Association ([http://writingcenters.org/](http://writingcenters.org/))**

Being a part of a writing center, you may be interested in looking around this site sometime, but in the interest of giving you practical resources, I want to introduce you to two very helpful pages within this site.

Resources for Writers ([http://writingcenters.org/resources/resources-for-writers/](http://writingcenters.org/resources/resources-for-writers/))

The International Writing Centers Association has put together a list of excellent writing resources from various universities and education professionals from all around the country. At this site you will find resources related to:

- Starting Out
- Organization
- English as a Second Language
- Language
- Writing Style
- Citation
- Grammar and Usage
- Reading

Peer Tutoring ([http://writingcenters.org/resources/peer-tutoring/](http://writingcenters.org/resources/peer-tutoring/))

Because there are as many unique situations in tutoring sessions as there are unique students, exploring a page that keeps this in mind is comforting. In this site you will find peer tutoring blogs, manuals, videos, and a bibliography.
This site is meant to be a resource for teachers who have some element of writing in their courses and since this is a very wide focus, the resources found here can also be useful to tutors and tutees. This site is home to a variety of open source, professional publications. Graduate tutors or teacher candidates may be interested in the WAC Clearinghouse Journals, which include, naming a few:

- *Across the Disciplines*: exploring the intellectual, political, social, and technological complexity of language, learning, and academic writing.
- *The WAC Journal*: Writing across the curriculum (WAC) educators exchanging WAC practices and theory.
- *The Journal of Basic Writing*: articles on theory, research, and teaching practices related to basic writing.

The Open-Access Books on the WAC Clearinghouse Web page might surprise you as well. Here you can find 38 books free to download or view, all devoted to academic writing. As a tutor, and really as a student as well, you will find that ‘open-access’ here does not mean these books are of lesser value. Here is a list of some of the series available now:

- *Perspectives on Writing*: series editor, Susan H. McLeod, University of California Santa Barbara.
- *Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition*: series editors, Charles Bazerman, University of California Santa Barbara; Anis Bawarshi, University of Washington; and Mary Jo Reiff, University of Tennessee-Knoxville.
- *NCTE on WAC*: series editor, Mike Palmquist, Colorado State University.

Other Recommended Sites

ESL
http://www.esldesk.com/esl-links/
http://www.englishpage.com/grammar/
http://a4esl.org/q/h/grammar.html
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/540/01/

CITATIONS
http://citationmachine.net/
I Didn’t Know I Could Get Help with That

A tutor needs to understand that not all tutees come to the Writing Center to have their essay and research papers revised or edited, yet some writers have the misconception that is what tutors do. Moreover, many students may not realize that there are many writing resources available to them. The tutee may feel that tutors insist that they bring some form of written material for us the check out. Not true, I feel that I am here to help them in any stage of the writing process, and if it is something that I cannot answer I know that I am not alone. I enjoy the fact that tutors have a variety of resources available such as peers, Writing Center professors, and numerous tutoring writing aids such as the Sacramento State's “Writing Across the Curriculum” I will access the Resource for Students web link and will write about some of my experiences with students’ request for help, which we can articulate by using these resources available all students.

Resources for Students:

- Sacramento State Student Writing Handbook
- Help with the writing process.
- Help with Grammar and Editing.
- Help with the Research Processes and Citing sources.
- Help with the Reading Process.
- Help with writing for Specific Disciplines (Theater, Sociology, etc.)
- Help with Writing a Thesis or Project.
- Help with Writing Resumes and Cover Letters.
- Help with Writing beyond Sac State.

The “student resources” web links are provided by Sacramento State's “Writing across the curriculum.” In addition to the “Resources for Student”, “Writing across the curriculum” offers many more useful web links for students, faculty and many more reports, journals, and statements. I found that most students do not realize that they have access to this user friendly writing resource and this web link is accessible not just to CSUS students, but to the general public as well. Initially, I had decided to explain the content of these web links, but as I browsed through the sites I was amazed on how much information was accessible. So much, that I decided to put the “Resources for Students” as a Hyperlinks to demonstrate how easy it was to access and follow. All you need is a question of the type of writing help you or your tutee may need.

Other resources are all around you, just take a look at the peer students next to you, he/she has much to offer and so do you. We may have learned many different English formats, styles, and strategies that work well for us, but if we combine all of our different form of expertize in the the English discipline, well you can just imagine. This past semester I was working with a walk-in and she had most of her writing completed and only needed help with the
Chicago style citation format. It was my first tutee of the day and I had not had much experience using the Chicago style format and I told her so. I told her not to worry because we had plenty of resources available. I went to our Writing Center resource library to search the the citation format. I have to say that as I walked by the front desk I asked two of my peer for the quickest way to access a Chicago style citation format. The front desk attendant enthusiastically said, “Wait I just made a Chicago style format presentation yesterday. Let me see if I can pull it up and get you a print out.” Another peer tutor pulled out a handbook with the page number of the Chicago format, and there in just a couple of minutes I had multiple resources in my hands, and handed them to the student. Needless to say, she was impressed, not because of my ability to understand the Chicago format off the top of my head, but because of the manner in which the Writing Center produced her needed information efficiently. Thanks to my living resources, expertise, and helpful demeanor. She thanked me and went on her way. (Time of visit fifteen minutes). I say don't be shy or stress out, but use your resources when needed.

My focus on this project will look at students as they encounter the Writing Center experience according to their belief of what is available to them as CSUS students. I will focus on the Writing Center and their resources and how we may assist them using the different resources available to all Sacramento State students. For example, on the previous tutoring session I needed to revert to the Resources for grammar and editing verbs, pronouns, articles, active vs. passive voice, and parallel structure. This information is easy to find in the writing across the curriculum link on My Sac State.

First Student

A walk-in student asks, though she was not currently working on a piece of writing, “I don’t have any writing samples, but I was told that I could get some help with my organization. And I feel that I am struggling with my grammar”. It was obvious that the student needed help, but did she know what kind of help was available for students here at the CSUS Writing Center. We have prepared ourselves through the 198A tutoring course so that we may understand the diversity of the student needs and that not all are similar, not to mention the specific disciplines of their studies. This particular student had a graded paper and a question pertaining to her grammar, but was reluctant to ask; however, she did mention it in a subtle way. My response was that we could review the past participle and simple past according to the grammar rules. Needless to say, she was astonished and said, “you can actually help me with my grammar?” She did not know that she could receive this type of help at the Writing Center. It seemed that she was thinking of different grammatical issues. My response was that she could come back and ask for that type of help, but first we should look at the organization and flow of her essay before working on her grammar issue stating the importance of the writing process and high and low order concerns. Before she left, I mention and showed her the resources mention above so that she could navigate through them in case she wanted to learn more about the grammar issues and how to work with them before she returned for additional help.

Second Student

Thank you, how nice, it’s been so long since I had a lesson in grammar. The basic concept was that this student needed to review the grammar rules whether to refresh her memory
or just review some issues about the grammar function on certain writing patterns. This student was easy to work with. I simply directed the student to the appropriated link according to her needs and it was a sound of relief because all the answers to the questions or insecurities in grammar were in effect there this particular student's use.

Third Student

On this occasion a graduate student need help with a lengthy research project. However, it was not that he needed help with the editing process. Instead he was looking for help on some additional research and organization. He was scheduled for a thirty minute session and said he just needed some ideas on how to identify his organization with facts and flow in the project. I had just viewed the “Thesis/ project writing Print and Online Resources,” so I looked up the link and we check it out. My experience this semester has had a major impact on my ability to research different ideas because as students we only work with our own specialized work and projects. The experience I receive here at the Writing center goes beyond my educational boundaries. However, because of the access to all the available resources and disciplines I get an added lesson in research, application, and review. Somethings we get so warped up in our specialized work we only learn the required lessons to fulfill our assignments.

Fourth Student

This student is one of my favorite because she is open minded and easy to work with. She has a thirty minute weekly appointment, and brings in work on two different Criminal Justice courses. She writes well but has issues with too many good ideas. This is not hard to work with because she has most of the ideas down, yet needs help choosing the best one. I hope this example sounds okay, so in one of the courses she had an issue with choosing a topic, all of which dealt with minorities in the criminal justice system. The problem was that she did not want to work with the minority issue because it was irrelevant to her research stating that if someone commits a crime it is a crime regardless of the ethnicity, yet she had to choose one. As I was reading through the list of topics I saw one interesting minority (women), and I mentioned this option to her. I learn early on that women are considered the largest minorities in the United States. As she was leaving she said reluctantly, “I guess I'll look at the topic on woman because I may not be bias with that issue and I think I can relate to it.” In this session she explained why it was hard to pick the topic. I notices that her focus was on the criminal justice system and not the prejudice against minorities. However, once we reviewed “women as minorities,” she understood how she could work it into her writing assignment. I am not an expert in ethnic studies, but have taken many classes in that discipline and I was surprised when I learn that women are considered a minority, I shared that idea with her and she refocused the fact into her writing. I don't encourage teaching students facts and concepts, but sharing your ideas according to your sessions may be okay. Just remember you are your most valuable resource.

Fifth Student

An English as a Second Language (ESL) student came in with a couple of revised portfolio drafts. She needed extra help with the final draft editing and revisions process. Her
writing was good and the organization was almost perfect. When we started our session I told her that we needed to read the essays aloud, I would start and she could take over at any time during the review. However, most of the errors were determiners and lack there of. This student was very intelligent because after I revised the first error I explained the rules on the proper use of determiners, and she caught onwell to the usage of determiners. After I explained the determiner error I continued to read out loud as I proceeded, she stopped me on each of the errors to correct the error herself. As tutors we only hurt students by correcting the errors for them. It is an important process for students to understand the error and how to correct them, so the they may improve on new pieces of writing. Within minutes she took over reading and continued to correct her determiner errors. I felt good about it, but I think she felt better about her essays. If I were unsure about the grammar rule or how to explain it I would have checked the rule on my grammar text book or the “help with grammar or editing” link. Resources are important to all student; unfortunately, most students are not aware of where the web links are or how to access them. I have to admit I was one of those students. However, thanks to the web links in our English 195A SacCT the web links were there for me. My advice is that if you have not yet browsed these sites, please do so as soon as possible. In a more subjective note research all available resources and get familiar with them because sooner or later you may need to access them as a tool for your tutees. I chose this topic because it is essential to access the needed support for the students and it will give you all the confidences needed as a tutor.
Collaboration in the Writing Center

The first week of tutoring at the Writing Center can be very intimidating because, when you first start, you may feel as if there is an immense amount of pressure and responsibility on you, the tutor. However, the same must be said for the tutee. In tutoring writing, the tutee is equally responsible for the success of a session. This is known as collaborative tutoring.

*Tutoring Writing* describes how, “All learning is fundamentally collaborative, requiring two people: one who is a member of the club and one who wants to be. They work together with trust in each other and confidence in themselves, and learning happens incidentally to their focus on collaboration” (5). It is not just the tutor who has responsibilities in improving writing, but the tutee as well. It is the tutee’s job to come to each session prepared to work on an assignment. Without proper preparation, there is little the tutor can do to assist in the learning process. This article will serve as a “How To” for successful collaborative tutoring sessions.

**Getting the Conversation Started**

One thing that you may not think about when tutoring is the importance of conversation. In *Tutoring Writing* the importance of simply engaging in conversation is emphasized. The text states that social constructionism shows “that language is social, a phenomenon of societies, both created by them and serving them” (1). When first read, this may strike a chord with you because it is both obvious and unknown at the same time.

While it seems easy to understand that an individual’s particular social environment influences their language, it may not be something we each think about on a daily basis. But when it comes to tutoring writers, it is important to think about their individual backgrounds when reading their writing. Since our language is deeply influenced by the type of social environment surrounding us, it is important to understand that the person you are tutoring may be influenced in a different way from you. As the text states, “We use language primarily to join communities we do not yet belong to and to cement our membership in communities we already belong to” (2). In this sense, tutoring writing works as a collaboration of two different people’s language to reach a common goal: successful writing.

This idea ties directly into another theory regarding tutoring writing: collaborative learning. As mentioned before, “All learning is fundamentally collaborative, requiring two people: one who is a member of the club and one who want to be” (5). What is most interesting is that one of these theories directly relates to another. Our language is influenced by the social environment around us and we work together with others toward common goals. In this particular case, the common goal is tutoring writing so that everyone involved succeeds.

**Working Together to Formulate Ideas**

It is a fairly common occurrence in the Writing Center that a student will come in for help with nothing more than a prompt. For an inexperienced tutor, this can be a frustrating situation because one expects that a tutee will have something written to allow us to work with. It is not just the tutor who has responsibilities in improving writing, but the tutee as well.

It is the tutee’s job to come to each session prepared to work on an assignment. Without proper preparation, there is little the tutor can do to assist in the learning process. However, it is always possible to collaboratively come up with ideas. For example, having the tutee do some type of free write in order to get ideas flowing is one way of working together to formulate ideas. *Tutoring Writing* explains that,
“This exercise, popularized by Peter Elbow (1981), liberates the writer from their internal critique and allows pure discovery of thought on paper” (33). You, as the tutor, have given the initial push and the tutee contributes by writing their own thoughts about the question you asked or the topic you gave them. We have found that any type of collaborative effort between you and the tutee works to get ideas flowing; sometimes, just talking is enough to engage the tutee to think abstractly about the topic. Therefore, “The tutor and writer share equally in the conversation, the problem solving, and the decision making” (26). Thus, a collaborative effort is created within the learning process.

Active Listening vs. Passive Listening

In a tutoring session, you may find yourself wanting to control a conversation or jump in immediately when you notice an issue with a tutee’s writing. This usually happens when a tutee is unwilling to open up. Our experiences have taught us that a student who does not want to talk in a tutoring session is usually one that is either embarrassed about their writing or confused or frustrated with their assignment.

So far, in order to collaborate rather than control a tutoring session, one of the best ways to attempt to overcome a tutee’s reticence is by asking open-ended questions. In Tutoring Writing, it is explained how, “Collaborative tutoring allows the tutor to maintain a flexible posture. The tutor encourages the writer, often with open-ended and probe-and-prompt questions, to engage in off-the-paper, exploratory talk and to expand upon undeveloped themes in the paper” (26).

Some example questions are, “What do you think about ‘this’?”, “What are you trying to say here?”, and even a basic question, such as “This isn’t clear to me; can you explain it in a different way?” This helps to get the tutee’s thought process going and by asking questions about their writing, it allows for them to become a part of the tutoring session as well. Then, you can either refer to a suggestion that has been made previously or point to a specific passage in their essay.

This forces the tutee to engage and actively participate in the tutoring process, rather than just observe. This approach is effective and it allows the student to come to their own conclusions about their writing, rather than listening to what the tutor has said.

An example of this occurred during the first week of tutoring. A tutee came in to the Writing Center struggling with a paper for a class in Social Work in which he had to reflect upon a book called “Nickle and Dimed” about the working poor in America. He was reluctant to talk at first, wanting me (the tutor) to read his paper silently to myself. Part of this was probably embarrassment at having to hear himself read aloud. However, after coaxing him for awhile by asking prodding questions, he was more than willing to talk in the session. He even found that the part of his paper that he felt most passionately about was the part that he had neglected the most. He did this on his own, through use of his own insight, and by talking aloud about what he felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the paper.

This approach encouraged the tutee to talk rather than the tutor monopolizing the conversation. This is an important key to having an effective tutoring session. In fact, the tutee worked on his paper for awhile, and as the session ended, he said that expressing his thoughts verbally helped him a lot more than he thought they would. This shows the tutee that they can make positive changes to their own writing. It helps to empower them as writers, which can ultimately change their entire perspective on writing for the better.
Avoiding the Risky Business of Text Appropriation

My semester working in the writing center has been filled with numerous and often surprising experiences that have enabled me to critically self reflect on my own abilities as a writing center tutor. Besides learning to listen to the tutee more, and talking less, attempts (not always successful) at putting theory into practice, and trying to explain grammar rules I don’t always understand, I have noted the challenge of not appropriating the tutee’s text as one of the most significant and ongoing issues a tutor can face particularly while tutoring during the constraints of a thirty-minute or drop-in session. In an effort to maximize the time working with your tutee, it is all too easy to commandeer a student’s text by making overreaching recommendations about the paper’s organization, over editing mechanical errors, or suggesting a more prescriptive way to re-word a particular sentence. Finding a balance between making suggestions on ways in which the tutee can strengthen their paper must be moderated with a collaborative dialogue that emphasizes the process of writing and learning over the product the student is creating.

How do we as tutors, particularly new tutors with little to no experience mentoring avoid appropriating a student’s paper during the constraints of a short tutoring session, difficult student writing assignments, or during the tutee’s last push of revising for portfolio deadlines? Some potential answers can be found with a multi-faceted approach that utilizes aspects from theories on problem posing, group collaboration, minimalist tutoring, and reading out loud, supplemented with my own experiences of avoiding the trap of appropriating a text during a session. By being aware of the signs of potential text appropriation coupled with critical self reflection, tutors can better prepare themselves to ensure that the student writer remains the primary agent in the tutoring session.

Signs of text appropriation:

During my semester of tutoring, I began to notice specific signs that would often lead to a session where I started to slip into text appropriation. Often, such sessions would begin with a lack of focus, where I had failed to ask the student to be very specific about what they wanted to work on that day. In the case of large papers and a short half hour session, it became obvious that I would often take over a student’s text when I tried to tackle the paper as a whole in an effort to cover as much of the paper as possible within the limited time constraints. This type of situation often led me to dominate the session verbally, making overreaching suggestions on as many issues as I could find in an effort to help the student “fix” their paper. Other instances that led to taking over agency of a text began with a student’s persistent urging to simply have their text edited, or their sentence structure analyzed. In circumstances like these, I found myself in a situation where I was asked to be an editor, and no interaction between me and the tutee was occurring because I was asked only to make grammatical corrections throughout the student’s paper. In all of these cases, a similar pattern seemed to emerge: the lack of a student determined and student led focus for that tutoring session that centered on important aspects of writing such as organization, structure, or creating a strong thesis statement.

Starting off a session: Problem-Posing and the rewards of open ended questions:

In order to combat a session that could easily slip into tutor led decision making, I suggest beginning each session with some problem posing questions. Problem-posing is a method developed by the theorist Paolo Freire that enables a teacher to ask open ended questions of their students using who, what, when, where, why, and how as the starting point to the question. This type of open ended questioning becomes a means of enabling the student to learn through creating their own answers through active problem solving and critical anlaysis. In an effort to create a more liberated classroom, Freire
created a space where students and teachers actively taught and learned from one another, utilizing problem-posing as dialogue. This theoretical approach is an excellent way to begin a session because it allows the student to answer your question through analysis and problem solving, and as the tutor, you are engaging in learning how the tutee forms arguments or supports their thesis because problem posing questions require them to answer more than yes or no.

I found that beginning a session with a series of problem posing questions enabled the tutee to determine what they were most concerned about in their writing. Problem-posing questions can help to avoid yes and no answers by asking, “What specifically would you like to work on today and why?” By asking the tutee to decide what to address during that session and why it is important to them, you as the tutor are helping the tutee to understand that they possess a sense of power, agency, and responsibility for the tutoring session. In cases when there is limited time and a long paper to tackle, I suggest asking the tutee to pick one or two paragraphs to focus on instead of tackling the entire paper. In cases such as a drop-in session, where I have never worked with the tutee before, I might suggest that we look at their opening paragraph, thesis statement, and their first full supporting paragraph for that particular session.

By limiting the focus of the session to a workable portion of the paper, there will be fewer enticements on the tutor’s part to take over and revise or edit for breadth. In a session where the student decides to focus on their thesis statement and only one to two paragraphs I would problem pose with them asking, “Where is your thesis statement located in this passage” or “How could you re-state this thesis in order to make it more clear?” Questions like these open up the conversation, enabling the tutee to begin explaining their ideas as a means of exploring their own writing.

A Multi-faceted approach: Minimalsim, Reading Out Loud, and Collaboration:

Jeff Brooks discusses several potential scenarios in his essay on minimalist styles of tutoring, ultimately advocating a hands-off approach to tutoring. In his essay, “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work” Brooks argues that, “the tutor should take on a secondary role, serving mainly to keep the student focused on his own writing” (169). Brook’s style of minimalist tutoring advocates informing the student writer about ways to improve themselves as writers, and not simply improving the product or text. While Brooks advocates an overly extreme level of minimalist tutoring, his focus on the process of writing and not the product or text is an important and necessary goal for tutors to embrace. I found in my sessions that embracing Brook’s style to a less stringent degree did prove helpful during many of my tutoring sessions. One way in which I accomplished a level of minimalism was to make a conscious effort to listen more and talk less. I would begin with a problem posing question such as, “What do you mean by this statement?” or “How can you expand your thesis statement so that it is more specific?” After asking, I forced myself to sit back and just listen, both allowing and in some respects forcing the student to talk out the answer to the question. If I felt the need to prod the student to explain further, I would limit myself to asking another leading question such as, “What do you think this thesis statement suggests you will be covering later in your paper?” Another approach to minimalist tutoring I have utilized is to make a conscious effort to listen more and talk less. I would begin with a problem posing question such as, “What do you mean by this statement?” or “How can you expand your thesis statement so that it is more specific?” After asking, I forced myself to sit back and just listen, both allowing and in some respects forcing the student to talk out the answer to the question. If I felt the need to prod the student to explain further, I would limit myself to asking another leading question such as, “What do you think this thesis statement suggests you will be covering later in your paper?” Another approach to minimalist tutoring I have utilized is to ask the tutee to free-write for a few moments as a means of developing their thoughts on a specific aspect of their writing. In a case where I feel a student would benefit best from quiet exploration into an aspect of their paper, I have suggested they take a short period of time, only 2-3 minutes to do some exploratory writing, giving them space and a bit of privacy by excusing myself for that period of time. Although free-writing is a tool that teachers often utilize in a classroom situation, it is also a method that can be used in the tutoring session as a way for struggling students to generate some beginning thoughts and ideas of their own.

Reading out loud is another way in which a tutor can foster a sense of ownership in their tutees. I admit that in many cases asking a student to read their paper out loud can be awkward at best. However, explaining to the tutee that hearing their paper read out loud enables them to both maintain ownership of their text while allowing them to hear their own language style, conventions, and voice often succeeds in encouraging them to engage in the process. Reading theorist Cathy Block argues for a metacognitive view of reader theory, “where the reader, in engaging in reading out loud also engages in controlling the text by
making continuous predictions about what will occur next, based on information obtained earlier, prior knowledge, and conclusions obtained within the previous stages” (73). In listening to their paper being read out loud, the tutee can engage in generating their own series of questions about their text, questions they would not necessarily ask had they not read their paper out loud.

If the student is extremely resistant to reading his or her paper out loud, you as the tutor should engage in this portion of the session. However, reading the entire paper start to finish often becomes overwhelming. I suggest that you tackle 2-3 paragraphs at a time, taking care to stop occasionally to give feedback about what you have been reading. Tackling a few paragraphs at a time also gives both of you a great deal of more perspective about the paper as a whole. Reading out loud engages both you and the tutee in a conversation about their text, while offering the student a chance to talk openly about their paper.

Collaboration becomes the trickiest aspect of tutoring. By this I mean collaborating together in a way that does not entail you as tutor talking the entire session, or making overreaching suggestions about the student’s text. Over the past semester I have worked with several students who seemed to have no problem speaking about their ideas fluently and eloquently during a session. However, the moment I suggested that they write down what they had just said, the student was unable to do so. I used a method of what I will call collaborative dictation where I would write as close as possible word for word what the student was saying during the tutoring session. In order to begin this process I would ask an open ended question and encourage the student to talk until they had nothing else to say, writing down all of their ideas word for word. I would also write the question at the top of my dictation notes so that the student would have a frame of reference when they went back to their notes and began writing. This method enabled students to orally “talk it out” and explain their ideas to me. By writing down their ideas for them using this dictation style students can compare their oral “words” to the written words of their draft as a starting point for revising their text. If this collaborative dictation method is used during a brainstorming session, the student has the beginnings of an outline that is written in their own words and expresses their own ideas.

All of these methods are useful approaches to helping a student create a text that is completely their own. Before you start that next tutoring session remind yourself that the ultimate goal of the session is to help create better writers by enabling them to make their own decisions about the tutoring session and their writing assignments. Start the session by giving the tutee the power to decide what they want to work on. Keep the session focused on the writer’s goals by asking them problem posing questions about their writing. Listen and wait to hear what the tutee says before you talk. Engage in reading out loud as a way for tutees to hear their own voice, and take notes on what the tutee is saying. With regular critical reflection after each tutoring session, you will be an active tutoring partner who collaborates, not appropriates.

Works Cited

Director or Not? Adapting an Approach

My experience at the Writing Center has been greatly influenced by the readings assigned each week. However, the more advice I read, the more I specialize my own approach to tutoring in response to that advice. For instance, I took into account the theory that tutors should take a more indirect approach when working with a tutee by allowing the tutee to have a stronger hold on where his or her paper should go (North, 2008). I also considered a more directive approach, like focusing on grammar and offering advice. Despite the reluctance of writing centers, a directive approach is an essential need for particular students who are still learning important, functional rules of the language (Myers, 2008). These two voices influenced my own approach to the writing center, for even though Myers and North have opposing ideologies of how to tutor students, I believe both ideologies can be adapted to whatever the situation is. Truthfully, I believe both directive and non-direct approaches are essential to a balanced tutoring experience. There are some aspects of academic convention that students may not acquire themselves, and if we as tutors took the time to de-mystify these mysteries of academic writing (setting aside the theory that academic conventions are just another mode of reinforcing superiority), the academic experience will hopefully be more enlightening and "doable." Below I outline strategies pertaining to when it is appropriate to take a more direct approach, and when it would be better to take a non-direct approach in the tutoring session.

The Directive Approach:

There are several reasons for why I allow myself to be occasionally directive in my tutoring sessions, one main reason being that the situation does not always allow for me as a tutor to take the time to be non-direct. Sometimes I meet with a tutee for 20-30 minutes, and I know there is a chance that I will not see this tutee again for whatever reason. Because of my constraints on time, I allow myself to explain more and provide more definitions simply because I don't have the time to ask, "So why do you think you need to be more specific here?"....or... "What do you think you should do after you talk about your evidence?" These are all good questions related to the demystification of why we write the way we do in academic writing, and they might be good to ask of specific tutees even with the time constraints, but asking questions about why students do what they do will most likely close them up because they know we already have the answer. It can easily turn into a guessing game.

Therefore, I have found that explaining to students the process they need to go through while constructing their paper paragraph-by-paragraph, point-by-point, helps them become not only aware of what kinds of questions they should ask for the paper they are writing, but aware of the questions they need to ask for every paper in the future. Good questions tutors can ask their tutees in order to formulate a thesis and brainstorm supporting topic sentences are:

- What is the prompt asking you to do?
- What does the author say in the article (if there is an article)?
- What do you agree with (in relation to the author's argument)?
- Are there any exceptions?
- What makes this important?
- Will anyone be able to argue with my thesis (or is it just an opinion)?
- Do I have main points that support my thesis?
- What kind of support am I using (surveys, statistics, quotes from others in the field...)?

Most classes that focus on improving their students' writing have questions like these, but having some prepared ahead of time could help make the brainstorming process go smoother. However, despite having a list of questions to help generate the material students need in order to write a strong paper, they may
not know what they are doing that makes their paper strong or effective. So as I read through what my students are doing, I can show them what they are doing. For instance, I might say, "You are analyzing here, you are providing evidence here...etc." This way, students can begin to identify for themselves the process each paper must go through and whether or not they are completing that process.

Another instance when it is appropriate to be more instructive with a tutee is when the tutee has obviously not acquired basic strategies most of their classmates already have obtained at that point in their academic career. Offering solutions to this problem can be very tricky because it is a well-known fact that not everyone learns the same. Some tutees are visual, some are auditory learners, while others are kinesthetic learners. Some tutees have to write notes down while others cannot write and listen at the same time (like me). If a tutee does not know his or her learning style, I just offer key strategies that seem to work for most of my tutees. Strategies that may be helpful to students (despite whether or not the strategies are obvious to us) are:

- Create a checklist of what the prompt asks students to do and check each item off as they are completed
- Underline any section of the prompt the student may not understand so that they can ask their teacher (or their tutor) to clarify for them
- Ask students to break their body paragraphs into three basic parts--topic sentence, evidence, and analysis--and ask them if it all connects together
- Or ask them to make a basic outline of the paper in general which includes the thesis statement, the main points or the topic sentences, and the evidence they plan to support it with.

As I go along I hear new strategies offered to me by fellow tutors and even tutees. Sharing strategies can be helpful, and it allows the student to keep his or her voice intact in the paper.

The Non-Direct Approach

Having a non-direct approach is one of the most difficult things I have had to learn as a tutor. Since I like to combine both approaches in my tutoring sessions, I have to constantly be prepared to pull back and let the student take control or step in when the student needs explicit direction. An appropriate time to be non-direct is also related to time. If you know that you will be seeing your tutee again because they have committed to meeting on a regularly scheduled time, there is not as much pressure to point out all the subtleties of academic conventions in one session. However, the reason why taking a non-direct approach can be difficult, is that the tutor has to know what questions to ask that will allow the student the freedom to answer without suspecting there already is an answer. We don't want our tutees playing a guessing game because they suspect we already know the one and only answer.

A good way to approach a non-direct situation would be to ask questions that you really don't know the answers to. I asked one of my tutees about a topic I had virtually no previous knowledge of: a bacterium with a very long name. She opened up right away, often forgetting about the paper (which is great, because then they are not tied down to what they have already written). By the end of her explanation to my question, she had generated a large of amount of material relevant to her thesis statement. But the funny thing was, none of what she told me had been included in her paper! Sometimes getting the students to just talk about their paper without pressuring them to come up with a thesis statement beforehand allows them to open up with what they already know, and as a tutor, I am able to identify points my tutee makes that could be a great source of discussion in her paper.

Sometimes just having the student summarize their introduction and recite their thesis (without looking at the paper) to me is just as effective in getting them to open up about their topic, because as soon as they mention their thesis, students will want to talk about what they said to support it. I had a student recite his thesis about whether or not the death penalty should be legal, and as soon as he finished explaining his thesis he began talking about all the reasons why it should be legal (I think it was after I asked him "why"--another good question to just keep asking). But like the previous tutee, much of what he told me was not included in the actual paper. So now the problem he had before of trying to make his
essay meet the page limit is no longer a problem. Now he has to figure out what points he wants to include because now he has a lot more material to work with.

Adapting

After working at the writing center for a semester, it became clear to me that every tutor approaches tutoring different ways, each unique, but just as relevant as the next. However, I do know that the most important approach should be sensitive to how the tutee learns the best. That is why I have chosen to adapt the two approaches, directive and non-direct. I know that both approaches have an idea of how tutees learn best, but we tutors don’t really know until we sit down with them and work with them and get to know them. Therefore, my strategies may end up being completely different than the next tutees strategies because we are all learning and adapting. As long as our strategies put the tutee’s growth at interest, feel free to experiment and come up with your own approach to tutoring.
Too Much or Too Little: Are You Doing Either?

In the University Writing Center you want to be effective as possible, but the ever-difficult issue of doing too much or too little when tutoring can hinder both yours and the student-writer’s development. Perhaps at this moment you are inexperienced when it comes to formal tutoring, you are nervous about your first few sessions, or maybe now you are weeks in but you are still looking for new methods to improve your lessons. Whichever the case, this article will address how to identify (and avoid) being a tutor who is not doing enough or doing too much, and will provide solutions as to how you may move past these difficult issues many tutors face.

Too Much:

On Their Part: Several students enter the Writing Center stressed or upset with previous papers or grades and corrections they may have received. Normally they decide the best time to let their steam out is with their tutor and, if allowed the opportunity, they will use a good portion of the session to tell inform you about the situation or professor they’re currently dealing with. For a thirty-minute sessions this cuts out a good portion of your time together, and instead of guiding them toward the solutions to resolve their issues, you’re sitting there nodding quietly or voicing “Mhm” every now and then. Another few students come in ready to lead the session even if they don’t mean to. This student-writer may show you several papers or essays all at once and expect you to follow along. They will explain to you their ideas and problems without ever actually getting the work down on paper. While it seems fine for them to go through their essays and prompts with you, it is ultimately unproductive if nothing is happening and they are allowed to go from paper to paper as if you can correct three at once and remember all the errors contained within them.

On Your Part: It is quite possible this could be the one rule most tutors break. It is very difficult to stay away from changing words or crossing out sentences, but persevere, young soldier. By not allowing them the chance to identify their own mistakes and make their own corrections you keep them in the same writing level they came in with. In these cases they won’t learn, they won’t know how to help themselves. Some of us may find ourselves accidentally putting words in their mouth or paper by saying or asking, “How about you say…” or “Do you mean to write…”. These are good devices for wanting clarity, however this can lead to taking ownership of the student-writer’s paper if you’re not careful. Other ways this may happen are through interpretation, editing by pen, or allowing them to use examples you created that directly relate to the topic of their paper and not going back and telling them to create their own ideas. When you begin to take ownership, you may not allow them the room to say what they feel is wrong or right about their paper. The student-writer will ultimately lose their voice and the chance to be involved in a session that needs their input and ideas. Believe me, no one will benefit from a session like this, because while the student-writer is chilling you’re doing all the work!
**Too Little:**

*On Their Part:* Student-writers will breeze through the doors expecting you to mark up their paper, give them some feedback, and leave with A+ work. It may not be their fault for thinking this way because they may have forgotten our golden rule about the Writing Center not being a “fix-it” shop. And it’s definitely not an auto-shop, guys. Some student-writers will come in not actively participating in the editing of their paper, they will simply sit and wait for you. Some come in, slip the paper right in front of you, then lean back into their chair like it’s your job to quietly edit. Although, as you will find out, it’s not always their fault that they come in with expectations of you *just* fixing their paper. If you let them, this will lead you to doing too much, and as said before this is not productive at all.

*On Your Part:* Now, this is probably the easiest one for a tutor to fall under, but in reality you’re just hanging out. Try to catch up with them on good ol’ times later and get to work! A way to remind yourself that a session is going nowhere is if everything is too quiet. Either you’re waiting too long for the student-writer to find an error or create a new sentence, or you’re really just sitting there waiting for something to happen. This wastes time and makes a session stagnant and boring. If you’re not giving feedback about the ideas or context of the paper, then you’re not helping the student-writer understand what mistakes they’ve made or clarifying whether they have written a engaging, understandable paper or not. You may not be engaging in the student-writer’s work as they expect you to be. It is also important to not let them struggle for too long when you want them to identify problems. Not pointing out what’s wrong simply gives you a little too much time to day dream or figure out what you’re eating on break.

**Solution:**

*“Equal Opportunity Tutoring”:* Both the student-writer and the tutor should have the opportunity to actively engage in the paper all while maintaining and establishing the fact that this paper is owned by the student writer. And although that may be true, the tutor must at times direct the session (I suggest asking what they feel needs the most assistance first) because a handful of your sessions could be about thirty minutes filled by drop-ins here and there. You will find out these sessions can go by swiftly. We want to establish that this is a one-on-one effort. No one is sitting back on this and we are addressing the issues head-on, their paper is now a collaborative project for however long the allotted time allows. Try to make the session interesting. Time has flown by for me when I’m enjoying what I’m doing with the student-writer. No matter how much time you have, try and show a welcoming attitude and be positive. You will want to establish a good relationship with your student-writer because they will feel relaxed and willing to participate in the session with you.

I take notes from Jeff Brooker’s *Minimalist Tutoring*, but I do tend to disregard the “Making Students Do All the Work” part because that may only be useful if you notice you’re doing too much. Step one of his guide for ‘Basic Minimalist Tutoring’ states, “Sit beside the student, not across the desk… This first signal is important for showing the student that you are not the person “in charge” of the paper” (Brooks). Keep in mind this is a very helpful idea because a
student-writer may already feel intimidated thinking you’re the hand of fate in their writing
career. His second suggestion in the ’Advanced Minimalist Tutoring’ guide which says, “Get the
student to talk. It’s her paper.” (Brooks) is also excellent advice. You both stay engaged in the
paper when you discuss what it is about or what the student-writer has tried to accomplish within
it. This method shows you are giving thought to their work, and it also allows them to reflect on
their paper in a way they might not have if someone didn’t ask them how they felt about it or
what they would like to improve on. There is no easy answer for tutoring, try different methods
and go with whatever you feel comfortable with that still benefits the student-writers going
through a session with you. This article is here to give you warnings about what you shouldn’t do
as a tutor, and even if you’ve done broken a few rules at times, it’s a reminder for you to
consider discontinuing those methods and collaborate. You want to make the unsure writers who
come in the University Writing Center leave the room as confident ones.
Teaching the Writing Tutor to Praise

To say, "well done" to any bit of good work is to take hold of the powers which have made the effort and strengthen them beyond our knowledge.

*Phillip Brooks (1835-1893)*

Paul Diederich, a senior research associate for the Educational Testing Service, once stated that noticing and praising whatever a student does well improves writing more than any kind or amount of correction of what he does badly, and that it is especially important for the less able writers” to hear praise because they “need all the encouragement they can get” (Daiker155). Indeed, the view that praise aids students in developing the type of confidence required in college-level writing has long been touted by members of the academic community. However, while many tutors may know intuitively that students become better writers when they are given the proper encouragement and feedback, many are hesitant to really use the art of praise to its fullest advantage. Therefore, in the effort to make praise more available to tutors as a means of connecting with and responding to tutees, this essay offers various perspectives and suggestions that will not only aid you in developing and increasing your personal arsenal of praiseworthy habits, but also in acknowledging the true power of praise and the various forms it takes in the tutor-writer relationship.

Step One: Recognizing Why We Praise

In “Learning to Praise,” author Donald Daiker notes that “praise may be especially important for students who have known little encouragement and, in part for that reason, suffer from writing apprehension” (155). For many tutors, myself included, praise just seems to come more naturally when working with students who have difficulties with their writing. Perhaps, in some ways, we see any little amount of improvement as a reason for celebration and our comments to students not only seem to be an attempt to point out moments of progress, but also an excuse for offering encouragement to continue writing. We give more praise to these weaker writers because we know their history—poor grades on papers, endless pages of negative teacher feedback, and a deflated ego to match their status as “failures.” Our praise for these students therefore stems not merely from our need to recognize and honor their evolution as writers, but also from a need to reestablish their long-lost confidence as authors. We praise—sometimes more than necessary—because we want these students to feel like they have accomplished something and made inroads as writers. We praise because we want to erase some of the frustration, anger, hurt, and disillusionment that has collected over the years because of their continual inability to master the conventions of form and language required of “good” writers. In addition, we seem to praise students more often when we fear that they may have already given up on writing. As Daiker notes, students who are highly apprehensive about writing because of their weaker skills “anticipate negative consequence” and therefore “avoid writing” (155). In turn, “the avoidance of writing—the lack of practice—leads to further negative consequences: writing of poor quality that receives low grades and unfavorable comments” (Daiker155). Maybe, by praising the students we feel are apprehensive about even approaching a writing task, we hope to rejuvenate or re-motivate them—to instill within them some of the zest for writing that we have found over the years. However, while this increased amount of support may be valuable to weaker writers because it provides them with much needed positive reinforcement, it often seems that we neglect to give “stronger” writers equal treatment. Consequentially, we must ask ourselves why this inconsistency exists and whether our uneven praise has negative effects on these individuals.
Step 2: Learning to Praise Equally

While many composition scholars and instructors acknowledge the positive effects praise has on student writing, many do not even recognize that their praise often does not seem to be dispersed equally. In fact, throughout my time at the Writing Center, I have noticed that individuals seem much more likely to praise students that they consider to be weaker writers than students characterized as strong writers. What causes this inequality in the dispersion of praise and why do we differentiate between the achievements of more- and less-able writers?

After recording some of my recent tutoring sessions, I noted that I praise “weak” writers twice as much on average than students whose writing I consider stronger or less error-filled. I especially neglect to praise students with only low-order concerns on their papers compared to students who still need assistance with the fundamentals of writing such as organization, analysis, and support. However, while I do not consciously recognize that I refrain from praising students with stronger writing skills, I wonder to what extent I am actually impeding their growth as writers by withholding praise or by praising them only for truly outstanding work?

In a 1972 study conducted by Thomas Gee, the author found that “students whose composition received either criticism alone or no commentary at all developed significantly more negative attitudes toward writing than students whose composition received only praise” (Daiker 156). Moreover, Gee’s study determined that after only four weeks, “students who received only negative comments or none at all were writing papers significantly shorter than those of students who were praised” (Daiker 156). As this study proves, even a lack of praise seems to have negative consequences on the quality of students’ work; therefore, it seems crucial that even strong writers receive acknowledgement for their accomplishments because failure to provide such support may in fact be crippling their desire to continue writing at the same level of excellence.

Step 3: Making Praise an Everyday Habit

Now that you have learned the importance of praising students in an equal manner, regardless of their level of ability, there are a few additional reminders that will aid you in best utilizing praise as a means of positive reinforcement.

Reminder 1: Allow Students to Experience Success on a Consistent Basis

As Daiker notes, “since positive reinforcement, or its lack, is so crucial to a student’s level of writing apprehension,” one way to reduce this apprehension and support writers regardless of their skill level, “is by allowing [all] students to experience success with writing” on a consistent bases (156). Tutors can immediately implement this change by becoming more aware of themselves as individuals whose positive feedback affects the confidence of students and consequentially their work as writers. Every student should have the opportunity to experience success as a writer and, while it may be more difficult to find moments of praise in the work of strong writers, there are always areas that improve in their work and therefore deserve recognition. For instance, students who are strong writers often will attempt to use language in innovative, very personal ways in order to establish their identity as authors. Tutors should praise students for such an attempt (even if it fails) because the student at least made the effort to experiment with style, voice, tone, etc… In addition, you can always praise students for insights that are especially well-articulated or profound or that teach you new ways of looking at the material or at the world.

Reminder 2: Praise Needs to Be Genuine to be Effective

Regardless of what you choose to praise in your student’s writing remember that the praise needs to be genuine and paper-specific. As Nancy Sommers notes in “Responding to Student Writing,” “most
teachers’ comments are not text-specific and could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text;” therefore, tutors should at all times avoid generic forms of praise and instead attempt to point to specific areas in the text where students evidence their evolution as writers (111). Even weak students know when praise seems artificial or forced and they are less likely to trust future praise of they feel you are being insincere or dishonest about their improvement as writers. Finally, remember to praise often and equally because “it’s a good bet that [this] genuine praise can lift the hearts, as well as the pens, of the writers” who we tutor (Daiker 162).

Reminder 3: Try Using Nonverbal or Alternative Forms of Praise

While most students respond well to verbal praise, other students—particularly those who are shy and experience a lot of anxiety when given recognition—might benefit from an alternative form of praise. For instance, consider the fact that approval can be communicated in a variety of ways including through eye contact, facial expressions, and even hand gestures. A friendly smile combined with a simple thumbs-up goes just as far as a verbal “good job” in building student confidence and, accordingly, writing ability. Nonverbal messages therefore are a critical link in developing proper praising habits and incorporating some of the below suggestions will not only increase your tutor-writer repertoire, but also give you an alternative to traditional verbal forms of praise.

- **Body orientation.** To indicate that you like what you are hearing and want to learn more, make sure that you orient yourself in a way that shows students that you respect and value their time and efforts. Avoid positioning yourself in a way that causes you to turn your back on a student or that seems to give them the “cold shoulder.” Instead, your body and chair should be positioned in a manner that enables you to turn towards the student in an open and sociable manner. Remember, if you like and respect the person, show them by facing them when you interact.

- **Posture.** Good posture is associated with confidence and enthusiasm. It indicates our degree of tenseness or relaxation. Observing the posture of others provides clues to their feelings. Students will immediately pick up on your lack of enthusiasm and engagement if you slouch or sprawl in your chair. Instead, you should seem eager and excited to hear more about the student’s thoughts and beliefs. When sitting back in your chair, remember that you should look comfortable, but also attentive. Bad posture, like negative comments, can really sour the dynamic of a conversation. Therefore, always consider that the way you sit can be just as important as what you say.

- **Facial expression.** Facial expressions are a window into the inner thoughts and feelings of the individual. Therefore, if your facial expressions do not align with or contradict your verbal messages of praise, students will immediately recognize that your words may not be genuine. Avoid grimacing, quizzically raising an eyebrow, and even frowning as such expressions communicate to students that something in their writing might be amiss. Instead, try smiling when you deliver a compliment or at least keep your face neutral in order to avoid causing a sense of confusion that might destroy the tutor-writer relationship that you have worked so hard to establish.

- **Eye contact.** Frequent eye contact communicates interest and confidence. Avoidance communicates the opposite. Rolling your eyes, staring off into the distance or even continually looking at the clock can belie any praise that you offer since it indicates to students that you might be weary of tutoring and accordingly their writing. Try instead to communicate your encouragement by letting your eyes speak for you. If you like what you see then let the student know by letting that excitement shine through.
Hand gestures. Students who are visual learners might benefit from the use of hand gestures or signs in order to communicate praise. For instance, try using a simple thumbs-up, “ok” sign or even “snaps” to show readers that you like what you are reading. These simple alternative to oral forms of praise not only are great because they are just as effective, but they also allow you to engage with students in a highly demonstrative and tactile manner. In addition, hand gestures allow you to extend praise even to hearing-impaired students.

Use of space. The less distance between you and the writer, the more intimate and informal the relationship. Arranging yourself in a manner that increases the distance between you and the writer only increases the student’s impression that you are unapproachable. By arranging your chair in closer proximity, you not only let the student know that you are not afraid to get closer to them spatially, but also personally. This will go far in showing students that you are eager to work with them and therefore make praise all the more genuine.

While these suggestions are not exhaustive and may not account for all student types and situations, they should aid you in developing habits of praise that truly communicate to students that you value them as a person and as a writer. After all, the job of a good tutor should not be to merely reinforce what students have already heard from their teachers regarding their writing, but really to give them the tools and confidence to become members of the academic writing community. However, in order to achieve this goal, we must be willing to praise and praise often.
On Liking Bad Writing

The way writers learn to like their writing is by the grace of having a reader or two who likes it – even though it’s not good – Peter Elbow “Ranking Evaluating and Liking”

We ought to encourage students to treat their own writing as texts that deserve the same kind of close attention we usually reserve for literary texts – Jeff Brooks “Minimalist Tutoring”

Excessive praise can prove just as dangerous as too little. Consider, however, the following scenario: it’s a hot and humid day, you stink, your hair’s a mess and leaving grease marks on your forehead, you can hardly button your pants and your bloated belly is unmistakable beneath your pale yellow blouse (well, it was white before you washed it) . Along comes your best friend, and, judging by the look on your face, asks what’s wrong. You point to the sprouting pimple on your nose, the ketchup stain on your jeans, the growing pit stains under your arms. Your friend laughs and tilts his/her head: “Relax, you look fine.” We know it’s a lie, and yet we cannot help ourselves; the corners of our mouths twitch and reach upwards into a lopsided smile. We’re suddenly less self-conscious, less concerned with the shortcomings of our appearance. Our friend’s reassurance, albeit a stretch, bolsters our confidence just enough so that we drudge through the rest of our day.

The latter example is a worst case scenario, for sure, but just as good friends build us up when we look and feel our worst, so must tutors encourage and instill a sense of accomplishment into student writers. Even if a paper is ugly, chaotic, and not much better than the composition your ten year-old cousin recently wrote on zombie brides– even if the paper is riddled with errors and frankly pisses you off – if we as tutors find something good to say about a student’s writing, we can then encourage said student to focus on her successes and (hopefully) thereby lesson her dread of the writing process as a whole. As Jeff Brooks reminds us, “Concentrate on success in the paper, not failure…” By pointing out to a student when he is doing something right, you reinforce behavior that may have started as a felicitous accident” (172). In this way, by highlighting positive feedback, a tutor may also persuade the student writer that she knows more and is a more capable writer than she previously thought.

Though the idea of ‘liking’ a student’s paper may seem obvious or simplistic, it remains a philosophy that many of us strive for and yet few attain. I myself am guilty of allowing lower order concerns to overshadow the effectiveness of my tutoring. The danger of such a practice may lead the tutor to focus on directive rather than facilitative feedback, where comments presented by the tutor may take the form of “you need to do this” instead of “have you ever thought about such and such” (I, too, am guilty of the former, as you’ll soon see). In the end, it’s a matter of putting the power and know-how in the hands of the student writer. By liking and taking an interest in what she/he has to say, we as tutors can create an open-ended dialogue in which we engage the student writer in the writing process by building upon the student’s strengths and helping her to discover her weaknesses.

A case in point concerns one of my habitual student writers, to whom I will refer as Joan. From that very first session, it was evident that Joan would prove my most challenging tutee. Not only was her paper rampant with grammar and syntax errors, but her analysis was weak,
disorganized and repetitive. Joan had little grasp of how to formulate an analytical paper and also demonstrated difficulty in recognizing mechanical errors in her writing (even after both she and I read the ungrammatical sentences aloud). Though born in the United States, Jane’s first and primary language is Chinese. As such, she falls into that category of L2 English language learners, who often display difficulty with understanding and catching grammatical errors. The first time I read aloud Joan’s essay, at the back of my mind I kept thinking, “Where in the world am I going to start; this thing is a total shipwreck.”

The first few weeks of tutoring Joan, my approach unfortunately relied heavily on directive criticisms, where I would often tell Joan how to rework her sentences and ideas. To add to my frustration, Joan continually questioned my feedback, as she did not understand why such changes were needed, and I in turn did not always know enough about grammar rules to offer a sufficient explanation: I just knew what sounded ‘right.’ Soon enough, I came to dread our appointments together and felt that Joan required more assistance than I was capable of providing. Meanwhile, in the tutoring class, it was at about this time – when I was feeling a bit overwhelmed with Joan’s writings – that we began reading about the distinction between facilitative and directive tutoring. During class discussions we talked about the benefits of facilitative rather than directive feedback, as well as the importance of flexibility in any tutoring session. Putting these ideas together, I realized that something had to change and fast.

Thus, I took these notions of flexibility and facilitative discussions to heart. I began to put myself in Joan’s position: a student writer who simply wanted to improve her writing. But, even though I was able to empathize with Joan’s situation, I had trouble getting started with her papers. I could not, for the life of me, get past what I considered to be ‘bad’ writing. That is, until I came across the writings of Jeff Brooks and Peter Elbow. Both Brooks and Elbow advocate for the legitimacy of student writing, for they both feel that every writer deserves constructive feedback on her or his writing. While Brooks contends that student writing merits equal respect as published papers (171), Elbow promotes a full-out loving embrace of student prose, bad or otherwise (406). If we as readers and tutors express critical yet positive feedback about students’ papers, such students may feel encouraged and inspired to make the paper better and to become invested in their writing (as opposed to feeling hopeless and wanting to hand that red pen over to the tutor so that he or she may mark up the page).

A new chapter, then, unfolded in my tutoring sessions with Joan. Rather than prescribe solutions or corrections to her papers, I engaged Joan in constructive dialogue via questioning, praise, short grammar lessons (when needed), and modeling. Though Joan continues to focus primarily on mechanical errors, I have come to terms – and no longer freak out about – such mistakes in her essays. By modeling and having me read her paper aloud, Joan is now able to identify many of her own grammatical errors. And, although I never praise excessively, I do make a point of highlighting Joan’s successes. Just the other week Joan smiled for perhaps the second time (as Joan is a rather reserved and serious person) when I admitted, honestly, that her writing had come such a long way since the beginning of the semester. The best part about it is that Jane did all of the work herself. Sure, her English instructor, class peers, and perhaps even our sessions in the writing center, helped with Joan’s writing. But, even more than that, Joan is certainly the hero of her own story; all she needed was a little push, a little guidance, a good dose of encouragement, and Jane’s hard work is certainly paying off. Even if she still has a long was to go, the important thing to remember is how far she has come…

The idea to take away from all of this is that by maintaining an open-ended and positive outlook, we as tutors can offer critical yet motivational feedback to student writers. While I
might stress the hazards of excessive or undeserving praise, I feel strongly that one ought to give recognition where recognition is due: couple negative feedback with something positive. And so, the next time you read a paper that seems every bit unsavory, ask yourself what about this paper seems to be on track; what is the student writer doing well and at which points does she or he seem to falter. I return to Peter Elbow’s quote that prefaces this essay: by liking student writing, we as tutors can encourage tutees to realize the potential in their own writing.

Works Cited


Struggling or Stuck? Tutoring Graduate Students

I felt confident as I walked to Rina’s table and sat down. I introduced myself and asked her what we were working on that morning; however, when she pulled out an 80 page thesis, my confidence went out the window. Her cultural studies topic was something I had no knowledge of whatsoever. As I read, I thought, “How am I going to help her with this? It looks perfect.” She reassured me that any suggestions for improvement would be a big help since she couldn’t take it back to her first thesis reader until more revisions were made, but it was as if all my tutoring knowledge left me. What could I help her with? Where do I look? I could barely follow her topic! Inside, I had just about given up.

Although it is rare for students to walk into the Writing Center with a thesis, graduate students regularly come in with advanced writing assignments. This article is intended to help those of you who might face a similar situation to mine, and provide some advice on how to handle these types of graduate tutoring sessions.

To clarify, the graduate students I am referring to are typically native English speakers. While much time and research has gone into L2 graduate tutoring, few studies have focused on the native speakers who seek help in the writing center and what to do in those situations (Garbus 1).

Julie Garbus, professor of English and coordinator of the University of Northern Colorado’s Writing Center, states that graduate students’ writing levels are expected to be advanced. When students enter or return to graduate school they often find themselves struggling with the conventions of their discipline, or the high expectations of their professors, In her article “Tutoring Graduate Students in the Writing Center,” Garbus explains that, “Whether or not they are in a field requiring extensive writing, graduate students must take writing seriously, not just to make themselves understood but because writing in a discipline is intimately linked with thinking, reasoning, and persuading effectively in it” (1). The “serious” nature of the writing at this level leads graduate students to visit the writing center despite the fact that graduate students are often embarrassed about needing a tutor and can initially be resistant to tutoring, as John Farrell points out in his article “Some Challenges to Writing Centers Posed by Graduate Students” (4).

In “Peer Tutoring,” Gregory Waters states, “because students often emerge with a variety of needs, the system of instruction should be flexible enough to accommodate itself to the needs of the individuals served. Some students require hours of instruction to improve their scribal fluency; others are already masters of their personal style” (749). Graduate tutees often fall in the latter category, having a greater sense of control over, variety, and sophistication in their writing. Waters’ suggestion that you have to realize that the needs of writers you will work with will vary holds true: ironically, however, graduate tutees require help on issues such as higher order concerns just as much as less experienced writers do. Difficulty arises for the tutor because their issues might not be as apparent as those of less experienced writers, making it challenging to locate them. The results of a nationwide survey performed by Judith Nelson and Jane Powers revealed that graduate students who are native speakers most often asked for help with organization, style, and content not like the less experienced writers or L2 writers after all (p #). Knowing that your advanced writers struggle with similar problems as other writers should aid in lessening your anxiety about working with them and make handling their papers less overwhelming.
Despite the fact that their struggles are similar, there are also two fundamental differences in graduate level writing. First are the high expectations mentioned earlier and the other is the knowledge of writing in their specific discipline. The tutee’s discipline will demand expert knowledge of a particular writing style and its conventions and he or she maybe be unaware how to identify or use them. As a tutor, you will work with students from disciplines ranging from business and engineering to nursing and social work, or in Rina’s case, cultural studies and anthropology. At some point you will be asked to help them with a style you are unfamiliar with, but don’t worry. There are things you can do to help your tutee find the writing information they need. For example, if you are unsure how civil engineers format their essays, you can look up example essays online, ask colleagues in the writing center, or ask the coordinator for help finding resources.

In addition to looking to colleagues for help, the following tips will help you if you find yourself stuck.

• First, remember that regardless of how advanced the writer or writing, there is always room for improvement. Writing that looks perfect can always be better, and experienced writers can work on new elements of writing.

• If you are having difficulty with the discipline conventions, take some time to familiarize yourself with the conventions early in the semester. You might also consider studying the citation or formatting styles you are less familiar with, which will benefit all of your tutoring sessions. Having some knowledge about conventions will give you confidence as you tutor.

• Finally, just like you would an undergraduate or less experienced writer, look for higher order concerns (HOC) first followed by lower order concerns (LOC). HOCs include thesis or focus, audience, purpose, organization, and development; meanwhile, LOCs are sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and word choice (OWL). You always want to start by looking at the big picture first, and work your way down to smaller sentence and word level issues, regardless of the tutee’s writing level.

Armed with this mental checklist, I have since felt ready to ask questions, give advice and suggestions for improvements where I can, and finally, I feel confident in my graduate tutoring sessions and most tutees will appreciate any help or insight you can provide.

I read Rina’s thesis aloud, paying no attention to the content, as I struggled to think about what I would help her with. Finally, I stopped reading, sat back, and asked her to talk me through the topic. As she explained it, the content started making sense and I began thinking that I could follow along.

Feeling better, I read on; however, this time I paid close attention and recalled my thought process for tutoring less experienced tutees. I started with HOCs and before long, I noticed a section where Rina wrote about characteristics, results, and then more characteristics. Even though I still did not understand exactly what those characteristics were or meant, I could tell that they seemed out of order. It turned out that while Rina has an excellent writing style, perfect
formatting, and citations, her organization needed work. She admitted to struggling with organization in the past too. Before she left she thanked me for pointing that problem out for her. As I walked away from the table and back to break room, I was thankful that I was able to help her, even if just a little.

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Tutoring the Student Not the LD

When students come into the Writing Center, we see them as writers. Usually, we do not know much about them; we may come to know their major and their year once they fill out the sign up slip or drop-in form. However, what is clear is that they are seeking help with their writing by entering the Writing Center door. As writers, students encounter all sorts of problems from writer’s block to a lack of analysis in their essays to becoming completely frustrated with a writing assignment. These are common problems for writers, but the writers themselves are not common. This semester I have been lucky to learn from writers with learning disabilities. Since their disabilities are not physiological, until they informed me of their learning process problems, I was unaware that talking and writing were not enough. Some writers need extra help, others need creative ways to learn how to formulate an essay, and others need explicit lessons on how to write an essay such as pre-writing, writing and revising. Regardless of the method of process and learning modes, the end result is, and should be, both a product and an effective method that facilitates learning and writing for student-writers.

As tutors, we are leading writers to assertiveness and independence in their writing skills. We want students to be confident in their process and finished products. Through collaboration, writers and tutors arrive at the style that will give writers the tools to be confident and able writers. But collaboration alone is not enough for some students. Through collaboration, we find that the relationship is give and take: the writer learns as does the tutor. Collaboration tends to decenter authority in the relationship between tutor and writer, but for some students, the decentering of authority does not enable them to achieve the tools they need to be successful writers. Occasionally, students who have challenges that require a more direct approach than collaboration come into the Writing Center for help.

This semester I have worked with several writers with learning disabilities, mainly auditory processing problems and short term memory problems. Learning disabilities are not psychological; moreover, the Learning Disabilities Act of 1968 defines them as “a disorder in one or more of the basic physiological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written languages.” Learning disabilities are permanent, and throughout life they can range in “expression and severity” (Learning Disabilities Overview Handout). When I began to work with the writers who had auditory processing and memory problems, I was unaware of their disabilities until they disclosed them themselves; moreover, it is against the law to ask a writer if they have a learning disability and then to access information regarding the nature of the student’s disability. Had it not been for their honesty to try to explain some of the reasons why they struggled with writing, I would have assumed they were just students who had had bad experiences with writing in the past or simply did not like writing. Learning disabilities are not due to “low intelligence, social situations, or economic conditions” (Neff 379). Thus, since we cannot tell by looking at writers what kind of help all will need before we talk to them, as tutors we need to be open to different approaches when working with students.

In the Writing Center, we work on the principle of collaboration. As tutors, we do not want to co-opt the students’ work, so we create an environment in which working together, often in a non-directive way, students receive suggestions or advice on how to improve their writing. Collaboration assumes that we are all learners in this atmosphere, and hence, both parties contribute to the half an hour or hour session. However, as I got to know some of my writers, I realized that collaboration without some explicit information and ways to improve the writing was preventing the writers from moving forward. One writer, Mari (not writer’s real name) has an auditory processing problem and a short term memory problem; in class, she struggles to take notes because not only does she sometimes not understand what
the instructor is saying, but she quickly forgets what she thinks she has heard in lecture. What this leads to is “understanding and memory fades” shortly after class ends, and later she struggles understanding the requirements of an assignment (Learning Disabilities Handbook 13). When Mari and I work together, we read over her assignments several times, and she takes notes on how she understands the assignment should be answered. Taking “good notes helps [Mari] later on take information from short-term memory and assists in rehearsing information until it is in long-term memory” (LDH 13); she needs to be able to turn to her notes or assignment in order to reflect on what her writing approach and answers will be.

With Mari, reading aloud is not helpful even if the Writing Center staff encourages it. Within minutes of reading the prompt or her own writing to her, Mari will ask to have it read again because she has not been able to process what she heard; in fact, Mari will only remember the first few ideas that she heard. Also, since, Mari needs time to develop long-term memory, she benefits from explicit instructions on how to approach writing and visual aids that she can use to organize and assimilate information: she requires tips on how to write a thesis statement, when and how to insert quotes or textual information, and even what assignment formats should look like. Mari took the time to teach me about her LDs, and the result was that I was able to teach her different ways to use pre-writing for her essays and writing assignments, and she was able to repeat these instructions back to me successfully and apply them to her writing assignments.

Most writers that come to the Writing Center for help know what they need to work on. The students, like Mari, who have learning disabilities who come in have lived with their LDs for a long time, yet they want and need the help to succeed in the academic setting. Most LD students are aware what techniques work for them; they know their strengths and weaknesses and know how they process information when they learn. Although they are aware of their learning processes, we, the tutors, may not be. Learning disability or no learning disability, writers face many common challenges when it comes to writing; learning techniques that may successfully turn writers with learning disabilities into assertive and competent writers may very useful to writers at all stages of learning. Here are some tips that may be useful when working with an LD student or a student who might need a new approach after a few sessions:

**Auditory processing problems**: Visual aids such as handouts, charts, Power Point presentations, overheads and for some computers work. They need the instructions or ideas explicitly written, not spoken for them, because they require time to commit information to memory.

**Visual processing problems**: Students here do not do well with visual aids alone. They work well with audio such as cassettes, videos, reading aloud to them, more discussion in the tutoring session, and a quiet space where the student can concentrate on what is being said during the tutoring session.

**Short term memory problems**: Students need to take thorough and accurate notes. Tutor should ask open-ended questions that are clear; the students then should write down the answers to these questions to be able to take another look at them later. The tutor should ask the writer to repeat back important information or points pertaining to the writing assignment, the comments on assignments, etc. Making flashcards also works well for these students. Tutors can suggest that students keep calendars or daily planners in which they write down important dates and information.

**Dyslexia**: Students with dyslexia benefit from structured lessons. Visual and hands on assignments work well for these students. Pre-writing exercises that are structured or visual such as clustering, webbing, cubing, or outlining help students stay focused. Flashcards also work well to write down important points. Worksheets with grammar formulas, for example how to correct subject-verb
agreement errors also works for students with dyslexia. And another technique that works for some students is the use of color: color highlighters, color pens and pencils.

Many students benefit from the collaborative model of tutoring; as a matter of fact, LD students benefit greatly from this model. However, there comes a point in which LD students and other students that seek help from Writing Centers need a more explicit and direct method of tutoring. Collaboration benefits the writer and the tutor in the Writing Center, yet since the tutor is usually the more experienced writer, the tutor will be wise to use a more directive approach to help the student. Knowing when to step in with visual aids, open-ended questions, specific formulas for writing will only improve the chances for success of an LD student and of other students who enter into a tutoring relationship.

As I read more on learning disabilities, I became aware that they are “persistent condition[s] of presumed neurological dysfunction, which may exist with other disabling conditions” and these dysfunctions remain “despite instruction in standard conditions” (LD 5). Since students with LDs’ brains are structured differently and work differently, the classroom becomes a contact zone for them or a social space in which “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 4). A contact zone for a student with an LD would “otherize” them because in traditional classroom settings their needs for processing information are not included. What we as tutors need to be aware of is that we do not create contact zones or environments in the Writing Center that are mirror images of the classroom. If we do, then we inhibit the student instead of helping the student become resourceful.
Dyslexia is the most commonly diagnosed learning disability. While all students require patience and understanding, it is especially important to remember patience and understanding when working with these students because their frustration levels are often at an increased level due to difficulties with tasks that are much easier for other students. According to the-dyslexia-center.com, a website that offers a range of articles and videos about all topics related to dyslexia, students with dyslexia often exhibit the following characteristics:

* Difficulty in learning to speak
* Difficulty in learning letters and their sounds
* Difficulty in organizing written and spoken language
* Difficulty reading quickly enough to comprehend
* Difficulty persisting with and comprehending longer reading assignments
* Difficulty in putting things in order.
* Difficulty with spelling
* Difficulty learning a foreign language
* Concentration difficulties
* Problems remembering messages or instructions
* Poor handwriting
* Difficulty with little words
* Difficulty with time management
* Easily distracted

(http://www.the-dyslexia-center.com/symptoms-of-adult-dyslexia.htm)

The list of difficulties continues to include struggles specific to areas beyond reading and writing, but the ones listed above are most crucial when speaking of students that you will encounter in the writing center. Below are our first hand experiences with student writers diagnosed with dyslexia. By reading through each of our situations, you will see that while all three students are diagnosed with the same disability, each still requires different attention as each student is different. There is not a single way to help a student with dyslexia, but we offer what has worked for us through our experience in the writing center.

**Student 1:**

On my first day as a tutor in the Writing Center, I met a student writer that would challenge me in every way. I sat at the table and found that Brittany** is incredibly chatty and easily side-tracked, dyslexic (this student writer chose to share this information about her disability immediately), and an Environment Sciences major. I was very unsure of myself after the first session. I wasn’t sure if what we did in that hour was enough to actually help her with her writing struggles. Surprisingly, Brittany found our first session to be extremely helpful and continued to come into the center weekly. I found it very helpful for Brittany to be so open about her learning disability. With the knowledge of her disability, I was able to better understand where she was coming from in her writing. The most important thing to keep in mind when working with a student with a learning disability is patience and understanding.
Initially, sessions were slow to get started, but with the awareness of Brittany’s difficulties with reading and writing, I quickly learned to adapt to different techniques to help this student writer. When working with most student writers, I ask them to read their papers aloud to me. With Brittany, however, I quickly learned that in order for her to benefit from our sessions, I would need to read aloud to her. With dyslexic students, the errors in their writing do not come from lazy proofreading or hasty typing. The errors do not appear as errors to these students. It takes an outsider to read the words exactly as they appear on the page for these unique students to recognize and remedy those errors. Most of the time, she notices and corrects the errors without my help. With Brittany, just sitting at the table with her and reading aloud is all she needs to succeed in her lab reports.

Student 2:

The second week I started tutoring at the writing center I met a tutee, Lisa, that told me how hard her life has been so far, right off the bat. She told me that she had leukemia and the chemotherapy had hindered her speech and the speed at which she thinks. Lisa explained that her writing has suffered the most because she cannot form sentences the way she used to and her clarity is almost nonexistent. I knew this would be a difficult session, but I was optimistic that it would help her and that we could find a way to help her edit and revise a bit more quickly than usual. Just from looking at her first paper I could tell she was not exaggerating about anything she told me. Clarity and organization were the High Order Concerns in her paper, but grammar was following behind very closely. We started off with papers just from her women’s studies class, but now work on papers from all her classes as they are assigned.

Lisa explained to me that due to everything she has been through she developed dyslexia from the chemotherapy as well. I appreciated her telling me from the start and it honestly helped me help her write her papers. I started off by asking her what I ask of all my tutees, “[w]ould you like to read your paper aloud, or would you be more comfortable if I read it?” I was told that she preferred that I read her paper since her speech was also hindered by her treatment and it would take much longer if she read it to me. Since I was reading it I asked her to hold a pen in her hand and to jot down any notes to herself or to make corrections on the paper as I read. With the pen in her hands and the pen in hers, I began to read. It seems to be much more effective for her when I read the paper aloud because I purposely do not make corrections as I read. Instead, I read the paper exactly as it is typed which she found much more useful. I agree that it is more useful to her if I read the paper since she has difficulties with her thought process and may not register the fact that I am making corrections as I read if that was how I decided to go through her paper. There were a couple times where I had to actually stop reading so that we could just go through full sentences based on the fact that letters and especially vowels were missing. One sentence read, “G.Q. is a magazine that hs alt of ads wit wite men in them and alcoha; it sems to be targeted towads rich population.” As I was reading that sentence she was shaking her head and saying “oh my gosh” and laughing at how she was unable to see those mistakes even when she had read over this draft twice before showing it to me.

This was when I took the liberty to talk to her a little bit about how to revise a paper. I explained to her exactly how I revise papers and hoped that maybe the same method would help her. I told her that “I generally write my paper in one go without making any corrections to it whatsoever. Then I take a break by eating something or reading my book just anything else other than looking at that paper; after taking that small break or even an hour one, I go over my paper making spelling corrections and grammar corrections as I see fit. Then I print the paper out and look at my clarity in sentences and organization. After I do all of that, I make my corrections and leave the paper alone, again, for a day or a few hours this time before going back to it and making more adjustments.” Lisa told me that loved the idea of going back to a paper because she, just like many of my other tutees, tries to get the whole paper done in one sitting including the writing process and revising and editing. She was excited to start using this method with her future papers and she even said she would most likely ask her husband to read them aloud to her so that they could make adjustments together before she brought the paper to me. This method works well with people who have dyslexia because they are able to make corrections to their papers without
thinking about it and without realizing that their paper has something written that is completely different than what they think it says.

Every tutee is different and with each one I have to change my expectations as to what a successful session will look like. Lisa really needed to find the skills to be able to do most of the writing process by herself without any help and she was much happier as we went through her paper and I gave her many ideas as to how she could edit and revise and work on her organization. I really felt like a success and that I had made a difference that day when she turned and said to me, “I really want to thank you for working with me and not talking down to me at all. Usually when I tell people I have a disability they talk to me as if I’m an idiot or like I don’t understand English, so I really just wanted to thank you for helping me.” I was shocked that people treat people with disabilities that way, but I was so ecstatic at the same time for making a difference in her life. She always randomly talks to me about how she feels like a failure and that things are too difficult for her sometimes after all the chemotherapy. I really am empathetic to how she’s feeling and I am just so glad that she now has better tools to help her with her writing process.

Student 3:

Another experience I had with a tutee that has dyslexia is with a girl named Shannon. Like the other students described above, Shannon chose to tell me about her disability at the beginning of the session. She is incredibly determined and an amazing writer; however, her disability hinders her ability to organize her paper and understand exactly what certain teachers are asking of her when she reads the prompt. The best way to handle a situation like this, from my experience, is to slowly reread the prompt multiple times. The first time I read it and then I have her read it back to me and then we both take notes as to what we think the prompt is asking. After doing this, we compare what we wrote and break down the prompt so that I can make sure she completely understands the purpose for the essay and how to develop a thesis for it.

Ideally, student writers will share any specific disabilities that hinder their reading and writing skills. Some students, however, may not offer this information as readily as Brittany, Lisa and Shannon did. When working with any student, it is important to take note of recurring errors in his or her writing. In so doing, you may notice that some of the difficulties that your student is having could be related to dyslexia. It is best not to jump to any conclusions and ask the student immediately. We advise giving the student some time to get comfortable with you as his or her tutor. Once the student is comfortable, he or she may naturally open up and tell you about his or her disability. In the meantime, while you wait to see if the student is going to share this personal information, adjust your tutoring style as if you already know this student is dyslexic. The label is not important; helping the student succeed is what matters more than the label.

The key to working with anyone who has a disability is to be patient. This is a lot to ask for some people because not all of us are capable of being as patient as we would like to be after half an hour of trying to explain to someone what a prompt is attempting to get you to write about, but what helps me is to take a deep breath and continue to try different approaches to explaining what the professor wants. As tutors we cannot be expected to make miracles happen and due to this you cannot expect to achieve great amounts of progress during every session. So if the only thing you are able to accomplish in a session with a dyslexic tutee is to explain what they need to write about, you need to realize that it is a great accomplishment because you have just done them the biggest favor they could ask for. So I am asking you to show some patience with your tutees whether they have a disability or not.

**All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the student writers.**
Employing Theory for Students with Learning Challenges

The majority of students who come into the Writing Center are there because they feel at a disadvantage in their writing abilities. Some of these individuals struggle with learning disabilities or challenges which can hinder their writing and reading in the university setting. Julie Neff’s article “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center” discusses some of these challenges by offering theories on how the brain functions. She encourages tutors to understand that there are many misconceptions about learning disabilities and works to provide accurate information. The article, particularly focused on learning disabilities, emphasizes that “a learning disability has a physiological basis and is not due to low intelligence, social situations, or economic conditions” (240). The writing students that we meet with may have one of these challenges to deal with and this article poses to offer realistic suggestions which may be appropriate for working with individuals who struggle with writing and reading.

To begin, it is critical that we have some basic understanding of what types of difficulties the students we work with may face. It is also important to note that physiological conditions which affect learning will vary in symptoms and degrees from person to person. As always in any tutoring situation, it is critical that you adapt to the student writer and their needs. Listed below are some of the specific medical terms and their definitions:

- **Dyslexia**: This learning difficulty is neurobiological in origin and will persist across the lifespan of an individual. Generally speaking, the individual will have difficulty processing written information because letters, words, and even entire pages become scattered.

- **Dysgraphia**: This disorder affects written expression and includes difficulty with handwriting, spelling and composition.

- **Dyspraxia**: This disorder affects the motor skills of individuals. These persons will struggle with planning and completing fine motor tasks.

- **Visual Processing Disorder**: This disorder affects the ability of the individuals to interpret visual information and affects areas of reading, writing and math.

- **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)**: This disorder deals primarily with an inability to concentrate and focus.

Academic writing can be difficult for individuals who have any of the above listed challenges. Potentially, they may struggle from one or more of the following to various degrees:

- Reading and comprehending a prompt
- Processing what is being asked of their writing
- Researching, selecting and reading the relevant materials
- Organizing the material into a cohesive whole
- Organizing the essay with academic paragraphing, grammar and spelling

What YOU, the Tutor, Can Do!

You can tutor the individual and adapt to their needs. The student may or may not have been diagnosed with a learning disability or be cognitive of a challenge which they face in writing. These tips are based on several methods that are shared on the National Center for
Learning Disabilities website. **Keep in mind that these tips can apply to students who do not have a learning disability.**

1. Help the individual analyze and understand the essay prompt or question.

What does the prompt ask of the student? By breaking the prompt up into sections or smaller parts, the student can better understand the prompt and apply it to their writing.

**Example prompt:**

Examine two of the texts read this semester in terms of their commentary on gender roles and gender stereotyping. Consider the characters in the texts and whether they uphold the social norms or challenge them. Discuss how and why these texts either maintain traditional gender roles or resist them. The essay should be 4-5 pages in length. Use textual evidence to support your claim.

By helping the student visualize the prompt, it will become more clear and workable. A breakdown of the prompt could look something like the following. Keep in mind that this can be done in a variety of ways. Consider using a variety of techniques such as underlining certain words, using lists or dividing the prompt by sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total length of essay</th>
<th>4-5 pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key essay components</td>
<td>Two texts, use evidence, have claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Terms/Focus of Paper</td>
<td>Gender Roles, Gender Stereotyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Question</td>
<td>How &amp; Why the texts support or challenge gender roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Brainstorming or “mind mapping” is another great tool. This helps because ideas, questions, and answers are not required to be in any particular order during brainstorming. This helps the individual especially when organization is a challenge.

**Example Mind Map:**
3. Help Individual with Reading by applying Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) Model

Example of Reading Model:

- **Preview** – Help students predict what will be read in the text based on titles, summary information, and introductions.
- **“Get the Gist”** – Help students identify what is the most important information in a passage. This can be done by identifying topic sentences, summary sentences and bolded or italicized words.
- **Wrap Up** – Help the student evaluate the text by asking questions following the reading. Help them to recognize what type of questions they can ask when they are reading on their own.
- **Additional Reading Suggestions from the CSR Model:**
  - Ask students to paraphrase what they have read
  - Look at organization of the text for information

This model like others can be used to help the student identify pertinent information in the texts which they will read and analyze. By improving their reading skills, these individuals will also gain a better understanding of academic writing.

4. Help students with organization by providing a basic understanding of essay structure.

**Example of Essay Organization:**

**Introduction:**

1st Sentence – Grab reader’s attention!
Background information, explanation of key terms, introduction to texts/subject
Thesis Sentence – The argument, the how and why of the essay

**Body Paragraphs:**

Topic Sentence – Explain what will be discussed. This should relate to thesis.
Evidence – Use examples from the text and explain the evidence. Remember citations!
Summary/Transition Sentence – Summarize paragraph and/or tie to next paragraph.

**Conclusion:**

A summary of essay – Do not just restate thesis!
Final thoughts on argument, possibly how it relates to a bigger picture.

5. If you write any examples or suggestions for the student, be aware that handwriting can affect understanding for many of these individuals. Do not use cursive. Print clearly and keep words simple. This will help them when they are working on their own.

6. Always remember that each student is unique and use these and other techniques as they are applicable to that particular student! Also, be sensitive and aware that many students will not discuss their disability or challenge with you and have developed coping mechanisms by this stage in their educational career. Be positive! Be helpful! Be a tutor!
Learning Styles: What You Should Know To Help Your Tutees

You have been working with a student for a few weeks now, but you have not been able to get anything to stick into that students mind. You are frustrated and not sure what you are doing wrong. You have tried saying it in every way that you can think of, but it just isn’t working. You are wondering if it is your fault or the students, and you wonder what to try next.

This situation is common for many tutors, and there may be many solutions to the issue; however, one that might be good to try first is to look at the students learning style because every student has different styles that work better for him/her, and your tutoring style might not be a match for your students, so it is your responsibility to change your tutoring style to fit the needs of your students.

You may have heard of learning styles in the past or even have done a learning style questionnaire. If you have and are familiar with the different learning styles, good for you, and now you can begin to work more effectively with your students. If you are unfamiliar with the different styles, continue reading on to learn a bit about some of the main ones and some of their characteristics.

The Different Learning Styles

Auditory Learners: Students who are auditory learners typically learn best when they hear things spoken to them instead of reading the information, thus the name auditory. They may also work well collaboratively in a discussion/study group because it allows them to hear the ideas spoken by their groupmates, and they would probably much rather be told how to do a task verbally than reading a set of instructions that are written down. Some strategies that can be helpful for auditory learners are:

- Talk aloud when studying
- Use a tape recorder during lectures
- Use mnemonics to help remember information
- Studying flash cards verbally or with someone else
- Try to teach someone else what you’ve learned

Visual Learners: As the name suggests, students who are visual learners are typically going to learn better when they see things written down rather than by hearing. They would rather complete a task using written directions instead of oral instructions. Some strategies that work well for visual learners are:

- Taking good notes on what is said during a lecture
- Annotate their notes and textbooks heavily
- Create their own diagrams, charts, graphs, maps, tables, or matrices

Kinesthetic Learners: These type of learners like to learn by actually doing things they are learning. They are typically hands on learners; they like to be active while they are learning, and they may have some difficulty sitting through lectures. Some good strategies to suggest for kinesthetic learners are:

- Try to sit in the front of the class and take good notes to keep busy
- Walk around or be doing something active while studying
- Use a chalkboard or white board to map out topics
- Try typing notes or ideas on a computer
- Try to apply what the student is learning to real situations and apply the ideas if possible
Conceptual Learners: Students who are conceptual learners tend to learn theories well and are able to think critically about abstract ideas. They do not need to have practical or real life examples or applications. They also prefer to work with language typically. Some strategies that work well for conceptual learners are:

- Look for the big picture ideas and how they relate to other ideas
- Try to connect readings with lectures and other readings
- Leave space in class notes to record these connections
- Think about how and why information is organized in the way it is

The styles listed above are just a few of many, and students are not limited to being only one type of learner; they can be a combination of many. Furthermore, the strategies listed above are only a few strategies that generally work for students with those specific learning styles. For example, none of the strategies for visual learners might work for a student who is a visual learner. If that is the case, the student (and possibly you as their tutor) might try to come up with new ways of approaching the information so that the student can be more effective and successful. Here is a longer list of many of the different learning styles; however, the ones listed below are not usually the dominant learning styles of students. The four styles discussed above are the most common and most dominant learning styles that students use and have. The group of learning styles listed below tend to compliment and can be used to augment the dominant styles.

- Social learner
- Independent learner
- Spatial learner
- Global learner
- And many more. A simple google search will give a more complete list.

Tutor Resources

If your student doesn’t know his/her learning style, it might be a good idea to try to figure it out early in the semester, so you and your student can be more successful all semester. There are a few ways to go about this. One is to find a list of learning styles and their characteristics and have the student do a self-assessment based upon what they know about themselves and their preferences. This can be good because it helps the student to think about how they are learning, which is never a bad thing. The second option is to have them complete a learning style survey or questionnaire. These questionnaires can also be good for tutors to take as well because it can show what areas you prefer, which can benefit a tutor in many ways. First, it can allow the tutor to be aware of his/her preferences which will help them to figure out what their tutoring style is. Secondly, if the tutor knows how he/she learns, he/she can help their tutees that learn the same way have more options and strategies. There are many free options for doing this. Below is a list of a few websites that will do a learning style assessment for free using student responses to questions:

- http://www.mtsu.edu/~studskl/hd/learn.html
- http://www.metamath.com/lsweb/dvclearn.htm

These are just a few resources. There are many more that a simple Google search for “learning style assessment” will bring up.

Tutor Response

Now that you and your student know and have a basic understanding of his/her learning style it is important that you:
• Begin to tutor toward that style(s) because it can help the student grasp what you are trying to teach them easier, and it can help what you are trying to teach stick in their mind easier as well.

• Know that your student most likely has multiple ways he/she can learn, you can try approaching information in different ways if others are not successful.

• Suggest strategies that might be helpful to your student considering his/her specific learning preferences.

• Have the student continually reflect on what seems to be working because the student’s preferences can change depending on the type of information he/she is learning, life situations, teachers teaching styles, and the text book the student is working from.
A New Perspective on Students with Learning Disabilities

When reading *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* article “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center” by Julie Neff (1994), I was surprised by how dated the material was. True, Neff did make many good points in her article that I have used with my own students with learning disabilities, or LD students. I have acted as a sounding board for my tutees to let them verbalize their papers while writing down key points they have said in their own words as well as by having them do different types of diagrams so that they can visualize important points in their papers, which is something that Neff suggests tutors do (Neff, 256-261). However, the absence of ESL learning disabled students and the somewhat politically incorrect wording within the article hinders its effectiveness to modern tutors. Therefore I decided to make my article somewhat of a research project filled with personal suggestions on tutoring learning disabled students so that future tutors will have better information when tutoring these students.

First I would like to address the issue of phrasing when it comes to students with learning disabilities. I was angered by Julie Neff’s word choice in her above mentioned essay, which made it seem like people with learning disabilities were broken and “deficient” (Neff, 250-261). I realize that it wasn’t Neff’s initial intent, as she repeatedly emphasizes that students with learning disabilities are not mentally challenged, as someone with Autism or Downs Syndrome might be (250-252). She relates the learning disability “handicap” to a person in a wheelchair trying to access a storied building; they can do it, just not by the stairs, which represents traditional cognitive learning styles (252-253). However, the overuse of words like “deficient” and “disabled” makes the reader unconsciously view their tutees as “other” even before the tutor meets their learning disabled tutee (250-261). This “othering” of tutees with learning disabilities it sets up a boundary in the writing center between tutor and tutee when there should only be openness and cooperation. Therefore in this paper I will refer to Neff’s “learning disabled” students as “students with learning disabilities” or “LD students.” The distinction here is that these students *have* a disability, but this disability is *not* who they are.

Sadly, I was dismayed by the limited number of recent articles on students with learning disabilities. Of these, most dealt with elementary or secondary school students, and few dealt with ESL LD students. This is unfortunate because in 1989 alone it was estimated that around one million ESL students had learning disabilities, a number which has undoubtedly grown (Klingner and Vaughn, 275). However, I did find two articles, one written in 1996 and another written in 2001, which seem applicable to our tutoring center and provide a little more information than the Neff article.

The article, “Reciprocal Teaching of Reading Comprehension Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities Who Use English as a Second Language,” written by Janette Kettmann Klingner and Sharon Vaughn is the older of the two articles. As the title implies, it deals with ESL LD students, though much of the finding could be attributed to LS students in who are not ESL (Klingner and Vaughn, 275-290). The articles main purpose is to explore the importance of cooperative teaching, cross-age tutoring (peer tutoring) and reciprocal teaching for ESL LD students (275). Reciprocal teaching was used with both cross-age tutoring and Cooperative teaching and will be discussed later.
Cooperative teaching is when the tutors/teachers use the native language of the speaker as well as English (Klingner and Vaughn, 277). An example of cooperative teaching is when a tutor who knows Spanish would give a Spanish word or phrase to help an ESL Spanish student grasp a concept in their English assignments (277). Cross-age tutoring is more akin to the tutoring we do in the writing center (277). Though the students in both groups improved, it is interesting to note that the cross-age tutoring group did slightly better in almost all the tests (282). Klingner and Vaughn discovered during their case study that a student’s initial reading ability and oral language proficiency had a profound impact on their ability to improve during their tutoring sessions, and students whose scores were low in these areas improved the least overall (285). However there were exceptions to this rule, one boy and one girl with low scores in either oral proficiency or reading ability advanced greatly, so it is important to not judge your tutees ability prematurely (285-286).

Reciprocal teaching/tutoring works best with students who can decode but have comprehension problems; however, it can also be beneficial to students who have decoding problems as well (Klingner and Vaughn, 276, 286). This style consists of talking out loud, and using the “six strategies” which are:

(a) predict what a given passage would be about,
(b) brainstorm what they already knew about the topic of the passage,
(c) clarify words and phrases they do not understand while reading [lookup with the tutee rather than tell]
(d) highlight main the idea in a paragraph,
(e) summarize the main idea(s) and important details in a paragraph or a passage, and
(f) ask and answer questions about a passage.

(Klingner and Vaughn, 276-278). These strategies seemed very helpful and, though they were originally created with reading comprehension in mind, these questions can be mixed up and/or modified so that a student writer can look critically at their writing as well as their essay prompts. However, make sure that the student writer is doing the brunt of the asking and highlighting, as you do not want to lead them and change their voice to your own. Another important point is that it is good to make the “brainstorm” portion of the strategy open for interpretation depending on the needs of your LD student. For example, one of my LD tutees was very analytical and mathematically inclined. He liked the black and white factor of math—one and only one answer, so when it came to brainstorming, which is open to interpretation, he would freeze and not know what to do. There was no structure for him to follow to organize his thoughts. In this case his “brainstorm” turned into an outline, as the formula style helped him stay on track and generate ideas.

Mark Hallenbeck’s “Taking Charge: Adolescents with Learning Disabilities Assume Responsibility for Their Own Writing” looks at the reciprocal teaching/tutoring method as well but with some unique differences. One concept he introduces is “scaffolding,” or moments when the tutor may ask questions beyond the scope of the writer to solicit further thinking (Hallenbeck, 229). Though this can be somewhat dangerous in the writing center, as we do not want to over lead the tutees and make them dependent on us, it is important to remember that as LD students may have problems with comprehension and/or decoding so a single leading question like “but if Y happens what do you think about X?” could be very helpful. This also builds up the LD’s confidence, in that they may not be used to voicing their opinions on their essays to others, especially if they have been discouraged for being “poor writers” in the past. How much
“scaffolding” to use in tutoring sessions will vary from student to student and tutor to tutor, but the scaffolding should decrease slowly over the course of the semester (229). If the appointment is a drop-in, maybe limiting the scaffolding questions to one or two instances might be applicable, given the time constraints.

Another tool Hallenbeck discussed was “color coding” (Hallenbeck, 233). After the tutee does a brainstorm, giving them colored markers/pencils so that they can group similar ideas and concepts together by color (233). This idea is especially appealing to me as a tutor because it encourages the LD student to find connections and give their brainstorms order which will help in the creation of their rough drafts later. This technique would be good both for those LD students who are very linear, as the dots can be categorized and counted, as well as students who are more spatial, as dotting can link concepts though “like” language (233).

Julie Neff’s article “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center” is a good starting point for tutors working with LD students but is very dated and in some ways is no longer politically correct. The word choices in the article make the LD student an “other” who is “disabled” and “deficient” which puts a barrier between the tutor and the tutee. Other articles written after Neff’s “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center” have different ways of approaching LD students that might be more beneficial. Reciprocal teaching is emphasized in these newer articles, and the questions generated in this are designed to help LD tutees as well as LD ESL tutees. Sometimes it may be necessary to “lead” a LD tutee for a short period of time using scaffolding question but the tutor should make sure that the tutee does the majority of the work and the scaffold questions diminish over the consecutive sessions. The main point I want new tutors to come away with form this article is to help your LD tutee as much as you can as you would with any writer. Do not think of them as learning disabled. Rather see these tutees as diverse and impressive problem solvers who have to navigate the English language a little differently to achieve their goals.

Work Cited


As tutors in the Writing Center, we typically discuss papers and ideas with student writers. A standard session for me begins with a few moments dedicated to establishing a rapport with the writer. We talk about the class, what the teacher’s expectations are, how the student is feeling about those expectations and where the student feels that he or she needs to improve. Throughout the rest of the session I will usually ask a student to read aloud while I watch them read and tell them when they are self-correcting. This is an effective method for me because I can see where the writer’s spoken language doesn’t make it onto the page. Sometimes, a student writer attempts to elevate his or her language in ways that are unnatural to their actual ‘voice’. Other times, the writer expresses ideas in our conversation that they don’t know how to articulate in written form. From here we might discuss how the student could improve his or her writing so that the paper is true to the student’s ideas.

All of these typical methods are challenged when the student who is coming to you for help is hearing-impaired. I have tutored two students regularly who are hearing-impaired and both times I was uncertain of how I would approach tutoring without spoken language.

Typically when a tutor is assigned a student who is hearing-impaired, you will be notified before they arrive. These moments prior to meeting the student are really the most nerve-wracking that you will experience throughout the whole session. One wonders, ‘How will we communicate?’. ‘What kinds of issues might a hearing-impaired student experience?’. ‘I wonder if we will have a translator.’ These are the questions I ask myself, anyway, and the answers are revealed in the session.

The concern with communication is typically the first to be resolved. This will not be the first time that the hearing-impaired student has tried to communicate with a person who does not know sign language. He or she will be adept at communicating with you. My best advice here is to submit to the methods with which the student is most comfortable.

Every student with whom you work in the Writing Center brings his or her unique method of communication to the tutoring desk, and the hearing-impaired student is no different in this way from students who can hear. In my experience working with hearing-impaired students, I have seen a translator twice—in the first two sessions with my first hearing-impaired student, whom I will call Ella. Ella dismissed the translator after the first two sessions because she felt that the translator slowed us down. Ella and I watched each other closely. Although she was entirely deaf, Ella could speak and read lips.

Most recently I’ve been working with a hearing-impaired student whom I will call Matt. Matt was not assigned a translator, but arrived with a small pad of paper, two pens and a small laptop computer, which we chatted on. Matt has grown accustomed to navigating a world in which very few people speak his language and has determined how he communicates best, with pen and paper.

Ella’s primary issue was that she hated to read and this created a situation in which she was unable to visualize what was being described in the text she read. In the case of a hearing student I would ask them questions. But the questions that I would ask would rely on verbal communication. Typically, I’ll ask a student about class discussion. I might suggest that a student talk about the readings with fellow classmates or the instructor. Ella, however, wasn’t in a position to do these things. Together Ella and I had to develop methods that would help her with reading comprehension.

We began by reading the assigned text and then we drew pictures of what was going on in the book. We only had to do this for a few pages before she began to read and tell me how she imagined the scenes that the author was describing. Once Ella began to visualize the stories that she read, we figured out what types of stories appealed to Ella personally. Then we came up with a reading plan so that she would know how much she should read daily to complete her assignments. The reading plan also included a book that Ella would read that was not assigned, but that she found interesting. This gave Ella a workable schedule and we would devote time to her reading comprehension while she was doing the
reading at home. After some time with Ella, I realized that many of her writing issues were related not only to the fact that she hadn’t been reading, but also to the fact that the language she communicated in was different from the written language and the academic discourse that she was being introduced to in school. In some ways, Ella’s problems with writing closely resemble those that we might find with students who are learning to speak and write English as their second language. However, an ESL student can go to a supermarket or listen to the radio and this will accelerate their language acquisition. A hearing-impaired student does not have that option.

Similarly, Matt has developed a written language that serves the purpose of quickly communicating with individuals who are able to hear. He has developed a sort of short hand and this is the language with which he is most familiar. This unique language becomes problematic when Matt enters into academic discourse. Matt communicates with brief notes that describe very basic needs or concerns. When he writes for academic subjects, High Order Concerns are rarely an issue with Matt, as he understands conceptually exactly why he writes any given assignment and has no trouble with organization or the progression of his ideas. However, sometimes the shorthand that he uses to communicate will slip into his papers and reports. I’ve had to be careful to ask him to explain everything that is not entirely clear to me in his written work.

Matt’s repeat issues are related to verb tense, articles and prepositions. Explaining these issues to the hearing-impaired student is tricky. When working with a student who speaks and hears, the tutor can explain the decision to use “a” over “an” through auditory examples. “A” precedes a word that begins with a consonant, while “an” typically precedes a vowel or a vowel sound. You might say, “I got an A on that paper” and this makes sense and can be broken down in writing, but to say, “I got an F on a paper” is more difficult to explain to a student who cannot hear that, although “F” is a consonant, when spoken it sounds like “eff”, demanding the indefinite article “an”, for audio-centric reasons.

When working with hearing-impaired students, especially on LOCs, you should throw out the idea that we are never to write on student papers. I’m not suggesting that you start editing, but once you have worked on HOCs, you should feel free to be creative when helping hearing-impaired students with Later Order Concerns. For instance, when Matt and I work together, I will often write him a note stating, “I’m going to show you where something is missing. In this round, it will either be an article or a preposition.” Then I will draw an arrow between two words and he will fill in the word that he thinks should be in that space. We will go through the paper a couple of times, once for articles and prepositions, and sometimes for verb-tense issues or other grammatical errors. I always tell him ahead of time what errors he should look for, and this has proven to be an effective method with Matt.

Tutoring hearing-impaired students has drawn my attention to the fact that the academic culture does not always effectively accommodate the needs of all students. Much of this is because the hearing-impaired learn on their own how to communicate with the hearing population. The hearing-impaired student learns to rely on his or her own communication methods long before they ever reach the university. Most students enter the academic environment without any prior exposure to the conventions of academic discourse. However, the hearing-impaired student is at a greater disadvantage when they enter the university. Many of us begin to pick up new language and conventions through dialogue with other students and professors. Such conversations occur naturally when we are able to hear and speak. One basic way to help a hearing-impaired student is to encourage him or her to read and to read a lot. Books, blogs, journals, magazines and fellow-student papers will expose the student to conventions that will bolster their understanding of patterns in academic writing that they might not otherwise be exposed to. But, probably the best advice that I can suggest is to encourage the student to work with you as regularly and as often as possible because writers and tutors both perform better when they trust and understand one another.

Works Cited
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Dealing with a Downer

When we think of important factors in a tutoring session, we often overlook attitude. A negative attitude is a hindrance to the tutoring process. Pessimistic tutees become so concerned with their weaknesses that they do not focus on their strengths. Furthermore, they often feel they are incapable of improving and thus make little progress. I learned the difficulty of working with such a student this semester. From the start, this particular tutee was self-deprecating and pessimistic. I was taken aback when during our first session she put sighed loudly and put her head down on the table. After a painful first session I began to question just how much progress we would make. Nonetheless, I found there are ways to effectively deal with a negative attitude. A tutor cannot be expected to change a student’s personality. However, it is possible to help a student get past their negative outlook and improve as a writer. A tutor can take control of a session by keeping a positive attitude, providing positive reinforcement, and ignoring negative comments.

One strategy for working with a negative tutee is to avoid becoming frustrated. This can be difficult especially when a session is not fruitful or when a tutee is self-deprecating. Nonetheless, keeping a positive attitude is essential when working with a negative student. Although, frustration is inevitable, tutors should strive to control this feeling. There will be times when the student may be uncooperative. During certain sessions my tutee was so frustrated she would shut down and ignore all my suggestions. In such situations tutors should remember that it is the student’s role to take responsibility for his or her learning. It can also be stressful when a tutee does not understand the material. However, progress does not happen all at once; it may take a whole semester and then some for a student to show significant progress. Keeping this in mind during difficult sessions with a negative tutee will help reduce frustration. Another way of keeping a positive attitude is to avoid judging a tutee. Most likely than not, negative students have suffered a lot of criticism in the past. The last thing a negative tutee needs is to receive more judgment from a tutor. The writing Center should be a safe place for students who struggle with their writing. The role of the tutor is not to point out flaws, but rather to identify weaknesses and find a way to improve them. Any student, including one with a negative attitude, has some strengths as a writer. It is the tutor’s job to reveal these strengths to the student, who may not be aware of them. Being aware of strengths helps dissipate some of the self-doubt that cripples negative tutees. On the whole, keeping a positive attitude during the session helps create a positive mood and counteracts any negativity.

Likewise, providing a pessimistic tutee with positive reinforcement helps break through the barrier of negativity. As aforementioned, tutors should notice what their tutee does well. During my own experience I noticed that in her essays, my tutee would incorporate too much summary. This was a hurting her work and I told her so, which made her all the more discouraged. However, when I pointed out that her summary was well done she was more open to my suggestions. Thus, I found that when making suggestions to a negative tutee it is necessary to point out strengths. This type of positive reinforcement enhances the student’s self-esteem and builds the ground for further growth. For example, once we had established that summary was my tutee’s strong point she and I worked from there to develop her analytical skills. I explained that the first part of analysis is comprehension which is reflected in summary. I stressed that all she had to do once she read and understood an article was think of it in light of her topic. After taking this approach her analytical skills improved and she became less despondent. By showing student’s their strong points they realize they are not terrible writers and are much more receptive to a tutor’s help. Positive reinforcement is a key strategy in working with negative tutees because it empowers them. This empowerment helps to improve their attitude while letting them take control of their own writing.
Finally, sometimes it is best just to ignore negative comments altogether. At first it is tempting to give a pep talk every time a student makes a self-deprecating remark. I found myself doing this every time my tutee made a negative comment. Soon I realized that doing this was exhausting and time consuming. When tutors spend too much time trying to refute every self-criticism a student makes, they only feed the student’s self-pity. Instead, tutors should direct the tutee away from useless negativity and find a way to fix the issue. In my case, I found that the pep talks I was giving were not helpful. It seemed that the more I tried to motivate her, the more intense the comments got. The talks only succeeded in discouraging me because I could not get through to her. When I started ignoring the comments, I noticed they became less frequent. It was then that we made some improvement, and she became more engaged in our session. She even began to identify specific problems in her writing, as well as things she felt more comfortable with. However, that is not to say that every concern a tutee has should be ignored. If a student has a genuine insecurity about a certain aspect of their work, it should be addressed. The problem lies in broad and altogether negative comments that are purely self-deprecating. Although it may seem insensitive, ignoring these comments actually helps tutees overcome their negativity.

Overall, although working with a negative tutee can seem like an overwhelming task it can be managed. One of the greatest satisfactions I have experienced as a tutor has been watching this particular tutee grow as writer. Even though it may appear to be otherwise, negative tutees want to improve. Their biggest problem is a fear of failure and the limitations they place upon themselves. The role of the tutor is then to tear down these limitations while giving them tools to develop a voice. On the whole, using these strategies can help guide difficult tutees and give them the confidence they need to develop their writing.
How to Encourage Passive Tutees

One of the most common challenges in trying to be a non-directive tutor is working with tutees who perhaps because of shyness or insecurity are overly quiet, passive, and unresponsive. When you ask them to brainstorm ideas, they sit there staring blankly at their paper. When you pose questions to them, they ask you for the answer. And their most common response to most any prompting begins with “I don’t…” or “I can’t…”

It’s easy to jump to conclusions when working with such tutees, especially after comparing them to those who are more enthusiastic and overtly motivated; some tutors might, for example, be inclined to blame themselves for their lack of experience or charisma, while others might prefer to blame their tutees for their laziness or diffidence. While such feelings may be understandable (and in some cases even justified), playing the blame game is almost certainly not going to be very productive for either you or your tutee. What ought to be done, rather, is to figure out what positive steps can be taken to break out of this familiar trap and get the most out the limited time you have to work with your tutees.

But before dispensing my own advice on the matter, I’d like to come clean and admit that although I have taken up the discussion of this topic for my Tutoring Book article, I am certainly not any kind of expert on transforming passive, stubborn, or unenthusiastic students into model tutees. What has largely enabled me to write this Tutoring Book entry is not my own reservoir of knowledge and expertise on the subject accrued from my experiences at the Writing Center but the invaluable input I’ve received from my colleagues and from Professor Melzer in asking what they might do were they in my situation. Similarly, if you get a tutee who has you frustrated, one of the best things you can do is probably not to run to the nearest computer so you can refer to this Tutoring Book entry but to simply ask your peers or mentors (don’t forget about the GACs) for advice on your specific situation (in fact, the same holds true when dealing with any issue you might encounter during your time at the Writing Center). After all, even if I was the authority on the matter, there’s no way I could address what to do in every possible situation in a mere two and a half page essay.

And just as important as collaborating with one’s peers is collaborating with one’s tutees. Usually, when speaking of working collaboratively to help one’s tutees overcome their challenges, we’re talking about helping them overcome HOCs or LOCs. But in this case, the issue at hand hasn’t anything to do with a lack of any kind of skill or body of knowledge but with certain attitudes or perceptions that interfere with their holding up their end of the collaborative relationship between tutor and tutee.

So yes, my suggestion is to work collaboratively with one’s tutees in order to overcome their attitudinal problems (I hesitate to use the term “attitude problem,” as this connotes defiance or resentment on one’s part, and while defiance and resentment can of course be the source of a tutee’s passivity, it’s not the only one possible). To do this, we do what we so frequently do anyway in being non-directive, minimalist collaborators: we invite them to offer their own opinions instead of telling them what to do. If, for example, we have tutees who are very unresponsive and don’t offer their own thoughts and ideas in brainstorming sessions, we might begin by asking why this is the case. The trick, of course, is to do this in an inoffensive, non-confrontational way that doesn’t make you come across as angry, resentful, etc. One possible way this, in turn, might be done is to ask them about the issue in a way that exudes concern rather than negativity. If you suspect that your tutees underperform during your sessions because of nervousness, shyness, or stress, you might try sympathizing with them by first asking them if this in fact what is preventing them from performing to the best of their ability. Then, if they answer affirmatively,
try reassuring them that writing isn’t something that comes easily or naturally to even experienced writers like ourselves, that we, too, often find things like structuring an essay, carefully wording thesis statements, etc. to be frustrating, painstaking processes. That, as Thomas Mann put it, “A writer is a man to whom writing comes harder than to anyone else.”

In my experience, such performance anxiety or fear of failure is one of the most common sources of passivity among tutees. While levelling with them in this way is certainly not a magic bullet that will instantly make them churn out A+ work, it may go along way in helping to build their self-confidence. And even if tutors accomplish nothing more than this, they’ve made no small contribution to their tutees’ personal and academic development.

As for tutees that really do seem to have something of a full-on attitude problem, I would recommend collaborating with them on reaching some mutual understanding of what the tutor-tutee relationship ought to be like. In doing so, you might have to explain that your purpose is not to get your tutees better grades but to help them become better writers and that because of reasons of academic integrity you cannot in good conscience simply hand over the “right” answers.

This sort of misunderstanding of what the tutor-tutee relationship is occurs most frequently with drop-ins looking for quick fixes to their problems. Of course, not all drop-ins will be quite so disagreeable, but you’re sure to encounter at least a few of them. The problem with these tutees is that they may simply not understand what we’re trying to accomplish in having them think for themselves and reach their own conclusions. But if you can manage to convey to your tutees that there is real value in doing things the Writing Center way, they will understand their being active and enthusiastic collaborators is part and parcel of their becoming stronger writers. Given that all the empirical evidence supports this view, this shouldn’t be too hard to do.

So far I’ve discussed only two types of passive tutees. As this is undoubtedly not an exhaustive list of all those one might encounter at the writing center, I also wanted to offer a few “high percentage” strategies that, while not sure-fire moves, work more often than not. The first was suggested to me by one of our many experienced tutors, Sarah Faye:

Don't be scared of silence. Once you have asked your question, wait for the answer. Just sit there with an engaging smile, until the student will feel awkward for not answering. If you think the student did not understand the question, rephrase it, but don't answer it yourself. If there is still complete silence, ask a question about the question.

Easy enough, right? If you’re worried that this approach might be a little time consuming (I can imagine some tutees turning such occasions into a game of chicken in which they try to make you feel even more awkward than themselves), I have a few suggestions of my own that might help keep things moving along. First, after initiating a brainstorming activity (or a similar activity), remove yourself from your tutee’s immediate environment. This strategy prevents the tutee from thinking that they can wheedle the answers out of you or wait for you to get frustrated and cut the activity short. It also has the added virtue of allowing you to take a break for a few minutes to get some coffee, stretch your legs, etc. If you’re still worried that after five or ten minutes of break time, your tutee will have nothing to show but a blank sheet of paper, you might also assign them some minimum amount of work you expect them to accomplish during their brainstorming session; when working on persuasive essays, for example, you might try asking them to come up with at least 3 different “pros” and “cons” for the position in question.

If you’re worried that continually interrupting your sessions with these activities won’t leave you with enough time to read through their entire essay, simply make note of important issues as they come
up without stopping until you reach the very end. At this point, you can work together with your tutees in identifying which issues ought to take priority over others and in deciding which one they would like to address first. This gives them some choice in the matter and removes the frustration of constantly being interrupted while reading.

Bear in mind that these strategies are best applied before having the Serious Talk with your tutees about the tutor-tutee relationship. This latter move should be done only as a last resort, when after having already tried out your peers’ and mentor’s suggestions you still find that nothing works. This might not be a very easy thing to do, but having done it, you can at least feel vindicated in knowing that even if your tutee continues to be unresponsive, you’ve done everything within reason to be the best tutor you can be.
Tips for Tutoring Reading

The types of reading that occur in the writing center are very diverse, but essentially almost all tutoring sessions involve some sort of reading. This reading could be an essay prompt, a draft of a paper, a literary text, or a research article, but is certainly not limited to these things. Strategies for reading in the writing center differ depending on what kind of reading students present us. For example, the way in which one approaches fiction or creative writing should not be the same way in which one examines a research article, secondary source, or scientific study. Our knowledge of a specific kind of text (for instance, many tutors may be well-versed in humanities and less knowledgeable in the sciences, or vice versa) can affect the things we should look out for and be aware of in our tutoring sessions.

General Reading Strategies

There are a few techniques one can use during each step of the reading process that are helpful for most reading situations.

Before You Read

Before jumping into a text, skim over the entire work. Look at the organizational structure (what does the structure of the article/novel/essay suggest? Can you identify a few main points from the structure?), consider the context or discourse community in which the writing resides, think about the title of the text, and note whether the work was written by a singular author or collaboratively. Sometimes even reading the last sentence or two of the text before reading the entire thing can be helpful. That way you are aware of where the text is headed and what the most important ideas are. This may help anxious readers relax and later, readily identify evidence the author uses to support the main ideas mentioned near the end.

While You Read

While reading, encourage the student to think about what has already been identified before starting. One of the first things to look for is the author's purpose in writing. Why is the author writing? What is the main point of the text? Are there sub-points? Encourage students to underline or make notes in the margin of the text while reading, and stress the importance of “marking up” the writing in order to break the text down into manageable pieces. Sometimes students feel more comfortable using pencil, and sometimes they will want to use highlighters. Either way, try to help them identify what is worth marking or what can be left untouched. Often, authors will give verbal cues that point to what is important, such as “ultimately,” “in other words,” “I wish to focus on,” or action words like “we should,” or “if this does not occur, this will happen.”

After You Read

After reading the text completely, identify the context of the writing. What audience is the author writing for? Was this piece of writing published in a scholarly journal or an entertainment magazine? Read over the notes the student made, and read the highlighted or underlined portions again. Try to make connections between each main point identified, and see if the student is able to discern between a main idea and evidence for that idea. A good exercise to employ after reading is summarizing. Help the student go through each section of the text, and write a sentence or two summary of that section or main point. By summarizing, the student is
able to internalize the information and make it more manageable.

**Reading Familiar Texts**

Approaching a text in which we have knowledge might seem like the ideal situation to most tutors, but even if we know a lot about the subject matter we still have to monitor ourselves to make sure we are truly helping the student learn and not just feeding them answers to our own questions. The biggest danger in this situation is taking over a session. Even if we aren’t directly telling a student how to interpret a text, a trap we can fall into is asking a question with an answer already in mind. In their article, “Reading in the Writing Center,” Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner note that, “Rather than engaging the writer in a discussion of the strategies she’s using to make that interpretation, the tutor instead pulls the student ever closer to guessing what’s in the tutor’s head” (114). In order to avoid this situation, it is best for the tutor to set aside for the session his or her opinions, biases, and interpretations concerning the text. What is left is the tutor’s general knowledge in the subject area. The tutor can use this knowledge to first ask open-ended questions (remember that open-ended questions can lead a student to important areas of the text, but should ultimately ask for their thoughts or opinions), and, if necessary, develop more direct questions from cues the student has supplied. Above all, make sure the student is aware of important things to look for in the text with which he or she is working. For example, if students are reading a literary text, they might consider themes, plot, narrative strategies, and setting. If they are reading a research article, they would probably want to look for the author’s argument, evidence, assumptions, and conclusions.

**Reading Unfamiliar Texts**

Working with a student who is reading texts outside of our knowledge base can be frightening. Sometimes we doubt our abilities to provide them with helpful feedback and questions simply because we are unsure of our own understanding of a text. However, if we can identify the structure and genre of the unfamiliar text, it becomes much more manageable. Often, students will come to the writing center with a list of questions which are based on their reading. If we are having trouble finding a place to start, these professor-provided prompts can serve as a good jumping off point, especially if we find that the student has not read the questions thoroughly, or perhaps didn’t understand what the professor was asking. Ultimately, as Gillespie and Lerner write, “As tutor, your goal is for the writer to teach you the content of the reading material” (116). What an unfamiliar tutor can do is make sure that the session doesn’t get lost to confusion. Keeping the session on track by asking questions concerning important features of the text and encouraging students to develop their thoughts can help when a tutor feels less-than-knowledgeable.

**Reading Student Writing**

One of the most commonly read things in the writing center are rough drafts of students’ papers for their courses. As much as we would like to have students come in before words even hit paper, many come into the writing center with fully-formed rough drafts, or even what they consider final versions of a paper. In this case, the first step towards helping students with their writing is through careful reading. Sometimes students are able to read their own papers closely enough to spot error or make logical organizational corrections, but often they come to the writing center hoping that we can help them with these sorts of issues.

**Higher Order Concerns**

When reading student writing, essays for example, for higher order concerns it is important to look at the overall organization of the paper as a whole. This type of reading will be most concerned with identifying main structural components. Does the paper directly answer the prompt? Is each idea presented in a logical order? Are there topic sentences at the beginning of
each paragraph, and transitional sentences at the conclusions of each paragraph? Can you readily identify the thesis or main points? These are some questions you might ask yourself as you read. An important aspect of reading for organization is making the student aware of these questions, as well. If they can ask themselves questions about their own writing structure as they read, they will be more prepared to approach organizational writing issues in the future.

Later Order Concerns

Many students are not able to see consistent grammatical mistakes or faulty sentence organization because as they read their papers to themselves, they fix the errors subconsciously without noticing that the page does not match what they read aloud. A good way to make error noticeable to students without having to correct them ourselves is to read their paper aloud, clearly pronouncing the errors and pausing slightly to give the students a chance to review. Most of the time, once students are able to identify that there is error and where the error exists, they can make logical decisions concerning how to correct it. Often, students will make the same mistakes continuously throughout a paper. If we read tutees’ draft carefully and slowly, we increase the chance that they will be able to correct reoccurring mistakes once they have noticed a pattern.

However, there are certainly cases in which the students will not notice the mistake as such, even if we pause or pronounce each word clearly. In this case, it becomes our responsibility to help them become aware of the error so that they have a better chance of not making the same error in the future. Of course, simply pointing the mistake out and correcting it will not do. We should take a moment or two to explain the reasoning behind the correction so that the student feels empowered and in control of their language.

Finally, informing students of the benefits of close reading their own materials is important in helping them become successful writers in the future. By performing as models in close reading we can encourage students to practice close reading themselves, once they are aware of this strategy.

Works Cited

Reading in the Writing Center! What?

Many assumptions are made about what happens in the writing center. It is often thought that we are a one-stop shop for grammar and punctuation. Yet, as tutors we know that our job is more complex than that. We are given the challenge of helping students become better writers. This involves much more than simple lower-order concerns. Each of us may struggle to find a way to help our students. We suggest that one of the best ways to help a struggling writer is to read in the writing center.

In his English 125B class, Angus Dunstan uses this quote: "There is nothing else we ask all our students to do in school that even approaches writing in the intellectual and psychological demands that it make on students." This is truth tested every day in the writing center where student tutors and tutees collaborate in an effort to improve the tutee’s writing. We developed the idea for this article from a discussion we had in the tutor lounge about how academic writing overwhelms students with marginal reading skills. We conclude that certain tutees need far more from the writing center than focus on their lower order concerns, although most of them tend to think that grammar and syntax is their major problem. While we do not wish, in anyway, to diminish the important role prescriptive grammar play in academic discourse, our topic focuses on what occurs before the tutee ever begins to write. It is our sincere hope that our discussion will prove useful to you in your own efforts to make a difference.

Some Theoretical Background

In a 2002 report, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) states that good academic writing is a response to analytical reading. Their finding is supported by a survey of California College and University faculty which shows a positive correlation between analytical reading and student success: 90% at UC; 71% CSU; and CCC 83%. This survey repeatedly identifies reading as the most significant factor in the success of college students. Three fundamental reading competencies prove essential: Reading for literal comprehension and retention, reading for depth of understanding, and reading for analysis and interaction with the text. Gary Griswold’s article about tutoring reading, In Postsecondary Reading: What Writer Center Tutors Need to Know, provides support for the ASCCC findings and gives evidence that tutors are supportive of reading in the Writing Center. Every tutor Griswold interviewed expressed concern about the reading skills of students they see. Most felt that their students did not have problems actually reading the words on the page but rather had difficulty engaging critically with the text and distinguishing between key points and supporting evidence.

Though students regularly have issues with literary analysis, Griswold's article also suggests that they have unique problems dealing with infotexts, such as textbooks and academic essays. All tutors interviewed believed that helping students become better readers is of importance in teaching writing. Griswold voices encouragement for the role of reading in writing centers by stating that tutors should be aware that a lack of formal course work in the teaching of reading does not mean they cannot be of great assistance to students, just like tutors who do not consider themselves grammarians but who, nonetheless, have acquired the ability to write and tutor grammatically correct English prose. He concludes that if writing center tutors receive even minimal training on and information about reading theory, they can develop a concept of how reading is best taught just as they have done with concepts or strategies for teaching writing. By formulating and incorporating specific reading strategies in their tutee sessions, tutors can improve a tutee’s reading ability, which will, in turn, improve the individual’s writing ability.
At our writing center tutors primarily focus on helping students become better writers by assisting them with higher order concerns as well as lower order ones, when appropriate. However, tutoring a student to write in academic discourse is astonishingly difficult when you realize that the student does not understand the prompt and cannot discuss the paper he or she has just written. If you find yourself in this situation, ask the tutee to read aloud. As soon as they realize you are actually listening, almost all of them relax and become engaged in their own papers. In a sense, showing an interest in their work breathes a little life into a dead paper that has been re-thought, if not rewritten, to the point of exhaustion. Also, engaging in meaningful dialogue with tutees about their work, causes them to see their papers as something of intrinsic value, one, in which they have something important to say. As a result, they begin to let go of the mistaken notion that the writing center’s function is solely to provide free editors and proofreaders for their work, and writing, that most daunting psychologically demanding task, becomes slightly less difficult.

Having tutees read portions of their paper aloud also teaches them a technique for catching errors, but if they do not have basic comprehension of their own material, reading aloud is an ineffective strategy. When Sharon first started tutoring, she thought she was accomplishing something positive by using the read-aloud strategy with a tutee. However, she found it had its flaws, especially when the student was just mouthing the words. When that happened with one of her tutees, she changed gears and had him begin to read his source material, a short story. In his first draft it was apparent from his instructor’s comments throughout the paper, that the tutee did not understand the storyline. So, Sharon and the tutee read the story; however, before they did so, she helped him look at the story prompts at the end and showed him how to consider these as questions while he read. She also asked a few questions about what was happening in the story as they read just to see if his comprehension had improved.

Almost all students are used to talking about people, so the type of question that gets the most positive response for students struggling with fiction is to ask simply "She did what?" It causes the tutee to engage with the character as an actual person. At the end of this one-hour session, this tutee realized that he had mixed up characters. What we, as tutors, do not understand is how he got it so wrong when he had actually read it before, read secondary source articles, listened to lecture in class and wrote a five-page paper. An unedited example of this tutee’s first draft on *A Rose for Emily* is included in this article solely to illustrate what may trigger you to back up and ask the student to read from the source:

Living in the early nineteen hundreths, Miss Emily was shaped greatly by the era she lived in. Her father Colonel Sartoris and mayor of Jefferson influenced her humble virgin figure by house training her to become a desperate figure seeking love. Being the daughter of Colonel Sartoris exposed Miss Emily to perform in a distinct delicate lady figure at home and in the eye of the public. After her father ceased, Miss Emily became a victim of the modernizing town's expectation to live up to a tradition south woman figure. In the story, "A Rose for Emily," William Faulkner demonstrates the ironic twists of how gender can influence the role of an oppressed woman, while blindingly alluding to the town’s judgments and expectations.

Sharon states that after reading the story she and the tutee discovered that Colonel Sartoris was not the mayor of Jefferson. Since the tutee’s paper had not only repeated this mis-perception throughout but was also the basis of his analysis, it was easy to see how the instructor’s comments contained a significant degree of frustration. Fortunately, the tutee's second draft was much improved, at least, insofar as the facts were concerned. However, his analysis and interaction with the text still needed work. Had Sharon not read with her tutee his analysis would have remained faulty. Hopefully, this is a lesson he can take with him during his academic writing career.
If we can help students engage in "metacognition or awareness of one's own learning processes" then we not only help them become more effective writers and readers but students as well (Gillespie and Learner, 107). Self-awareness is fundamental to improving the overall writer. The more we can help students question what they read the more likely they will become critical thinkers. We, as tutors, must be prepared for students who have little in the way of critical thinking practice.\(^1\) One way to bridge the critical thinking gap between our students and their texts is through the SQ3R method of reading. We can model this method for students and ask them to do any of the following:

- **Survey:** This has the student engage in previewing the text they are about to read. They are to notice headings, indentations, underlining, end summaries, chapter questions, charts, etc.
- **Question:** Have the student create questions they think the text will answer. These are based on their initial preview. They can reference questions posed throughout the text or at the chapter’s end. They can also pose their own questions based on what they have previewed.
- **Read:** The writer then reads the text searching for answers to their questions.
- **Recite:** Here, the writer will read or write down the answers to the preview questions and review the answers, preferably aloud.
- **Review:** The writer will reread certain portions of the text to gain clarity on the answers to the questions.\(^2\)

By now you are probably thinking we are crazy, or at least wildly optimistic, for suggesting this process to tutors who typically have only a half or full hour with their students. Admittedly, the confines of a tutoring session prohibit engaging a student in the entire SQ3R process. However, we believe there are small yet effective ways in which you can give examples of how it will be beneficial to their writing.

The following is a brief example from a tutoring session Nicole had with one of her regulars to illustrate our point:

> In one of my sessions I was asked by one of my regular tutees to help write a case summary of a law brief. She had a very large and imposing law book that contained numerous examples of case briefs. Her task was to concisely summarize each section of the case into a total of one page. I asked her if she had ever written a summary. She stated that she had not and then asked if I could show her how. I said, "Sure," and advised that the best way to construct a summary was to go paragraph by paragraph and summarize according to what the instructor wanted her to look for. "She then jokingly asked, "Are we allowed to read in the writing center?" I said, "Yeah, I guess so."

> Before we began to read I advised my tutee that I would not be very helpful in terms of the law jargon we were to encounter and that she was the expert in this regard. I felt that this allowed our session to be more collaborative because I was the "expert" on summarizing and she was the expert with the language. Once this was established she chose where we were to begin - the facts. "What does that mean?" I said, thinking of Dragnet and "Just the facts ma'am." She said, "Oh you know, the facts of the case." I just smiled and asked her to begin reading out loud. (Yes, we read a law textbook in the WC aloud).

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\(^2\) Adapted from Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring
After each paragraph I asked her to explain to me what the text was saying about the case. When she finished I advised her to write it in the book next to that specific paragraph. At the end of each section, I had her create a summary based on the notes she took. Though we were only able to make it through two of the five sections she needed to get done, she felt completely confident that she could now do the process on her own.

In this example, Nicole was able to use the session to help the student engage with her text. By modeling the SQ3R in a collaborative manner, Nicole negated the typical utor/tutee hierarchy by reminding the student she was an expert in the area of legal terminology. By taking their respective roles, Nicole and her tutee were able to remain on the same page. This session served as an educational function for both individuals. The tutee was able to learn an effective way to read a text and summarize it and Nicole was able to gain some trans-discourse knowledge that she will be able to use in the future.

Final Thoughts

Gillespie and Lerner note, that students who come to the Writing Center are responding to some kind of reading either to "simply make sense of what they are reading" or to "analyze [and] evaluate" (105). Given this, reading becomes fundamental to the writing process. If a student cannot critically read or summarize a document then they are less able to articulate on their own pages. Reading and writing are "powerful instruments for learning, capable of enabling thinking, and the critical analysis of ideas" (Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavan, and McGinley, 136). If one is better able to read, it follows that they are better able to critically analyze, which will lead to a more enriched analysis of their texts rather than one that simply scratches the surface of an idea.

Writing Center tutors can help their tutees negotiate the text by modeling close reading when appropriate. When we ask our tutees to define what they mean it often pushes them to the limits of their cognitive ability. In order to survive such the cognitive overload that academic writing demands, the SQ3R can be a useful way for your writers to work with a text they are writing about, regardless of discipline. Caveat: Try to introduce the "SQ3R" without using the actual acronym, as it has been our experience that "SQ3R" causes immediate phobic algebra flashbacks in certain students and tutors. What we hope future tutors remember from this article is that we are a writing center where writers help writers, and that while we can employ reading strategies when needed, we should be careful not use reading as a back door to appropriate the tutee’s text. It is still the tutee’s paper, and the informed tutor can avert disaster in helping tutees develop their own skill set of critical reading tools as well as academic writing skills. Just remember that "your job isn't to explain the meaning" but rather "help the writer discover that meaning" (Gillespie and Lerner, 108).

Works Cited


How is writing like swimming? Give up? Answer: The psycholinguist Eric Lenneberg (1967) once noted, in a discussion of “species specific” human behavior that human beings universally learn to walk and to talk, but that swimming and writing are culturally specific, learned behaviors. We learn to swim if there is a body of water available and usually only if someone teaches us. We learn to write if we are members of a literate society, and usually only if someone teaches us (Brown 334).

I often felt that a similar statement could be made about tutoring: We learn to tutor if we are members of a community that values interaction, and usually only if we are able to learn from one another. I started this semester with many questions. Although I still have questions on what the best approaches to tutoring may be, this semester has been a success largely because writers I worked with shared their time and their ideas about writing. Each of them taught me something about what encourages good writing, even if sometimes we both learned the hard way. In particular, working with ESL writers taught me that while native and non-native English speakers have much in common when approaching writing, non-native speakers face unique challenges. I would like to describe some of those challenges, and an approach that we arrived at to make our sessions more effective.

Throughout the first few weeks of active tutoring, I tried hard to remember the guidelines for promoting good writing. Experiences in the Writing Center, discussions in the classroom, and readings from the texts emphasized active involvement. In Understanding ESL Writers, Leki asserts that “Feedback on the writing of both natives and non-natives is generally more effective if it is given when the students have the opportunity to incorporate the comments into their writing rather than if it appears on a dead, final text” (127). The advice was logical; the tough part was applying it to the best effect.

To begin with, discussions of whether or not to incorporate comments, or interaction of any kind seemed strained. Writers I met with were congenial, but many, especially those for whom English was not their primary language, seemed hesitant to say much. I was the only one interested in active conversation. Remembering good advice, particularly sections from The Tutoring Book on “Learning to Listen and to Question,” I tried to wait out our “loud” silent pauses. I could see we were both struggling. These were their words, why weren’t they eager to share their thoughts on writing? Realizing this was unproductive, I searched for ways to engage the writers. As our sessions progressed, the students (and I) relaxed a bit, and they began to respond with more than “OK,” or “I guess so.” From our conversations, I began to understand that their stoic behavior was really deference, or respect, shown to the “authority figures” (tutors) at the Writing Center.

Early in the semester, the reading material emphasized the importance of establishing a peer relationship, and collaboration during tutoring. I found that for some ESL students, this only adds to their tension and sense of awkwardness. Coming from family backgrounds or traditions in which teachers’ opinions should be accepted as spoken, raising questions or even offering a firm opinion might be seen as impolite. Contributing to an “authority image” is the fact that I am two to three decades older than most of the students. Although that was unlikely to change, I was determined to be more approachable and establish a collaborative atmosphere during our sessions.

Asking writers to read out loud proved to be a big step toward achieving this. It began as an experiment, asking a couple of writers to read their essays out loud to me. My goal was to test several ideas:
• Would writers feel more comfortable discussing their ideas with me?
• Would ESL writers catch more of their own errors?
• Would it keep me from talking too much?

At first, the writers I asked to read out loud were hesitant, but they obliged me. The sessions were actually very lively and resulted in an exchange of good ideas. Miele, from Laos, had been one of the shyest students. She told me that she had been brought up to not look adults in the eye; it would be disrespectful. She went on to say that reading made her “feel easy” and then talking about writing also came more naturally. Maybe we were on to something. The writers did appear more anxious to talk about their work; reading seemed to pull their thoughts into the present.

Once we had overcome this barrier, writers were eager to bring their drafts in and discuss strategies on how to proceed. They spent a lot of time searching for words and concepts in writing assignments, often frustrated that the finished document did not reflect what they really wanted to say. This is apparently common among ESL writers. Some I’ve worked with still create an initial outline in their primary language, as abstract thinking flows much more readily. “They may be missing the resonance of words in English, but they can apparently use the resonances which words in their native languages have for them as touchstones to spur their thinking along and to verify the exact meaning they intend” (Leki 80). All of this takes time. “To produce the number of words that they manage, L2 writers need considerably more time than native speakers need” (82). As tutors, we can make a genuine contribution by listening to their work, and encouraging their reading, oral, and comprehension skills. Leki cites a 1985 study by Raimes, in which she concludes “ESL students need more of everything: more time, more contact with English, more opportunity to read and write” (82).

As to the question of whether ESL learners would catch more errors through reading their work out loud, I have to say the results were mixed. Often students did consciously self-correct. Sometimes they spoke the correct tense/suffix/noun-verb agreement in spite of a written error, without noticing the error. Sometimes they neither spoke nor wrote anything resembling correct grammar usage. Research has been conducted on the question of whether writers will self-correct if asked to read out loud. Leki indicates studies have demonstrated its effectiveness with students for whom Standard English is a Second Dialect. However, she states that “this strategy is much less available to ESL students, who often seem barely to understand what they are reading out loud even though it is their own writing” (35).

Referring to the 1985 study by Raimes, Leki cautions that ESL students’ “language limitations may make it more problematic to write a lot, to sustain the effort of writing, and to analyze the product in order to make changes” (82). Leki concludes, “Even advanced ESL students are much more likely to use bottom-up reading strategies, trying to guess the meaning of what they are reading from the graphemes on the page, rather than top-down strategies, using meaning to anticipate the words on the page; as a result, they are much less able to correct errors that appear there” (35). In spite of inconclusive results regarding error correction, I did see progress and believe it energizes the writers. The practice also sets a positive tone for a mutual exchange of ideas, “breaking the ice” by asking the student to speak first.

I found reading out loud to have additional benefits as well. I hear writers taking ownership of their own words and notice that they remain engaged throughout the session. This is important. While observing tutoring sessions around me, active give-and-take is the norm. Occasionally, however, I also see students staring off into space, looking bored while their tutor silently reads through their essay. By the time discussion begins, the silence is firmly in place and the tutor is only able to pull brief, non-committal remarks from the writer. I had experienced this also and, as mentioned before, in spite of knowing better I often filled the void by talking more than I needed to. When students begin sessions by reading to me, silence never sets in. The writers are already in the driver’s seat, controlling the flow of our
discussion throughout the reading by asking questions and pointing out areas of concern to them. Reading out loud appears to be a powerful tool.

One issue that I struggled with throughout the semester was how much emphasis I should place on correcting the errors students missed while reading, particularly errors related to Lower Order Concerns (LOCs). Early on, I let minor and apparently random grammar errors slide by unmentioned, focusing instead on errors that repeated themselves. The next week the writer brought his corrected paper to our session. It was filled with red ink. The teacher’s notes indicated, “good ideas – but incorrect grammar impairs understanding.” We were both very disappointed. I felt as though I had somehow failed him.

Without the intuitive sense of “what sounds right” that is available to most native speakers, ESL writers often demand (and deserve) additional attention to the specifics of English grammar, and direction on common usage. The literature does contain support for more assertive strategies when discussing corrections with some ESL writers. In *Tutoring Writing*, McAndrew and Reigstad (2001) describe a direct approach offered by Judith Powers (1993). “Powers realized that tutors had to intervene more directly with ESL writers than with native English speakers” (97).

In this vein, McAndrew and Reigstad assert that “Tutors working with ESL writers must be ready to become more like traditional teachers and less like helpful collaborators” (97). But how to start? Again, in *Tutoring Writing*, McAndrew and Reigstad refer to Muriel Harris and Tony Silva. They recommend “plunging in – ESL writing often seems plagued by miscues at all levels. Tutors need to be reminded to maintain a hierarchy of concerns, [Higher Order Concerns] HOCs before LOCs; focus on one or just a few problems at a time, and explain to writers that miscues are a natural part of learning and using language, even for native speakers” (98). While on guard to not appropriate their material, I gave myself permission to guide ESL writers’ grammar a bit more firmly.

Still another benefit of reading out loud is that writers gain practice in correct pronunciation and inflection so critical to grasping the nuances of English structure. During one session I discovered that some ESL students’ primary opportunities to read and write English are connected to school. Growing up, parents in these households conversed in their native language. No English language newspapers or magazines were routinely available, and so the rhetorical conventions of English composition are literally foreign material. For those not familiar with composition and academic writing in their primary language, the difficulties can feel insurmountable. In *Understanding ESL Writers*, Leki notes that “it does seem intuitively clear that those who never learned effective writing strategies in L1 cannot employ them in L2 despite a great deal of fluency in L2” (78). With this in mind, it’s easy to see the value of the Writing Center. Students can practice unfamiliar concepts and work to get their ideas down on paper in a safe and supportive environment.

Although it’s true that writers we see have matriculated through the educational system in either this country or abroad, there is no guarantee they received the assistance needed to succeed at the college level. Vu, a sophomore born in Cambodia and a U.S. resident since grade school, told me that her high school teachers never mentioned that her writing ability or reading comprehension were lacking. Her parents spoke almost no English, so were not in a position to help or coach her. She was shocked when she enrolled at CSUS and her professors told her she lacked the writing skills to navigate through basic coursework. Time spent in the Learning Skills Center and in the Writing Center has paid off; she now enjoys working on the essays required in her classes. Vu was one of the first students who obliged me by agreeing to read her work out loud. As the semester progressed her confidence increased, and her self-correction of obvious errors improved also. During a session in late spring, she produced a paper that had been marked up – this time with an “A” and “Well Done!” written across the front. She beamed with pride, and I knew she was well on her way to success in college.
As the semester winds down, I have the opportunity to reflect on shared experiences at the Writing Center. I hope those with whom I worked found value in the sessions, and I am grateful to the writers and other tutors who shared their insights and thoughts on the process of writing with me.

Reading out loud is a practice that may not succeed in all tutoring situations, but I found that it has distinct advantages when working with some ESL students. Rapport seems to come more easily, students can’t disconnect as their work is being reviewed, and most importantly, it puts the writers and their words front and center in the tutoring session. If you’re struggling with some of the issues that I did, try it out and see if this approach can work for you.
Are There Proof-reading Traps Regarding ESL Students?

As writing center tutors the discussion over Lower-Order Concerns (LOCs) vs. Higher-Order Concerns (HOCs) becomes a not very exciting one. Why? Because we are repeatedly told that though important, our priority should not be to edit papers and just proof-read for missing commas and other sentence-level problems. Instead we are supposed to look at the “big picture” and talk about ideas, analysis, brainstorming…etc. first and then proof-read.

Ok I get it. Even the sign at the front desk tells students that we will not just “edit” a paper. But what happens when an English as Second Language (ESL) student walks in, and you realize he/she has the best ideas but cannot get them across because of sentence-level issues? What if they keep forgetting articles, or they have fragments galore, or they confuse words and make up their own? Do we ignore them because it is not “our job” and try to move on to “more pressing issues” that don’t exist?

Of course not, and I’m not the only one that thinks so. Sharon Myers agrees with me in her article “Reassessing The ‘Proofreading Trap’: ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction.” Myers also has issues with “writing center scholars and others who view sentence-level revision for ESL students unethical” (219). I would find it even more unethical to expect ESL writers to learn in the same ways or at the same rates as native writers. Thinking back to Stephen North’s “Idea of the Writing Center,” he tells us that it our “job to produce better writer’s not better writing” (38). Therefore we have to ask ourselves, what would make our tutee a better writer?

Myers calls for tutors’ recognition “that so-called ‘sentence-level’ errors actually involve deeper levels of creating and processing meaning. By helping ESL students correct these errors, then, tutors can help students gain deeper insights into English syntax – an important step in becoming better readers and writers of the language” (219). This means that with our help in paying attention to the sentence level errors, we will help students become better acquainted with language and its lexical and syntactic conventions.

The problem here lies when tutors and writing center scholars refuse to see the “the depth of the ‘sentence-level’ problems involved in second-language processing” (Myers 221). It seems contradictory to say that “sentence-level problems” are deep, but when it comes to ESL students that can be the case because those problems may stem from their language barriers and cultural writing differences. For native speakers, grammar is second nature; we do not have to think about the differences between the past participle and the past imperfect, but they do. The hardest part is that sometimes they are aware of their mistakes and they do not know how to fix them. That’s where we come in. Native writers do not need the sentence-level editing to be a priority because if they read through their writing carefully, they will catch their mistakes and fix them. Unfortunately, non-native writers do not have these skills and sometimes think that they way they wrote something, although grammatically incorrect, is the correct way of doing it. Also, these small mistakes are a reflection of the problem they have communicating their ideas. Their ideas might be there, but they do have the skills necessary to express them. So when to us it might seem like their word choice is just “awkward,” it could actually be a bigger problem than anticipated. It is important to keep this in mind and try to help them better express their ideas, because in this case their LOC’s are their only concerns and should be treated accordingly.
We also do not want to just fix the error for them, because then they will never acquire the skills necessary to do it on their own. By helping them develop these skills, they will become better writers: this is our main goal.

The best way to start is by reading the paper out loud to them. This is because hearing you read it will either verify the things sound the way they wanted them to or show them how the errors interfere with the clarity of the paper. When stumbling upon such errors it is helpful to say something like “Do you see how I’m having trouble reading this part?” or “See how that is confusing when I read it out loud?” The next step is to discuss their answers to those leading questions.

The reason why I would not recommend having them read the paper out loud is because as ESL students, they may not be confident in their English speaking abilities enough to read out loud. This added pressure is not conducive to a comfortable tutoring environment. Also, they are more likely to read over the error without catching it because of their limited knowledge to writing and grammar conventions.

Make sure that both you and the tutee are holding a pen. The reason for this is that as you see something that needs to be corrected for clarification, you can underline it or circle it. Don’t be afraid to mark up their papers…with useful notes and information. They are then going to need the pen to fix the mistakes themselves. They can rewrite the sentence, fix the tense, or add their own notes in the margins.

Other tutoring theories and methods usually emphasize minimal marking. This is what teachers do when they only write “awkward” or “frag” in the margins, or even when they simply underline a sentence and put a question mark next to it. This minimal marking may work for native writers that can read over it and fix it. Yet, it is not fair for non-native writers that can read over it and maybe see the mistake but not be able to correct it, which is why they come to us for help.

It is also helpful to have a dictionary or thesaurus nearby. This might help with vocabulary and word choice issues. If we teach them how to look up words and what the difference between a dictionary and thesaurus is, then they will be able to look them up on their own in the future.

When the problem is grammatical, then the best thing to do is to be as specific as possible. If it is a noun, verb, punctuation or tense issue it is vital that we tell them that. That way they will have a clue as to what the problem is and what they need to do in order to fix it.

As soon as we move away from the idea that proofreading as a priority is taboo, then we will be able to better serve all our students, not just a select group.

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Labels and Misleading Assumptions: “ESL Students”

Labels are easy. We throw them around without thinking, thus putting people into strict categories for easy filing. However, being a tutor means being flexible when encountering unexpected tutoring situations, and respecting the students as individuals. Therefore, we must be careful when we use easy, one-size-fits-all, labels such as: “ESL students.”

Sharon A. Myers’ article on tutoring ESL students points out some techniques on how to help students who are struggling with the English language, and these techniques can undoubtedly be very useful for tutoring multilingual students. Myers says that ESL students need to focus on “the ‘linguistic component’ (vocabulary and syntax) much or more than [on] the ‘writing’ (rhetorical) component,” and that we should pay attention to LOCs when tutoring ESL students (Myers 220). As an example, she states that “subject-verb agreement is a difficult feature of English” (Myers 230). I agree: the English language’s grammar rules are mind-bogglingly difficult – but this is so for ESL and native speakers alike. So why only help ESL students with LOCs? Just because we have labeled them as “ESL students?”

Behind the label “ESL,” there are two lurking assumptions: 1) all ESL students don’t know English very well; 2) all native speakers know English very well. These assumptions do not reflect the reality, since I am a so-called ESL student and I tutor a native speaker who does not know the rule of subject-verb agreement. Should we call my native speaker an “ESL student?” After all, why should we separate ESL students from native speakers who have the same difficulties with the English language? The focus here should not be the place of birth, but the level of proficiency with written English. When I tutor my native-speaker student, I apply Myers’ method of focusing on LOCs, showing him “the many complex ways a language determines, subordinates, coordinates, lexicalizes and so on” (Myers 224). I do this because I recognize that this native-speaker student has similar language issues as what Myers calls ESL students.

The term “ESL” is misleading. Although we break this term down in class into different categories (international students, immigrant students, Generation 1.5, and eye vs. ear learners), Myers’ article throws around the label indiscriminately, as if ESL students all came from the same background and had the same level of proficiency with the language. Rather than just labeling students as “ESL,” tutors should always take into consideration more important things than the place of birth, such as the level of confidence with the language, the understanding of the American rhetorical and academic conventions, and the individual preferred learning style.

I want to come back to one of the assumptions behind separating ESL from native speakers, which is: assuming that native speakers should know written language better than ESL students. This assumption can affect the way we see native speakers who have the kind of problems that Myers links to ESL students. We might wonder why, since they were born here and speak English at home, they do not understand a specific grammar rule. We might get frustrated that they are not able to pick up their mistakes when they read their paper a second time. But native speakers, like ESL students, come from very different backgrounds; some of these backgrounds did not offer them real opportunities to have someone teaching them the rules of grammar and spelling, or mentoring them in the differences between spoken and written conventions. However, tutors often believe they should not point out LOCs to native speakers, since they think these students should be able to see their mistakes when they reread their drafts. If the students fail to meet these unrealistic expectations, tutors might see them as lazy or distracted. Even worse, I have witnessed native speakers being completely demoralized by the comments that their professors left on their writing. The tone in some of these comments stops just short of calling them stupid because they keep making the same grammar or spelling mistakes. These comments reveal the professors’ impatience towards students they feel should know “better than that,” and these professors’ assumptions about their students create an environment of frustration that goes against effective learning.
As tutors, we should not make assumptions on the preferred learning style and language ability of the students based on the labels we put on them, whether those labels are “native-speaker” or “ESL.” Assumptions will negatively affect our tutoring methods and our respect for the students. Therefore, Myers’ advice that tutors should patiently point out their errors again and again to ESL students, since “students are not uniformly ready at all times to internalize everything pointed out to them,” could be applied to all the students who could benefit from this method, no matter their accent (Myers 225).

One thing Myers does not bring up in her article is the existence of multilingual tutors, which shows Myers’ assumption that tutors are all native speakers. But that’s simply not true, since there are quite a few multilingual tutors in our Writing Center. As a multilingual tutor, my motivation is to help students make sense of the very difficult material that I had to learn. I’ve picked up some tricks and methods along the road to learn this language, and I gladly pass them along to all the students who struggle with written English. Needless to say, I cringe when articles on so-called ESL students implicitly label them as “only tutees,” because I feel left out.

As a multilingual student, I have encountered a lot of labeling. People hear my accent and think I’m fresh off the boat and cannot put two English words together. When I say I’m studying English, they often assume that I am studying the language, so I have to correct them and tell them that I’m working on a Master’s degree in American Literature (it’s always a kick to see the facial expression change!). Native speakers are not the only ones labeling me, since my multilingual students label me as well. When we start the session, they hear my accent and their worried looks let me know that they are not sure I’m proficient enough to help them with their language difficulties. They see me as an impostor, trying to pass for someone I am not. It always makes me smile when I see that happening, because I want to tell them: “People label you all the time and I know you hate it, so why are you labeling me?” But, as the session goes on, they realize that I know the language without having forgotten how hard it is to learn it. They then feel comfortable to vent their frustration at the difficulty of the English language to someone whom they know can not only empathize, but sympathize.

This labeling back and forth of people based on their accents is a great loss of time and energy. It also grossly oversimplifies the complexity of human beings. As you have probably noticed by now from the class discussions, tutors mix and match techniques as needed in different situations. You will hear tutors say: “Usually I am a minimalist, but when I notice that the student is getting frustrated, I take a more directive approach…” If we are not comfortable putting a label on ourselves and want to keep some freedom of movement between our different techniques, why are we so rigid with the labels we put on the students? When you use the term “ESL,” find out what it really means to you, see who and what you are focusing on and, more importantly, who and what you may have left out.

Grammar as a Reflex

As a tutor you are going to encounter a lot of ESL students. And what they need most help with their lower order concerns. In my experience, they usually know what they’re doing; they understand the prompt, the research, the thesis, etc. But even if they can speak English well, they may still have trouble putting those thoughts into writing. I understand that it’s tempting to just fix all their errors and make the paper pristine and readable. But then the student hasn’t learned anything. Edit at tutee’s paper and he will pass one assignment, but teach him good grammar, and he will become a doctor! But explaining the rules of grammar can be hard when we all learned them back in elementary school. So here’s a quick refresher course on the two most common grammar rules you need to remember to work with ESL students: Verb Tense and Article Usage.

I. Verb Tense

It’s not all Past, Present, and Future to worry about. You also have to deal with these grammatical landmines:

Present Perfect

The present perfect consists of a past participle (the third principal part) with "has" or "have." It designates action which began in the past but which continues into the present or the effect of which still continues.

1. Betty taught English for ten years. (simple past)

2. Betty has taught English for ten years. (present perfect)

Future Perfect Tense

The future perfect tense designates action that will have been completed at a specified time in the future.

1. Saturday I will finish all my housework. (simple future)

2. By Saturday noon, I will have finished all my housework. (future perfect)

II. Articles – (a/an, the)

The native language of the ESL student may not use articles like a/an and the, the mistake is easy to spot as a tutor, but to them the rules can be very difficult:

a/an = indefinite article
"A/an" is used to refer to a general or non-particular member of the group. For example, "I would like to go see a movie." Here, we're not talking about a specific movie. Here we are writing about any movie. There are many movies, and I want to see any movie. I don't have a particular movie I want to see.

"A" and "an" signal that the noun modified is indefinite, referring to any part of a group. For example:

1. "My daughter really wants a cat for Christmas." This sentence refers to any cat. We don't know which cat because we haven't found the cat yet.

2. "Somebody call a policeman!" This sentence refers to any policeman. We don't need a specific policeman; we need any policeman who is available.

3. "When I was at the zoo, I saw an elephant!" Here, we're writing about a single, non-specific thing, in this case an elephant. There are probably several elephants at the zoo, but there's only one we are writing about here.

When we write a in front of a word with a vowel or with a vowel sound like hour, we use the an form of the article.

I “Mother, will we see an anteater?”

2. “Yes, perhaps within the hour.”

the = definite article


The is used to refer to a specific or particular member of a group. For example, "I just saw the most popular movie of the year." There are many movies, but only the one particular movie is the most popular. Therefore, we use the.

The definite article is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific or particular. The signals that the noun is definite, that it refers to a specific member of a group. For example:

"The dog that bit me ran away." Here, we're writing about a specific dog, the dog that bit me.

"I was happy to see the policeman who saved my cat!" Here, we're writing about a particular policeman. Even if we don't know the policeman's name, it's still a particular policeman because it is the one who saved the cat.

"I saw the elephant at the zoo." Here, we're writing about a specific noun. Probably there is only one elephant at the zoo.
count and non-count nouns

The can be used with non-count nouns, or the article can be omitted entirely.

1. "I love to sail over the water" (some specific body of water) or "I love to sail over water" (any water).

2. "He spilled the milk all over the floor" (some specific milk, perhaps the milk you bought earlier that day) or "He spilled milk all over the floor" (any milk).

"A/an" can be used only with count nouns.

1. "I need a bottle of water."

2. "I need a new glass of milk."

Most of the time, you can't write, "She wants a water," unless you're implying, say, a bottle of water.

With the above information, I could have saved myself a lot of time hunting online with a tutee. I don’t expect you to remember these rules, and really why should you? You already know them. But if you have a regular ESL tutee that has trouble understanding the rules of grammar, I would print this out and keep it on hand. If they have a grammar issue that isn’t Verb Tense or Article Usage, then try Purdue Owl, that’s where I found the useful tips above you. Good luck.
Really Getting To Know Your Student Writers

I was really surprised by the tutoring experience this semester; however, I think the teaching experience I gained has been invaluable to me. In thinking about my experience more thoroughly, I want to write about two personal experiences I had working working with two different student writers this semester. I want to give future tutors an intimate look into the different scenarios that may present themselves within the writing center and also lessen any fears that may accompany the tutoring experience, especially when working with 1.5 generation and international students.

The first writer I would like to highlight is, Wendy. Wendy is a very bright generation 1.5 student; however, after meeting with Wendy continually throughout the semester I began to notice her lack of self-confidence with regard to her writing and her writing abilities. She oftentimes made comments like, “I’m just a terrible writer” and “I’m not good at English—this is apparent in the low grades I always get on my papers.” As I continued to work with Wendy, I noticed though her ability to think critically about things and also the many sound ideas she had for her essays—what was really holding her back was her confidence. Oftentimes generation 1.5 writers can deal with issues from past writing experiences. I thought of ways that I might change the outcome of the situation and provide Wendy a new writing experience—one of positivity. During one of our sessions, when she was really beginning to get down on herself and her writing, I decided to step away from the writing and instead talk about her fears, hopes, and personal desires for her education. I learned a lot that day from Wendy. She expressed how she felt hopeless in accomplishing her educational goals because of writing abilities and the stigmatizing errors within her writing (especially tense issues). It was during this time, I was able to relate to Wendy that we all have hardships and struggles within our writing, myself included, and I explained to her ways to see beyond those hardships especially through viewing writing as a process versus a product. A process she was taking part in through coming to the writing center. We didn’t work on her writing assignment very much that day; however, we did talk about Wendy’s personal involvement, learning style, and fears about her writing—something no one had ever taken the time to do with her. This day was particularly helpful in going forward throughout the rest of our tutoring sessions together, the information I gained was helpful to me in that it gave me tools to help Wendy with her perceived areas of weakness in her writing. Similarly, it helped Wendy to see that we all struggle through the writing process in one way or another.

What I want to convey from this first student example is the importance of building relationships with your student writers, especially those 1.5 generation writers who may struggle even more so because of negative past writing experiences. You will learn lots of strategies and techniques within this class; however, they will only be best applied through an understanding of your student writer’s particular needs, learning style, and confidence level. Sometimes it is best to take a step back to understand what is truly inhibiting the student writer, when you do this, you are able to get a more clear understanding of how to apply the learned strategies to best serve the student writer.

The second student writer that I would like to highlight is a Swedish international graduate student, Christopher. Similar to my experience with Wendy, I found I was able to best
help Christopher through connecting to him on a personal level but in a different way than Wendy. In approaching writing with Christopher, a very bright international student, it was a totally different experience than any of my other student writers. This was because of the differences in language, culture, and word nuances. Because of this, if I didn’t understand something in Christopher’s writing I would always take a brief interval, step away from the page, and try to ask him a question that would help to clarify. It always made complete sense to me after we had a brief conversation, and in return Christopher would often then question me about U.S. culture and its writing practices. The thing I want to highlight here is that, like my experience with Wendy, there was a benefit from the personal exchange and sometimes taking a ‘break’ from the writing. In this way students and tutors are able to connect on another level, a level where information about writing, cultural background, and language takes place. I feel this is essential to a quality tutoring experience.

Both of the aforementioned students examples represent students you will work with in the writing center. Oftentimes it can seem overwhelming trying to help students of a different cultural, language background simply because of the lack of familiarity. However, in taking the time to really get to know the student writer, personally, I think this barrier is broken. In this instance, there is a true exchange of information and this is where the real learning takes place for both the tutor and the student writer. In thinking about all of this, you can best serve student writers, and the diversity that will exist among them, through active listening and learning. As tutors, we shouldn’t just be teaching we should be learning too alongside our student writers. Here are some helpful tips as you work with ESL, 1.5 Generation, and International student writers:

- Listen to your student writer actively
- Realize you may not be able to tell they are a 1.5 generation or international student (unless they tell you). This is why it’s important to get to your student writers personally.
- Recognize they may have past writing experiences that have affected their confidence. It is your job to help BUILD that confidence and help them to see writing as a process.
- Don’t be afraid to share your own feelings/experiences for writing. This helps student writers to see that everyone struggles—not just them.
- Finally, let the student writer’s needs direct the tutoring session as I did that day with my student writer Wendy. Yes, we didn’t look at her writing much that day, but we did work on her confidence and THAT affected her writing in a positive manner for the rest of the semester.
Tutoring Multilingual Writers: Applying Socioliterate Approaches to Tutoring

As a tutor, you will encounter a variety of different writers when tutoring at the writing center, including multilingual writers. Furthermore, you might have already encountered a variety of theories and approaches to tutoring. Most of these are applicable to multilingual writers. The purpose of my article is to add to your understanding of theory and how it can be applied at the writing center. Specifically, this article will help your understanding of Socioliterate Approaches (SA) and how you can apply these to your own tutorial sessions when tutoring multilingual writers. Before I go any further, it is important to define “multilingual writers” and understand who they are. These writers generally fall under three categories:

- **Early-arriving students**: These are students, according to Dana Ferris, that were born in- or arrived in the U.S. “prior to age 10” (17). These students might speak a language other than English.

- **Late-arriving students**: Unlike early-arriving students, late-arriving students are those who arrived in the U.S. after the age of 10. Dana Ferris mentions that these students “may have studied little to no English” prior to their arrival (17).

- **International students**: These students have been educated in their home country and are fluent in their native language. Generally, these students are usually here in the U.S. on a temporary student visa with the intent of returning to their home country.

As for SA theory, this can be summed up in a few sentences. SA focuses on how people are shaped by text and the social nature of language. The main goal of SA is to bring this to students’ attention, while encouraging flexibility and creativity in negotiating and processing texts in “new social settings” (Johns 285). In order to achieve this goal, I have outlined several approaches often emphasized by SA theorists that you can use in your own tutorial sessions. Keep in mind that I do not expect you to apply these approaches in each of your sessions. Rather, I hope that you will consider the following and use when applicable.

### 1. Revising Students’ Understanding of Genre

SA theory places a great emphasis on revising multilingual students’ understanding of genres related to writing. These writers are generally familiar with socially constructed discourses and have been exposed to certain texts. Yet, many of these writers, according to Ann Jones, might use one template for “certain common genres” (such as the five paragraph essay) (288). As tutors, you can help students expand their knowledge of genres through the following methods and techniques:

- **Teach students that they do not always have to restrict themselves to a five paragraph essay.** Inform them that ideas can be fully developed over several paragraphs. One idea for example, can be explored and discussed over two fully developed paragraphs.

- **Inform students that certain discourses and genres might have different expectations.** For example, a narrative essay might require more reflection than an essay in a chemistry class that might require more analysis. If the student is having trouble writing a particular assignment, inform them to always refer back to the assignment prompt and/or course syllabus.

- **Let students know that there are useful resources they can use when writing for a certain genre.** Below are other useful resources your student can use and refer to:

  1. Purdue OWL available at owl.english.purdue.edu/owl
2. Giving students the skills needed to research roles, text and tasks

According to Ann Johns, if multilingual writers are expected to succeed in “many, unpredictable and foreign environments” where they will read and write texts, they must learn to ask the correct questions when dealing with roles, texts and tasks (289). Additionally, in a classroom setting, students often have the opportunity to ask the instructor about the texts and tasks being given to them. They are also able to negotiate tasks and request further clarification. Yet in a tutorial session, students do not have the same opportunities. However, as tutors, we can still help and give them the skills needed to research roles and ask crucial questions about the texts and tasks presented to them:

- Encourage multilingual writers to ask themselves questions about the tasks required by their instructor. If a student is in the preliminary stages of their draft, encourage them to ask probing question, such as “what is the prompt asking me to do?” or “How can I approach of what’s being asked of me.” Students might also need to understand their role in relation to their prompt. Sometimes they might be asked to take on a position or persuade a certain audience.
- If a student is unaware of the instructor’s expectations, encourage him or her to review the course syllabus. Often times, instructors will include their expectations for each assignment on their syllabus.
- Be sure to also encourage your student to visit his or her instructor during office hours. From my experience, many students are unaware of the advantages of using their professor's office hours where they might be able to ask questions, negotiate meaning, and receive additional feedback and clarification.

3. Encourage students to assess, expand on and revise strategies for approaching writing and reading tasks

As tutors we have to understand and acknowledge that multilingual writers have their own strategies for approaching reading and writing tasks. When the opportunity arises in our tutorial sessions, we should always do our best to help these writers revise and expand upon their strategies for reading and writing. Most importantly, we should help students understand that certain tasks might call for different strategies. In order to help students become successful, they need to have the necessary tools to approach and process the texts that they will encounter throughout their academic careers:

- Encourage students to reflect on strategies they use. Also, encourage them to reflect on strategies that have not worked for them. This will also help you determine what strategies you might use in the tutorial session. Here a few question you might want to consider asking your tutee:
  1. How do you currently approach reading and writing assignments?
  2. What methods and strategies do you use? Which ones(s) do you find most successful?
  3. How often do you spend writing, revising or editing your assignment?
  4. Do you highlight or take notes when you read?
- As I mentioned before, certain tasks might call for different strategies. For example, a writer engaging in an outlining activity for one assignment might not be successful when using it again for a different assignment. Each writer is different and unique, so we should not expect them to approach every task the same way. When the opportunity arises, take a moment to teach the student new strategies or revise their current understanding of the strategies they use.
How SA translates in a tutorial session:

In my tutorial sessions, I try my best to include various socioliterate approaches when applicable. Let me share with you one of my experiences with using SA. Several weeks ago, I was tutoring a student named John who was struggling in drafting ideas for an essay for his English 2 class. The assignment required him to take on a position on the topic of social media in the classroom. He came into the session with a few ideas written down, but he believed that he was going in the wrong direction. I first had John pull out the assignment prompt and together we spent a few minutes discussing and reading over the requirements. During this time, I highlighted key words and phrases, such as “argue for a position.” It turned out that John had misinterpreted the requirements of the assignment, so he was able to realize that he needed to argue for a particular side. He assumed that he had to present his views on both sides of the issue. After our discussion, I asked John how he approached writing tasks to which he informed me that he often skims through them and avoids writing any notes on the margins. I took this opportunity to discuss with John the various ways to approach and process texts, such as reading aloud, writing notes on the margins or highlighting keywords and phrases. I also encouraged him to always ask questions and clarification on assignments during class time.

Final Thoughts on SA:
There are certain aspects of SA that depend on your role as the tutor and how comfortable you are in teaching your tutee about discourses. There are some who believe that a tutor is only responsible for helping the writer and his or her paper. In contrast, there are others who encourage tutors to take the extra step to teach writers about disciplines and discourses. I believe that as tutors, we must give our tutee the necessary skills and knowledge needed to become successful and independent. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, the approaches discussed in the article should be used when applicable in your tutorial.

Works Cited
Multilingual Students: Who They Are, How They Learn and How to Tutor Them

Background of Multilingual Students at Sac State
(by Vu Tran)

A lot of native speakers are unaware of the complexity of speaking and writing in two languages. Becoming fluent in one language is a difficult task alone, but to become fluent in two languages is even more difficult. Recent research shows that it takes more than 10 years to become academically fluent in a second language. Many native speakers view the grammatical errors of multilingual students’ writings at the university level as something that is a deficiency, and not a unique process. In fact, one can say that it is an accomplishment for multilingual students to have made it this far academically.

Speaking and writing English has never been a strong skill for me while growing up (for most of my life) in an impoverished neighborhood filled with street violence, gangs, crimes, and poverty. I, along with other immigrant children in my neighborhood, suffered from the perennial condition of not having enough food, clothes, and resources available in order to maintain good hygiene and function sufficiently on a daily basis. Consequently, education took a toll on me and became secondary to my human basic survival needs (e.g. food, clothes, and immediate resources). My parents’ primary objectives were to work and bring money home to feed and clothed us. However, even that became a dilemma, for the language barrier immensely hindered their progress to acquire a decent job position. They would often work as menial farm laborers, custodians, and janitors; jobs that required long hours per day and paid appallingly minuscule in return. The thought of overcoming this poverty-stricken situation, coupled with learning a second language in alien environment, was nearly impossible.

The education that I had received during my high school years did awfully little to help ease my deprived circumstance at home. During my senior year, I began asking myself questions like: Did learning about grammar rules help provide food and clothes for my family? Did writing an essay about endangered species provide my family the resources we need to survive at home? My family was still in dire condition, prone to violence, crimes, and poverty that prevented us to climb up the socio-economic ladder. However, with my parents “nagging” at me constantly about the importance of education, I knew that graduating from high school and attending college was not a choice, but obligatory, and the only means of overcoming our impoverished situation. Therefore, the need to speak and write fluently in English at the University level became a means to an end for me.

Many of the multilingual students at Sac State are experiencing this dilemma as we speak. They come from a diverse range of linguistic, cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. I recently conducted a study in several of the multilingual classes here at Sac State, and found out that many of the students were either 1.5 generation or immigrants coming from different cultural, economic and educational backgrounds in various cities across California. Many of them shared similar experiences and outcomes. Based on the questionnaire, they view their writings thus far at the university level as more of an accomplishment than a deficiency, and that teachers/tutors should be amazed by what they can do in two languages, rather than what they cannot do. Out of all the multilingual students that I have tutored throughout the semester in the writing center, there was one that truly made me appreciate how beautiful and gifted multilingual students are. I was not only amazed by the tutee’s ability to write in English at the university level, but was even more astonished by the fact that English was his fifth language. He told me
that he was forced to learn five languages because his parents’ jobs required his family to relocate frequently to a different country, which required learning an entirely new language and a different writing system each time. Personally, learning a second language throughout my adolescent years was unbearable, but the thought of having to learn five languages and become fluent in all of them is something that should be highly valued and praised by us all as an honorable achievement, and a talent that only multilingual students are capable of accomplishing.

The Differences of Second Language Learners
(by Kristina Kellermann)

ESL. EFL. Multilingual. Bilingual. Generation 1.5. Immigrant. International. There are many different labels given to students nowadays who speak another language besides English, and just as there are many labels, there are many levels of proficiency, as well as language and cultural backgrounds for each multilingual student out there. But what do all these labels mean? How does a tutor identify what kind of multilingual student they are working with? And perhaps, most importantly, how best to help to help them?

We all know as tutors that there is a wide variety of students who come into the Writing Center, and this variety is in no small part due to the diversity of multilingual students who come seeking help. But one multilingual student is not always the same as the next, and at times, it is difficult to not only identify that your tutee is an multilingual student, but also what their proficiency in English is and how best to help them with their writing. Though we are loathe to blithely categorize students into finite groups, it is helpful to know that there are three distinct general kinds of multilingual students who fall into two more general classifications of learners. Understanding what kind of learner you are working with is not only helpful for you as the educated tutor, but also helpful for both you and the student together so you may help them in a more efficient and conscientious manner.

Many of them may be very new to the country, and others may have lived here in America their entire lives. Many speak their first language (L1) at home and/or with their home community, and others may actually be more proficient in English as their second language (L2) than in their first language. Many multilingual students are better at speaking English than writing in it, and for others, it may be the reverse. In general, multilingual students, from brand-new freshmen to seasoned graduate students, are much like English native-speaking students: they study in many of the same degree programs, they enjoy a lot of shared interests, and they are engaged in common extracurricular activities and sports.

The multilingual students who come to the Writing Center have historically come from several language backgrounds: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Hmong (an Asian language), Korean, Hindi, and others. For many of these students, English may actually be a third or fourth language, though they may have varying proficiencies in their other languages. There are three general categories of multilingual students here in the United States, and all three are represented here at Sacramento State University: international students, immigrant students, and Generation 1.5 students. Each group has its own unique learning needs.

International students have come from other countries to study at the university for varying lengths of time, often for one semester or an academic year. Many of these students have been well-educated in their home country, and their study may be financially supported by their families, universities or government. Most international students have studied English for at least a few years before applying to study abroad, and have had to pass rigorous standardized tests like the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) which is a requirement for admission at most American universities and colleges. In studying English, most international students have learned a lot of English grammar and are very good at reading, but their writing skills as well speaking and listening skills are often at a much
lower proficiency. This is often due to lack of opportunity to practice both latter sets of skills, as many have had non-native teachers or they have not had the chance to interact with many native speakers. As they have largely learned English through what they have seen, namely studying vocabulary and grammar, they are considered “eye learners”. Almost all international students deal with culture shock in some degree or another when they first arrive in the country, and the amount of English they are exposed to on a daily basis increases exponentially, and may be at times overwhelming. On the positive side, as they come from cultures and language backgrounds different from our own, international students often have diverse opinions and points of view on topics, which tutors may see reflected in their writing. An important point to remember as a tutor is that when working with an international student, you are dealing not only with a student who is still learning a new language, but is also still learning a new culture, and all of its obvious and not-so-obvious idiosyncrasies. While they may be educated and comfortable in some aspects of the language, they may not be very familiar with social and rhetorical conventions, not just in writing, but also interpersonal communication.

Immigrant students arrive in America from other countries often as refugees, having left their home countries to escape political unrest, prosecution or simply to make a better life here in this country. These students are sometimes sent ahead of the rest of the family to live with relatives or friends. They vary greatly at times in age and educational background, and many have had interrupted or inconsistent schooling in the past. Sometimes they may be the first in their family to attend college. Most immigrant students have limited proficiency both in their first language and English, though many are at least orally proficient in their first language. There may be considerable gaps in their education, not just in English, but other areas as well. Immigrant students might struggle with lack of literacy and reading experience, and their understanding of grammar rules is sometimes hampered by inconsistent schooling. Spending some time to ask a student about their background and language proficiency, both in their first language and English, will often provide a lot of insight for tutors who work with these students. Because it is not always easy to know where a student is coming from, both literally and figuratively, it is important for tutors to remember too to be patient and respectful of all students.

Between the general categories of international and immigrant students, and sharing characteristics of both is the very diverse group of Generation 1.5 students. These students are so-named as many of them are the first generation in their families who have been born here in America to parents who have emigrated from other countries. These students’ first language is not English but rather the language of their family. They first began to learn English generally from an early age when they first entered school at the preschool or kindergarten level. They acquired English not just in school though, but also on the playground, from their peers, as well as hearing the language from television, movies, the Internet, and interaction with other native speakers. As they have largely learned English through what they have heard, they are considered “ear learners”. They grow up learning both languages, most predominantly in oral form, and by the time they arrive at the university, many are considered to be fairly proficient in speaking both languages in some degree. But there is a lot of variety in this group. Some Generation 1.5 students may be more comfortable and adept in English than their first language, and yet others may not feel that they are fully fluent in English nor their first language. If asked to label themselves, a lot of Generation 1.5 students see themselves as bilingual or multilingual, but still others may not even consider themselves to be multilingual students. A lot of these students can pass for native speakers in terms of speaking proficiency, but their reading and writing abilities are often not as advanced. Their writing contains a lot of the colloquial and idiomatic language they have acquired in hearing English, and careful analysis will reveal systematic errors that reflect their spoken proficiency in English. Many Generation 1.5 students live between two languages and cultures as well, creating an identity that encompasses traditions blended from those of their own family and community, as well as the academic and social environment they are immersed in here. Tutors may see the writing of Generation 1.5 students also often reflects influences from their first language, in word choices or word order, for example, and at times it may difficult to address and correct. It can be confusing to tutors to
work with students who seem to speak a certain level of English whereas their writing shows a very different level of English.

How the Proficiency of L1 Affects L2
(by Rexford Osei-Ansah)

Tutoring in the Writing Center can be more effective and productive in providing assistance to students if the educational, cultural and socio-linguistic background, and more importantly the L1 of the students are made available. Every individual begins to talk from infancy before learning to speak other languages. This language of infancy is the first language (L1). The second language (L2) is the language a person learns after the first language (L1). Human beings are born with the ability to learn and form associations so a child acquires language form by imitating what he hears the parents speak. Adult L2 learners who learn a second language begin from scratch and in the learning process, they find different ways to facilitate the mastery of the language. An example is repetition which is similar to a child’s first language learning process.

I am writing this article based upon what I observed from an analysis of a Russian-speaking ESL student’s writing as a requirement for one of my TESOL classes and from my personal experience as an ESL student so many years ago. In the course of the analysis, I noticed that some error patterns which I found to be the result of transfer from L1 which is the Russian language. This student had difficulties with the use of certain elements of the English language that are not in the Russian language. I would like to point out that Russian is a case language whereas English is SVO (it follows the “Subject Verb Object” order of arrangement). For example, “Peter kicks the ball.” Peter is the subject, the verb is kick, the action performed by Peter, and the ball is the object that received the action.

By analyzing the errors, I found out that errors occur often due to the difference between L1 and L2. For example in Russian, the definite and indefinite articles “the” and “a” do not exist. In a sentence like “Peter is a boy”, the student wrote “Peter boy”. By writing “Peter boy” the student is transferring directly from Russian because they are not familiar with the use of the definite and indefinite articles. Certain errors were made in the use of auxiliary verbs as well. I noticed structures in which the student wrote “that why” “he the boy that came to the school”, “I been” etc. Another one of the characteristics of the Russian language is that the auxiliary verbs “to be” and “to have” don’t exist. For this reason, the student deleted “is” from the sentence - another example of transfer interference.

When I lived in Ghana, Twi, one of the Akan languages, was used together with English from first grade through the eighth grade. Because of its limited use in the classroom, there was limited opportunity for students to practice the use of English language through direct interaction with people. I came to United States as an international student only to realize how handicapped I was in the use of the English language. I could write well, but in the middle of conversation I got lost when others spoke fast. I was classified as “biliterate” because I already had a basic education in my L2 but I had many deficiencies as far as grammar, structure and organization were concerned. I had a hard time adapting to writing styles in America. Even though I thought I had considerable words in my English lexicon, some of them were spelled differently. For example in America, words like “defence” and “labour” are spelled “defense” and “labor” respectively. Also, I found out that in high rise buildings, people use an “elevator” but not a “lift” to move from one floor to the other. Words like “lorry” and “articulated truck” have been replaced by “truck” and “eighteen-wheeler truck”. The transfer from the Twi language (L1) into English language (L2) contributed to most of the linguistic differences.
Ear Learners vs. Eye Learners
(by Jamie Ferrando)

As previously mentioned, there are two terms that describe how multilingual students learn. Based on the status of the learner (International, Generation 1.5, or Immigrant) they will usually fit into one of the two categories. Ear learners most likely are students who have had little formal training in their first language. These learners have learned English by being immersed in the second language by television, native speaking friends, and places like the grocery store. They have learned English by hearing it spoken around them, and not necessarily by formal classroom instruction. Most immigrant students are ear learners. Some characteristics of their writing include conversational style language and often misspelled words that sound different than they are spelled. For example, when a native speaker says the words ‘first of all’ an immigrant student might write ‘firstable’ in his or her paper because that is how some immigrant students hear native speakers say that phrase. Since they have no formal classroom training, they write words how they hear them.

On the other hand, eye learners have often had extensive formal grammar instruction, but they may not have the oral fluency that generation 1.5 or even that immigrant students have. The reason for this is that they often visually see language with their eyes, but rarely have the opportunity to speak or listen to authentic English language. International students often fit this description. They know grammar rules, but often lack skills in listening and oral proficiency. These students often have problems with understanding English idioms and American culture. In addition, these students might have problems forming paragraphs because their prior language training most likely consisted of single sentence exercises versus writing and drafting essays.

Still, there are generation 1.5 students who fall somewhere in between ear learners and eye learners. As previously mentioned, generation 1.5 students usually began learning English in elementary school, but depending on their parents’ first and second language fluency, these students might or might not have had formal training in either their first language or in English. Most likely generation 1.5 students are ear learners.

Suggestions for Tutoring Eye Learners and Ear Learners
(by Jamie Ferrando)

It might seem rude to ask a tutee their background information, but the information above should help you distinguish at least the international students from the immigrant students so you can decide which of the following suggestions to help them become more fluent writers. Since an ear learner has learned English by hearing it spoken around them, an ear learner would benefit from reading his or her paper out loud, or by having someone read it out loud for them. Often times, they will be able to correct their own mistakes simply by hearing what they wrote. They will not be able to explicitly tell you why the sentence is wrong grammatically, but they might just say “it doesn’t sound right.”

International students might have “perfect” grammar; however, they might lack transition phrases. Also, their papers will often be shorter than the amount required by the teacher. For international students, going over the prompt with them and helping them expand their ideas will help them become proficient English writers. They might misunderstand the teachers’ expectations because of their lack of listening skills. In addition, you might have a problem understanding their ideas when speaking to them, but having them free write or brainstorm might help them “verbalize” their ideas through writing. A majority of these students also rely heavily on their first language, and sometimes they transfer this prior knowledge to English. An example of this could be that the word form is wrong, or the sentence structure is backwards. If you suspect transfer, a dictionary, preferably one from their first language to English will help them be more concise in their words choice.
Immigrant students, again, vary within the two categories, but some of the mentioned suggestions will help you find a way to aid these students in becoming better writers.

My Personal Experience with Tutoring a Generation 1.5 Student
(by Jamie Ferrando)

Even though I am aware of the differences between eye and ear learners, it wasn’t until this semester (Fall 2009) that I was able to work one student who demonstrated the previously mentioned characteristics of an ear learner. During the beginning of the semester, I had a drop-in whose first language was Hmong. She was a Generation 1.5 student who began learning English in elementary school. She admitted that she uses her first language the majority of the time with her family and friends, and that she considers English her second language. When I began reading her paper out loud, as I do with most of my tutees, she began fixing most of her grammatical errors. Although she was not able to correct all of them, she learned that by reading her paper out loud, or by having someone read her paper to her, she could correct the majority of her errors. Her content, for the most part, was organized and cohesive, but it was the strategy of reading out loud that really gave her a different perspective of her writing process.

My Personal Experience With Tutoring an International Student
(by Kristina Kellermann)

I’ve worked with a number of multilingual students in the Writing Center, mostly Generation 1.5 students, but also a few international students. One student I tutored came to study here from her home in China. She was also in a tutorial I taught this semester, so I had worked with her before with speaking and listening skills, but not writing. She needed help at the time writing a cover letter to accompany the portfolio she would be submitting at the end of the semester for her English class. We reviewed the assignment prompt together, going over each individual requirement, and checking in the letter to see if she had covered them all. Her writing was relatively easy to read, with simple neat sentences that indicated to me that she had taken time and care to construct them. She was aware of some of her problems, namely run-on sentences, development, and some minor grammatical issues. We specifically discussed these issues as she had identified them earlier in the semester, and what strategies she had learned to correct and avoid these errors in the future. For the most part, she had followed the prompt, and I praised her organization and clarity. When conversing, I reminded myself to speak a little more slowly and clearly, and I checked with her a few times to be sure that she understood and to see if she had any other concerns. In the end, she said she felt more confident about the letter being nearly ready to present with her portfolio.

I think having a previous rapport established was helpful in this case, and I feel my student was relaxed and not overly self-conscious working with me. While my situation with her was a little unconventional from typical experiences with international students in the Writing Center, I do certainly recommend getting to know the student a little before beginning to work. Taking my time, being patient, and remembering respect are all key points that I endeavor to keep in mind any time I work with a student, multilingual or otherwise. I also remind myself that a lot of multilingual students, especially international students, are not only dealing with the challenges and workload ever-present in the academic environment that faces every college student, but are doing so in their second language. Trying to handle all this in one’s first language is difficult enough, but I have immense additional respect for those students who do it all in a language other than their first. Every time I work with a multilingual student, it’s a humbling learning experience for me as well. So when my student thanked me at the end of the session, I simply told her, “Xie xie. Thank you.”

Contrastive rhetoric, pioneered by Kaplan in the 60’s, was one of the most holistic approaches for working with second language writing during the time. Contrastive rhetoric examines the differences in modes of writing between cultures. Perhaps the most beneficial result of Kaplan’s exploration of contrastive rhetoric is found in the hearts of sympathetic readers like tutors and teachers in the academy. But before we can become sympathetic readers, we must become aware of what makes writing different from one culture to the next. If you were born and educated solely in the States like me, you may be oblivious to the vast differences in writing styles across the world. Understanding some of these differences may help you identify others in your ESL tutee’s writing. You might find yourself doing a little contrastive analysis with your multilingual writers. Hopefully, and most importantly, you might begin to understand the challenges that multilingual writers face when attempting to compose written text in a language and culture wildly different from their own, opening an ocean of knowledge and creative tools to use when working with the wonderfully diverse population of writers who frequent the University Writing Center. Below, three ESL writer/tutors share their experience and expertise.

Western cultures are often viewed as individualistic and hence supportive of direct, assertive, and explicit verbal styles. However, this is a broad generalization that can be damaging while working with multilingual students. Because of such generalizations, the writing styles of European students might be mistakenly viewed as closely related to the American, white, middle-class writing modes and, therefore, not deserving of special approach. In the present article, I will argue that Anglo-American and Continental writing traditions are in fact distinctly different and that the writing center should be a contact zone where understanding of the differences between American and Continental academic writing could be negotiated.

The Continent refers to continental Europe, explicitly excluding the United Kingdom as an island. Interestingly, this geographical division has resulted in two different writing traditions. Studies show that continental scholarship of Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia, was developed through direct contact with German thinking and intellectual style. There are two different writing traditions within the Western culture: Anglo-American and Continental (Clyne, 1989; Duszak, 1997; Rienecker & Jörgensen, 2003). Based on these findings, I will refer to the writing style of the students from continental Europe as “continental” style.

On the Continent, where was been born and educated, universities do not endorse the teaching of academic writing. The underlying rationale for this position is that content is married to form and good writing is married to good thinking and all these are so tied together that instruction which separates these marriages may be a fruitless endeavor. The idea of good writing as a gift, as an innate intellectual or artistic talent which is, in its nature, unteachable, dominates continental attitudes toward academic writing. In schools, exercises in creative writing replace the English drill in step-by-step instruction in the production of argumentative texts. For instance, the teacher may read aloud the best student’s paper but would never comment on what makes it good; thus, the ability to produce good writing is viewed as an art to be mastered through observation and practice.
Recently, Rienecker and Jörgensen (2003), who based their research on the writing center in Copenhagen University, described two traditions of writing: the Anglo-American (problem-oriented) and the Continental (topic-oriented). In their view, the continental tradition emphasizes science as thinking; in contrast, Anglo-American writing tradition emphasizes science as investigation and problem solving. They explain that American university writing, and the teaching of it is “heavily influenced by rhetorical text-concerns such as purpose, aim, reader, focus, structure and argumentation.” In fact, they claim, there is a whole continuum between the straightforward and economical Anglo-American style and that of the narrative redundant European style (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Continental and the American Academic Writing. Adapted from Rienecker & Jörgensen (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Continuum</th>
<th>Anglo-American tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Think&quot;-texts</td>
<td>Problem solving texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources in the foreground</td>
<td>Problems in the foreground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy, the history of ideas, epistemology, culture, split and mind, arts, and aesthetics</td>
<td>Facts, realities, observable matters, empiricism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on concepts and theories</td>
<td>Emphasis on methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation (preservation) of traditional culture</td>
<td>New understandings, evaluations, and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent epistemology</td>
<td>Controlled, purposeful epistemology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerous points, claims, conclusions, around the subject</td>
<td>One point, one claim, one conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often non-linear, discursive structure</td>
<td>Linear structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digressions allowed</td>
<td>Digressions discouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing as art and inborn ability</td>
<td>Academic writing as leaned craftsmanship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text-features, which distinguish continental university writing from that of American university writing, are: structures which do not necessarily follow fixed patterns; digressions and associations; high number of abstract concepts; linguistic complexity and abstraction; varied language, reformulations, varied use of concepts; source influenced language; and reflections of the writers personality in reasoning, conclusions, and style. While writing in the American university setting, the continental students face the following writing problems:

- Believing that writing is not an inborn ability
- Quoting too much and writing conceptually and linguistically too close to the sources
- Finding and maintaining a focus
- Getting beyond mere restatement and reformulation of the others
- Adopting an assertive academic tone

Based on my own experience as both a continental and an American student writer, I suggest a few approaches, tailored to address the above problematic areas that writing center tutors may apply.

Attitudes toward Writing
The continental ways of writing a good paper are bound to certain teachers or thinkers, not to commonly accepted rules. One continental philosophy teacher put it in the following way: “We do not instruct before writing, our students are supposed to sit at the feet of their masters and absorb their writing themes and styles.” Continentalist teachers, as a general rule, do not believe in instructional materials which re-enforces the perception of writing as an art. To address these continental attitudes, writing center tutors can ask the European tutees to reflect on their writing in Europe.

a) If they believe they are bad writers, explain that American academic writing is not an art but a craftsmanship that everybody can learn.
b) In case they believe to be excellent writers, point out that learning to write in a different mode will enrich their gift and quality of thinking.

**Introduction and Thesis Statement**

Continental writers give poor previews of the exposition to come and are reluctant to reveal their thesis, using a strategy of avoidance. Duszak (1994) provides the following example of a Polish style introduction: “I am not dealing here with… Neither am I dealing here with … This attempt does not aspire to … but only outlines a problem.” Writing center tutors should not press continental writers to come up even with a tentative thesis and stick to it; usually, European writers perceive the idea of a thesis as limiting their thinking and their process of interpretation. Instead:

a) Negotiate the need of some kind of hypothesis rather than thesis.

b) Talk about “evolving thesis” and recommend the thesis to be stated at a later stage of the writing process.

c) Negotiate stating the thesis at the end of the paper if the writer seems to be capable of managing the paper this way.

**Organization and Cohesiveness**

Knowledge, not the structure, is idealized in the continental tradition. The way knowledge is conveyed in continental academic texts presents a demanding task for the reader. European students are not trained to write for an audience, nor do they care to make their text more “marketable” within the academic discourse community. To negotiate more explicitness and better organization, try the following:

a) Do not to be irritated of European elitist approach to academic writing.

b) Involve them in an honest conversation about more democratic ways of presenting knowledge.

**Voice**

Continental academic writers tend to appear wary of committing themselves fully, without hesitation and reserve, to their statements, propositions, and suggestions. In other words, they formulate their pronouncements in a far less assertive, direct, and matter-of-fact tone than English writers usually do. This high degree of *hedging* also implies a certain modesty of understatement. Consider the tone and voice in a following example provided by Duszak (1997) and written by a Czech academic writer:

> I know only too well how much I expose myself to the danger of being accused to be again humming the same, old tune. I do not want to deny that the research into the problems of written language and into its particular status, as opposed to that of spoken language, has been one of the subjects repeatedly attracting my attention. And each time I was fairly and honestly convinced I would never take up the subject again.

I would not recommend avoiding pressing the issue of the assertive academic voice; instead, acknowledge the difference between the two writing traditions and your understanding of the struggle of the continental writers to adopt a more assertive tone.

**My Best Tip:** From the very first tutorial, writing center tutors should make the differences between the Anglo-American and the continental writing traditions explicit. Although the rules of the Anglo-American mode of writing have been explained to students in their writing classes, continental students need to build an awareness of their own modes of writing in order to transition to American mode of writing. Only this way they may see the academic writing in an American university not as oppressive and limiting mode, but as a different and enriching experience.
How Can Tutors Help Asian Students Improve Their Writing Style?
Hyang-Sook Park

Everyone who has worked in the writing center this semester knows the plight of international students who are striving to adapt to the American academic community. Most Asian students studying in American universities experience a hard time making themselves familiar with the new academic community. Not only do they have to develop their writing ability in English, but they also have to adapt to the different writing style, which is a new concept to them. Kaplan (1988) argues that no writing style is universal, but each varies in every culture and changes constantly. Different cultural values can determine the form and style of writing. As a writing tutor, it would be helpful to have an understanding about how a student’s culture is connected to his/her writing. Knowing the differences in writing styles can be the first step to finding an appropriate approach to assist writers transition into the American writing style. Therefore, I would like to address how the Asian writing style is related to its culture and tradition and give some suggestions that may be helpful in tutoring writing.

In American writing, students are taught to develop a thesis statement, identify supporting ideas, add a few examples being both coherent and cohesive, and conclude the paper with a brief summary of the paper. Conversely, Asian writing does not have a thesis statement at the beginning of the essay, but rather a topic statement at the end. American writing is writer-responsible while Asian writing is reader-responsible. American writers try to convey their thoughts directly and clearly with explicit details; whereas, Asian writers do not express connections too explicitly as a way of showing respect to the reader. Despite the loose organization of the essay, the reader has the responsibility to make connections between various parts in the writing and understand what the writer conveys in his or her writing. On the contrary, American readers have little patience with implicit detail. Therefore, tutors should help the students become aware of the cultural differences and of the value of audience awareness in writing.

Asian students who are accustomed to sentence-level instruction and pattern practice in the writing classroom may have difficulties in expressing, supporting, and explaining a single idea at length and in detail. Providing model sentences can help students become familiar with how they are expected to write. American culture values individualistic expression and debate. On the contrary, directness is considered to be impolite in Asian culture. For example, it would be rude and disrespectful if you say, “I disagree with the view of the author…” Due to the cultural values, Asian students tend to seek more of a consensus and may feel awkward performing writing exercises without a model or collective help. Therefore, providing model writing samples can increase their writing fluency.

Second, providing a mini lesson is another way to help students. For this activity, tutors can ask students to explain a given idea elaborately or ask them to support the idea by giving examples or relating to a personal story. This activity can encourage students to get to the point without digression from the topic. For example, tutors can provide sample supporting sentences and ask students to further explain by giving a specific example or relating a personal experience. Understand that the writer-responsible conception of a piece of writing moving from general to specific may be difficult for an Asian writer to grasp because they are unfamiliar with writing thesis statements, topic sentences, and supporting sentences. So try explaining that writing is like taking a photo. For example, a photo without a focus can be very blurry. When you focus on the topic you want to discuss, you can describe all the details and examples clearly. This analogy can teach students how the essay moves from general to specific.

Another useful strategy is color coding. Color coding can help students to stay coherent from the beginning to the end of their writing by using different colored pencils or markers to mark a thesis statement, topic sentences, and examples. While writing a paper, a student can continuously keep in mind the purpose of his/her paper by using different colors, and as a result, it can help them to produce cohesive writing.

Free-writing and processed writing are two useful writing techniques. Free writing directs students to simply get their ideas onto paper without worrying much about grammar, spelling, or other English mechanics. For free-writing activities, allowing students to write in their native language can be a benefit. In doing so, students can focus on content without pausing to think about the vocabulary or
grammar. After free-writing, a tutor can ask the student to explain what he/she wants to say in the writing in English. The rational is that most students feel more comfortable communicating in person than writing due to their lack of academic writing skills. The students can develop their ideas fully by just writing down their flow of thought.

Processed writing, another useful strategy, requires many hours work. This activity can guide students into logical, persuasive writing and train them to be good negotiators with their ideas by discussing the purpose of writing and organization with them. Processed writing can save students from frustration and even the loss of confidence caused by the pressures to write a perfect, native-like essay.

Communicative relationships between a tutor and a student can also maximize learning potential. “Language acquisition emerges from learners wrestling with meaning in acts of communicating or trying to communicate” (Myers, 231). Guiding students to achieve focus, clarity, connectedness, specificity in their writing will be a very critical role for tutors. I think it is an important role as a tutor to introduce students to the variety of styles, conventions, and different academic disciplines. Tutors can help them feel more like insiders to the academic discourse community by encouraging them to express themselves explicitly. Finally, I ask you to listen carefully and actively when your tutee speaks slowly or in broken English. This thoughtful consideration can encourage the student to become more willing to speak what he or she wants to express in the paper.

The Testimony of an Indian Working with Diversity
Manpreet Devi

It is important that tutors create a close relationship with bilingual students to make them feel at home. Having been in the shoes of an ESL student, I can say that it is extremely hard to share personal feelings or thoughts with a person who was raised in America because there is always a fear that my ideas might not be accepted or would not be understood. For example, I have worked with a student from Thailand who presented himself as a very timid person. He would ask for exact guidelines of what to write and in what structure. Soon enough I felt that I was doing the work for him. It is his job as a writer to present me with many ideas which I can then help him develop. I asked him to write down his thoughts for a paper: the uses of MySpace. He wrote down terms like, predators, young teens, safety, and privacy. We talked about these terms for a little bit and what they meant to him. He said he thought about his younger sister as he was coming up with those terms and how she could be in harm’s way if she doesn’t use her new MySpace safely. A little conversation led to a good idea of what the paper was going to be about where it was headed. Thinking about his culture and how it is a brother’s responsibility to watch over his sister, he was able to make close connections with his topic. Bringing his personal life into this also made it easier for him to write with less help from me. As a tutor, I encouraged him to talk to me more about his family and the role a male plays in his culture. Seeing my interest encouraged him to pursue his paper the way he wanted to.

Making the Student Feel Comfortable
When multilingual students don’t feel comfortable sharing their idea because their culture doesn’t allow them to be so open about a subject, it is always a good idea to show extra interest in their background. I always found it very helpful when a tutor or a teacher would compliment my unique or indifferent ideas. It’s important that they are encouraged and appreciated for working hard. When they see that their ideas are valued by someone they look up to, it is satisfying and very encouraging. This helps the student express ideas more freely since their ideas are not “odd” but useful and interesting to others. Once students create a channel through which they can express whatever they please, it then takes them to the next stage of sharing information with more people. Likewise, I was able to help the student with a MySpace paper as well as his future papers because I invited his ideas and wasn’t afraid to show my amazement towards some values that people from his descent hold.
Reading Out Loud
As tutors, we don’t want to miss any opportunity of improving the writing of the student. Many students catch their own mistakes when reading aloud. During every session, if a paper is read out loud, in addition to a student catching his own mistakes, he will be working on speaking clearly. Talking out loud and asking questions will help the student put together his own sentences and learn by listening to the way the tutor speaks to him. I had a student whose sentence structures rarely made sense. The positive thing was that he never spoke the way he wrote. He spoke in full sentences missing just a couple of words. Whenever I came across sentences like these, I turned them around into questions and had him answer it out loud. For instance, he wrote, “To stay safe on MySpace, you should put age 99, location, add strangers, put pictures private.” I would ask, “I am going to make a MySpace. What can I do to stay safe?” He would answer slowly and in short sentences, but they were not run on sentences when he spoke. I would quickly start writing down what he said word for word. When I showed him what he spoke versus what he wrote, he agreed that writing something down was a problem he faced. I suggested that he ask himself what he wants to write in a sentence, and then answer that question out loud while writing the answer down. He is currently working on editing in this manner and shows much improvement.

Making an Outline
ESL students at many times have problems with development. They have a topic and know what side they are on, but don’t know how to turn that topic into a 3-4 page paper. One way to help an ESL student is to ask him many questions while going through his essay. When a student has to explain everything, he is forced to think about ways to expand his ideas. If he had a good idea written down on paper, asking numerous questions shows him what his reader needs to see more of in his paper. In future papers, he would find it easier to clarify many ideas because he gets used to explaining one thing in many different ways. By asking questions, the tutor not only shows interest but also challenges the student, which makes the student a better writer as well as a better speaker. Asking questions leads to new ideas. If one has a weak thesis for a paper, he can make it strong by answering a variety of questions the tutor asks. If this process is followed for all papers, the student will become a strong writer on his own through continuous writing.

Focus on Higher Order Concerns First
It’s always helpful to educate the student about higher order concerns first since they need to be able to structure their paper before structuring their sentences correctly. The structuring may be something new to a foreign student since writing styles are different in different countries. If a tutor provides them with a handout of the basic structure of an essay, it can be used by the student for future papers. Students who are new to the academic writing structure are not likely to get it the first time. Therefore, it is important that they are given something to reference.

Take it One Step at a Time
Most importantly, be aware that if this is your first time being with an ESL student, it is normal to be frustrated. They need help in many areas, and at most times, it is not in our control to help them with everything in a 30 minute or one hour session. You are just one source through which they will learn a few things to carry on into their future writings. It is not the tutor’s responsibility to make a student a perfect writer by the end of the semester. It is our responsibility to make sure that we are steering the student in the right direction, that we are not just helping them to get a passing grade on one paper, but to make them good writers in one small area or another.

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We might remember that multilingual writers are not only trying to acquire academic writing skills but that they are also struggling with the threat of loss of identity by forgoing the style of writing
which represents more than just a part of their past. Their writing style represents a thread of politics, economics, family, faith, perspectives, principles, ethics, and other various codes unique to experiences that are not inferior but equally vital to any that an American like me might express through writing. A keen amount of sensitivity to the very essence of who writing center writers are and how to best help them maintain their identity during this transition is essential not only to the success of the writer but to you, the tutor, as well as the Writing Center, as it stands to serve the best interests of its writers.

References


Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern Writers

Way back in the 1960s, Kaplan wrote that people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds write differently, in ways that reflect their own language and culture. Writers use different methods, styles, and structures depending on their native language, native culture, and educational background. (Zhong 3) Culture seems to play the largest role in writing style variations, so I would like to give Sac State tutors a little background on three culture groups that are likely to be seeking help in the writing center but are probably unfamiliar to most tutors.

I have spent the last three years living and teaching English in China, India, Egypt, and Oman. Of course, the culture of each of these countries is not exactly the same as that of the surrounding countries, but the similarities are enough to present some key features that will hopefully help tutors. I will discuss Asian students – meaning Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Laotian, Thai, etc - based on research and my experience with Chinese students. Some of these countries have related languages, and all are similar in culture and education in the areas related to writing center work. Likewise, the Indian, or South Asian, culture and education is similar enough to those of neighboring Nepal, Bengal, Pakistan, and others. Most Middle Eastern countries share language, culture, and education methods to a strong degree. These students are those from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and others. Turkish and Israeli students will have cultural similarities. Afghani and Iranian writers will have some language but mostly cultural and educational similarities. All of these populations are present, and growing, in the Sacramento area and at Sac State.

To be successful in an English language university, students need to be able to write in a fairly formal voice, with a concise and linear organization putting the main ideas first and following with details. Students need to be able to present their own ideas and opinions while staying strictly on topic and completely answering a prompt. This style of composition is generally taught throughout school, starting in elementary school and continuing in high school.

All three of these groups – Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern – share, amazingly, a few cultural and educational writing similarities generally opposed to the Academic American English standards. Writers from these backgrounds often place important ideas at the end of sentences or paragraphs. This way of presenting ideas and organizing writing reflects the cultural values of self-discipline, modesty, and harmony (Zhong 4) important to all Asian and Middle Eastern groups. To avoid what seems like aggressiveness, writers may put the less important information first, and then gradually express the main ideas in a way that promotes easy agreement. Asians have a more circular writing style that goes around the main ideas, covering the all of the details, before making a strong point. South Asian writers may also use a circular style, or likely a meandering progression towards the main point. Details and similar ideas will be presented before the strongest main idea. In the Middle East, writing is done with a zigzag approach to the main idea; writers will move generally towards the main idea but will provide details and side points along the way. (Zhong 3)

Education is also similar in the Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries. (It is important to note that the amount and style of a student’s education is specific to the resources of their family as well as the country of origin.) In most traditional education environments, students from these countries are used to authoritative teachers and disciplined learning techniques. Students tend to maintain formal and distant relationships with teachers, have great respect for teachers, and expect teachers to impart all knowledge required in a class. Students are taught through memorization and rote learning and are expected to reproduce information in writing or examination. Critical thinking, or analyzing something a teacher has taught is not common. A Chinese proverb explains ‘if one can recite three hundred poems from the Tang Dynasty, one can then compose one poem’ (Zhong 5). Memorization and rote learning are used all over the world, and have their merits, however, students educated almost entirely in these strategies tend toward academic writing that is more ‘reproductive’ than critical or
developed in the American Academic style. Students will likely rely on repeating an authority’s opinions (author or teacher) rather than incorporating their own ideas or conclusions.

The similar cultural and educational backgrounds of the Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern students is separate from language features that affect their writing in English. The following sections give tutors a few language specific – grammatical and mechanical – points that can help a tutor decipher what is happening in a student’s text.

**Arabic** *(most Middle Eastern countries; to some extent also Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan)*

First-language Arabic speakers, and those who use the Arabic writing system, face a significant challenge when learning to write English. There is very little positive transfer from the Arabic language to English. The most obvious differences – the written alphabet and the direction of writing – are only the beginning of an Arabic speaker’s/writer’s difficulties.

**Grammar and Mechanics**

- Word order: Subject Verb and Adjective Noun order are opposite in Arabic. An Arabic speaker may put verbs before subjects, as in ‘runs the athlete’ and nouns before adjectives, as in ‘bus yellow.’
- Verbs: Arabic speakers may omit *to be* verbs, especially the present tense as/is/are because the verb does not exist in Arabic. Arabic also does not use *modals* (*can, could, would, should, etc*) so writers may avoid them, add verb endings such as ‘he cans runs,’ or add auxiliaries as ‘he does can go.’ *Phrasal verbs* do not exist in Arabic so writers may avoid them and will commonly make errors or omit the ‘preposition.’
- Prepositions: Arabic uses fewer prepositions. Writers may struggle with the difference between in/on, with/by, etc.
- Pronouns: Writers may overuse or repeat pronouns because Arabic incorporates them into the verbs. Ex. ‘John he works.’
- Punctuation: Comma splices, run-ons, and overuse of conjunctions are common for Arabic speakers writing in English. Punctuation usage in Arabic is freer and it is common to start sentences with and/so repeatedly.

**Learning and Writing Styles**

Students in Arabic speaking countries are most likely going to have been educated in a system of rote-learning, memorization, and under the expectation to reproduce information that was delivered or imparted from an authority – the teacher. The concept of expressing one’s own ideas or opinions, or presenting some original thought, may be new to a writer, and may even be considered unfair. Elicited answering and discussion might also be challenging for students used to ‘learning’ exactly what the teacher says. (Smith 209) Tutors may find the writing from these students to lack opinions and thesis statements, and therefore neglect the teacher’s assignment.

**Chinese** *(all Chinese dialects and other Asian languages)*

Although not all Asian languages are from the same language family as Chinese, the writing systems and education systems are similar, giving the students some similar features in their written English language.
An initial, and lasting, significant difficulty for Asian students learning English is the alphabetic script. Learning and writing the letters is not difficult – especially compared to memorizing and writing thousands of characters, but students find the amount of space a word to use – its length in letters – a challenge. Ideograms present a word in a relatively compact space, so reading in English can be both physically (because the eyes are not trained to read in strings) and cognitively (because of the time and sound memory needed) demanding. (Chang 310) Even in more advanced years of study, Asian students may struggle with comprehension of texts that are longer or convoluted (prompts).

Grammatical Mechanics

- Verbs: Chinese, and related languages, do not conjugate or inflect verbs. Writers will likely have trouble with subject verb agreement, irregular verbs, and simply choosing the correct tense. In Chinese, tense is marked with adverbials, so these might be overused in English. Phrasal verbs also do not exist in Chinese, so writers will likely avoid them.
- Pronouns: The Chinese pronoun system does not distinguish gender or case. Writers may simply always use the same gendered pronoun, as in ‘John is here, she’s inside’ – always choosing ‘she’ regardless of the subject, or writers may choose pronouns randomly. Similarly, the distinction between I/me or my/mine isn’t made, so students may confuse these in English.
- Prepositions: Like many languages with a more regular preposition system, the idiomatic English prepositions will be challenging.
- Plurals: Learners often have trouble remembering to add the plural ‘s’ to nouns because nouns are not marked in their 1st languages. The array of English non-count nouns is confusing also. Some students will tend to ‘over-correct’ and pluralize nouns in incongruous situations.
- Articles: Chinese does not use articles, so the English system is difficult.
- Conjunctions: Writers will commonly over-use conjunction words, placing them at the beginning and middle of a sentence, as in ‘Because I didn’t know him, so I didn’t call him.’

Learning and Writing Styles

The methods of education will greatly affect a writers’ work. Asian students tend to have great respect for teachers and consider them persons of authority, so students may find it difficult to express opinions or share their own ideas. Memorization is a popular learning tool, and Chinese students are especially adept memorizes – probably due to the ideogram writing system that must be memorized (Zhong 7). Unfortunately, memorization skills may not serve students well for writing activities where analysis and explanation are needed. It is also important to note that Asian students are extremely industrious and hard working (Chang 322). A tutor should never assume that a written draft is a 1st, 2nd, or even a 3rd. These students pour over their work and are reluctant to show anyone work that is not their greatest effort. I spent about two years, over a dozen papers, tutoring and working with a Laotian student and never saw a draft fresher than 5th. It is important for tutors to be aware of their responses to these papers that have already been through rigorous readings and rewritings to prevent from making detrimental comments.

South Asian languages (Hindi, Urdu, Nepali, Bengali, and others)

These languages, and others, come from the same language family, so many challenges faced by English learners will be similar for students even with different first languages.

Another group of South Asian languages – including Tamil and Telegu - comes from a different family. The grammatical and sentence level mistakes made by these learners will be different, but the higher-
order writing concerns will be very similar since education style plays a larger role in writing style than mechanics.

It is important to note that English, sometimes called Indian English or South Asian English, may be the first language, or the language of education for these students. South Asian English uses constructions that would be considered incorrect in American or British English, but are correct in this dialect. Dialectical differences are more ‘forgiven’ in spoken language but students who write in Indian English may find the different rules and norms of Academic American English especially challenging – particularly when it comes to self-editing a text. (Shackle 227)

**Grammar and Mechanics**

- **Verb tenses:** Indian languages, like English, uses similar past, present, and future tenses, including simple, progressive, and perfect but learners tend to use the English tenses more universally than allowed. “Verby” sentences, or atypical progressive endings (-ing) stand out. Ex. ‘we are wanting,’ ‘he was understanding,’ ‘you will be knowing.’
- **Modals:** Writers may overuse could, should, would in an attempt to indicate kindness and reserve. Could is sometimes mistakenly used to mark a past attainment, as in ‘we could go’ instead of ‘we were able to go.’
- **Adverbs:** Writers may have trouble distinguishing the connotation of English adverbs, using ‘too’ incorrectly, as in ‘I like it too much’ rather than ‘I like it very much.’ In Indian languages, adverbs can be repeated for emphasis as in ‘please speak slowly slowly’ for ‘please speak very slowly.’
- **Prepositions:** Writers will likely struggle with the appropriate use of on, in, with, for, by, from, to, and others because of the rather idiomatic English usages and because Hindi prefers postpositions.

**Learning and Writing Styles**

South Asians have a great respect for written language and its place in education. Although teachers and tutors can appreciate this respect, it can lead to writers using an elevated, or overly formal, writing style (Shackle 241). Of course, this register may or may not be suited to a course or assignment, but the most challenging aspect may be that students attempt more complicated structures in English, aiming to match their native language styles, and therefore make mechanical and grammatical errors that hinder meaning.

**Works Cited**


African American Vernacular English and the Larger-Than-Academics Problem: Social, Economic, and Educational Immobility and the Loss of Identity

There seems to be a growing awareness of the potential importance of our ever-changing textual world and its effects on young writers, especially speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) whose nonstandard interaction with Standard American English (SAE) writing continues to obstruct their academic and economic success. Many of these students are not only disadvantaged socially and economically, but they also struggle educationally. Many of the obstacles they encounter are similar to those of multilingual students who struggle with cultural and linguistic interference when learning SAE for academic purposes, all the while trying to maintain their personal identities through their organic languages and cultures.

While SAE is institutionally preferred or standardized in academic writing, there may be a need to accept a certain amount of AAVE writing characteristics in order to help AAVE speaking students transition into SAE writing. It should not be our goal as tutors to extinguish the use of AAVE all together. Instead, we should attempt to help these students become aware of the differences and give them the tools to use both appropriately in any given context. Perhaps the adroit ability to move between these varied discourses can then be marveled similar to that of a multilingual individual’s ability to code switch. If you have ever heard a bilingual speaker, say of Spanish and English, utter a sentence that is made up of vocabulary from both languages, then you have witnessed the phenomenon of code switching. This often happens to individuals who speak more than one language and who are no longer translating vocabulary from their native language to the second language in order to speak. Essentially, code switching occurs when a multilingual speaker thinks in more than one language at a time. This is an important skill to teach AAVE speaking students if we want to see them succeed in the academy. More crucially, speakers of AAVE who do not acquire standardized writing practices are left little room for socioeconomic advancement. These socioeconomic and vertical mobility disadvantages haunt many speakers of AAVE culturally, academically, and vocationally. However, as a word of caution to avoid racially stereotyping African Americans, it is imperative to remember that not all African Americans are speakers of AAVE, some speakers of AAVE are of other ethnicities, and being a speaker of AAVE is not necessarily an indication of an AAVE writer.

Stratification can be particularly immobilizing for the successful career advancement of speakers of AAVE with a less than stellar socioeconomic status. AAVE prevents many capable job candidates from either getting a job for which they are qualified or being promoted to do jobs they may have otherwise earned if their use of AAVE was not stigmatized. The stratification of SAE above other varied dialects of English has created a social stratification of speakers of those dialects, especially AAVE, which affects individuals’ lives in many contexts, including their careers. Walker asserts, “A possibility must be stressed that, with becoming standard, there is one less barrier to entrance into the mainstream of society. For example, a job interviewer will not be able to use English as an excuse for not considering a black person for a job” (1977, p. 42). Donlan also recognizes the effect social stratification has on successful mobility and argues “that America’s schools must provide the instruction necessary to free the growing number of disadvantaged from a hapless future of continued poverty and frustration” (1974, p. 261). But I think Joan Baratz’s succinct words, as quoted in Fasold & Shuy, resonate the genuine issue: “In refusing to teach standard English to these [students] we cut off even further their possibility of entering the mainstream of American life” (1970, p.26). Although this is much more general and in response to the issue of neglecting to address AAVE features and teach SAE, the issue is not who should be responsible for the acquisition of SAE, but merely that it is fundamental for the mobile, social, and cultural success of a large demographic of society. Essentially, there is much more at stake for these students than grades or passing a class. When tutoring speakers of AAVE, it is necessary to maintain a keen sensitivity to what more these students have to lose.
The acquisition of SAE for speakers of AAVE is much like bilingualism, and as such, both dialects serve as assets; furthermore, being able to switch between the two dialects could only broaden the social breadth of the community. Cooks urges that students “must master how to switch back and forth between the different genres to be successful” (2004, p.76). Labov (1965) likens this bi-dialect acquisition to bilingualism of foreign language because speakers of nonstandard dialects share three fundamental things in common: many are isolated from SAE, learning SAE does not necessitate neglect for the home dialect, and structural features of AAVE can most certainly cause interference with SAE. Although “the shift to another language in bilingual situations seems to be a radically different step… there is a functional relation between different languages [bilingual] and different styles [monolingual] which cannot be overlooked” (Labov, 1969, p. 21). It is, in fact, favorable for speakers of AAVE to maintain their cultural heritage through their home dialect while acquiring SAE. This idea is similar to code switching in bilingual speakers. However, bi-dialectically, this becomes a complicatedly different phenomenon all together, and for the sake of simplicity, I’ll refer to the bi-dialect phenomenon as code switching as well. Anyone interested in reading further on the subject might consider Labov (1965), Donlan (1974), or McCrary (2005). However, resources on the subject most certainly do not end there. Donlan defines this dialect switching as “the mutual acceptance of both dialects and the ability of the speaker to switch back and forth as the situation demands” (1974, p. 263). We can see the need for this shifting in view of the conflicts that many African Americans face when speaking in different contexts. They may face ridicule from their peers for speaking SAE or may not be taken seriously or treated respectfully at work or in school for speaking AAVE. This makes it a social necessity for speakers of AAVE to have the ability to switch back and forth between SAE and AAVE.

This bi-dialectic shift should be embraced or, at least, encouraged as a positive tool for rhetoric and voice. McCrary advocates it as giving students “the freedom to make a contribution to academic discourse by using their own language or voices and the values embedded within them…because that is what is denied to many other-literate students in the academy” (2005, p. 75). Their are common rhetorical issues in the writing of speakers of AAVE, such as the tendency to use a tone much like the preacher Martin Luther King or other African American orators, and some awareness of audience will often show in a shifting in and out of this “high-context” and “low-context” rhetoric (Blackburn & Stern, 2000; Chapman, 1994; Linn, 1995). Often you will find a rhythm, pacing, and preachy tone similar to what you might hear from a speech from Martin Luther King, Malcom X, or Barack Obama, especially when they are addressing an African American audience. The dry nature of academic writing, which rejects the performing style of AAVE writing, creates a formidable reaction to SAE writing for these students because it is so far detached from the style of their home dialect and overall culture. As Linn states, “Thus the incoming African American students, who have grown up being passionately involved with their arguments, must learn the rhetoric and stylistics of presenting ideas as though they were completely objective and impartial and that the ideas had an objective life of their own” (1995, p. 39). Balester shows how African American students’ perception of prestige is why they use the passionate tone of a preacher, explaining, “They are attempting to be identified with educated or sometimes literary language by using features stereotypically associated with it. Their stereotypes quite naturally will come from discourse they perceive as elevated or prestigious” (1993, p. 78). I find it most important to draw these writers’ attention to the difference in tones between the two varieties in English. Sometimes this can be a delicate task. We certainly do not want to give the impression that we judge or mock, as this dialect variation has strong racial implications which I would argue miss the mark grossly when we ignore the role of socioeconomics. Nonetheless, I will refrain from the urge to rant on about it in this article. So how can we bring light to this rhetorical variation between SAE and AAVE? One way might be to search the internet for a two speeches, letters, etc. by the same orator (MLK, Malcom X, etc.) and have one written intended for a white, college educated audience and compare that to one written for members of that speaker’s community. The idea is to show our AAVE writers 1) what code switching is and 2) how to do it. Most of the time, they do not even see the AAVE features which makes it necessary for tutors to find a way to bring them to a writers attention when they are present in the writing. I have never experienced an AAVE writer refuse to write SAE (although I might be inclined to view this as refreshing and powerful). Like all other writers on campus, they want to get good grades, pass classes, and graduate. Just because a writer has a difficult time with taking an appropriate and consistent rhetorical approach when they write, does not mean that
they are unaware of the social implications attached to them. Thus begins the struggle for a new identity somewhere in between, one that will be accepted by both communities of speakers.

The academy’s expectations of SAE production in college composition papers necessitate an aggressive growth of SAE in the writing of speakers of AAVE in order for the demographic to attain social and vertical mobility. Nonetheless, adherence to expectations and standards by this disadvantaged population is not necessarily the primary concern. As tutors, we are educators, and as educators, we have a responsibility to avoid stifling the African American voice while attempting to instill appropriate SAE writing features for their success in academic work and business. By stifling their style completely, we run the risk of causing more damage than just dry, formulaic, unoriginal term papers; we run the risk of destroying their social and cultural identities. The academy values a sophisticated use of voice, but this is a sophistication which speakers of AAVE, as novice writers, lack. Cooks explains that students “must learn not to think of writing in a hierarchical structure but rather to think of all types of writing as being equally valid” (2004, p. 76). Roozen reminds us to consider “how important it is in human terms to look at the whole person, to support the extracurricular activities as well as the curricular” (2008, p. 30). Throughout my experiences working with speakers of AAVE, I have noticed a strong resistance to this hierarchical structure, especially with students new to an academic community, but the institution has built that structure and has maintained it. These writers are not the only ones who need to stop thinking of writing as a hierarchical structure. We all do. Perhaps this breakdown begins with the tutor. We have the power to be sensitive and encouraging, of bringing awareness to the African American student of the significance of having a strong control over both dialects. Educators have a responsibility to provide more for students than standard methods. As composition tutors, we encourage students to develop their own ideas and arguments by supporting them with evidence and analysis. We explain that we value their opinions, that we are interested in what makes them unique and progressive thinkers. However, we need to listen because listening is a fundamental signal that we truly value what they have to say.

Getting off the soap box, there are definitely practical approaches to working with the writing of speakers of AAVE. One of the best places to begin is just knowing which features are common (and sometimes even unique) in their writing. Like code switching, you may recognize some of these features as ‘errors’ you might find in an ESL writer’s paper. It should come as small surprise, then, that often the best way to approach these features in an AAVE speaker/writer’s paper is with more direct and explicit feedback as we would an ESL paper.

- They will rarely omit a plural –s if it is pronounced /z/
  The boys and girls bought stamp to mail letters to their three cat.

- Possessive –s in noun possessive construction is often omitted
  The lady purse is pink.

- 3rd person singular –s is almost always omitted
  Everyone drive to work at the same time.

- Dropped –ed past-tense marker
  We park the car too far away, yesterday.

- There is often an absence of inflected “is” and “are”
  She ( ) mad cuz we ( ) fly.
“be” used to mark habitual actions in the simple present tense.
He be callin me all the time.

“been” used in past perfect and present perfect progressive
You been sleepin a long time. (past perfect)
He been sleepin. (present perfect progressive)

“done” as future perfect or intensifier
I be done finish when you get here. (future perfect)
I been done had some. (intensifier)

Absence of “if” or “whether”
She don’t know ( ) he gonna come come home.

Double prepositions are often used.

Apostrophes are often not included.

Perhaps the list above looks like unforgivable errors for any native speaker of English. However, I urge you to consider further reading if you find yourself having a similar response. Labov (1972) and Smitherman (1977) have done some extensive and fascinating research to determine why these features exist in AAVE. In a nutshell, when Africans entered the American population through the slave trade, they brought with them nonnative languages with different grammar systems. As they acquired English, just like any other second language learner, certain features of their native languages remained. Researches, including but not limited to Labov (1972) and Smitherman (1977), have identified many of the features in the list above as grammatical rules found in languages native to West Africans. Of course, this is a grossly oversimplified explanation, but I would hope that it prevents anyone from viewing AAVE as an inferior dialect. The following five suggestions are what I consider key to successfully working with AAVE speaking writers:

Build a rapport with the tutee. Spend some time getting to know them. Help them view you as an ally, as someone who is knowledgeable and genuinely concerned about them as an individual. This trust is absolutely necessary in order to affectively address some of the sensitive issues that will surface. There will be no need to shy away from open communication if proper rapport is established.

Bring awareness to the features in their writing which are inherently AAVE by attempting to show the differences, especially rhetorical features. Many of the grammar features can be addressed more simply in the beginning as you would with any other writer. However, after building a solid relationship with your tutee, you just might decide to discuss some of the dialectic implications with some of these as well. The importance initially is awareness.

Openly discuss the cultural, social, economical, and educational implications (again building rapport) as they arise. Do not be afraid to discuss some of the issues we address in this article with your tutee. Just be wise and sensitive. Remember that your ultimate goal is to help the writer with their writing. While open communication is essential, we must be careful not to over indulge and take away from the writer’s right to our time with their writing.

Address necessary features through practice. Use the internet to find texts that might be valuable in comparing and contrasting rhetorical features in SAE and AAVE. Use handouts and give mini-lessons you are familiar with to address less prominent grammatical ‘errors’. Use many of the same techniques you use with all writers to address higher order concerns (i.e., focus, organization, development). If a
Communicate the value of maintaining their voice once they gain control of using both SAE and AAVE. Hopefully, during our open discussions, we will have touched on the educational implications brought about through both AAVE and SAE writing. If our tutees reach a place in their writing where they show advanced control over both dialects, we get to embark on the joyous task of helping them find ways to maintain their identity by creatively incorporating some rhetorical features of AAVE. Perhaps once they reach this point, they won’t be coming to tutoring sessions, but if nothing else, we need to encourage individuality by acknowledging the value of a tutee’s voice and teaching them to acknowledge that value as well.

This is a recursive process. It is not linear. It is important to perpetually build trust and rapport, to discuss and communicate openly about said implications and the value of maintaining identity through voice, all the while bringing to light existing features and providing the appropriate tools to give the writer independent control down the road. Once a strong confidence is established between tutor and tutee, you might find that these are some of the hardest working writers you will ever work with.

References


Chicano English: Understanding a Significant Dialect and its Writers

Here’s a Story

I still remember when Maria and Truong came storming in to my dorm room after English class our freshmen year: they were upset. Shaking essays in my face, they complained that the professor had told them they had “ESL issues” and even asked the loaded question, “Is English your first language?” Maria and Truong were upset because English was their primary language, they saw themselves as average American, English speaking eighteen year olds that just happened to have Spanish and Asian surnames. While they did speak second languages fairly well, they couldn’t write in them and couldn’t figure out why their writing would seem “accented”—it just seemed normal to them and it was normal, just not “standard.” What they hadn’t realized and what their professor didn’t know, was that they spoke and wrote in non-SAE dialects that were structurally influenced by their parents’ primary languages of Vietnamese and Spanish; consequently, these two students felt a sense of cultural betrayal by being labeled, essentially, as linguistic outsiders.

It is important to distinguish students like Maria and Truong, who write in non-SAE dialects from those students who truly write in English as their second language because they have different needs—this is not always easy though. As tutors and teachers, we are generally taught about African American dialects of English as well as regional dialects, but rarely do we discuss the emerging English dialects that borrow structural features from the languages of growing, initially immigrant, populations. For example, students like Maria and Truong are generally discussed as “ESL” students rather than students who speak or write in alternate dialects of English—it’s just been easier to do this instead of taking the time to address the needs of writers of all the variants of English.

Passive Bilingualism & SSL Speakers

It is difficult to explain how or why the many variants of English exist and emerge, except to acknowledge that English, like all other languages, is constantly changing to meet the needs of its speakers. When English comes into contact with another language, or when people who speak other languages begin to speak primarily in English, the possibility of creating new dialects of English is present. The United States, being a unique mecca of language contact, has developed many dialects of English. For example, in California, where there is a large and growing Latino population, Chicano English or ChE is an important dialect to be aware of when tutoring and teaching.

Linguists Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman, describe ChE as “a distinct dialect of American English…which is the native language of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Americans (1998, 419). These linguists also say that ChE is heavily influenced by Spanish and differs both systemically and phonologically from SAE (1998, 419). ChE most likely emerged as a natural English language development that began when bilingual Spanish and English speakers began code-switching—a process where bilingual speakers use both of their languages within a single phrase or sentence (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998, 418). And while no one can tell for certain, it is safe to say that ChE is becoming more common in part, because of passive bilingualism and the growing numbers of Spanish as a Second Language speakers.
Like other immigrant groups and Native American groups, Chicanos/as and Mexican Americans have historically been pressured to assimilate into the “dominant culture.” Who in California hasn’t heard a story about someone who was reprimanded in school for speaking Spanish? The social pressure to abandon Spanish, and legislative legal moves towards English Only laws (see Crawford, Perea & Moran), have led to more passive bilingualism. Passive bilingualism refers to people who can speak a non-English language, but make the political choice not to. Most often passive bilinguals are parents who feel their kids will be better off if they only teach them English. This impacts ChE in two ways: first, passive bilinguals are often ChE speakers and so, their children learn ChE as a first language; secondly, children who are kept from learning Spanish may try to learn ChE or cling to it as their only linguistic link to their ancestry.

On a more positive note, plenty of Chicanos/as, Mexican Americans and others are maintaining or learning Spanish as a second language. This means that more people are able to code-switch, and consequently, can understand and pick up on the syntactic and systemic features of ChE. So, SSL speakers may also normally or naturally write or speak in ChE, as it is the dialect of English that is most in-line with their linguistic make-up. SSL speakers of ChE are also important to note because, while they do speak Spanish, they may not have the grammar skills in Spanish that we sometimes assume they have. Many Chicano/a or Mexican American Spanish speakers speak a North American dialect of Spanish that follows several regional and archaic usage rules that are not standard in Mexican Spanish (Anzaldúa, 1999, 79). Therefore, it’s probably not going to aid them in understanding a non-standard English usage error by saying, “how would you say this in Spanish?” or by trying to figure out what Spanish usage rule they may be applying.

Some Common Characteristics of ChE

**Spelling Notes:** While English has eleven stressed vowel phonemes, Spanish only has five (i, e, u, o, a), so in both speech and writing, words like read and rid may sound and be written the same way (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998, 419). This means that when ChE writers attempt phonetic spelling in SAE, they may have some difficulty seeing or hearing the difference between their spelling and the standard spelling of a word. ChE spelling and speech may also use ch and sh interchangeably, resulting in words like chow for show and share for chair. The same is true of the letters b and v and c, s, and z (1998, 419). Another spelling difference between ChE and SAE that you may see, is called word-final consonant simplification, where past tense suffixes are deleted, for example, I star school at 2pm or she marry him yesterday (1998, 420). The words for to may also be used instead of only for or to since in Spanish they are more often strung together. An example of this would be a phrase like, we are ready for to go on the trip.

**Syntactic Differences:** Fromkin and Rodman note that “in Spanish, a negative sentence includes a negative morpheme before the verb even if another negative appears; thus negative concord is a regular rule of ChE syntax” (1998, 420). The written and spoken result of this rule may be sentences like I don have no more or he don know nothin. These linguists also point out that there is a regular difference between the “use of comparative more to mean more often and the preposition out from to mean away from. The resulting ChE sentences may look like I want to get out from my apartment or She uses cilantro more (1998, 420). Something else that may appear in ChE writing is a habitual use of the words the, that and to. Since in Spanish masculine or feminine markers usually precede nouns, ChE writers may insert the, that or to to compensate for the lack of SAE markers. For example, a sentence may read In that book, The Awakening the mother to commit suicide drown herself.
Probably the most important suggestion I can make about approaching ChE writers is to treat them as non-SAE speakers rather than as ESL students. The main reason I say this is because ChE students are not learning English, they know English, but they may still need to learn how to translate their writing into SAE for the sake of completing academic papers. Dialect translation is not an easy skill to learn, but it can be encouraged by asking ChE writers to work on editing their own work, comparing their sentence structure to the SAE version of the same sentence, and by identifying and naming their individual usage trends so that they can learn to identify their own. The main goal should be to address their usage trends in the context of their writing rather than as singular grammar problems to be attacked through drills and endless usage jargon ala “you’re devoicing your consonants”.

A final suggestion I will make about ChE writers is on how to identify them and differentiate them from ESL students. These are not iron-clad rules, but consider the possibility that you are working with a ChE writer if:

- He doesn’t speak Spanish
- He can’t write in Spanish
- While he knows Spanish and even if it is his first language, most of his schooling happened in the United States
- She grew up in an enclave where ChE is a dominant dialect of English.
It Is Ok. I Am an Expert.

Tutoring is an acquired skill. The time spent in class and studying articles such as this one will not fully prepare you for what you are about to face. A significant portion of it can only be taught to you by the tutee. One case that requires much practice is learning how to tutor someone who has a different major than you.

Now before you think, “Well, maybe I’ll get lucky and avoid it,” you won’t. It’s going to happen. It’s common to be afraid of the idea of tutoring someone in a subject that you are unfamiliar with. How are you to know how to help this person? Because you just unwittingly signed up to tutor any student at any level of any subject, does this mean you now must go out and do a crash research of everything?

The good news is that this is the writing center. It is not the chemistry center or the business center. You don’t need even a general knowledge of the subject that the tutee brings to the session. You are only responsible for helping them improve their writing. And the ability to articulate oneself through the written word is universal across the curriculum.

With this in mind, you may still find yourself wanting to look up your scheduled tutees, maybe check out their Facebook and do a bit of research on their subject prior to your session. Depending upon your zest for knowledge, that could mean anything from spending hours in the library to looking up their subject on Wikipedia. That is ok. Doing your best to familiarize yourself with their subject ahead of time can open the door to swifter modes of communication. And I’m sure the tutee will appreciate your efforts.

But it is highly unlikely that the tutee will bring in something as basic as you were able to learn in those few days prior to your session. In fact, they may not even show up for the session at all. Being a tutor means being flexible and ready to adapt to a new situation at a moment’s notice. Your appointment with the genetic botany major may be cancelled at the last minute and filled by a walk-in who needs help on their psychology thesis. At that point, all the time you spent reading up on plant genetics becomes wasted. It would’ve been better spent working on your own studies or drinking margaritas.

Don’t be afraid. This does not mean the situation is hopeless. Truth be told, there are cases in which a complete ignorance about the subject at hand can actually help the dynamic of the session.

When a tutee signs up for a session, they are often unintentionally placed in a subordinate role right out of the gate. As it is today, the writing center unfortunately has a stigma of being a place for “a lower order of writers who need help getting on the same level as the rest of us.” New tutees come in with the idea that they are somehow not good enough to do this alone and need the help of an authority on writing. Not always, but often enough, they will first admit to themselves that they have a problem and then show up with their tail between their legs and sheepishly ask for help.

Of course, this is not correct. But it is common. And this kind of dynamic makes for a very poor session, one in which the tutee is quiet and reserved, possibly just handing over their paper and saying, “I need you to fix this for me.”

Our duty as tutors is to use our entire toolbox of skills to combat this. In this case, we will do so by embracing our lack of knowledge. It is not the only way and should not be relied on as a fix-all, but it definitely helps in certain situations.
The goal of this is to turn things around and place them as the authority on the subject. Simple questions regarding the nature of the assignment are helpful for any tutoring session. But now, you can ask simple questions regarding the nature of the discipline. When they tell you what class their paper is for, don’t be afraid to follow that up with an “Ok. What is that exactly?”

Suddenly, they are thrust into the role of the teacher, telling you, the person they originally held in the traditional professor role as “untouchable expert,” about things that they consider to be the most basic. It helps to place the tutor and tutee on a level field. This is key to the writing center model. We are not working in the traditional professor and student roles. We are peers helping peers. No one is supposed to dominate or be the absolute authoritarian. And if this balance is to tip, it should be in favor of the tutee. “Ownership of the piece is the writer’s and must remain so for the greatest growth in writing and revision proficiency to occur” (McAndrew 73).

Showing them that they too are the expert gives them a much needed boost in confidence. They may come in feeling that just because they are having trouble writing, they are no good at anything. This technique quickly dispels any such thoughts. It gets the shy tutees to open up, and it gets the extroverted started on one of their favorite activities: talking.

So much hinges on getting the tutee talking. They become comfortable in their environment, stop focusing on distractions, such as the fact that they are speaking to someone they don’t know personally, and begin working on how they can instead solve the task at hand. Just the act of them talking about something they know gets their brain into the habit of formulating words from ideas. I imagine that would only stimulate similar brain activity and make it easier for them to articulate whatever part of their study they are trying to get down on paper.

Although it works wonderfully, the asking of simple questions is not just for breaking the ice at the beginning of a session. Keep it in mind throughout as a way of perpetuating conversation if you ever find things starting to slow down too much. But you should only use this in moderation and after carefully reading the tutee’s body language, tone of voice, etc. You don’t want to break their train of thought or take the focus away from their goals for the session. And you don’t want to give the impression you’re an idiot, either.

In the end, it’s ok if you don’t know anything about the subject at hand. Just make sure you know how to gauge the situation and help the tutee feel comfortable in their role as an equal in the session and an expert in the subject.
The Value of Writing Center Tutors as Writing Tutors

Current pedagogy attempts to define effective practices in writing centers in response to the perceived potential of this ‘other’ space. Operating outside institutionally imposed expectations, but charged with supporting the less powerful individuals within that institution, tutors and writing center administrators are confronted with a tremendous challenge: support the ‘man’ or fight the ‘man’? Tutors find themselves at the center of a tug-of-war as theorists vie to define their methods and rescue writing instruction from its quandary of whether to focus on teaching standards or honoring diversity. Much of this discussion stems from differing views on what the purpose of a writing center and, more specifically, a tutor are. In particular, theorists (and practitioners in our class) do not agree on the basic tenets of how a writing center should be structured: most basically, in what subject areas tutors should be trained.

Although this seems like a fairly basic question (i.e. we are writing tutors, so shouldn’t we be trained in writing?), it actually poses a subject for much discussion in the world of theory. Most notably, this discussion plays out in the debate between having discipline-specific tutors that focus on particular areas of study and generalized tutors who are trained in the discipline of writing.

The first step we wish to take in order to enter into this conversation is to establish a vocabulary with which to discuss this issue, and, in so doing give a sense of the purpose of this paper. There is no reasonable distinction between what has been described as a “discipline-specific” tutor and a “generalized” tutor. A “discipline-specific” tutor is trained in a specific discipline. So too is the “generalized” tutor. The “generalized” tutor is trained in the discipline of writing and will for our purposes be called a writing-specific tutor, a term that we feel more effectively captures the expertise of tutors working in most writing centers today. Furthermore, this nomenclature is more appropriate for those who staff writing centers, the purpose of which is to tutor students on writing-specific tasks.

In Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences, Donald McAndrew and Thomas Reigstad propose that tutoring is best performed by tutors with specialized training in the disciplines of their tutees. This proposal is based on a 1993 study performed by Jean Kiedaish and Sue Dinitz in which they observe that “students writing papers for upper-level courses would be best served by carefully trained tutors with knowledge of the discipline,” a position McAndrew and Reigstad support (McAndrew 72). The authors argue that although generalized tutors can help writers in all disciplines well enough, “well-trained tutors who are knowledgeable about a discipline can be of even more help because they can read like the audience for the piece, in this case experts in the discipline” (73). Further, although McAndrew and Reigstad recognize the benefits of specialized and writing-specific tutors, they pose that “the best would be to acknowledge areas of expertise among all tutors and cluster that expertise into specialty teams based on academic areas” (73). They conclude that a writing center would function best if it were broken up into schools of study, like “colleges in a university” (73). This, they assert, would allow tutors to have a greater knowledge base of the subject matter students are writing about as well as the conventions of discourse expected in the discipline.

Although the benefit of discipline-specific tutors might be seen as their ability to converse more confidently with the tutee about the area of study, we might conclude from this, however, that the discipline-specific tutor is in greater danger than a writing-specific tutor of focusing on content rather than the writing process of the tutee. This concern is echoed again and again by theorists attempting to address perceived problems of writing centers. If North’s contention is correct and tutors improve writers and not texts, then discipline-specific tutoring can have a negative impact on tutoring sessions. Potentially, these tutors could harm a tutee’s development as a writer by focusing on helping her or him create a text that is adequate in regards to content, instead of helping the tutee become a more successful writer over all. In the seemingly never-ending battle to discourage academia from seeing the writing center as a “fix-it” shop, there is a de-emphasis on grammar and other mechanical concerns. To tell tutees that we won’t fix your grammar but we’ll be happy to fix your content will certainly impair efforts to
assert the mission of writing centers as places that seek to improve the writer rather than mastery of content.

Discipline-specific tutors would presumably also have a stronger grasp of the conventions of the discipline than the tutee. This too can lead to a tutoring relationship in which the tutor is seen as the expert and the writer a mere disciple, a dynamic that very closely mirrors the classroom and therefore diminishes the benefits of the writing center as a space in which the benefits of collaboration is a driver of success. Furthermore, unless the tutor has access to the classroom, even the most skilled discipline-specific tutor will not be as qualified as the student to understand the writing task. While many instructors practice the rhetorical techniques of writing effective prompts, most writing tasks are communicated not just through the written prompt but also through classroom practices, exercises and culture. Thus, it is the tutee that must be held responsible for understanding and communicating to the tutor the purpose of the writing task, something they may feel unqualified to do during a session with a perceived “expert.”

According to McAndrew and Reigstad, research on the benefits of peer group work has shown that peer groups “develop their own metalanguage about writing that allows them to discuss writing processes and products in ways that teacher-supplied language rarely does” (McAndrew 9). This “teacher-supplied language,” however, seems to closely describe the kind of language discipline-specific tutors would speak. Instead of bringing in a new, quizzical voice that tutors often do when faced with a subject they are unfamiliar with, discipline-specific tutors may simply reinforce the language of the teacher. The idea behind having more specially trained tutors is that in engaging in discourse with a discipline-specific tutor, the tutee would further gain access to that discourse community. The hope is that through working with the tutor, the tutee would gain a better understanding of the content area they are studying and the conventions they are expected to use in writing. While this sounds ideal, it does not, however, allow for a space that is at least partially separated from the requirements of the instructor and a discipline in which students can engage in sincere questioning of their subject. This oversight is unfortunate as it suggests the omnipresence of the instructor and institution.

What is particular about writing centers that entices so much interest from theorists is that they pose a place where the institution may be challenged because of the student-centered nature they embody. One thing that is often glossed over in many discussions of the role of writing centers and their tutors is the population that comprises these centers: tutees are students and tutors are students. What these players have in common is that they are learners, primarily engaged in a quest to gain knowledge, and they are people that almost certainly participate in various discourse communities. To further delve into the implications of this, we turn to feminist theory and how it can be used to describe the work being done in today’s writing centers. According to McAndrew and Reigstad, there are “three distinct aspects of feminist teaching” (which, it is important to note, don’t have anything to do with being male or female, oppressed or oppressor). At the center of feminist theory is the desire to encourage a deeper engagement on the part of the learner in three ways: feminist theory “redefines subject mastery as seeking knowledge on personal terms and in concert with others,” “it awakens students’ voices, encouraging and supporting them in expressing their responses and life experiences,” and “it establishes a new authority in the classroom: Students are responsible for their own learning because the learning is grounded in their life experiences” (McAndrew 7). While tutors might struggle to see how to enact the first two tenets in half-hour tutoring sessions with drop-in tutees, we might all agree that learning should be the responsibility of the learner—and is, perhaps, only successful under those conditions. We should not shy away from placing a significant portion of the responsibility for their learning process on the tutee, for it is their education for which they come to the writing center. Tutees should be expected to bring the knowledge of their own discipline with them to a session, including content and conventions, while tutors should bring the knowledge they have of their discipline as well, their knowledge of writing. We can, of course, help them determine where to find the information they need about their discipline if they do not have it. However, tutors are not simply there to reinforce the knowledge of the instructor and the institution the tutee is already coping with, but to help them find their own place as writers within their discipline. We do not need to be experts in other disciplines in order to help students understand the knowledge base and
expectation of their disciplines more clearly through discussion. If we come to a session aware that there are other ways of thinking and knowing in various colleges around campus, then we can help students become more knowledgeable members of the academic writing community, as well as the language and knowledge community they wish to belong to, no matter what community that is.

In her essay, “Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center,” Andrea Lunsford advocates for a writing center based in collaboration, specifically “collaboration that is attuned to diversity” (Lunsford 51). From her extensive research, Lunsford enumerates many benefits of collaborative learning, including enhanced problem solving skills, interdisciplinary thinking, and a “deeper understanding of others” (49). A collaborative view of the writing center such as this would capitalize on the benefits of a feminist approach for tutoring described above that “redefines subject mastery as seeking knowledge on personal terms and in concert with others” (McAndrew 7). Here, the question is not how do we overcome differences between tutors and tutees, but rather, how do we capitalize on them. Lunsford connects this benefit to the demands of the workplace by citing reports from the Labor Department indicating that to be successful in today’s workforce, students “will need to be able to work with others who are different from them and to learn to negotiate power and control” (52). The idea that students need to learn to “negotiate power and control” is not new, and the question remains to be definitively answered if learning happens best in an environment that is teacher-led, student-led, or defined by power-sharing/decentered authority. Writing center advocates invariably come out on the side of a decentered authority. When tutors and tutees are both able to approach a tutoring session as learners and experts, who each have valuable knowledge to contribute to academic discussion, tutoring sessions can become a place where difference is not simply “dealt with,” but rather where it is what ignites the academic curiosity and discussion that is necessary for learning to occur.

When tutoring takes place with discipline-specialized tutors, the equal exchange of differing questions and expertise is lost, for the ownership lays with the tutor, as that is where the knowledge resides. Tutors would clearly know more about the subject matter and the writing conventions than the tutee, leaving the tutor in the power position. In tutoring sessions with writing-specific tutors, on the other hand, knowledge resides in both parties and opportunities to generate new, shared knowledge emerge, a benefit expressly acknowledged by feminist theory. A writing-specific tutor can offer the kind of audience that asks the tutee to take authority over the subject she or he is addressing, for in most cases, the tutee will know more about their content, even if the tutor knows more about the writing process in general. Instead of offering another audience similar to the instructor, one who knows the content and conventions better than the student, the writing tutor can provide a much safer space that gives more room for the tutee to be the expert. This equalizes the subject positions between tutor and tutee, for they both possess a level of expertise and can therefore work collaboratively as learners. This can allow students to develop the “voice” feminist theory calls for because it respects the knowledge and worldview of the tutee, not just the expert tutor or instructor. According to Rebecca Moore Howard, in her essay “Collaborative Pedagogy,” “students can teach each other; more important, they can discover things that individually they might not” (59). Howard quotes Lunsford and Ede, who claim that “successful collaboration … allows not only for ‘group cohesion’ but also for ‘creative conflict’ and the protection of ‘minority views’” (65). When generalized tutors place students as “responsible for their own learning” and expect them to contribute their own “life experience” in a meaningful way to the session, then collaboration can be successful because the tutor’s and the tutee’s views are both placed as the “minority view.” Neither viewpoint is privileged if both come as equals who have expertise in differing areas of study. They can each contribute and thereby create new knowledge, not just reaffirm the knowledge supplied by instructors.

Writing center tutoring is based on the idea that collaboration is an effective learning method. Ideally, collaborative learning decenters authority, reduces the stakes for writing, and fosters growth through an appreciation of differences. However, this appreciation of difference has not always been the focus of collaborative learning. According to Lunsford and Ede, “collaborative learning theory has from its inception failed to challenge traditional concepts of radical individualism and ownership of ideas and has operated primarily in a traditional and largely hierarchical way” (Howard 61). In her essay “Peer
Response in the Multicultural Composition Classroom: Dissensus—A Dream (Deferred),” Carrie Shively Leverenz also explores this deficiency. She states that “although (early collaborative) pedagogy does give students practice in how to become members of established knowledge-making communities, it does not give them a mechanism for critiquing those communities” (2). How to teach this ability to question the institution in which one operates is keeping theorists everywhere awake at night. Luckily for us, as writing center tutors, we are inclined to encourage this kind of questioning, whether we mean to or not. Because of our ‘in-between’ role—not quite instructors, but not quite devoid of all authority—the collaborative environment we create will naturally be a place where standards and value systems are challenged. Collaboration at its roots encourages questioning because people share their systems of thought and in this transaction, thinking changes. We do not need to become experts in the disciplines of our tutees, but rather become experts in sharing and receiving knowledge, for in order for collaboration to really work, both parties must come to value the knowledge of the other. If one contributor is the expert in everything, it is not collaboration, just another classroom.

Perhaps to answer our question of how exactly our tutors should be trained we should consider why we have a writing center at Sac State in the first place. In general, we think it is fairly safe to say that most of the tutors in our writing center are tutors because they feel that writing is an important process that students should learn, and believe that through discussing the process of writing with a peer, students can become better writers and more confident thinkers. Through approaching the concept of the writing center with respect for the discipline of writing and for the learning process of students, we should not feel the need to convert our center into a biology or history tutoring center. Providing an environment that values collaboration and shared experience and expects students to be responsible and active learners in their own writing process will encourage learning among both tutor and tutee in a way that allows both to succeed in and out of the institution.

Works Cited


How to Teach Students to Understand Prompts + An Exercise

In addressing students’ poor performance on written assignments such as essays, tutors often find that the source of the problem was the first step in the writers’ process: reading and responding to the prompt. All too often students come into the writing center with a draft that partly or completely misses the point of the prompt, even if the writing was itself good. Either the student didn’t understand what the prompt was asking, lost focus and went in a different direction with the paper, or didn’t answer all of the questions the prompt asks.

What students must understand is that essay assignments are usually tests of knowledge. They show the instructor that you have an understanding of the material that is deeper than being able to recognize the correct answer on a multiple choice test or memorize a term to fill in a blank. That being said, it is important to thoroughly develop and respond to all aspects of the prompt. What if a student forgets to answer 25% of a multiple choice test? Even if they answered the rest of the test perfectly, they could still only get a 75% (C). This is why, no matter how well written an essay is, it will lose credit if it doesn’t respond to the prompt properly.

Through experience, I’ve developed two techniques students can use to make sure they are answering all the questions/aspects of the prompts and staying focused. They are prompt dissection and keywording.

Prompt dissection involves separating the sentences of a prompt, simplifying them by figuring out what they’re really asking, and making each sentence a question, if possible. It converts the prompt from a wordy paragraph to a simple list. Prompt Dissection may look like outlining, but it’s not (though it may turn out that the dissection will provide an outline). The process goes something like this:

Step 1) Underline information that is NOT asking you to do anything. This may include background information about the topic, a review of things you’ve been studying, etc.
Step 2) List all other sentences on a blank page with space between each sentence for notes. Some sentences may contain more than one command, such as: “Describe the ways in which music affects society and your own personal life. Notice that there are two very different things to write about here: society and yourself. When you list them on the blank page, list them separately.
Step 3) If you aren’t sure what you are being asked to do, ask the teacher or someone else if they can clarify. Ask others and yourself what the question is really asking and simplify it.
Step 4) Understand and write down the instructor’s intent. They gave you this essay for reasons other than torturing you. What does the professor want you to learn? What knowledge does the instructor want you to demonstrate?
Step 5) As you write and after you finish your draft, go through each request on your list and find where you discuss it in the essay. If you can’t find it, or find that you didn’t talk much about it, you probably need to add it in.
Keywords are single words that define what you are supposed to discuss in the essay. There will usually be several. Keeping these words in mind and being sure that they appear in every paragraph will help keep you on topic. The following page contains examples of Prompt Dissection and Keywording.

Prompt Dissection Example
Sample prompt similar to that found in a composition course

Remember- the focus is on dissecting what the writer needs to say to satisfy the prompt.

Language discourse communities are groups which communicate in ways unique to those communities. For example, you probably communicate and use language (verbal and physical) differently depending on who you are with or where you are: with family, friends, at a doctor’s office, in the classroom, meeting with a teacher, on a baseball team, etc. Choose a language community that you are a part of and describe the way the people within that community communicate. What features of communication, such as specific words, level of formality, and body language appear in this community that are not likely to appear in other communities? How is this different from the ways other communities might communicate? What does all of this reveal about the effects of context on language and writing?

Step 1) The underlined sentences are those that give an introduction to the material that will be covered in the paper. It is not giving direction on what to write, just background information. Therefore, it doesn’t make the list.

Step 2) We list the sentences separately:

- Choose a language community that you are a part of
- Describe the way people within that community communicate
- What features of communication, such as specific words, level of formality, body language, etc. appear in this community that are not likely to appear in other communities?
- How is this different from the ways other communities might communicate?
- What does all this reveal about the effects of context on language and writing?

Step 3) The third and fourth sentences are a little confusing, so we can try to simplify them. They are both basically asking the same thing: How do people in group/situation A communicate differently than people in group/situation B, C, or E? How does a group of college aged friends communicate differently than middle aged coworkers in a meeting? What the essay is really asking the writer to do is compare/contrast the way people in different groups communicate.
Step 4) The last sentence reveals *what the instructor wants the writer to learn*: how context (where you are, who you’re with, the situation you’re in) affects the way you speak or write. By recognizing the difference, we can understand why someone speaks>writes much differently to a friend than a boss. It is quite likely that this will be discussed in the conclusion (what you’ve learn is what you conclude)

Step 5) **Review** the list of requests that the prompt makes, always keeping them in mind while writing and revising

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**Keywording Example (same prompt)**

Language discourse communities are groups that communicate in ways unique to those communities. For example, you probably communicate and use language (verbal and physical) differently depending on who you are with or where you are: with family, friends, at a doctor’s office, in the classroom, meeting with a teacher, on a baseball team, etc. Choose a **language community** that you are a part of and describe the **way the people** within that community **communicate**. What **features** of communication, such as **specific words**, **level of formality**, **body language**, **etc.** appear in this community that are **not likely to appear in other communities**? How is this **different** from the ways **other communities** might communicate? What does all of this **reveal** about the effects of **context** on language and writing?

What words in this prompt seem to be very important? My own analysis tells me the words in bold are important. This isn’t the same as dissecting, which figures out what you’re supposed to do in the essay. If that were the case, I would have bolded the verbs “choose” and “describe.” Keywords simply define what the essay should be about. You should find yourself using these keywords or their synonyms quite often. If you’re not, you’re probably not on topic.

This exercise was very effective for a student of mine who was writing an essay about a nearly identical prompt about language use in language communities, and how that language was unique to that community. Using two two keywords- **language** and **unique**, we went through each paragraph to see if those words were there. In most paragraphs, they weren’t, and synonyms such as “methods of communication” or “different” weren’t there as substitutes either, This helped the student see that he wasn’t on topic. We used this method constantly every couple of sentences he added; I asked him, “Ok, what does this have to do with **language**?” He was often quite surprised to find that the answer was nothing.

Using these methods, we eventually crafted a very focused draft that addressed all aspects of the prompt. I encourage all tutors to give the techniques of Prompt Dissection and Keywording a try. Some students (usually English 121) will occasionally come in with nothing to work on. Since misunderstanding prompts is such a common problem, this would be a good exercise for them to do. On the next page is a different prompt you can use with these students. Or, if you’re more comfortable having them apply the techniques to the above example of which you’re already familiar, do that. If students do bring a prompt, you can have them use these techniques with their own prompt. If they’re having a problem doing that, give them one of these sample prompts to work on; they may have an easier time applying the concepts to something
new. Keep in mind that although students may not be at all familiar with the subject the prompt is referring to, they can still extract the requests/questions the prompt is asking for.

Sample Prompt 2- From a Philosophy of Religion Class
Theists generally believe that a god(s) created the universe and our planet, and most religions suggest that that god/gods interact or have interacted with our world and shaped its development. Atheists generally believe that there are no gods, and hence the world developed by natural rather than supernatural means. Why do you think theists and atheists believe these things? Analyze their respective reasons for their belief, and the sorts of evidence they provide if questioned about their beliefs. Based on your analysis, which side do you believe presents the most plausible argument and why?

Prompt Dissecting

Step 1) Circle sentences that are not asking you to do anything or asking a question of you (will probably be background information or an introduction)

Step 2) List the questions or requests the prompt makes (there may be more than one question/request in each sentence. List them on separate lines)

Step 3) If there are any confusing questions/requests, try to simplify them. What are they really/essentially asking. Ask a tutor or your teacher if you need help.

Step 4) What does the instructor want you to learn or conclude? What knowledge does the instructor want you to demonstrate or walk away with?

Step 5) Review and keep these things in mind while writing your paper and constantly refer to them to make sure you’re on topic

Keywording Practice

One of the keywords in the above prompt could be “reasons” (for believing in these things). Throughout the paper this word would come up a lot. Making sure the word reasons (or words that mean the same thing) appear throughout the essay is a good way to make sure you’re staying on topic. What other words seem to be key to the focus of the essay? Underline these in the prompt above.
The Writing Center and the WPJ

Becoming a Junior at Sac State comes with its own right of passage: the WPJ. The WPJ (Writing Placement for Juniors) exam is a placement test that will allow the student to be placed in the English class that will help them the most. Students taking the test will either be placed directly into their Writing Intensive (WI) class that they need to graduate, or they may be required to take one or two additional English classes before they take their WI requirement. This is to ensure each student maximum success when they finally do take the WI course.

However, since not all students excel at timed writing tests, or may even feel that they could really benefit from a foundational writing course, there is another option. Students do not have to take the WPJ. Students can choose to take the English 109M (for multilingual students) or the English 109W course that will serve the same purpose as the WPJ placement test. Instead of a timed writing test, this choice allows students to enroll in a semester-long course where they will write several essays. At the end of the semester, the students in these courses will turn in a portfolio containing the essays and a cover letter that shows how they improved. Much like the WPJ, after students finish the 109M or 109W course, they will then be placed into the next English course that is the best fit for them.

How will each student know which choice is best for him or her? This is where the tutors at the Writing Center come in. Our job, as tutors, is to explain this choice to the students/writers and help them decide which option may be the best for them. We can do this by discussing their current reading and writing habits. Ultimately, it is up to the students to decide what is best for them. Our focus as tutors should be to help them work through this difficult choice.

Choosing the WPJ

If the students/writers read frequently, feel they have a lot of previous college writing experience, feel confident that their writing will earn them a good grade in their classes, feel comfortable writing in an academic style, are comfortable and confident in timed-writing situations, and are confident as editors and revisers of their own work, then these students/writers are good candidates for the WPJ.

Understanding the WPJ:

- Students will take the WPJ only once
- The WPJ has two parts:
  - the student will be presented with 4-5 mini texts, such as a cartoon, a map, an advertisement, a written excerpt, a table, etc; the student will then figure out an issue that relates to all of the presented texts, take a position on this issue, and write a short argumentative essay
    - students will be given one hour to complete this portion of the test
  - the student will then write a separate, critical, self-reflection essay about their writing process: how they write and why they write
    - students will be given 30 minutes to complete this portion of the test
- Once the test is complete, students will be placed into the writing course that fits their level of writing best:
  - some students will be able to take their WI class next (3 unit placement)
some students can enroll in the WI course along with the 1 unit, group tutoring, 109X course (4 unit placement)
o some students will need to take one or more additional writing courses before they are allowed to take their WI course (6 or 10 unit placement)
  ▪ this will ensure each student the very best chance of succeeding in the WI class when it is eventually taken

• For more information on the WPJ, visit the website at www.al.csus.edu/writing/gewritingrequirements/gwar.php

Choosing the 109M/W Course

If the students/writers do not read frequently, have not written much at the college level, are not sure if their writing will earn them a good grade in their classes, are not comfortable writing in an academic style, are not comfortable in timed-test situations, and need a lot of help from teachers and peers for editing and revision, then these students/writers may be more successful if they choose to take the 109M/W course.

Benefits in Choosing the 109M/W Course:

• Students will have a chance to work on their writing skills throughout the semester so that they can ultimately feel confident when taking their WI course
  ▪ students will be given multiple opportunities to work on the same paper, learning to revise and edit
• Students can come to the Writing Center and get additional tutoring on each essay throughout the semester
• Students can gain writing confidence at their own pace and not be subjected to the potentially stressful, timed-writing situation
• The 109M/W course can also provide essential, foundational writing practice for students who have been away from school for an extended period of time

Choosing Between 109M or 109W:

• Students whose first language is not English and who receive an EDT score of 4 or higher should choose 109M
• Students whose first language is English should choose 109W
• During the first week of classes, the students can be moved into the correct 109 course if they have registered for the wrong 109 course

Placed into Writing Intensive + 109X: What does that mean?

English 109X is a 1 unit, credit/no credit, writing-intensive, student-centered, group tutorial workshop. The 109X course will provide group tutorial support for Writing Intensive course assignments, and it will include additional instruction in academic writing, focusing on the writing process: writing a rough draft, revising the draft, and editing the final draft before turning it in.

Students who receive a 4 unit placement from the WPJ or a 109M/W class will be required to enroll in 109X along with their upper division Writing Intensive course. Students who receive a Writing Intensive + 109X placement can enroll in any Writing Intensive class but must also enroll in the matching,
supplemental 109X tutoring session. Each discipline will have a small-group 109X tutoring session available. Students need to make sure they enroll in the 109X that matches the discipline their Writing Intensive class is in.

**The Role of the Writing Center and the WPJ**

In addition to presenting each student/writer with the available options (WPJ or 109M/W), tutors also have the opportunity to do much more. If students want to practice before they take the WPJ, then the Writing Center is the perfect place to brush up on basic writing and editing skills so that they can approach the WPJ confidently. There is a sample WPJ test available for students and tutors to know what to expect. If students choose to enroll in the 109M/W course, the Writing Center is the ideal place to get additional help with their writing. Either way, the Writing Center and its tutors play a vital role in helping each student at Sac State achieve success as they work towards their degree.

**Appendix:**

- Self Assessment
- Sample WPJ Test
- WPJ Grading Criteria
MAKING THE GWAR CHOICE: ENGLISH 109W/109M OR THE WRITING PLACEMENT FOR JUNIORS (WPJ)?

at each number below, please circle which statement you MOST agree with.

1. I read frequently
   I do not read frequently

2. I have been asked to write frequently in my college classes
   I have not been asked to write frequently in my college classes

3. I feel confident that my writing will earn me a good grade in my classes
   I am unsure if my writing will earn me a good grade in my classes

4. I am comfortable writing in academic discourse
   I am not entirely comfortable writing in academic discourse

5. I am comfortable writing in a timed-writing situation
   I prefer having the chance to revise my writing

6. I can assess my own work without relying on teacher feedback
   I depend on teacher feedback to tell me if I’m doing a good job with my writing

Now, please count the number of questions for which you circled the top statement.
If you circled four or more of the top statements, taking the WPJ may be the best option for you.
If you circled four or more of the bottom statements under each number, taking English 109W/109M might be the best option for you.
Essay #1 (60 minutes/90 minutes for MLi)

Several significant issues could emerge from the following five texts. Please read the texts and write an essay in which you not only identify one significant issue, but also take a position on that issue. Use information from at least three of the texts provided, as well as your own experience, to support your position.

Adults were asked the following question: Do you feel that you will need more training or education in order to maintain or increase your earning power during the next few years? Their responses are tabulated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEEL MORE TRAINING/EDUCATION NEEDED TO MAINTAIN/INCREASE EARNING POWER DURING NEXT FEW YEARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Based on ever employed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-82 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than H.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. grad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voc/Associate college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some 4-year college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College grad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Less than one-half of one percent.


From “Winning over young voters” by Tamara Draut, San Francisco Chronicle

To win young voters, politicians need to understand that today's youth -- who are in the thick of their battle to work or educate their way into the middle class -- are being hit by a one-two punch.

The economy no longer generates widespread opportunity and our public policies haven't picked up any of the slack. As soon as they graduate from high school, young adults are plunged into an obstacle course that has dramatically changed in just one generation. From the price of a college education to the new cutthroat realities of the economy, young adults are trying to establish themselves in a society that has grown widely unequal and less responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens. At each step in the obstacle course to adulthood -- getting an education, finding a job, starting a family and buying a home -- our nation's public structures are showing major signs of decay and distress. The outcome: This generation has less economic mobility and security than other generations.

What are some of the specific issues politicians would be smart to address? The high cost of college and the dramatic rise in student loan debt, to start. Today, the average college graduate leaves school with $20,000 in student loans. Far more smart young people never make it through college because they can't scrape together enough loans, grants or money from minimum-wage jobs to foot the bill. Today, the cost
of attending a public four-year state college is just more than $11,000 -- about what it cost to attend a private university, adjusted for inflation, a generation ago.

According to 2003 Census Bureau statistics on earnings in the United States:

--Associate's degree holders average $8,000 a year more than high school graduates.
--Workers with bachelor's degrees make nearly $23,300 more a year than high school graduates.
--Master's degree holders average $11,300 more a year than bachelor's degree holders.

Essay #2 (30 minutes/60 minutes for MLi)

Please read the following text and write an essay in which you discuss to what extent this statement resembles your own experience with writing.
“Learning to write is a complex process, both individual and social, that takes place over time with continued practice and informed guidance.”

*Statement on Learning Outcomes for First Year Composition* from the Council of Writing Program Administrators.
| Requirement                                                                 | Units  
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<tr>
<td>Identifies and articulates a focus arising from the prompt</td>
<td>3 units</td>
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<tr>
<td>Articulates writer’s own position in analyzing a significant issue:</td>
<td>4 units</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion that analyze</td>
<td>6 units</td>
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<tr>
<td>major ideas surrounding the issue: produces a developed and cohesive</td>
<td>10 units</td>
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<tr>
<td>academic composition employing conventions that are appropriate for the</td>
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<tr>
<td>genre selected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides evidence of awareness of writing as a process: demonstrates</td>
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<td>awareness of or reflects critically on writer’s own literacy history and</td>
<td></td>
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<td>practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates awareness of conventions of academic discourse: makes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>appropriate rhetorical choices regarding purpose, format, evidence, tone,</td>
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<tr>
<td>conventions, and organization, and genre.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays evidence of editing with adequate control of grammar and mechanics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>appropriate to an early draft. Errors do not slow the reader, impede</td>
<td></td>
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<td>understanding, nor seriously undermine the authority of the writer.</td>
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<td>Grammatical errors, inappropriate word choice, or incorrect usage may</td>
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<td>occur throughout the essay but rarely interfere with effective</td>
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<td>communication.</td>
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A Hurdle Called the Writing Placement for Juniors

Before I provide some steps and tips on how to deal with students who request your assistance with the Writing Placement for Juniors (WPJ), a test that fulfills the first portion of the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR)---the undergraduate writing requirement with which students either take the test to see whether or not they need additional courses before taking a Writing Intensive course, the final GWAR requirement, or not take the test and enroll in an ENGL 109 course before taking the Writing Intensive course---, I will explain the WPJ situation that I encountered during my experience tutoring at the California State University, Sacramento University Reading and Writing Center, or just Writing Center. In anticipation of my first week of tutoring, I peered at the online scheduler and discovered that one of my students (allow me to call him Student #1) listed his reason for visiting the Writing Center as “WPJ preparation.” Because my mind consists of paranoia, I began to worry even though I had earned a score of “80,” the highest score possible, when I took the test the previous semester: all the stress I had when I first began to prepare for it rushed back over me. But this recollection allowed me to think about the steps I took to prepare. I used these steps to help Student #1 during each session while working with him on his lab reports. A few weeks later, Student #1 brought his friend (Student #2) to a session and requested if I could help him as well because he did not like the tutor with whom he had worked. Of course I agreed, and for several sessions, I repeated and continued with the steps I had taken with Student #1, continuing to work with Student #1 on his lab reports. Then one day, Student #1, with another student, approached me as I walked toward the Writing Center door in the adjacent hallway. I joked to myself that Student #1 would ask me if the man next to him could also join our sessions, and when we met, he said, “Hey Matt, my friend also does not like his tutor and was wondering if he could join us.” That makes Student #3. Fortunately, the two original students had already taken the WPJ by the time the third student joined out sessions, but I had to once again restart the WPJ preparation process. Below, I detail the steps I took to confront these group WPJ tutoring sessions of three multilingual students and to avoid the struggles you might expect from such sessions.

Step #1: Remember What It Was Like

The first step I took after I noticed that my student needed WPJ preparation involved my remembering what I had done to prepare when I had to take that test. I ventured over to my stacks of work from past school years and located my work from College Composition II (ENGL 20), a class I accidentally took before I realized that English majors have exemption because they must take Advanced Composition (ENGL 120A). From the ENGL 20 syllabus, I made several copies of a concise, detailed essay model, a page regarding transitions, a page on incorporating quotes and other evidence, and much more. I brought these as handouts to my sessions with Student #1 and to the other students when they arrived, allowing them to take them home and ensuring that I have extra copies in case the students or I lose any. These handouts guided my sessions: I guided them through how to set up an introduction, support paragraph, and conclusion; how and when to use a quote to its most effectiveness; how to use both simple and complex transitions; when to speak generally and when to speak specifically; how to analyze a quote, paraphrase, or summary; and so on. By no means did I speed through this part of our
preparation. In fact, in the first session with Student #1, I explained about three sentences in an essay introduction when the hour ended. The reason for this revolved around the idea that learning takes time and care. Reading through the required chapters, essays, and articles on dealing with multilingual students, I knew that even if a student nods his or her head in agreement, that does not mean they understand what you just told them. I also recalled how I had an entire ENGL 20 semester to learn what I attempted to teach these students in one-hour weekly sessions. Therefore, I made time for practicing any new concepts such as writing transitions or writing a general statement in the beginning of an essay and for answering inevitable questions which included comma usage, the appropriateness of starting an essay with a question, pronoun types, and so much more. I had to also pay attention to when each student needed individual attention and when they could work off of each other, as well as when I needed to use a more direct tutoring approach and when I could watch them learn on their own. For those of you who might find the need to group tutor, these ideas remains key. Humans have a natural aversion to anything new, a central reason for spending as much time on new ideas a possible and remembering how you felt when these topics were new to you.

**Step #2 Sample Examples, or the Other Way Around**

A more specific way to spend time on new subjects includes providing examples or samples on how to work through ideas. For example (get it?), allowing the students to see the essay model on the handout, the students saw an organization pattern they could use in their writing. The knew the whole “introduction-body-conclusion” idea, but they found it fascinating that they could leave one idea per support paragraph. Rather than spewing out information, they discovered a way to separate paragraphs into succinct thoughts, connected by transitions of course. They never realized the importance of spending so much paper space on analyzing a single quote or topic. Seeing a flow of thought on paper allowed these revelations to occur. A similar point involves the need to explain the significance of certain conventions. For instance, understanding that transitions help a paper move cohesively will enable a student to feel obligated to use them and have more confidence in their writing. Having that visual model will also aid their understanding for different techniques. However, I realized that seeing the “model” would not suffice when it comes time to sit and write a complete new essay. Therefore, I went back to the stack of old ENGL 20 schoolwork and located a sample essay question that I had to answer for my Midterm, a question that dealt with the ongoing conflict between science and religion. I made copies once again and gave each student this handout, but I also made sure to explain how the WPJ works, a sometimes confusing system. I showed them how they are provided with four to five sources and how they need to not only argue a point but devise an argument that they can argue (Be sure to study how and why the WPJ functions before moving to this step). I guided them through the non-multilingual-level question and how they might approach it. After several sessions of explanation, I asked them to write an essay at home and then bring it to the next session so that I can look at it. Over the weekend, I decided I would bring my two-page essay from the stacks to the next session. But, none of the students brought an essay, so instead I showed them how I approached the essay question, using my answer essay as a visual aid. After that, I escorted them to the computer and together we looked over the WPJ website (http://www.csus.edu/testing/wpj.stm) and came across an information on (multilingual) requirements, dates and times, a FAQS page, registration information, score definitions, and much more (http://www.al.csus.edu/writing/gewritingrequirements/gwar.php). From there, we noticed a free WPJ preparation workshop; however, the students had a class during workshop, so
instead, we clicked a link (http://www.al.csus.edu/writing/gewritingrequirements/GWAR_Workshop_Packet.pdf) that took us to the entire workshop packet, where there existed a sample essay that better resembled the format of the WPJ questions and information on the second WPJ question in which a student must write a shorter essay on their writing experiences or views of writing. We practiced with these essays until their test time arrived, providing them sufficient amounts of confidence and awareness. Again, newness can blockade a student from learning; fight newness with practice and by readdressing unfamiliar or difficult ideas.

**Step #3 Registration Has Arrived**

When it comes time to register, guide them through the process, especially when working with multilingual students. This will ensure that they receive all the instructions (test date and time, room number, $25 check-only fee, time length, two photo ID’s, and so on) and that they do it properly (clicking the multilingual option if that applies which gives them extra time of the test, signing up on the days on which they can come, and more). This will give them last-minute confidence and allow them to see your true care for their scores and wellbeing. Embody generosity.

The steps I provided apply for recurring students: if you have a drop-in or one-time student, focus on showing them a good essay model and explaining how the WPJ works. I suggest carrying around several copies of an essay model---from a previous class or one you make up---for any students, drop-in or recurring, shortening the length of time it takes to explain what essays look like. Nevertheless, enjoy your tutoring sessions and remember to revisit ideas you might have learned, provide examples and samples, and show kindness to your potential new friends. On a side note, Students #1 and 2 both earned 80 on their WPJ’s and the third will take his in January. I know they appreciated my help because as soon as they found out about their scores they bought me an expensive-looking CSUS pen set and have expressed their newfound friendship in me. The same could happen to you.

**Links**

WPJ website [http://www.csus.edu/testing/wpj.stm](http://www.csus.edu/testing/wpj.stm)
As writing tutor interns, we are informed early on of the progression of English composition classes. Students are encouraged to take English 1, English 1A, or English 2 during their freshman year at Sacramento State, to take English 20 or 20M during their sophomore year, and to take English 109 or 109M during their junior year (unless they decide to take the Writing Placement for Juniors (WPJ) exam instead). But what does any of this mean? These are just a series of seemingly random numbers? What does a student do in English 1A or English 20, and how are those things related to or different from each other? What do we need to know in order to be the best possible tutors of students in Sacramento State composition classes that we can be?

The truth is, the world of composition has its own specific terminology and its own set of generally accepted subjects, each of which is integrated into the composition progression at Sacramento State in a different way. If you are a graduate student or a transfer student at Sac State and did not take English 1A or English 20 yourself, these specific expectations can be confusing. The first time a student walks in asking for help with a rhetorical analysis essay, it can be overwhelming if you, the tutor, do not know exactly what a rhetorical analysis essay is, and although teachers generally try to make it clear in their prompt what is being asked of the student, no one is perfect. It does not always come through clearly. It’s all right, though. Don’t panic! As a tutor who was once a teacher of English 1A, I am here to define and clarify the arcane world of composition for the avid reader of the Tutoring Book.

A Brief History of Rhetoric

Allow me to begin by telling a story. Once upon a time, way back in the 300s B.C.E., a society who referred to themselves as the Hellene was flourishing in modern day Greece. I say a society, but it’s really a misnomer, because although they shared a language and several cultural traditions, they were really a number of societies, tiny city-states separated from each other by the mountainous terrain of the Peloponnesian peninsula. Today, we know them as the Ancient Greeks. In one of these city-states, Athens, the governmental form was almost pure democracy. Every single male citizen of the city had the chance to vote on almost every single issue raised in the city. Any time there was a problem, the first five thousand citizens who came to the town square acted as the voters. It didn’t matter how much education you had, whether you were a farmer or a teacher—everyone had the same power in the highly interactive government. It sounds ideal, but it was not long before the system was corrupted. Because regular citizens often did not know much about the issue in question, they allowed their opinions to be swayed by brilliant speakers known as demagogues, people who were trained in the arts of persuasion, and these people were often wealthy, because only the wealthy could afford the expensive tutoring required to learn how to be such effective speakers. As such, the people, in the thrall of these demagogues, often voted in the interests of the wealthy citizens of Athens rather than the people as a whole. Frustrated with the state of things, a philosopher named Aristotle wrote a handbook on the arts of persuasion, aptly named Rhetoric, in the 4th century B.C.E.

English 1, 1A, and 2: The Rhetorical Triangle and the Rhetorical Square

In his handbook, Aristotle defined rhetoric and broke it down into its constituent parts in order to make it more comprehensible to a wider audience and to help people to use it more effectively. He defined rhetoric as the art of finding the available means of persuasion in any particular case and broke the possible means of persuasion into three categories: logos, pathos, and ethos (Cooper 7-9). Today, these are directly linked to three similar subcategories of argument: message, audience, and tone. Together, these three concepts form the sides of the rhetorical triangle. Logos consists of the basic facts
of any argument, the evidence upon which the speaker’s position is founded, and it is linked to the **message**—what the speaker wants to say. **Pathos** consists of the emotional effect of a speech, the way the speaker chooses to phrase his or her position in order to influence the audience’s emotions, and it is linked to the **audience**—what the speaker wants to evoke in his or her listeners. **Ethos** consists of the way the speaker presents him or herself, the way the speaker chooses to phrase his or her position in order to give a general impression of him or herself. Does the speaker wish to come across as erudite or common, passionate or calm, violent or peaceful, authoritative or interactive? All of these impressions can be created within the bounds of the speech being delivered, by careful control of the **tone**.

Today, Aristotle’s text is still considered by many rhetoricians to be the key work on the subject of rhetoric, and the rhetorical triangle is one of the basic foundations of the modern field of composition. Modern composition scholars, however, found the triangle to be incomplete, especially for a field focused on teaching writing rather than public speaking, so they added a fourth category to the rhetorical situation—purpose—and renamed the rhetorical triangle the **rhetorical square**. These four sides of the rhetorical square—message, purpose, audience, and tone—along with the **context** in which a text is being written, form the **rhetorical situation**, all of the factors which must be considered when writing an essay. Most experienced writers consider these things without thinking, adapting to the needs of the audience and the requirements of the context instinctually, but for many inexperienced writers, this is not so easy to do. Therefore, the rhetorical square and the concepts of logos, pathos, and ethos are often the first things to be taught in a composition class, and all three levels of composition at Sacramento State rely on them.

### English 1, English 1A, and English 2: The Rhetorical Analysis Essay

As such, you will often see a student in English 1, English 1A, or English 2 assigned a **rhetorical analysis essay** assignment. There are many different versions of the standard rhetorical analysis essay, but all of them will ask the student to read something and analyze the rhetorical choices of the author. As an example, one of my tutees this semester was asked to choose a speech and analyze the writer’s rhetorical choices. She chose the “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King Jr. At first, we ran into some problems. My tutee struggled with vocabulary and reading comprehension, so she found it difficult to understand King’s basic message, let alone how he appealed to his audience, what his purpose for speaking was, and how he came across in his tone. After spending a session outlining his message, however, we were able to discuss his many audiences and she noticed that he seemed to have a different purpose for each audience. I find that freshman composition students often confuse message and purpose, so it may be worth your while to ask them if they understand the difference between the two and to go over it with them. The message is what the writer/speaker is saying. The purpose is why s/he is saying it, what s/he hopes to achieve through the act of writing or speaking. For King, his audiences included black people and white people alike, and he seemed to hope that he could inspire black people and white people to work together for the common cause of freedom and equality. For white people, he encouraged them to use their power to help influence the American government. For black people, he encouraged them to never give up protesting. And always, from everyone, he begged a non-violent approach. His message was peace and perseverance. His purpose was to inspire his audience to action.

English 1, 1A, and 2 generally introduce students to the concept of the rhetorical square—as well as the corresponding concepts of logos, pathos, and ethos—and ask them to practice utilizing these concepts in their writing by analyzing the writing or speaking of famous writers and speakers, analyzing the writing of fellow classmates in peer reviews, and, finally, analyzing their own writing. Students are encouraged to learn how to incorporate the rhetorical square into their writing, to learn to achieve the perfect balance for each individual rhetorical situation which may come up.
In English 20/20M, the goal is slightly different. The purpose of the class is to introduce each student to the experience of writing across the curriculum, and, as such, these classes tend to focus on another concept: the discourse community. A discourse community is exactly what it sounds like—a group of people who understand one another because they are utilizing the same language, but it does not simply refer to national languages. All sorts of communities have their own specialized discourse that they use with one another which outsiders cannot comprehend. People who play video games regularly, for example, have a set of slang all their own, just as rock climbers can discuss rock climbing with each other using technical terminology for rock climbing equipment which might baffle an outsider. Indeed, any group of friends who have known each other long are likely to have their own discourse community, their own inside jokes and references which are difficult to explain to outsiders. A person may have any number of discourse communities to which they belong, and students in English 20/20M (and even sometimes in English 1/1A/2) are often encouraged to identify some of their discourse communities, choose a single discourse community, and write about it. They are asked to identify the community, explain how they can see that it is a discourse community, and describe some of the features which make it a discourse community. They are also asked to analyze their place in the community and/or their particular community’s relation to other discourse communities.

Meanwhile, students are also introduced to the notion that academic discourse is a discourse community. When in the classroom, teachers and students generally use a type of fairly formal, elevated discourse with a tone and vocabulary very different from that of every day speech between friends. This formal discourse is academic discourse, and since it is the type of discourse most commonly found in academic writing across majors, students in early composition classes are encouraged to learn to identify and imitate it. Yet, even academic discourse is not a single discourse community, since each individual major expects slightly different things from its members. Students of law need to understand legal language, while biology students need to understand biological and/or anatomical terminology, for example, and they need to be able to use these terms appropriately in context—both spoken and written. In English 20/20M, students are encouraged to learn about different major discourse communities and compare and contrast them so that they can better understand the concept of a discourse community and the way various communities within the university interact with one another.

English 109/109M: Genre and Conventions

In English 109/109M, students spend a lot of time on the concepts of genre and conventions. (Sometimes students are introduced to these concepts in English 1/1A/2; sometimes they are not.) Most people are familiar with genre as a term used to refer to different types of novels: science fiction, fantasy, romance, horror. However, genre can refer to any specific form of writing within any particular context. Journalism, for example, is a genre of writing, while it has subgenres within it such as sports reporting or news. Students in English 109/109M are encouraged to identify the genre of writing which their major fits into (physical science, social science, humanity, etc.) and are asked to analyze academic sources from their major in order to learn the conventions of their major and its genre. What kind of terminology are specific to the major? What kind of language do they expect in writing in their field—cold, analytical, flowery, poetic, spare? Are writers in the major expected to give their writing a particular organization? A particular tone? Writing done for astronomy journals is very different than writing done for history journals, even though both count as academic discourse. The standard writing practices of any major are the conventions of that field, and in English 109/109M, students are given experience analyzing writing in their field and performing writing in their field so that they can get used to the conventions of their major and become better writers in their particular chosen areas. They are also often asked to write essays analyzing the discourse of their major community and identifying its conventions.
The Cover Letter

All three levels of the composition progression at Sacramento State generally ask their students to turn in portfolios. Sometimes the students turn in a portfolio for each assigned essay which includes the final draft, earlier drafts, and various prewriting materials from the course. More often, however, composition students turn in a single portfolio at the end of the class which includes all of their final drafts of essays for the class along with all of their preparatory materials for each essay and a cover letter. The cover letter is a unique genre of writing in which students are asked to use their own writing as evidence for an essay detailing how they have improved as writers throughout the course. Sometimes, students are given specific questions to answer in the cover letter or specific topics to cover; sometimes the cover letter assignment is more open-ended. However, cover letters in composition courses consistently ask the student to analyze his or her own writing throughout the class and use that writing to support an argumentative essay about their own improvement and what they have learned.

In Conclusion

Armed with knowledge about the rhetorical square, logos, pathos, ethos, academic discourse, discourse communities, genres, conventions, and the cover letter, you should have the terminology necessary to be able to offer knowledgeable aid to any composition student who comes your way. As a matter of fact, you are now familiar with some of the important conventions of the genre of academic discourse found in composition classrooms—a discourse community all their own.

Works Cited

Analyzing Rhetorical Situations in English 109M/109W

There is a wide variety of students who use the service at the Writing Center. I have never realized the influx of students who come from different countries and are seeking help to improve their writings not until I became one of the tutors. Most writers I have dealt with are either from the English 109M or 109W. The distinction between the English 109M and English 109W is minor; just bear in mind that 109M is for students who are multilingual and 109W is for students whose native language is English.

To help understand what these courses mean, according to the University catalog, English 109M/109W provide intensive practice in prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing academic writing for multilingual and native-English speaker writers. Students research, analyze, reflect on and write about the kind of writing produced in academic discipline.” This quote illustrates the type of writing the students are expected to produce, and they have to produce a considerable amount of writing that involves informal reading responses, rhetorical analyses, and an extended academic research project students need to submit at the end of the semester. As a tutor, it is important for you to know the descriptions of both courses (English 109M/109W) so that you can assist your writers when they come to you for help on their essays. Thank goodness I had taken English 109M; if I had not taken this course, I probably would have encountered problems in understanding my tutees. At least when they came to me, I knew exactly what they would be talking about. Let me tell you more about this.

When students from English 109M/109W come to you for help, they will show you their assigned homework pertaining to their discourse communities. So, what is a discourse community? In general terms, it is a group of people who share the same interest and common goal. Few examples of discourse communities are disciplines students are majoring in, say, biology, music, etc. Thus, those students who take English 109M/109W will have to produce essays that analyze the rhetorical situations of their fields. An example of the rhetorical situation is illustrated below:

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**THE RHETORICAL SITUATION**

(Rhetoric = the art of using language effectively and persuasively)

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| CONTEXT | The situation in which the writer is working including the discourse community |
| AUDIENCE | The person to whom the writing is directed |
| PERSONA | The way the writer presents herself in the text |
| PURPOSE | The reason the writer is writing |
| TEXT | What the writer actually writes and how she/he writes it |

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Student writers will come to you for help because they need to produce some analyses of their academic discourse communities, and the analyses are usually based on articles or scholarly journals that are retrieved online. Analyses are typed in a form of academic writing and revised several times during the semester. Finally, peers and instructors would review the final writing again, revised by the writer, and then kept in the writer’s portfolio for submission.

The academic writing has conventions that must be followed, but bear in mind that writing conventions differ in different fields. Therefore, as a rule, writing conventions have the following primary features as illustrated previously, such as: purpose, audience, persona, text, and genre. It is important to remember that these criteria are the main reasons why writers from the English 109M/109W will want some assistance because most of them do not understand the gist of the features. In so doing, let us take a look at the primary features of any rhetorical situation so that when writers show their assigned projects, you as tutors will be able to communicate effectively how the features are applied to their academic discourse communities.

- **Purpose**
  Almost all English 109M/109W writers who come to me always struggle with the purpose. They seem to interchange it with objective which takes on a different meaning. As defined by the Sacramento State Student Writing Handbook, a purpose could “include the goals the writer has for his/her writing, that purpose that is set out for the writer in a teacher’s assignment, and the influence of factors like the audience writing is addressing.”

  **Example**: Mark Bauerlein’s writing of this article is to raise awareness of change and development in the use of the technology in schools. For example, he writes “because writing is a deep habit, when students sit down and compose on a keyboard, they slide into the mode of writing…” (25). This quote further proves…

- **Audience**
  In the writing center, I have not encountered any writer who is not aware of their audience. The writers know full well that teachers are their primary audience. However, teachers can play a variety of roles when they read and respond to writer’s writing. At other times, teachers play the role of representatives of their academic field and they will respond to the writer as a biologist, a nurse, an engineer, etc. For example, I have seen teachers assign a project whereby a writer is to create a memo targeting the audience of their own discourse community. In so doing, the audience will affect the purpose for writing, the persona the writer takes on, and the way the writer develops and organizes the text.

  **Example**: The audience or target readers of Mark Bauerlein’s article are scholars, researchers, academicians, futurists, students, and individuals or organizations belonging to his English and non-English academic discourse communities who understand and respond to the changes and development of the technological revolutions. For example…

- **Persona**
  Of all the writing features that have been mentioned, I think the persona is the easiest to explain because it is how the writer presents himself/herself. It can also include the voice, stance, tone, and style a writer takes on in their writing. Furthermore, it includes a writer’s
word choice and the attitude that resonate within the writing. Since the writer’s writing is done at an academic level imposed by the academicians at Sacramento State University, the writer is expected to write on a formal persona rather than informal. In other words, depending on the writer, he/she can be friendly, informative, experienced, or articulate in their writing. Hence, bear in mind that a writer from English 109M/English 109W will end up taking more courses unrelated to their academic discourse community that there is really no single persona a writer assumes in all of their college writing; each rhetorical situation will demand a different approach to voice, style, and audience.

**Example:** Mark Bauerlein presents to me as a person who is concerned about the changes and development of the digital age. He is very analytical, intuitive, and has an ability to foresee changes that will be taking place that can make some impact in our society. He is very concise and specifically uses words that are simple and brief.

- **Text**
  Text means different things to different people. Text can mean a research paper or a lab report, Web site, a PowerPoint presentation, flyers, handbook, or a brochure; thus, most teachers consider them as part of the academic discourse because they are used to communicate with writers or students. What comes along with text is the use of graphs, diagrams, photos, images, and etc.

  **Example:** Mark Bauerlein’s article is two pages long, written in a simple MLA format using Times New Roman font type and font size of probably nine. On the title page, however, he uses a different font type like Arial Narrow that is bolded and a font size of 36, in order to make the subject matter more visible to the reader and catches the reader’s eye.

Each academic discipline has its own texts. For example, the accounting students who come to the Writing Center have their own texts to analyze. They come with graphs, and ledgers with columns and rows. The accounting discourse community has specific texts that are used in response to the purpose and audience of their own discourse community.

In turn, format that comes out of the text in response to the recurring rhetorical situation, is called “genre.”

So, what is “genre?” Most of the English 109M/109W have struggled with this concept. I, myself, have struggled with it too. Thus, there really is no clear definition of this particular concept, but to make it easier, simple examples are movie genres such as spaghetti western, suspense-thriller, or romantic comedy. In these examples, genre is used to classify a certain type of movie. As for academic writing, genres are used as well. For instance, a case report or book reviews are considered genres. In other words, typical kind of genres requires typical responses that pertain to the purpose and audience in accordance to the academic discourse community.

- **Context**
  Of all the features that have been discussed, the context take on the broader social, cultural, and historical aspects that influence writing. For example, a writer comes to you and tells you that he/she has to analyze a scholarly journal written by a certain author. Part of the assignment is to analyze the context of the author’s journal. You as a tutor need to educate the writer that part of the context involves a summary of the author’s background, and how the background impacts the author’s discourse community. In addition, part of the context relates to the aspects of audience’s economic class, their level of expertise with the subject matter, their background, and personal beliefs.
Example: Mark Bauerlein’s background such as his credentials which includes education, profession, and experience prove his ability to evaluate, investigate, foresee, and forecast different social and cultural changes that will occur in the future. In addition, his profession as an English educator at Emory University further distinguishes him as a well-articulated and –rounded individual, with a keen sense of understanding of the impact, influence, and the phenomenal implications the digital forces may have in our school system, and almost likely the society’s social and cultural environments.

Lastly, almost all academic writing requires some form of summary. The summary is not part of rhetorical situations; however, almost all instructors from English 109M/109W require it. For instance, many instructors will require students to read a material about a certain subject. Thus, students will then summarize the information they learned through reading the material. Including with the summary are: the author’s name, credentials such as education and experience, and a brief description of the author’s subject matter. In addition, four to five sentences are enough for a summary provided the student writers have made their points.

In conclusion, at the end of the semester writers should be able to show that they can engage in writing as a process that includes revision, editing, and drafting based on feedback from peers and instructors throughout the semester. As a tutor, just do the best you can to help them. You will find that meeting different writers from different discourse communities is a rewarding experience because as a tutor, you will then get exposed to many facets of disciplines with different rhetorical choices to be dealt with. Enjoy!
What the Hell Am I Reading?

There is no single, “right way” to approach tutoring in the Writing Center. Rather, our effectiveness as a tutors largely depends on our ability to identify and accommodate the needs of the various student-writers we encounter. The purpose of this article is to prepare you to work with a particular type of student you are likely meet during your internship this semester. Specifically, we will introduce you to student-writers enrolled in English 121, as well as provide you with strategies you may find helpful in your effort to assist this population.

What is English 121?

English 121 is a one unit course which students can take in order to earn academic credit for making regularly scheduled, one-hour, weekly appointments in the Writing Center. The course was designed to reward those students who visit the Writing Center as part of their regular writing process. Students interested in English 121 usually schedule their appointments in the second week of classes and spots fill up quickly. It is extremely likely that you will be working with at least one 121 student this semester.

What You Should Expect

One way to understand 121s is to contrast them with drop-ins. You will not be spending a lot of time working with any one drop-in. Drop-in appointments are unscheduled, thirty-minute, non-recurring sessions. 121s, on the other hand, are required to attend regularly scheduled, weekly appointments, and will receive no credit if they amass multiple absences. You will be spending a lot of time with your 121 student-writers. You will know their names and, eventually, who they are as people as you work with them throughout the semester.

Another useful point of contrast between 121s and drop-ins is their respective goals for each session. Drop-ins will always have something specific to work on. You will likely spend your whole half-hour assisting them with a single issue which they will articulate at the beginning of a session. 121s, on the other hand, may have difficulty identifying what specifically they want to work on. In fact, it is not uncommon for a 121 student to claim that they have nothing with which they need your assistance. This can prove problematic because 121s must nevertheless spend the entire hour with their tutors in order to earn credit for their appointment. This issue accounts for the primary difficulty associated with tutoring 121s.

Wait, So What’s the Problem?

The problem is one of two things:

- **They Don’t Bring Anything**
  Sometimes your student-writer will show up without any of the documents associated with their writing course. They may mistakenly assume that we cannot assist them unless
they have a draft for us to look at. These students may fail to bring an outline, their syllabus, the prompt, and/or the readings associated with the assignment or course they are currently in.

2. They Don’t Have Anything
Often 121s simply won’t have a writing assignment to work on during one or more of the weeks you are scheduled to meet. Not all 121s are concurrently enrolled in a composition course. It may be that their 121 credit is associated with a course which only requires a couple major writing assignments. These students will not have a current essay draft or prompt for you to look at.

How Do I Address These Issues
The easiest way to address this issue is to ask that your 121s always bring everything with them. Even if they do not have a draft for you to look at, an essay prompt is an excellent tool for establishing what is expected of your student-writer and can assist in creating an outline (more on these later) for their use when they go to draft. Even without a prompt, a course syllabus describes specific class goals an instructor has for her class. Encouraging your 121 to consider these goals and use the language of the syllabus is a good initial approach to tackling the semester ahead.

Ask your 121s to bring something specific with them to each session. You do not have to give them extra work, but leave yourself five minutes at the end of each session to establish what they will bring with them, and what they want to work on next week. Start your sessions off saying, “So last week we said we were going to work on X, and you said you would bring Y for us to look at.” Hold your 121s accountable. If they consistently do not have their materials, you can absolutely end a session early and give them an absence for the day. Finally, if your student-writer literally has nothing left for you to look at, ask them to bring in an essay from another class or from a previous semester. Remember that it is our job is make better writers, not better papers. Looking at prior writing assignments is an excellent way to begin addressing major writing concerns with your 121 before they start turning in assignments for a grade.

On a less heavy-handed note, it is also advisable that you get to know your 121s. You will be working with these students for more than a dozen hours and establishing a rapport with them is essential to the tutoring process. Writing can be a very personal activity. Taking time to get to know your student-writer can make them more comfortable with the tutoring process, and give you useful information about a particular student’s approach to academic writing. As an example, If you know that your student-writer is a math major, you might suggest they approach their writing like an equation. “Thesis = Topic Sentences” could be a useful equation to encourage your math-minded 121s to constantly and recursively revise their thesis and topic sentences so that both sides of the equation are saying the same thing.

Tutors Wear A Lot of Hats

Tutoring is not unlike working customer-service: Your job is to establish what a student-writer wants, and then to accommodate that need to the best of your abilities. As in customer-service, your job is much easier when the customer already knows what they want: When a student sits
down next to you and says something like, “I want you to look at my transitions,” there is no mystery regarding how you will be spending the next half hour. Your role switches slightly when working with a student-writer who has no specific goals for your time with them. In these cases, you are setting the agenda for the tutoring appointment. In this, your role is not unlike that of a teacher.

With this role comes the responsibility to address higher order of concerns that are usually the derailment of student’s papers: Thesis development, organization, and research seem to present the biggest problems in much of the writing we see. For the 121 student with “nothing” to do, a mini lesson on one of these three facets of academic writing will provide you with something fall back on when the student writer has nothing for you to look at.

**Here Are Some Mini-Lessons You Can Use**

**Thesis development:** A “clearly stated thesis statement” is required in most academic essays, yet students have a hard time understanding what factors create clarity in a thesis. We like to explain the statement as a map for the paper. It provides early organization for the rest of the project and requires that the student know who their audience is, what the purpose of the paper is, and what they are trying to prove. After explaining WHAT a thesis is, it is helpful to model this for your student-writer.

1) **Pick a Subject:**
   - Defense of English 121 as a course.

2) **Draft a Thesis:**
   - “The English Department should keep English 121 in the course catalog because it provides the framework needed for students to become academic writers.”

3) **Identify Audience, Argument, and Purpose:**
   - **Audience:** The English Department.
   - **Argument:** 121 provides framework for students to become academic writers.
   - **Purpose:** Keep English 121 as a course offered at CSUS

Note that purpose and argument are completely different. An argument is what your audience will be convinced of by the end of an essay, and purpose is what your audience will do with that information. If, for instance, you went to a restaurant and your food came out cold, you might inform your waiter of this and ask that he have it remade; in this example, your **argument** would be that the food is cold and your **purpose** would be to have the meal remade. Note also that an essay’s purpose should always focus on **end goals**. That is, your purpose is never merely to inform; you are not, for instance, merely trying to inform your waiter that your food is cold in the earlier example, but rather that he should have your meal remade. You may need to make this distinction with your student writers.

After you have modeled what a thesis statement looks like, have your student writer repeat the above steps with their own subject or subjects until they are comfortable creating these sentences. After each sentence make sure the student writer can identify audience, purpose, and
Organizing: Explaining the purpose of having an organizational plan is the first step in teaching the concept. Students get frustrated with revision, particularly when it requires that they reorganize ideas. Students are concerned with organization (you’ll often hear them ask, “does it follow?”) but do not always have the tools to create a plan before they write. Explaining different methods of organization (Chronological, compare and contrast, ordinal, and emphatic) allows your student-writer to have choices and to think about the best way to use the evidence they have effectively.Listing, columns, bubbling, and free writes are all tactics to get the student writer to compile her ideas and then choose a writing strategy and create an outline. Again, modeling provides an effective experience with the student watching real writing take place instead of imagining a hypothetical writing situation.

1) Isolate Topic Sentences: A topic sentence tells you everything that a body paragraph will prove and should be connected to the thesis statement in some way. One strategy for helping students organize their paper is to have them isolate topic sentences so they can see the main points they have made.

2) Have students reorganize their topic sentences using one of the organizational patterns:
   - Chronological
   - Compare and Contrast
   - Ordinal
   - Emphatic

Once your student-writer has organized her topic sentences using one of the strategies above, point out any which do not seem to support her thesis. Note that it may be easier to simply revise a thesis based on topic sentences than it is to craft entirely new topic sentences (and thus new body paragraphs) to fit perfectly with one’s thesis.

Research: Conducting research and identifying valuable sources is a convention of academic writing. Knowing where to look and how to integrate what is found successfully will equip your student writer with the confidence to prove her thesis.

1) Use the Library Databases and Google Scholar: Spending time at the computer doing hands on research will allow the student to feel comfortable with research databases. Explain what a peer reviewed source is and show a student what it looks like. Read abstracts to find out if a source is relevant to your student-writer’s thesis. Mine the bibliography for other related sources. Talk your student-writer through every step in the research process. If your student-writer does not currently have a research assignment to do, make one up. You want her to feel comfortable looking evidence on her own when she has a specific assignment.

2) How to integrate: Have the student-writer get familiar with the style guide they are supposed to be using. Go to The Owl Purdue (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/) and explain
in text citations (direct quotes and paraphrase) and how to create a works cited page. Practice doing these tasks with the research you found earlier. Have the student write a few sentences using direct quotes and explain how to introduce a quote. Then have them write a few sentences using paraphrase. Knowing the difference will help them avoid plagiarism and develop confidence using outside sources to develop their own arguments.

Research strategies are vital to your student-writer’s success as an academic writer. Like the other mini-lessons we have discussed, it is also entirely possible to teach research strategies without having an actual assignment to look at. It is our hope that you will use these lessons if ever you find yourself without anything to do while meeting with your 121s.

Finally

This project emerged out of a discussion between us regarding the challenges we encountered working with 121s. We came up with these strategies to address these challenges. While it is true that working with 121s can prove difficult at times, if you use the strategies discussed herein, you will find that working with the same student over the course of an entire semester allows you to track your and their progress, making it the most rewarding experience associated with tutoring.

As a final piece of advice, know that you currently posses all the skills necessary to be an extraordinary tutor. The Writing Center at Sacramento State University is student-run by design (plenty of university writing centers are run entirely by staff). If you find yourself anxious about the tutoring process, don’t. You will encounter a plethora of strategies to assist you in the tutoring process while enrolled in the tutoring internship. Be vigilant, fellow tutor, and have an excellent semester!
Before I started working in the CSUS Writing Center, I thought people plagiarized because they were cheating, or lazy, or perhaps both. I had a vague understanding of culture sometimes playing a part in the act of plagiarism (because in some cultures knowledge is shared more openly so the concept of “stealing ideas” is not implicitly understood), but mostly I figured people plagiarized because they wanted to pull one over on their professors. I viewed plagiarism as a serious academic crime and mentally judged people who committed it – even perhaps questioned their right to be in the university. (Yes, intolerance is the word for this. And ignorance.) However, after working with more than one student in the Writing Center who had plagiarized work, the reasons behind plagiarism grew more complicated to me. These students were indeed cheating and their act was unaccepted, but the motivating factors behind that behavior were not what I formerly thought. In my efforts to assist them, it became clear to me that plagiarism can be the result of a lack of knowledge or understanding (as opposed to blatant, intentional cheating), whether it’s regarding the assignment, the standards and expectations of academic discourse, or even the reading and writing itself. My hope with this paper is to convey to new tutors the complexity of this issue so we may better serve student writers and perhaps address the underlying reasons for the “crime” as opposed to simply punish for it.

The first student I worked with who brought plagiarized work to a session was (ironically) a Master’s student in Education. She was a multi-lingual student who was struggling with writing her Master’s thesis/project. There were consistent patterns of error in her writing, so when I read perfectly crafted, complex, error-free prose interspersed with sentences reflecting a limited understanding of English grammar and syntax, I became suspicious and asked her if it was hers. She said “yes.” Still skeptical, I copied one of the perfect sentences from her paper and pasted it into Google, then hit “Enter.” Immediately the original source popped up (an academic article). There began a long discussion of plagiarism and its consequences. At the time, I was somewhat appalled at her blatant thievery and inclination toward deceit. Now, my perspective on her has changed, but I’ll get back to that later.

In another session, I was working with a student in her senior year, a Criminal Justice major. She wanted to work on an article review she had written. In the process, I ended up reviewing part of the actual article being reviewed and noticed she had pulled whole phrases right out of the article and put them in her paper. I alerted her to this and she said “I don’t know how to ‘review an article’ and the professor didn’t explain it. Shouldn’t I put in what the article actually says?” When she said this I had my first realization that plagiarism is more than just cheating. She did not know how to paraphrase. She did not know how to summarize an academic article (in her own words). She didn’t understand the assignment. We spent the rest of the session going through the article paragraph by paragraph. We would read it together and then we would set it out of sight and she would tell me what it said. I was assisting this process by pointing out key words or concepts she may have missed and suggesting connections between paragraphs that develop into the main argument of the article. From that point forward, with this student I always made sure to work on paraphrasing and summarizing. The last article review she turned in (at the end of the semester) did not involve plagiarism.
The third student I worked with who plagiarized was a second-year Child Development major. I discovered her plagiarism by reading her work; there were very clear variations in voice in her paper. Some of it was written in grammatically perfect, complex academic prose that contrasted greatly against her own writing. I pointed this out to her and she skirted my questions. Eventually, after going around and around for awhile, as I attempted to decipher what was really going on (causing the plagiarism), it occurred to me to have her tell me what the article says (as a way to convey to her how to paraphrase). She tried, but what came out of her mouth was a convoluted mix of concepts. It was clear she had no idea what she had read. She didn’t understand the article. This was a problem of reading comprehension, not “cheating.” It resulted in cheating, but the cause was a limited ability to comprehend complex academic writing, or, at least, this particular article. After I realized the situation, I worked with this student on reading comprehension tactics. We talked about actively reading (with a highlighter and pen), looking for key words, using headlines and titles as indicators, etc. We continued to focus on this throughout our time working together in the Writing Center.

Returning to the first student I mentioned, I must say she is the most complicated version of plagiarism I’ve encountered. It is unclear to me why she did it. No “excuse” seems to fit. She was in her last year of graduate school (in Education no less), so clearly she had been exposed to the rules surrounding plagiarism. It is also hard to believe that a student at that level was unclear about how to summarize, paraphrase or cite appropriately. However, she is an ESL student and her Master’s project was quite apparently the most difficult thing she had ever tried to write. All that said, in this case, I was simply glad to have caught it and I hope I was helpful to her in communicating the severity of what she did and showing her how easily plagiarism is detected. But I don’t quite see her as just a “thief.” I see her as a student who was facing extreme difficulties and made a bad decision. I see her as a student who needs help. Maybe she simply got lazy and tried to float something but got caught. Whatever the reason, there is no excuse for what she did, but as somebody interested in trying to be the most effective tutor possible, I need to continue to look for deeper the reasons for plagiarism, give students the benefit of the doubt, withhold judgment on them as individuals, and consider plagiarism in its broader context, as a complex issue. The second I dismiss a student as a “fraud” or “thief” without asking myself WHY they resorted to acting like a “fraud” or “thief” is the second I lose effectiveness as a tutor – and miss an opportunity to possibly help the student avoid plagiarism in the future.

Now, please don’t misunderstand me; I am not justifying or excusing the act of plagiarism. I am simply arguing that there is sometimes more to it than just cheating and we can better serve students by looking for the underlying reasons a student may plagiarize, as opposed to immediately assuming they are deceitful, lazy and/or without moral fiber. An assumption of the latter results in a scolding, some threats and a handout passed their way, and a dismissal. A focus on the former may result in actual learning.
For some tutors new to the University Reading and Writing Center, the readings on the theoretical underpinnings for the Center can be a bit daunting. While some of the articles may sound interesting, even something we may agree with, it can be difficult to find a translation from theory to practice. In other words, some may find themselves agreeing with the tenets of one theory or another, but leave the classroom thinking: *that's nice, but what do I do with this?* My goal is to help new tutors see possibilities of how theory can translate into practice.

Social constructivism is built upon the idea that knowledge is created through the process of interaction between several individuals. No wonder this theory is applied to writing centers! Where else on campus can you find so many individuals collaborating toward a mutual understanding of a text? Tutors and student writers are constantly in dialogue toward a negotiated meaning of writing prompts, student writing, instructor feedback, and the readings students respond to in their classes. Andrea Lunsford tells us that collaboration is paramount in our understanding of this theory, and that the movement toward collaboration involves a shift “from viewing knowledge and reality as things exterior to or outside of us, as immediately accessible, individually knowable, measurable, and shareable—to viewing knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language in social use, as socially constructed, contextualized” (48). What does this mean? This definition might be expressed differently as an equation:

\[
\text{collaboration} + \text{context} \rightarrow \text{knowledge}
\]

According to social constructivists, knowledge is not a static, singular object, but a nebulous thing always in flux, always being created, added to, deleted from, and transformed through our interaction with others. Feeling more confused? Hopefully not, but in the next section I’ll show a small vignette from a tutoring session that will hopefully help to explain how this might occur in the Center.

**Social Constructivism in Practice: A Vignette**

One example of social constructivism in the writing center can be seen in a recent session with Joel, one of my regularly scheduled student writers. Joel needed help understanding Lord Byron’s poem *Prometheus*, one of the readings that had been assigned in his history class. Joel had (half jokingly) asked if I could just tell him the meaning of the poem, assuming that all English majors are well versed in Lord Byron. Rather than dispense an analysis of the poem (which would reinforce the early model of the writing center as a Storehouse of Knowledge, and this model’s inherent hierarchy of power), we began to negotiate the meaning of the poem through several practices that reinforce social constructivist theory. After reading the poem several times over (both silently and aloud), we both began to dig out bits of meaning of the poem. When Joel was stuck on a word, we turned to the dictionary, looked up the definition and wrote it in the margins of Joel’s text. From there, they began to work out their own meaning through collaboration. For example, when we reached the line “What was thy pity’s recompense?” we both began to discuss the difficulty with the language, replace the difficult words (pity and recompense) with the phrases and definitions that had been negotiated through the use of the dictionary, through our conversation, our own analogies and examples, and finally started to reconstruct the sentence. The sentence transformed into a less eloquent, but more understandable question: “What did Prometheus get in return for feeling bad for humans?”
This interaction accomplished the goals of social constructivism on several levels. As Andrea Lunsford states, writing centers built on social constructivism will “place control, power, and authority not in the tutor or the staff, not in the individual student, but in the negotiating group” (52). In the example of Joel’s reading, no one party had more power than the other. The input from Lord Byron (through his text), from Joel, and from the tutor all were part of the construction of Joel’s understanding of the poem. Even the instructor for Joel’s class played a role in creating meaning as Joel reviewed his lecture notes on the poem from the previous day. All of these pieces work together in order to create a new text that was more understandable, and ultimately created Joel’s knowledge of the poem.

**Techniques for Implementing Social Constructivism**

For tutors who want to implement social constructivism into tutor sessions, there are many techniques that you are probably already addressing that work toward the goals of social constructivism. If students seem to be struggling with how to start an essay, there is a chance they do not quite understand the text to which they are responding, and may therefore benefit from collaborative active reading as I have outlined in the vignette. Collaborative brainstorming during the pre-writing stage is an important task that can be done during tutoring sessions with the student writer. This strategy will help students gain better insight through negotiation with the tutor about what students already think about the topic, what they want to say, and what they need to discover before writing. In the revision stage, tutors can use Elbow’s “Movies of the Mind” to give students their reactions to the writing without imposing a set idea of what is wrong or right, what is working or not working in the student’s writing. This will allow the student writer to assess if the tutor’s reaction and response are what was intended by the writing. These activities empower students with the authorial authority over the paper, and also allow for discussion and negotiation with another party (the tutor) to help guide students through the drafting and revision process. This will, in turn, allow students to construct a better understanding of writing prompts and their own writing through collaboration. There are many techniques that you can choose to implement a social constructivist tutoring framework, but hopefully these strategies give you a place to start. Happy collaborating!

Works Cited

At this point in the semester, you’ve probably met with several different student writers and, furthermore, you may have found it useful to adapt your tutoring methods to meet the various needs of each particular student. For example, you may have played the uninformed reader to a student in a different major, asking largely content-related questions, or you may have taken a more directive approach regarding subject-verb agreement issues with an ESL student. You have probably even changed your style in different sessions with a recurring tutee, depending on which stage of the writing process they are engaged in – if it is a brainstorming session, perhaps you’re more likely to just let the writer talk through his or her ideas, occasionally asking problem-posing questions, or if a draft has organizational issues, you might make more concrete suggestions as to what might ensure clarity. Just as we adapt our tutoring style to the needs of the student at hand, I think that it can be beneficial to view writing in a similar way: as an act of adaptation to a particular rhetorical context. With that in mind, we can also view tutoring as an opportunity to help students recognize, question, and negotiate these contexts.

A way to facilitate this discussion is through the lens of the postmodern conception of writing as “situated.” Many scholars have discussed this concept, but I think that Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch, in her article on post-process pedagogy, sums up the discussion nicely when she says that “writing must correspond to specific contexts that naturally vary” (115). In the case of writing, a context is the rhetorical situation that the writer is working within (or, in some cases, around or against), which includes but is not limited to: tone, audience, form, language use, and so on. While these issues themselves should always be considered while writing, the specifics of what they are will always change from writing task to writing task, from context to context. For instance, in a personal narrative, the tone might be somewhat casual and personable and the form may follow that of a traditional plot with a climax and denouement, while a sociology essay might require a more formal tone and a decidedly thesis-based form. There is no one universal rule in writing. The “rules,” like language itself, are arbitrary, socially constructed, contextually-bound, and changeable. This broad view of writing is known as “situatedness,” and it “refers to the ability to respond to specific situations rather than rely on foundational principles or rules” (115). Writing is not a matter of knowing how to do it “right,” but of determining what is appropriate for the situation.

As tutors, we can help writers navigate the tricky terrain of situatedness by allowing our own experiences and knowledge of writing in various contexts to inform, and, conversely, we can allow ourselves to be informed by our tutees. An example of this is a simple knowledge exchange. If you happen to be a literature major and are very good a integrating quotes, you might be able to give your tutee some ideas of when that might be considered appropriate or how it might stylistically be attempted. Or if your tutee brings knowledge of the way data is often presented in a scientific research paper, he or she can break that down for you, which serves the dual purpose of adding to your own general knowledge and reaffirming their own knowledge and expertise. Any new, context-specific knowledge of this sort adds to a writer’s knowledge of writing in its various forms, and gives a writer a broader knowledge of writing as a whole. This aggregation of knowledge hopefully makes it easier for a writer to shift fluidly between disparate rhetorical contexts.

Another skill tutors can bring to this process of discovery is the knowledge of what kinds of questions to ask. And usually, the questions that are deceptively simply will yield the most complex, yet
perhaps fruitful answers. Freirean, open-ended problem-posing questions, in particular, can be applied to almost any writing situation with deconstructive and demystifying results: why, what, when, for whom, and how? Asking these questions encourages writers to both examine and question the conventions of the writing tasks assigned. For example, one of my tutees this semester was getting frustrated with APA formatting, so we had a fifteen minute discussion about it, asking why we thought this system was created in the first place, why it was so intricate, why citation was so valued in American academia, etc. While the conversation understandably didn't alleviate all of her frustration with the format itself, she was able to discern that there was a logic and reasoning and values system behind it.

These kinds of questions can also help the writer move beyond simple conventions into thinking about their writing in ways they might not have considered before. For example, another of my tutees had an assignment for a writing class in which she had to research a rite of passage in a different culture, and she was having a difficult time moving beyond regurgitation of the facts. So we started problem-posing. Why do you think the teacher assigned this particular essay? How is this topic relevant to you? How does your cultural vantage point affect how you view the subject matter? How does the cultural practice you’re writing about make you rethink or validate your own cultural views? And so on. These questions served several purposes: they allowed the writer to consider, and even accept, to an extent, the teacher’s reasoning for the assignment, making it feel less arbitrary, they required her think of the assignment in direct relation to herself, consequently making it more personally meaningful, and they asked her to question her own cultural assumptions, which is one way to encourage critical consciousness. As Breuch notes, “rote learning of subject matter, without understanding its relevance to one’s situation and the world, does not improve one’s education” (119). Engaging in this problem-posing is perhaps one of surest means of self-reflection. I think that it is a good idea not just to ask these questions, but encourage writers to ask these questions themselves, beyond the context of the writing center.

Viewing the world, language, and writing as contextually situated can also help us to negotiate the seemingly adversarial relationship between academic discourse and a student’s home discourse. For this course, you’ve probably read an article or two about the Postcolonial pitfalls of academic discourse, about how it assimilates students into an academic culture. This argument, while occasionally hyperbolic, is not entirely off-base: while we may value a student’s home discourse in the writing center, in the majority of academic writing situations, they must ultimately adapt to the language and conventions of the academy. While the fairness of our academic situation is up for debate, it is the reality we currently face, and for some writers, it can be quite daunting. I think that taking a step back and viewing academic discourse as man-made allows us to see that it isn’t necessarily “right” or “better” than one’s home discourse, but simply a different rhetorical context. As theorist Patricia Bizzell notes, academic discourse is really just a series of conventions established “by consensus of the community this discourse unites. Academic discourse conventions derive their authority more from their status as conventions than any inherent superiority” (139). Of course, this doesn’t make academic discourse any less complex or difficult for writers to adapt to, but it emphasizes the fact that it is not intrinsically more valuable than one’s home discourse. As tutors, we are placed between these home and academic contexts, and hopefully we can be effective mediators by helping writers negotiate the differences and similarities of these contexts so that they can successfully and critically operate within both.

Works Cited