The Tutoring Book – Fall 2013 Edition

By the Tutors of the University Reading and Writing Center, 2001-2013

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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.
Don’t Strive For Perfection, Strive for Improvement

First Tutoring Session

Don’t worry if, during the first week the writing center is open, not many of your student writers shows up. This first week is still early in the semester and many students are still arranging their schedules and adjusting to being back at school, and are not going to want to make a trip to the writing center. My first tutoring session was uneventful because the student writer did not show up. In fact, my first two hours of tutoring were uneventful because of the lack of student attendance. At first, I became a little insecure; there were students who had signed up for these sessions, and they didn’t show? They didn’t even know me to know we would not work well together! On my second day of tutoring, I had a chance to talk with some of my fellow tutors, who also mentioned that they had what we call “no-shows.” This eased my concern quite a bit, and I went to my next session with a much more positive outlook.

Tutor Collaboration

What I have found to be helpful when I am having issues with a student writer is asking other tutors for their opinions and suggestions. English 195/410A meets once a week once tutoring begins, and tutors will find that they spend more time with their classmates in the tutoring center than in class. Usually tutor experiences are varied, but the commonalities are such that tutors can assist each other well with advice. The Graduate Associate Coordinators (GACs) are also available as resources for advice, and are commonly found running the front desk of the URWC. A different perspective on a situation can be directly helpful, or help bring other ideas to the mind that did not come initially. Regardless, the assistance of fellow classmates, other tutors, and GACs should not be overlooked or underestimated.

In my English 195/410A class, I am one of the less seasoned tutors and I found that intimidating as the semester began. However, through my tutoring and collaboration with fellow tutors, I have learned much and have been told I helped others with their own tutoring. If this is your first attempt at tutoring, it does not mean your input or tutoring experiences are any less meaningful than more experienced tutors. In fact, the different viewpoint on similar experiences can provide any tutor with new ideas about how to handle the wide variety of students that enter the writing center.

A Perfect Tutoring Session Does Not Exist

Going into those first few tutoring sessions, a tutor might have an ideal tutoring session in mind. Throw that out the window now. No tutoring session will go perfectly, that is just life. However, a tutor can do many things to focus on making each tutoring session as productive and meaningful as possible. “In tutoring there is no right or wrong answer; rather, there is a helpful and reasonable dialogue about the writer’s piece” (Tutoring Writing 28). If one part of a session does not go well, that does not mean the session was meaningless. Even if a tutor feels as though the session went just awfully, that does not always mean it really did. We, as tutors, can only do the best we can. The job of making a tutoring session worthwhile does not only rest on the tutor’s shoulders, there is also the factor of the student writer’s efforts during the session. This is a factor we can only influence so much.
The Goal Needs to be Improvement

The focus of the session will seem like it revolves around the assignment, but in reality, it revolves around the student writer. Tutors do student writers a disservice if all they do is correct the essay. In fact, tutors are not supposed to serve as proofreaders, they are guides to help student writers improve their writing and thereby, improve their writing process. To feel as though a tutor must change a student writer’s writing process in a one hour tutoring session can be incredibly daunting. However, it is not a tutor’s responsibility to completely fix a student’s process, nor should it be. The goal of a single tutoring session should be improvement.

Improving a student’s writing does not mean fixing the errors, nor does it mean changing a student’s writing process. As tutors, our goal is to give student writer’s several optional writing tools and strategies that they can choose to incorporate into their current and future writing. We are also not responsible for changing every problem an assignment has in one session, or even over the course of the semester. If we can help a student improve in even one category of their writing they were struggling with, that is progress. It is especially helpful to point out that progress to the student; if they can see that they are actually improving their writing, they get a confidence booster and are more likely to continue working on improving their writing.

Sometimes, Things Just Don’t Work Out

It has been four or five sessions with the same student writer. You have pulled every tutoring strategy and trick you have out of your pocket and still, the session is not productive. The student is not cooperating and has unrealistic expectations. At this point, it is not time to give up. Instead, it is time to realize that sometimes, people just don’t click. Some people are not compatible working together, and that is neither person’s fault. However, for the benefit of the student writer, this needs to be recognized and remedied. A discussion needs to occur with the student writer about how he or she thinks the session could be improved, even if the improvement involves the student writer switching tutors. Tutors can’t fix every problem, nor are they expected to. However, if there is a roadblock to the writing process, that is a problem that needs to be addressed, one way or another.

Keep Your Head Up, Tomorrow’s a New (Tutoring) Day

Most tutoring sessions will go well, if not better than that. However, you will have rare bad days that absorb your energy or challenge your patience. It has always been interesting to me how many people choose to focus on the one bad day they have, instead of thinking on the good ones. What helps keeping a cool head and positive perspective though less than perfect tutoring sessions is remembering the big picture. All the productive and enjoyable tutoring sessions versus that one bad cookie, which would you rather spend time thinking about? Personally, I do put thought into sessions I thought could have gone better, but to dwell on them does not help anyone. Improvement is key, and staying with a negative mentality will prove fruitless in successful tutoring. No matter how a tutoring session goes, it only lasts an hour (at maximum) and then it is over. Shake it off, and go into the next tutoring session with a good attitude and a positive outlook and I guarantee things will go well.
What Are You Afraid Of?

I’m afraid of snakes, and sharks, and many other things that start with the letter S, but who isn’t? And would you look at that! I’m already off topic. Ha-ha, let’s get back on it and see what this is really about. This is about what I believe to be the most common fear of the tutor -- be it the grizzled, veteran tutor or the greenhorn that has arrived fresh off the boat. So, about this tutoring thing...what’s the worst that could happen?

Worst is You Fail

You fail. You simply don’t do what you were enrolled to do. There’s always that chance. The primary fear of the tutor being a failing to teach the tutee anything at all over the course of their short amount of time together, -- or worse, confusing the tutee greatly and marring their current skill set, dulling the tools they use for writing, thereby making the ill fated student take a step backwards instead of a progressive step forward.

This may very well be a tutor’s worst fear. The fear of failing. It is a fear shared by all and it’s what makes us human. You always hear people saying that. “I’m only human,” -- like it’s a bad thing to be the smartest life form on the planet, ...but I digress. It’s good that we got that primary fear out of the way. It’s better to recognize it now than to allow the fear to eat away at you under your skin. Now I want you to do something. I want you say something with me -- out loud. Yes, I’m really asking you to do this. And if you don’t, I may come back and taunt you and haunt you if I ever become a ghost. So now that you’ve heard my strange threat and become driven towards my assignment, I will give you your directions. Here’s what you are gonna say when you ever think of failing. Perhaps for your tutoring and even applied as a guide for life as well, when you think of a worse case scenario, you say

“That’s not gonna happen.”

Did you say it? I don’t believe you. Say it again. This time with feeling.

“That’s not gonna happen.”

I know it’s more cheesy than Chuck E Cheese. I have no long-term goal of being a motivational speaker, and sensing my failure at this point, I’ll settle with you saying my slogan of words inside your head.

Now, you’re not gonna fail, and it’s not gonna happen because just by you being around your student, this student will be made better from being around an advanced writer, -- yes, yes, you are an advanced writer. You were brave enough to stay in this class thus far. So even if you are not a master of tutoring techniques and you fear the worst, know that you can invent your own techniques that work for you. And what you might discover along the way is that your student that is seeing you and sitting down with you every week might be made more aware of their words on the page and maybe they will even take the task of writing less seriously.
What I mean by this is that so often the best writing happens in a blur. You just go. You type. Before you know it the white page is filled with black. You are past your word count and you know the grade you will receive will probably be a good one. But for a few students I have had, they approach the blank page like they are walking on a virtual minefield. They are infinitely cautious and suspicious of their words and their formatting and at every single moment they look down at the page and hope they haven’t been defeated. So if we as tutors can have one humble goal that might very well be for students to just get their work done without stressing and giving so much weight to words that prevent the student from moving freely in the writing environment.

There are a few other fears I would like to share with you, and for these fears, I will be drawing from specific tutoring sessions of mine. During my time in the course, I saw a female student for most of the semester, and I felt that we had good tutoring chemistry, but all of a sudden, she stopped coming to her appointments. I don’t know the story behind her absence, and it took me awhile to realize that her no show was not a blow to me and my tutoring skill. The lesson here is to not take dramatic changes in your tutoring life personally cause, like the wise man once said, shit happens. Move on and don’t get stuck on what could be interpreted as a potential defeat -- realize that it is just a change and change can occur in the tutee’s life for a multitude of reasons. These are reasons I don’t even want to mention, but I guess the main one would be a failing on the absent tutee’s part. It’s not a failing of mine or yours.

These next two fears I’m about to talk about combine into one. And they also happened to me and served as learning experiences. I’ll start by saying I typically see a student named David on Mondays. For this period of time, we talked about a science paper David had that focused on prehensile (bending, gripping) tails. David and I had a good session this time. We covered ground, and I felt that I set him on the right track. He could venture on and complete his assignment. Fast forward to the following day. I saw David with another tutor -- and they were working on the exact same assignment. I couldn’t help but feel betrayed and also insignificant. Was my session really that bad that it had to be supplemented with another? And that’s when it hit me. David needs more help. He has trouble with these assignments. So if a tutee asks to see another tutor, or you happen to see them “cheating” on you,

Don’t take it personally.

And don’t be afraid of failing and fear. Fear has a way of getting in yours. It prevents you from doing legitimately good work. This happens when you succumb to the dragging doubt of the feeling. And that’s all fear is. A feeling. A feeling that you have power over but only if you face your fear. I assume that I can’t be all talk and no actions, so at this point, I’ve learned that I must face my own fears. To do this, I must answer one question.

Why am I even afraid of sharks and snakes?

Because I’m supposed to be afraid of them. I’m told their terrible, -- especially great white sharks and venomous snakes. Good thing sharks aren’t venomous. I suppose they don’t need the venom. That would be overkill, but slithering back to snakes, (see that transition!) I was once told by a man I forgot the name of that all primates have an innate fear of snakes. That makes
sense. My fear is universal to my kind. But what about sharks? Well, these creatures have been negatively represented by the media, most notably in the film, *Jaws*. That fear inducing dorsal fin breaches the surface as soon as I wade into the water. I have been afraid of sharks many times in my life, even in the safety of an indoor pool. But I shouldn’t be afraid, least of all in the safety of a pool. And I’ve never even seen or been bitten by a venomous snake in real life. I have in my dreams, though, if that last line confuses you. But it’s for these reasons that my fears are unfounded.

That’s all I got for you,

Cameron out.
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.
Reading (and Writing) Rainbow

The University Reading and Writing Center (URWC) is an interesting place. From drop-ins to regularly scheduled meetings to cancelled appointments, you’ll eventually run the gamut on tutoring sessions. More than once I thought someone was punking me as the tutee says something straight out of “Boot Camp” like, “Ok, this paper is due in an hour and I need a lot of help,” or “I have no idea what the professor is asking me to do, do these comments even make sense?” You may be thinking, like I once did, “This writing thing is old hat; how hard could this tutoring thing be?” Prepare thyself. It’s not that tutoring is difficult per se, but it does need one crucial ingredient—balance. As other articles in this tutoring book will no doubt help illuminate, balance is needed on a number of levels. Everything from the relationship with the tutee to explicit instruction versus implicit instruction benefits from a measure of balance, and session length is another one of these things. This article will discuss some of the pros and cons of the two most common session lengths at the URWC and help you strike an early balance that will lead to being the greatest tutor ever…e.v.e.r (ok maybe not “ever,” but you get what I mean).

First, let’s talk about the 30-minute session. The 30-minute session comes with a number of advantages and disadvantages. I must admit, I’m a little biased here as the 30-minute session is my favorite. These sessions feel like an extension of Robert H. Garrison’s “brief, efficient four-to-five-minute writing tutorials” (McAndrew and Reigstad 107). Garrison was able to prioritize his time to work quickly with students and give them succinct directions. On some level, these quick sessions force us tutors to stay at a distance simply because we cannot insert our voice into the essay or writing if we don’t have time to do so. Now you may be freaking out, “I’m pressed for time—just move this here and this here and add a quote here,” and BAM, before you know it, the paper is yours and not the tutees. It’s ok, take a deep breath, say it with me, “Woosa.” Let’s be honest, this is a possibility, and probably something you might do by accident, not every session is going to go according to plan. But keep in mind, the paper and the grade is up to the writer, not the tutor. Some people think of these quick sessions are like leading the tutee by hand, but I like to think of it as setting the writer up for as much success as possible and then pushing them off to go write If done right, this can help you be a part of the writing process and not the writing product.

The 30-minute session also allows us to focus more on Higher Order Concerns (HOC) as opposed to Later Order Concerns (LOC). Assuming you’re able to stay away from the ever-tempting LOC trap (they are a lot easier to find and “fix”), hopefully you’ll be able to find the most important HOC issue and work on it. Don’t be afraid to read quickly through a draft, dodging LOCs as you go, to make sure you find that all-important HOC. Also, if there are multiple HOCs, the limited time frame forces us to focus on two or three key issues that will maximize the paper. In general, focusing on only two or three issues in a paper at a time is a great strategy so as not to overwhelm the tutee. And even if all the HOCs are there and you have to focus on LOCs, the 30-minute session means that you can choose one (or a couple) LOC pattern(s) to illuminate.

On the other hand, the 30-minute session is not without it’s drawbacks. Many times there can be a feeling of being rushed in the 30-minute session (I know, crazy right?) and you might feel like you don’t have time to fully help the tutee. Sometimes, a tutee will come in with a paper and in 30 minutes you might not be able to get through the whole thing. Or, as is the case with
some English as a Second Language (ESL) students, you’re forced into explicit LOC instruction and don’t find the HOC until 2 minutes before the session is over, or sometimes 2 minutes after the session is supposed to have ended. But, you did your best and it’s up to them now, and if you can be engaging without being overwhelming you’ll strike the balance that will keep the rhythm of the session so well you could do the Macarena (or whatever you crazy kids do these days).

The 60-minute session isn’t also without its ups and downs. Students can come with a seven to twelve page paper and you’ll be able to diagnose HOCs and LOCs and probably cover both within the time frame. The 60-minute session can also allow you to gain the extra bit of rapport with the tutee that allows you to help them level-up like a Digi-Mon. In addition, you can easily get into the writing process at any stage. The tutee can bring in a piece that’s in the very early stages, perhaps even needing to find or read over a source before beginning to outline and prewrite. Any student that has the most difficulty with these stages in writing will likely gravitate towards 60-minute sessions just because they know they’ll have a good amount of time with a tutor. Both of these can really help tutors and tutee’s feel like they’re “getting a lot done.” This added feeling of accomplishment can help student writers, and writing coaches, gain the confidence that they might be lacking and open entirely new avenues of critical thinking and help them fly as high as a butterfly in the sky. I can fly twice as high, take a look, it’s in a book, it’s Reading (and Writing) Rainbow. But, I digress.

Keep in mind that there are two groups of students that really do seem to benefit from the 60-minute session: ESL and Learning Difference (LD) students. As for ESL students, you’ll likely need to do a fair amount of direct instruction with regard to LOCs. Some ESL students don’t have the language, and perhaps grammar skills, necessary to make their ideas clear and meaningful on the page. This creates a couple of problems. First of all, you might have trouble even understanding meaning, and working through this conundrum and getting them to talk it out can be time consuming. Then, you’ll have to take what they’re trying to say and help them write while at the same time trying not to write the paper for them, and all with the goal of making them life-long writers (no biggie, right?). Also, it’s easy to become overwhelmed by the quantity of LOCs, making it time consuming to find the LOC patterns. Many of these language issues relate to LD students as well. With LD students, it’s important to try all the strategies you have to find the one that works. In either case, the 60-minute session can allow you to fully engage with the tutee.

There are some challenges in the 60-minute session. Whenever there is more time for you to stay in contact with a piece of writing, the chance of influencing it will increase unless you really focus on open-ended questions and a more “minimal” style of collaborative tutoring (yay for buzzword bingo!) It’s our job, and likely our desire, to help as much as possible. Because of this desire to help, you might be tempted to encourage the students to look at the essay from your point of view or even give the essay writer your language by mistake. This can be minimized as long as we, as tutors, are aware of this potential and try to steer clear.

One of the more challenging aspects of the 60-minute session, from a tutoring perspective, is that, frankly, they can feel a bit “long”. As you sit with a student for a full hour working on one essay, especially if you’re tutoring around 4 or 5 o’clock, as I did, at the end of a long day, even the tutee can begin to yawn. In these instances, it’s good to go into the session with a plan in mind. By partitioning out your time you can help keep both you and the tutee engaged and working throughout the session.

Some of this is just out of your control. An ESL student might think a half-hour a week is the perfect amount but really need an hour or more. A senior psychology major working on a
paper she would like to help launch her into graduate school might think that an hour a week in the URWC will really help her. It’s not that the tutee is wrong, rather that we have to be conscious of the different needs and desires of our tutee’s if we’re going to help them. By learning what they want, and figuring out what they need—if it’s different from what they want, and understanding the different time constraints you’ll be asked to work within, you’ll be able to create a balanced session that helps create life-long writers.

Works Cited
No Draft? No Problem!

Writing doesn’t just magically happen. You can’t 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.
10-4, Little Buddy: Two Way Convos

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.
On my first day at the writing center, no one had a draft. In fact, none of the students I saw that day even had so much as a topic prepared. This completely floored me. Before beginning tutoring, I had expected that at each and every appointment a student writer would come in with more or less a whole paper to work on. I had expected that the student and I could then methodically go over this piece of writing, not needing to delve too deeply into the student's thoughts on just what exactly they intended to write about. I thought that somehow, students would get themselves started, work through clarifying their thoughts on their own, and then come in to the writing center to work on refinement. It never occurred to me that before doing any of the refining work I expected to do, these student writers might need help getting their ideas off the ground first.

I'm fact, counter to my expectations, work in the writing center is actually very much about what a student does before writing. Throughout the semester, I found that brainstorming and prewriting were a major part of the work I ended up doing: I'd say that more than half of all the appointments I had focused on, at least in part, helping the student writer prepare to compose instead of working with a finished product. This is important to keep in mind while tutoring. For many students, starting is often the hardest part of the writing process. While it's tempting to take for granted the ability to come up with a topic and a plan for a paper, these are important skills which must be developed and practiced if a student is ever to have any success with writing.

With this in mind, here are a few tips and suggestions for those times when you're helping students who are at the beginning of their writing process:

1. Stick to the prompt

   I can't emphasize this first point enough: it's vital to establish the purpose of a student's writing assignment right at the outset. Any work done without first considering the parameters of the project is wasted effort. Your student may come up with a great topic and direction for a paper, but will only end up being frustrated to later discover that it won't fit with what their instructor’s asking for. Ask for the assignment prompt right at the beginning, don’t hesitate. If the student forgets it, look it up on SacCt, or perhaps through the student’s course syllabus.

2. Be encouraging

   I have found that a lot of the problems students have getting started often seem to stem from a lack of confidence. It's not that they can't start thinking about their topic, or that they don't have any thoughts about it at all, they just lack the confidence to share what ideas they do have. So many of their experiences with writing have been negative ones, and they are afraid of somehow being “wrong” again. One of the most important things you can do as a tutor is encourage a student to write. You should somehow communicate to them that their ideas are
good, and that they’re worth working on further. It is for this reason that I suggest being especially enthusiastic at this stage of the writing process. Don’t poke too many holes in the ideas students bring up, and don’t be too critical. Work to be complimentary, and encourage them as much as possible.

Try a variety of strategies

Everyone learns, works, and writes slightly differently. Accordingly, some prewriting strategies may be helpful to one student, some may really not be to another. Thus, don’t be afraid to try out multiple brainstorming methods until you find one that works.

McAndrew and Reigstad’s *Tutoring Writing* suggests a great variety of such strategies for exactly this situation. Of these, I personally found versions of “Twenty Questions,” “Clustering,” and “Point-of-view mapping” to be most helpful, but they’re all good. Give ‘em a shot.

2. Make a plan and stick to it

Once you and the student are able to hammer out a topic or direction for a paper, don’t hesitate to move to the next step. Start working on a potential outline or plan of action for the paper, and make sure the student has the momentum to keep working on their writing. Often, I worked with a regular, returning student on coming up with a topic, and sent them on their way only to have them return without having done any further work on the paper. So often, these students would seem to leave the writing center thinking that they’d done enough work, and let the next part of the assignment slide. Don’t be afraid to make plans and goals for your next session with a regular, returning student. You can give them work to do in the time between your sessions: this ensures that you’ll both make the most of your time tutoring.

Obviously, you may not have the opportunity to plan such return sessions with a drop-in student, but this shouldn’t stop you from helping the student plan through what happens next for their paper. Planning is, in my experience with academic writing, always a good thing.

Over time, I think you’ll find that the prewriting and brainstorming sessions with students can be some of the most fun hours in the writing center. You get a chance to talk with a wide range of people, and get to explore so many different ideas with them. It’s easy, and it’s interesting to see how different people work when clarifying their ideas. Best of luck to you!
Making the Most of Drop-in Tutoring

As a tutor, you will be exposed to many different tutoring strategies based on research and techniques that have been honed over years of studying the art of running a writing center. One important aspect of tutoring that is mentioned in tutoring literature is that writers are all different, that certain strategies will work to help some writers but may not fit with others. It is important to note that each tutoring situation may be different as well, besides the fact that different writers are in each unique session. Here at Sacramento State our writing center has regularly scheduled repeat writers that generally meet with one tutor over the course of the semester, and drop in sessions where any tutor available can be assigned to a writer. While all the tutoring sessions are typically one on one, which gives personalized attention to the writers seeking assistance, these drop-in sessions can be challenging for many reasons, which will be discussed shortly, and a different approach should be taken when tutoring in this manner. Seeing many different writers possibly only once will present some challenges, as the environment of each of these rapid fire sessions will be different, but it also can be rewarding for the tutor. Developing the adaptability to handle varying situations is very useful not only in the academic world but everywhere. It is important to rise to this challenge in order to do the best job for the writers, and to hone the skills needed to be more adaptable.

Building Rapport

In any tutoring session it is very important to build a rapport with the writer. This allows for better understanding and trust to be established so there can be a free flow of ideas. Regular, weekly tutoring allows this to happen gradually, and more completely in most cases, due to more time spent between writer and tutor. Drop-in tutoring is quite another matter. These sessions are usually only 30 minutes long, or less, and many of the writers that sign up for these sessions are new to the writing center, and writing tutoring all together. In order to make the most of these short sessions everything must be prioritized and somewhat compressed. The process of building a rapport with the writer is still very important, so it should begin right away. Asking a few questions about the assignment and the class in general can be a good way to open up a dialogue. Trying to relate to the class and assignment and sharing a similar experience with the writer can help put them at ease and show them that tutors are students too, not professors, and hopefully this will cause them to feel more comfortable.

It is important, however, that the discussion not directly concerning writing is short but effective. Take control of the discussion after a couple of minutes trying to get to know each other and lead it into the piece of writing that is to be reviewed. The rapport building process can include a discussion of the prompt for the assignment, through discussion of how the assignment relates to the rest of the class and to other classes in general. Hopefully this rapport building process will only take a few of the precious minutes in a short session, but it is an investment in the effectiveness of the overall session, and may make the writer more comfortable coming to the writing center in general. If you can show the writer that tutors are genuinely there to be helpful, and are not intimidating, then they will be more inclined to seek help in the future. Once the writer is comfortable it is time to really get to work.
The Push

In order to make the most of a short session with an unfamiliar writer time must be prioritized effectively. This means that focusing on what can be accomplished and admitting what cannot be done both must occur. Being able to quickly analyze the situation is key to being able to get the most out of a short time. Some things to note are the length of the paper, the progress made so far, the particular strengths and weaknesses of the writer, and their requests for attention to certain topics. Some writers will want to focus on LOC concerns while others want to talk about structure and organization, but it is up to the tutor to help guide the topics to the greatest benefit for the writer. For example, if a writer wants to go over each and every sentence and through the process of reading it becomes clear that the thesis and supporting evidence are not arranged properly then the focus should be shifted. Since the overall goal of most college level writing is analysis, then delivery of the main ideas of the writer must always take priority. If the ideas expressed in the writing are not organized and presented clearly, then no grammar improvement can help. There can be a time where grammar and word choice get in the way of ideas, but most of the time the message itself is the most important aspect of the paper and mild grammar errors will not detract from the overall message. If grammar and word choice require the most attention then it is correct to stick with these concepts, but these can be the most time consuming to review. This is where adaptability comes in, being able to recognize the most important concepts to address and knowing when to take a more directive approach and steer the focus of the session toward the major issues. Some strategies for accomplishing this will be mentioned in the next section.

When evaluating the strengths and weaknesses that are the most evident it is also important to continue to make the writer feel comfortable and confident. Whether the focus is on HOC’s or LOC’s, be sure to compliment the writer on anything that stands out as particularly good, either as it was written before the session or generated out of collaboration. Always be honest, it does no good to praise something that is not good just to say something positive, so focus on effort based work and listening or analyzing skills, which are key to the writer’s thought process. Since the goal of tutoring in the writing center is to build up the skills of writers over the entire writing process, as long as the writers are putting forth an effort there will be something that you can genuinely compliment, and it is important to do so since most of what ends up being said, during critiquing of the writing, may make the writers feel critical about their skill. Giving constructive criticism is best way to keep the writer engaged in the session and will leave them with thoughts to chew on afterwards.

Particular Strategies

During a short tutoring session it is important to have a strategy in mind once the writer is comfortable and the scope of the assignment is known. If the goal of the session is based on HOC level aspects of writing then start with the biggest concepts and try to work down. That is to say, focus on overall organization and the thesis statement, and perhaps discuss methods for setting up a paper such as brainstorming activities or outlining. HOC’s are much easier to tailor a session’s length to since these topics are broad and only get more specific as the discussion goes on so there can be natural stopping points.

If the discussion is focused on LOC’s then more prioritizing needs to take place. Since it may not be possible to review every sentence in a short session, focus on a section of the paper
and really try to analyze it looking for repeat errors that can be used as learning tools. For instance, if comma usage is commonly incorrect, then try to discuss sentences using commas from different sections of the paper to avoid letting the writer get stuck in their own thought process, and focusing only on one issue at a time if possible regardless of where each sentence actually falls in the paper. If verb tenses are a consistent problem then look for that throughout the paper and address it every time it comes up, even if you are pointing out when it is done properly, as this can reinforce the concept and build up the writer’s confidence. Finding a balance between positive reinforcement and addressing problems can be an effective way to draw out questions from the writers and create a discussion.

Try to teach a concept rather than be a fixer only, so that the writer can improve, if only slightly, in that regard. It is important that the writer can learn to fix errors so checking for understanding is a good idea. As you address each issue try to ask questions about any proposed changes to see if the writer fully understands the concept you are discussing. Some writers will try to get you to give them the “answers” to their problems, and will just do whatever you agree with without knowing why they did it. Some writers will use this strategy to just get lucky after proposing multiple changes, and will use you as a yes-or-no machine to get you to edit without realizing it. The only way to combat this is by taking control and starting a dialogue about the writing rather than trying to appease the writers. While dialogue can be more time consuming, it gives the writer more knowledge and forces them to grapple with concepts rather than agreeing with what a tutor or reference guide says.

Sometimes it will be challenging to explain grammar by looking directly at a student writers sentences, as these have multiple problems including the one you want to address. The multiple issue sentences may require multiple steps to fix completely, and it can be confusing for the writers to follow along. Writing simpler sample sentences to mimic the issues in the writing can help illustrate certain concepts. Find a scenario or theme that works for you to generate your own quick and consistent sample sentences, as this can make it easier to come up with examples on the fly, such as life on a farm or dinner in a restaurant. Simple, consistent examples will lessen the chances the writer is confused by varying sentences and topics, and can give writers a template for creating their own examples in the future.

Final Inventory

At the end of the session, it can be a good idea to recap what was discussed. While this is important in any session, it can be most important in a condensed 30 minute drop in. Covering topics quickly over a short period of time can make it difficult for a writer to digest ideas. As a tutor, make it a priority to keep track of topics that are discussed so that a full recap can be done in the last minute or two. This can be challenging so use notes or a short list, if necessary, to keep track of topics discussed during the session so no topic is overlooked. Writers often have great ideas that never make it to written form, and the same thing goes for tutors, don’t allow this to happen.

Also, it is a good idea to sell regular tutoring to any writer at the end of a drop in session. Remind them to always bring their assignment prompt to any tutoring session as well as any source material or brainstorming that they will be using. As this will help them as well as any future tutors they meet. During the recap of a session, try to emphasize the importance of having a regular audience and consistent tutoring. Bringing up these benefits during the inventory can show writers how much they can benefit from tutoring through specific examples.
“Drop-Ins” and the 30 Minute Session:
A Couple of Things I Wish I Had Let “Sink In” Early On

When I started this semester, I had a set expectation or idea of how tutoring was going to go. I’ve had prior experience helping friends with their writing and those experiences were made up of happy and collaborative efforts. I made the poor assumption that if students sought help with their work that they would be engaged in the writing process. I was wrong. This is not always the case.

Another tidbit I didn’t allow to “sink in” at the time was the major difference between one hour and thirty-minute appointments. This semester, the majority of my appointments have been students who have come in as a 30-minute “drop-in.” I didn’t think that these appointments would be all that much different from students who come in regularly on a weekly basis...and for an hour a week. This makes a huge difference! How? Well, for one, I didn’t have a chance to establish an ongoing rapport with a student. Most of my appointments were a one-time deal that more than likely had a paper that was “due tomorrow.”

I definitely learned how to make every minute count this semester.

3 lessons I learned as a “Drop-In” Tutor:

Lesson 1: First I had to learn that not every student engages with their work. Stop. Read that line again. I had to learn that NOT EVERY STUDENT ENGAGES WITH THEIR WORK. So what does that mean? Now, don’t get me wrong, I didn’t think students were going to come in addicted to their papers, but I didn’t expect the majority of students to be distant. I also didn’t expect them to purposely stall and force thirty minutes to fly by either.

So let me share some stuff. This feeling of distance and stalling can be due to many factors you will never really be sure of. Some being:

a) The limited time:
A student may feel like- what could possibly be accomplished in thirty minutes? Trust me, a whole LOT. Time management is KEY. Every minute is important. It’s up to you as the tutor not only to tutor, but to model good time management skills and to help the student see that effective work can be completed in 30 minutes. Both you and the student will feel incredibly accomplished and super smart. I found that the first 5-7 minutes were spent with greetings and introductions, asking them what they were looking for, going over their prompt and asking them if they felt comfortable reading out loud. Then 20 minutes were spent having them dig deep into their essay while I engaged with the text and the writer. Then my final 3 minutes were spent on concluding with the student by using directive words.

b) The “I don’t know” response:
There are different reasons for the “I don’t know.” Some things to keep in mind when a student responds this way:

- They really could genuinely not know what they’re doing. So, give the student the benefit of the doubt. The behavior I see related to a genuine “I don’t know” response typically involves behavior associated with embarrassment like they begin to look down, get nervous, and/or grow introverted. When this happens, be warm and reassuring. Make yourself human. Give examples of things you’ve had to learn or obstacles in your writing you’ve overcome or are still working on. Explain yourself, and let the student in on why you’re asking the questions you are asking. Help them see the bigger picture of their work.

- They could be a student who is sensitive to the time pressure of thirty minutes. They may not want to get in too deep with work or too deep into an idea when they only have thirty minutes. When this happens, refer to the “limited time” reason above.

- The student could be insecure. They may fear being “wrong” or try and dodge ALL questions with body language that comes across defiant, uninterested, or even bored. You may even feel that it may be some strategy against you, like trying to discourage your attention on them and have you “give up” on them since there are only 30 minutes. Not the case. Also, there could be some students who are unaware or insecure of a learning disability, and are simply trying to protect themselves from the discomfort of facing those obstacles especially while in front of you. So, with the “I don’t know response” in these situations reassurance and a clear agenda on what the tutee will be working on is crucial. Have them underline, circle, take notes, and write questions on their paper while you take on the role of a positive “coach” like in sports. Keep them engaged and let them know that their thoughts and ideas matter and that you’ll help them find the words. Have your words lead the tutee through a writing path they may not have ever known was there to take.

Lesson 2: Another lesson I learned the hard way was that it was okay to take a directive approach. I needed to let go of this idealistic expectation of a harmonious collaboration between me and the tutee. Even though our class text reading introduced other approaches to tutoring, I had no idea why I was stuck on collaboration. However, not all students like to collaborate. Some students may never have experienced this type of teamwork. I had to realize and accept that there was a clash between the expectations set between me and the tutee. I had my “collaborative expectation” up against their need for “clear cut direction” while pressured to stick to a limited timeframe. I came to realize that it was okay to be more directive for the students that needed it (and not controlling) and to balance my collaborative efforts when the tutee was more open to engage.

Lesson 3: The last lesson I learned about “Drop-Ins” is that they usually have a 30 minute appointment rather than an hour, and their assignment is usually “due tomorrow.” This is important to know, because as a tutor you may get the draft the student is ready to turn it. This is usually the “prewriting” dumped into a structured form. Congratulations, you’ve recognized that they just began their writing process when they think they’re close to being done- and you have to break the news to them. It’s okay. Breathe. This is normal. By the end of the semester, you’ll be a pro. This is how my thirty minutes were portioned when I needed to take a directive approach:
1) Make a quickie introduction: You have 30 minutes. Remember, 15 minutes cannot be spent on building rapport, that’s half your session! Your introduction may just be an exchange of names, a quick small talk of a few sentences (while you walk to your table) so that when you sit down you’re ready to work. A quickie introduction is important; a sincere smile, good eye contact to let them know you’re present, one or two questions about the day and such will ease the student into the work. Friendly rapport is going to be built by reassuring and guiding them through the rest of the session. Stay Engaged.

2) Ask questions and dig for information:
After an introduction, I began a session by asking questions. I asked for the prompt; I asked if they had anything specific they wanted to work on. I asked them to share with me their thoughts in terms of what they thought the assignment was about, and I asked them what direction they took. I asked for the format (APA/MLA/etc.) to get a feel for the context they’ll be writing in and possible voice they’ll be using. I tried to get an idea of whether or not the assignment asked for a thesis. I would write all of this down while I listened. You’re going to use this information to make sure they are meeting what the prompt is asking them to do. This is important. You want to make sure they’re writing in the right direction. You also want to model for them this clear question/answer/note-taking and prompt comparison exercise so that they can do it on their own.

2) Set the tone, it’s okay to be directive:
The tone can be set the moment you start asking questions and taking notes. They see that you’re ready to work, and they’ll more than likely follow along. If not, refer to the “I don’t know” responses above. Here are some examples of how you can be directive:

Examples:  “Okay, go ahead and take out your prompt.” Underline the key points of the prompt with them. You may need to model for them how to read a prompt, never assume they know how. You may be surprised that not a lot of students read a prompt.

“Right off the bat, this is what I see, let me show you ______.”

“Go ahead and underline for me what you feel your thesis and your main points are” (if thesis is applicable)

(If you see something random, ask) “Where are you going with this?”

“What are you trying to say here?”

“Is this what you’re trying to say, ______?” (Give verbal examples, they may not know how to say something or how to word it)

“I know you said you wanted to work on grammar, but I see that your content is underdeveloped. Let’s work on what you’re trying to say. Tell me verbally what you want to say and I’ll take notes.
Let’s see where we go, then we’ll go back and see what I wrote down and compare to what you wrote in your essay, okay?” (By the way, this works super awesome.)

3) **Take notes:** 30 minutes goes fast. From the moment you sit down, take notes. When the student talks, it is important to take notes. I can’t stress this enough. When they start rambling, take notes. In your notes, you’ll find pearls of information. You may find that they were building something verbally that doesn’t appear in their essay; there may be items that stand out to you that you’ll want to address. You’ll want to use your notes to support and guide them through their writing. This is important. When you use their words to support their work, they can better visualize themselves revising an essay on their own. This shows the tutee that you value what they say and that they pretty much worked their own essay- you were only the guide. For example, 10 minutes in, you’re taking notes on what the essay is about. You have already gone over the prompt and a bit of the essay with the student. You notice that some stuff they said earlier was real good, so you show them your notes. They will see their verbal structure and how it fits in with what they wrote, and watch how they start lighting up and begin making the connections that weren’t there before.

4) **Conclude.** 3 minutes is a good amount of time for a verbal conclusion. Conclude with what was accomplished in the session, remind them of the strategies both of you did together so that they can do it on their own, and set a goal for them.

**Good Luck!**

All in all, stay consistent, kind, genuine, helpful, and fully engaged with the essay and the writer by taking notes and helping them analyze their work. By this point, they’re in awe that so much can really be done in 30 minutes, they’ll look at you like some God and want to reschedule with YOU specifically. You won’t even need to Hard Sell the writing center; just say, “hope to see you back here soon” and they’ll look at you with eager eyes like, “Definitely!”

I’m totally serious.
Nothing about Something

As tutors, we are also students who can easily identify with the struggles our tutees will face. There are countless occasions where we receive homework assignments and essay prompts pertaining to topics we know hardly anything about, or have much passion for. If the subject is one on which you have few convictions and little information on, it can be reflected in your writing. Can you be expected to make a dull subject interesting? As a matter of fact, that is precisely what you are expected to do. This is the writers’ essential task: to adhere to the professor’s expectations of the topic being discussed.

The writer’s job is to find the argument, the approach, the angle, and the wording that will take the reader with them. This is seldom easy, and it is particularly difficult because professors will generally be much more familiar with the topic than the student. It is tempting to feel as though there is nothing you can do with such subjects except repeat the old bromides. This article provides multiple suggestions the tutor can suggest to their tutee if they face an obstacle with their writing that seems too high climb. These suggestions may make their papers if not throbbing with life, at least a little less insufferably tedious that they might otherwise be. This article will discuss strategies such as: avoiding the obvious content, slip out of abstraction, call a fool a fool, and the use of colorful and colorless words.

Allow me to elaborate.

Avoid the Obvious

Let’s say the topic is about college sports, and the student writer must take a stance either for or against it. Have them begin by jotting down all the arguments that come to their mind on paper. The list might look something like this: it is too commercial, it takes the students’ minds off their studies, it is hard on the players, it makes the university a kind of circus instead of an intellectual center, and for most schools it is financially ruinous. When they feel as though they have listed all the arguments they can think of, the next step is to not use any of the material on their list. That’s right. Don’t use any of them. If these are the points that leap to their mind, odds are they will leap to everyone else’s too. And our objective by avoiding the obvious is to apply arguments that are not as blatantly, well, obvious.

Continuing with this example, if they choose to reside on the side opposing college sports, have them dig through their own personal experience with it. Coming up with reason(s) to support their argument can be difficult because they may think their ideas trivial, foolish, or indefensible at first, but at least they are training their mind to think outside of the usual arguments. If their claims are deep and perceptive ones, that’s great, but this may not always be the case. For example, if the only supporting arguments they can create in their defense are: because the colleges do not spend enough money on it to make it worthwhile for the athlete, because it is bad for the characters of the spectator, because the players are forced to attend classes, because the sports stars hog all the beautiful women, or if the sport happens to not be baseball they might say it competes with America’s past time and is therefore un-American and possibly Communist inspired.

The student may then see value or potential with the initial idea in their second list. They may realize there is much to explore on this tangent such as the common occurrence of college sports stars getting paid under the table. This could very well lead them to research that would point to
the very scandal of college sports itself, wherein student-athletes generate billions of dollars for universities and private companies while earning nothing for themselves.

To sum up and dispose of the trite and conventional points before moving on to other ideas that are less obvious may allow the student writer’s mind to be illuminated to a topic they have not yet explored. This has the advantage of indicating to the reader that they are ambitious in their attempts at avoiding an essay that is typical and pedestrian. Moreover, this may also increase your tutee’s chances of coming up with ideas they can actually connect with on a topic once perceived as dull, evading their interest altogether.

**Slip Out Of Abstraction**

At this point, it may be profitable to remind your tutee that as a writer it is important to practice awareness of when they need to move from the generality (the abstract statement) to the concrete example (the facts and figures, and illustrations). With this said, different fields of study require more straightforward explanations, particular jargon, and logical language than others. For example, if the class is Criminal Justice and the prompt is directing the student to write about the effects of drug trafficking in Columbia, they may want to focus on ideas that will help them slip out of abstraction, and into poignant evidence such as, the drug cartel gaining power spreading internationally, and how this power affects not only the citizens of Columbia but how it can affect the U.S. as well. In this instance, explicit examples, hard evidence, and concise explanations are essential in order for the writer to move towards some specific remedy, rather just a general wringing of hands.

**Call a Fool a Fool**

In the occurrence where a student writer may worry about their qualifications to be speaking on a given topic they may resort to padding their words with excessive timidity. For example, if the student writes, “In my opinion, the principal of my high school acted in way that I believe every biased person would have to call foolish.” The assumption is that this is not what they really meant to say. If this is the case and the principal was a fool, then call him a fool. Urge your tutee to be confident and intentional in their writing, and that their readers will thank them for it. If the tutee hedges their paper with “in-my-opinion’s” and “it- seems-to-me’s,” it will not gain much ground with the reader. The student’s predisposition to hedge might stem from either a fear of offending their reader, or from a modesty that in other circumstances might be deemed commendable. But overall it does not help to announce one’s incompetence in every paragraph. It is important to remind the tutee that when they decide what they want to say in their paper, it is important to say it as clearly as possible, without apology, and with evidence supporting their claim.

Keep in mind however that this will not be required in every writing assignment you will come across at the Writing Center. Some writing may call for a sort of mediation where “hedging” and supposing is expected; such as writing reports in the field of biology and other sciences. Ultimately it is up to your discretion when to suggest this, or any of these strategies, with the student writer.

**Colorful and Colorless Words**

The final strategy is to inject colorful words if an essay appears flat and needing more movement or dimension that will produce a picture or evoke an emotion. A writer’s work is a constant struggle to get the right word in the right place that will best reflect a meaning they wish
to convey. Some words can be referred to as “colorful” words. By this I mean that they are calculated to produce a picture or induce an emotion in the reader’s mind. They are dressy instead of plain; specific instead of general, or loud instead of timid. An example where colorful words might be useful may look like this: “It was very cold driving home early yesterday morning.” If the strategy of using colorful words is implemented, the sentence may look like this: “While driving home yesterday morning, the crisp air pushing through my windows kept me awake as I watched a new day thawing while the sun peaked over the horizon.” This style may not be one your tutee will enjoy or find necessary, but the point is that by introducing colorful words when necessary you are inviting your tutee to not only stretch their brain to think of fresh and creative ways to write, but you are also teaching them skills on how to better engage their readers through their language.

Again, the question of whether your tutee should use the techniques this article suggests depends purpose the assignment asks for. In any case, the meaning of a word is the sum of the contexts in which it occurs. When one hears a word, it echoes of all the situations in which it was heard before. Words such as these can be useful in situations where the tutee may want to incorporate words that will help guide their reader more effectively. It is important to remember that a writer builds with words, and not every paper your student writer brings in will require these particular strategies I mentioned earlier.
Easy+“Prompt Analysis”

The purpose of this “article” and I use the term loosely, is to inform and to educate you, some guy/gal from 195/410, about student writers, tutees, etc, and their respective assignments with emphasis on interpreting the actual prompts.

Before we get to the actual process, I’m sure you have some questions in mind for me. 
Q: so why should I care about what you have to say/what’s to differentiate this article from the rest?
A: good question potential reader’s voice in my head, you should care because the prompt dictates the assignment, the grade, and consequently whether one passes or fails the course. That said, there are many ways to go about dealing with the prompt; this is my method.
Q: where did you learn this technique?
A: I got tired of reading prompts and forced the student writer to do it instead and essentially created this process on the spot out of laziness.
Q: hey, wasn’t this all just filler text to fulfill the 1-2 pg. requirement?
A: more or less, here’s where the actual article begins so pay attention.

For lack of eloquence, this is the three step process (see figure 1 for visual representation):
1.) Ask the student writer about the prompt, in their own words, while silently looking over a physical/virtual copy of the assignment. If the prompt isn’t available then wing it based on the information given by the student writer.
2.) Determine accuracy of their interpretation with regards to the prompt; give feedback if needed but the goal of this step is to leave with a general understanding of the prompt.
3.) Condense the prompt into a couple of sentences, noting keywords, phrases that dictate the type of discourse i.e. compare, contrast, etc.
For those of you who are still skeptical about this process, it does work provided you, the tutor, are familiar with the type of discourse—generic essay, lab report, case study—as there is always something to address/argue.

That said, I find this method especially valuable for minimalistic tutoring as the student writer will be doing most of the legwork here. Your role, assuming they’ve misinterpreted the prompt, is to clarify and clear up inconsistencies, if any, and then condense the prompt into a sentence or two which can go onto thesis formulation i.e. “compare and contrast this, drawing from x sources while acknowledging that…” substituting variable this, that, x for actual relevant terminology.

So yeah, here’s a summary of the article, in case you haven’t been paying attention before the conclusion: ask for prompt, ask for explanation, compare notes, and clear up any inconsistencies; it’s really easy, almost makes me wonder why I even chose this topic in the first place but I digress.
Encouraging Incubation in the Writing Process of Student Writers

Writing as a process was not an idea that I had fully understood until I had taken a writing theory class here at Sac State. One idea that really changed how I thought about writing is that the process of writing is recursive; writing is a process that has no real end and the different strategies within can be used many times over in the writing of a paper. While helping student writers in the writing center, I have encountered some writers who think of writing as a linear process; writing has a definite start and a definite end. Many times students think they are near finished with their paper when they are really just getting started.

Many students may have learned the linear model of writing: pre-writing → writing → revising → editing → finished paper. This model offers a rigid structure where the focus is on making it to the next step and completing the process rather then encouraging the development of content and ideas. The recursive model allows for the use of strategies to be employed during any of these steps and these steps can be repeated or completed in any order. This allows the writer to become familiar with his or her own process and really focus on their ideas rather then the process.

The idea that writing is recursive seems to revolve around the idea of incubation. Incubation is the process people undergo when they think about their topic and contemplate in their minds how they will write their paper. People that think about their topic or think perpetually about a topic do not seem to go through a process of multiple drafting because they have already done so in their minds; they have taken the time to think about the topic enough that they have already formulated an outline and working thesis. When they sit down to type, they are often past the point of free writing and first draft and are really sitting down to write a working draft. People who do not go through this intensive thinking process before sitting down to type can also utilize the idea of incubation. Some writers prefer to start out with a free write and get a sense of their knowledge and feelings toward a topic and then move to writing an outline and then some form of writing that produces a working thesis and body of a paper. This process may be repeated in any given form at any point of the process until the writer has accomplished what he or she feels needs to be conveyed. In both of these cases incubation played a part. The writer spends time thinking about and organizing material related to their topic in some way. If the idea is not working for them as they sit down to write for their audience then they probably need to go back to their process and incubate further.

Another approach to incubation comes from the text Because Writing Matters, written by Carl Nagin and The National Writing Council. The main support for the article I would like to consider is the study that was conducted that questioned what strategies helped students become better writers and ultimately better students. What they found was that students that engaged in planning, writing multiple drafts, teacher-student discussion, and compiling of portfolios were more likely to do better academically then their peers. Once again, writing as a recursive process was introduced to the students. They spent a lot of time writing drafts and having discussions with the teacher about their thoughts and ideas. The teacher’s role was to help students see how
they could further develop their ideas and the message they wanted to give. This process employed incubation because it kept the students minds on what they were writing and enabled them to not only write better but also have better recall and score higher on exams (Nagin). As tutors, we can effectively help students understand the importance of this aspect in their writing, especially if they are regularly visit the writing center.

Working in the writing center positions us perfectly to help students develop their writing process and become better writers. My experience this semester has been working with students who either need help getting started, or are in the midst of revision (sometimes writers confuse or morph this idea with editing which is not the same as revising). In the first case, I have had very positive experiences. When a student comes in and shows a prompt or assignment, this is the opportunity to start the incubation process. I have seen many different brainstorming activities implemented at this step; however, I think the best way to encourage incubation is to simply talk it out with the writer. For me, it is very natural to just sit down with someone and talk about their thoughts and feelings about a topic. Problem posing questions are best used in this because it encourages the writer to think actively about their topic. These questions invite the writer to think critically about their writing. These questions usually begin with What, How, or Why. We can use these questions to help the writer to see any disconnect in their work, or to try to work out what they were really trying to articulate in areas where their writing is undeveloped.

I had a student writer who came in this semester with an assignment to pick one of four current topics given in her class to write about. She was very unenthusiastic about the topics and did not want to write the paper. As we talked about the topics, I found that it was not the topics she did not like, but rather it was that she did not want to write the same paper that many students before had written. She wanted to write something original. We then started talking about the different aspects of these issues and discussing angles that are never talked about. We discussed many possibilities that the paper could take in the direction of the topic. The ideas that she liked she wrote down and we talked more about those. We spent the entire hour long session talking about ideas for the paper and the topic. At the end of the session she thanked me and said that she was excited about her paper and was going back to her dorm room to write it. Two sessions later, she told me that she received an A on it and that her professor wrote comments about how she enjoyed the fresh take on the topic. Incubation worked for this writer and helped her see the value in brainstorming and thinking about her topic before she sat down to write.

While the first example is actually easy to encourage incubation because it was done before the writer sat down to write, a harder case to encourage incubation is when a linear thinking writer wants to move from revision to editing in the same session and be done with the paper. For these situations, it helps to talk to the writer about the overall message or goal of the paper. Asking the writer to highlight areas in the paper that talk about the message or support the goal of the paper can help the writer see where certain parts of the paper can be revised to better reflect what the writer is trying to say. A good area to start this exercise would be look at the topic sentences of paragraphs and see how they relate to the message that the writer gave in the introduction. If these points are not clear or do not flow well with the thesis, this is an indicator that the writer is still unclear about the message as a whole and needs to go back and consider what they are trying to say to their audience. At this point, we can problem pose with the writer and talk about the aspects of their paper and how each paragraph connects and does not connect with the thesis.
can try to tease out from the writer what they are really trying to say and do some brainstorming on how they could better convey these ideas in their paper.

The benefits of helping student writers think about their topic are that they can see the many different ways that they can approach a topic and how writing a paper can be eased through the process of thinking about their paper before they sit down to write or are in the midst of the drafting process. Our place in the writing center is to encourage students to put onto paper their own thoughts and feelings. They can better do this if they have had time to think about how they can use their ideas as direction for the paper. As they start to practice this idea of incubation, writing will become more natural to them and they will have a better time composing papers and sharing their ideas.
A Basic Review of Sentence Boundaries

One of the things I have noticed while assisting students in the writing process is that though most know the basics of essay writing, many lack experience with commas. I have to admit commas can still be tricky for me to figure out at times, even though I have had several grammar classes. While it is true that punctuation must understandably take a back seat to content, sometimes how something is written, no matter how profound it might be, gets in the way of understanding its meaning. Such a little thing as the placement or misplacement of a period or comma can affect the readability of a paper. After a student has invested much effort and time into writing down his or her thoughts, good punctuation can mean the difference between an essay that is a pleasure to read, because ideas are clearly marked by boundaries separating one thought from the next, or an essay that reads like a chore because one must continually go back and reread sentences to clarify where one thought ends and another begins. Because of this, writers still have to pay attention to these kinds of editing details while working on the final draft of a paper.

So to help with this process of revision and fill any gaps in information, tutors now have one more option at their disposal. As always, when they notice many punctuation errors on a paper, tutors can direct students to the Purdue Owl Website, but now they also have at their disposal this handy review of some basic punctuation rules. This review has been created in handout format in order to give to tutees. Having copies of these handouts can be useful as an easy reference whenever the need arises to help explain the proper placement of commas and periods and avoid the dreaded run-ons and comma splices.

A handout on fragments and clauses is also included. This is because though not as common as comma splices or run-ons, fragments do have a tendency to appear in some papers. This handout can help explain the difference between fragments and clauses. Also, one of the definitions of a fragment involves subordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions also factor into explanations on comma splices and run-ons. Because these terms build upon one another, it is helpful to begin with the most basic. Both subordinating and coordinating conjunctions are explained in the handouts.

Included on the last page is a copy of Tammy L. Montgomery’s punctuation guide taken from her book Interpretations. I have found this information to be very helpful when I am writing and like to use it as a quick reference.

Fragments and Clauses

Fragments can hamper the understanding of content more than many other grammatical errors because the reader has to guess at the author’s meaning. This is because a fragment is not a complete sentence; it does not express a complete thought. A fragment, as defined by Thomas S. Kane’s The New Oxford Guide to Writing, “is a single word, a phrase, or a dependent clause standing alone as a sentence.”

According to Tammy L. Montgomery’s writing book Interpretations: Writing, Reading and Critical Thinking, “A phrase is a group of words missing a subject, a verb, or both.”

Here are some examples of phrases:

- has left the building (doesn’t have a subject).
- The main idea of the paper (doesn’t have a verb)
- under the bleachers (doesn’t have a subject or verb)

These kinds of fragments can be fixed by adding the missing subject, verb or both:

- Elvis has left the building.
- The main idea of the paper argues against the death penalty.
- Her cat ran under the bleachers.

The other type of fragment is a dependent clause.

A dependent clause has a subject and a verb but cannot stand on its own because it contains a subordinating conjunction. Altenburg and Vago’s English Grammar: Understanding the Basics states, “Subordinating conjunctions connect a sentence with another sentence, which is a subpart of it. The subpart sentence is a dependent clause (or subordinate clause).”

An example of a subordinate clause:

Before Elvis left the building (before is the subordinating conjunction)

Other subordinators that create dependent clauses include words like: if, when, or since. These kinds of words connect sentences by helping to explain the relationship between the ideas, such as condition, time, effect-cause, or opposition.

Common subordinating conjunctions according to Altenberg and Vago:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>even though</th>
<th>than</th>
<th>whenever</th>
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<td>although</td>
<td>how</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>where</td>
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<td>as</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>wherever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as if</td>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>till</td>
<td>whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as though</td>
<td>once</td>
<td>unless</td>
<td>while</td>
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<td>because</td>
<td>rather than</td>
<td>until</td>
<td>which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>even if</td>
<td>so(that)</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>why</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 Altenberg and Vago, English Grammar, p. 73.
There are two ways to fix a dependent clause:

One remedy is to take out the subordinator: (before)

Elvis left the building.

The other is to add an independent clause.

Montgomery states, “The independent clause (also known as a complete sentence) can stand on its own because it contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.”

Example:

Before Elvis left the building, he changed into a new pair of angel flight pants.

If the first clause is dependent, (such as in the previous sentence) a comma is necessary at the end of it.

If the first clause is independent, a comma is not necessary:

Elvis changed into a new pair of angel flight pants before he left the building.

Clauses: Fixing Run-ons and Comma Splices

Run-on sentences

A run-on sentence, defined by Tammy L. Montgomery’s writing book *Interpretations: Writing, Reading, and Critical Thinking* is “two sentences that run together with no punctuation between. A run-on sentence is sometimes called a fused sentence.”

Example: My cat ran from Ryder she’s scared of little kids.

This is an example of a run-on sentence because two independent clauses have been placed together improperly.

1st independent clause: My cat ran from Ryder.

2nd independent clause: She’s scared of little kids.

Montgomery states, “A clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb. There are two kinds of clauses-independent and dependent. The independent clause (also known as a complete sentence) can stand on its own because it contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.”

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5 L. Tammy Montgomery, *Interpretations*, 455
7 Ibid., 455.
There are several ways to fix a run-on sentence. The first two are the most basic:

1. The two clauses can be separated by a period:

   My cat ran from Ryder. She’s scared of little kids.

2. The two clauses can be separated by a **semi-colon** (one of the functions of a semi-colon is to separate independent clauses):

   My cat ran from Ryder; she’s scared of little kids.

Other options for fixing run-ons are more complex. The writer can express a certain relationship between ideas by inserting a **conjunction** between two independent clauses. There are two types of conjunctions- **coordinating and subordinating**-and the purpose of both is to help explain these relationships and add variety as well as a higher level of complexity to a paper.

There are seven **coordinating conjunctions**- **For**  **And**  **Nor**  **But**  **Or**  **Yet**  **So**- and they function like a bridge that unites independent clauses. An easy way to remember these is by the acronym **FANBOYS**.

Montgomery defines these relationships as:

- **For**: expresses a relationship of *effect-cause*. The idea in the first sentence is the effect. The idea in the second sentence is the cause.
- **And**: expresses a relationship of *addition*. The idea of the second sentence is added to the idea in the first sentence
- **Nor**: expresses a relationship of *negative addition*. The idea in the first sentence is negative, and another negative idea is added in the second sentence. (Notice the subject and verb in the second independent clause are not in their usual order): Sam didn’t have enough money to buy the computer, nor did his parents.
- **But**: expresses a relationship of *opposites*. The idea in the first sentence is in opposition to the idea in the second sentence.
- **Or**: expresses a relationship of *alternatives*. The idea in the first sentence is one option. The idea in the second sentence is another option.
- **Yet**: expresses a relationship of *opposition*. The idea in the first sentence is in opposition to the idea in the second sentence.
- **So**: expresses a relationship of *cause-effect*. The idea in the first sentence causes the idea in the second sentence.  

3. The two clauses can be separated by a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction:

   My cat ran from Ryder, for she’s scared of little kids.

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8 Ibid., 455-456
Though this last option works grammatically, it may sound a bit formal for American English. Here is a fourth option which sounds more natural in this instance.

4. The two clauses can be separated by inserting a subordinating conjunction to the beginning of the second clause making it a dependent clause (a group of words with a subject and a verb that cannot stand on its own). No punctuation is necessary when the second clause is dependent:

My cat ran from Ryder because she’s scared of little kids.

If the first clause is dependent, a comma is necessary at the end of it:

Because she’s scared of little kids, my cat ran from Ryder.

Common subordinating conjunctions according to Altenberg and Vago’s English Grammar: Understanding the Basics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>even though</th>
<th>than</th>
<th>whenever</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>although</td>
<td>how</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>wherever</td>
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<tr>
<td>as if</td>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>till</td>
<td>whether</td>
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<tr>
<td>as though</td>
<td>once</td>
<td>unless</td>
<td>while</td>
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<td>because</td>
<td>rather than</td>
<td>until</td>
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<td>before</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>even if</td>
<td>so(that)</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>why⁹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Comma Splice

Whereas the run-on sentence uses no punctuation between sentences, the comma splice uses it incorrectly. A comma splice or comma fault is defined by The American Heritage Dictionary as the “improper use of a comma to join two independent clauses.”

Example: Kobe Bryant detached his Achilles tendon, his team lost in the first round of the playoffs.

The comma splice can be corrected in the same ways as the run-on sentence:

1. The two independent clauses can be separated by a period:

Kobe Bryant detached his achilles tendon. His team lost in the first round of the playoffs.

2. The two clauses can be separated by a semi-colon:

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⁹ Altenberg and Vago, English Grammar, 73.

Kobe Bryant detached his achilles tendon; his team lost in the first round of the playoffs.

3. The two clauses can be separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction:

Kobe Bryant detached his achilles tendon, so his team lost in the first round of the playoffs.

4. The first clause can be changed into a dependent clause by inserting a subordinating conjunction. If the first clause is dependent, then a comma is necessary after the dependent clause:

Since Kobe Bryant detached his achilles tendon, his team lost in the first round of the playoffs.

If the first clause is independent, then no punctuation is needed between the clauses:

His team lost in the first round of the playoffs since Kobe Bryant detached his achilles tendon.

Tammy L. Montgomery’s Punctuation Guide for using commas:

Comma Rule #1
Insert Commas between items in a series.
· The exhausted, confused, and frustrated writer leaned back in his chair.

Comma Rule #2
When you begin a sentence with a subordinated or dependent clause, you must use a comma after the subordinated (or dependent) clause.
· If he could just remember that great opening line, the rest would flow.

Comma Rule #3
If the subordinated clause comes after the independent clause, you do not need a comma.
· The rest would flow if he could just remember that great opening line.

Comma Rule #4
Put commas around an interruptive word in a sentence.
· For two long hours, however, no words came to his mind.

Comma Rule #5
When you join two complete sentences with a coordinator (FANBOYS), you must use a comma after the first sentence.
· At midnight he finally remembered his thrilling opening line, and he began to type, “Once upon a time…”

Comma Rule #6
When you begin a sentence with an introductory phrase, place a comma after the introductory phrase.
· On a sunny Monday morning in June, the new graduate began to look for a job.

Comma Rule #7
Place a comma before and after a nonessential phrase.
· The interviewer, usually an impatient man, gave the recent graduate his full attention.

Comma Rule #8
Use a comma after a complete sentence when introducing a quotation.
· He later explained to the graduate’s new coworkers, “This young man’s education and enthusiasm make up for his lack of experience in the field.”

Works Cited


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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 probing 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.
Experiences in Directive Tutoring

Throughout the semester in the Writing Center Theory and Practice course, we've studied different tutoring theories and strategies to utilize when tutoring in the writing center. The various theories, or approaches, express the degree to which tutors should assert themselves into the tutees' essays or assignments. They describe a continuum with “minimalist” tutoring on one end, “collaborative” tutoring approximately in the middle, and “directive” tutoring at the far end of the spectrum. As student tutors we were to evaluate these theories and incorporate them into our tutoring sessions to whatever degree we saw fit. Like most of my fellow classmates, I have employed strategies in my tutoring that took into account all three schools of thought. The determining factor of which to use and to what degree was always predicated on the tutee that I was working with and the nature of his or her assignment. Although collaboration is currently viewed as the tutoring norm, and the tutoring scheme I most incline to, several of my regular tutees required a more directive approach. As a result of my tutoring experiences I believe that there are three situations that ofttimes require a more hands on approach: tutoring ESL or 1.5 students, tutoring students who evidence learning disorders, and tutoring a student whose assignment encompasses an area of knowledge in which the tutor is an expert and the tutee a novice.

Minimalist tutoring proponents hold that “the student should be the only active agent in improving the paper.” (St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors, “Making the Students Do All the Work,” by Jeff Brooks) However, several of my tutees were either ESL or 1.5 students, and I soon discovered what Sharon Myers noted in “Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': “It is frustrating for ESL students to have a native informant of the language resist informing them, particularly one who is employed, ostensibly, to pay attention to their language and help them write.” And not only to help them write, but also to help them read and understand text that was, as yet, beyond their lexical level. Nor is this problem merely a matter of helping them define individual words since even after we had used the dictionary to define problematic words, they might still not understand the meaning of the clause or phrase. These types of situations occurred, for instance, when they had to read a scholarly article employing a high level of diction and complex sentence structures which included many pronouns that might be separated from their antecedents by several lines of text. Furthermore, such articles may necessitate an in-depth understanding of each preceding paragraph before the following paragraph or point can be comprehended. For example, one of my ESL tutees had to read Derek Walcott's "The Muse of History," a long and erudite essay which presupposes that the reader possesses a high academic lexicon and a panoramic knowledge of western literature and Latin American history; none of which my tutee possessed; understandably, my tutee had been unable to make any sense of even a single paragraph of the essay and was feeling frustrated.

Although at first I had him read the article out loud I soon found that he was spending all of his mental powers on deciphering the pronunciation of the polysyllabic loaded lines, and could not pay attention to the meaning of what he was reading. Consequently, I read out loud, carefully pronouncing the difficult words, and had him pay attention. After each chunk of meaning I would stop and ask him what he thought the sentence or sentences meant, and if he was still stymied I would provide what I believed was a reasonable translation, explaining the
logic of my interpretation and then asking for his assessment of my version and sometimes a recast, or rephrasing, of my statements. Several paragraphs also required my giving a mini summary of the historical issues to which the essay was referring. Since we had been meeting for one hour sessions over many weeks, I knew that if I had immediately sent him to research the essay online, he would have had similar comprehension problems apprehending the online articles, so this direct method seemed the most reasonable way to help him. Moreover, as we moved through the first few paragraphs, the concepts we discussed triggered connections in his memory with what his teacher had discussed earlier in class, but which at the time had not been very clear to him. Of course, such strategies are not only directive, but require a great deal of collaborative dialogue as the tutee is asked at every stage of the process to summarize what he or she has learned and to add his or her own commentary, including any further insights on the subject in general or any particular part of the content.

Working with students who exhibit learning disabilities may also require more explicit instruction from the tutor. Generally speaking, these cognitive disorders make it difficult to accurately receive or process information. In “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center,” Julie Neff states that tutors tutoring tutees with learning disorders “may be called upon to demonstrate organization or to model a thesis sentence when the students cannot imagine what one might look like.” Once again, I experienced this situation with one of my regular native English speaking tutees. Even though to my knowledge he had not been diagnosed as having a learning disorder, he clearly and consistently evidenced problems with understanding what the assignments’ prompts were requiring him to do. Although he was very bright and hard working (he would write over 50 pages of notes and ideas for each assignment), he stated that even after he had read the assignment's prompt several times, he was often uncertain what specific issue he was supposed to address. After I patiently explained the prompt, and he showed me that he recognized it by recasting, he still had great difficulty in staying focused as he worked on developing an outline for the essay. During the week, the more he worked on his essay, the more he invariably began to stray off topic. For example, one of his assignments required that he delineate direct and indirect efforts by federal and state governments to create good new jobs and to show why their efforts have largely failed. The first week, I went over each aspect of the prompt with him and when it was clear to me that he was still having problems understanding what he needed to do, I diagrammed the prompt. We also collaboratively discussed what is meant by the term “good” jobs and what type of evidence and support could answer the prompt's demands. He was to return the following week with at least a thesis statement and a rough outline that detailed the governments' job creation efforts and the reasons for the failure of those efforts.

However, when he returned, both his attempted thesis statement and his several outline drafts failed to mention any such government efforts. As a result his support was also off topic. I asked questions that helped him grasp that he’d strayed off topic, and he again admitted his ongoing difficulty in remembering and keeping focused on the topic. Asking him questions that were designed to get him to narrowly focus on the prompt had failed to get him to recognize what the clearly stated prompt required. Consequently, I felt that it was necessary to demonstrate a broad but clear model of essay organization and a general thesis statement that would accurately reply to the prompt, so he could see how an outline and thesis statement logically and precisely addressed a prompt. I wrote a simple template somewhat similar to this: “Federal and state governments attempted to create good new jobs by doing 1.----, 2.----, and 3.-----. However, these efforts were largely not successful because 1.----, 2.--------, and 3.------. Once I had written a
general outline and skeleton sample thesis on paper, we then discussed the organization under each of these topic headings. He found it much easier to understand what kinds of evidence would be necessary to accurately support the thesis statement and topic sentences. He could discern which support fit and which was not directly relevant to the thesis or subtopics. After the session, he was to substitute his own outline and thesis statement for mine. As a further aid in helping him keep focused while he worked on his assignments between our tutoring sessions, the tutee began to tape record our sessions, so he could frequently check his progress on an assignment with what we had discussed. Two weeks after this directive session my tutee came back beaming. He had received an A- on this essay. I asked him if he had remembered to highlight the government's role in every paragraph as we had discussed, and he replied, “of course, that's what we'd discussed. His prior essay had been a C-. Although our goal is to make better writers, good grades and a surge in the tutee's confidence is evidence that the tutee is making progress.

If I needed reassurance in providing direct assistance to tutees grappling with challenging content in a discipline in which I possess some expertise, I found it in “A Critique of Pure Tutoring.” Coauthor Deborah H. Burns recounts how the director of her Masters thesis was “authoritative, intrusive, directive, and product orientated. Yet these practices created major turning points for a variety of writers. . . . When the director intervened, a number of thematic, stylistic, and rhetorical issues came together in a way that revealed and made accessible aspects of the discipline which had remained unexplained or out of reach. Instead of appropriation, this event made knowledge and achievement accessible.” On two occasions, one of my first tutees, a Biology major, was required to read and explicate a poem for one of his requisite English courses. But he had no skills or experience in such a task and failed to understand a single line of the poem. One of the poems, for example, was about an anonymous gay pick up in a car, but the tutee erroneously interpreted the poem's lines and images as narrating a gang hit squad searching for a target because he could not make sense of the tropes or pay sufficient attention to the lexical signposts. He wanted me to go over the poem with him and help him understand it on at least the most basic level. Since I was not familiar with the poet I suggested we look up a brief bio on the Internet to see whether we could glean some clues to assist us in understanding his themes and tropes. Among other aspects, we learned that he was a gay, third world poet who had often been in legal trouble for liberal political activism in his poverty ravaged and religiously conservative country. Armed with this possibly useful information, we returned to the poem, and I carefully read each line or linguistically meaningful phrase with him, trying to accent the poem's rhythms for him. Because he did not understand many of the words, and time was an issue, I defined some of the words for him, but had him look up a few others in the dictionary. Since there was neither time nor need to give an explicit mini lesson on prosody, I focused my efforts on instructing him in how to search for basic meanings and themes in verse. It was, therefore, necessary to explain that much of modern poetry works not by logical declarative statements, but by suggestiveness and ambiguity to achieve multiple meanings, and imagery that often conveys subjective states rather than objective situations. So, for example, images of violence in the poem are suggestively linked to how the narrator experienced his anonymous, dangerous, and clandestine sexual encounter. As we slowly worked through the poem, he began to see how the meaning and tone of the poem were being created through use of the poet's metaphors and phrasings.

By the end of this session and then again after a second poetry explication the following week, I could see that understanding the poems was not only becoming easier for him as he more
and more began to use the skills and methods that we had practiced, but he was also really enjoying the process. Moreover working through the poems in this informal manner with someone whom he considered an expert, gave him a relaxed security that began to transform into self assurance in his own abilities as he became increasingly experienced in reading and understanding the figures of speech not as statements of fact but as alluding to the poet's or narrator’s inner experiences. Accordingly, direct intervention by explicative modeling led to the tutee's beginning to acquire new skills and the concomitant confidence that comes with success under the guidance of an authority whom he trusts. Since these early sessions, we have developed a more collaborative style of working together, and he seems to enjoy the relationship; he has never missed a session, and I always look forward to our time working together.

My experiences in the Reading and Writing Tutoring Center this semester have taught me that there is no one ideal tutoring doctrine or strategy that must by applied to every tutoring session. Rather, each set of circumstances brings new challenges in understanding who your tutee is and how to best work with him or her on each unique assignment to become a better writer and reader. The three instances depicted here merely show how intervening into the tutee's reading and writing processes can, under special circumstances and for a limited period of time, lead to the tutees gaining abilities and confidence where a more minimal or even purely collaborative effort might only have led to increasing the tutee's frustration and insecurities.
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” (Daiker 155). 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” (Daiker 155). 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 forms 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.
How Modifying Your Personality to Connect to Your Tutee Can Affect Your Tutoring Sessions

Let’s face it: It doesn’t matter how much you know about writing and tutoring if you’re lacking in the personality department. Personality can make or break your tutoring session. It won’t matter how knowledgeable you are on the subject, how well you have memorized all the textual conventions of MLA and APA, or how insightful you are in terms of revision strategies. If you can’t create a rapport that allows you to effectively transmit that knowledge, you can throw it all down the trash! That’s not to say, however, that personality is somehow going to compensate or mask these things. Nevertheless, it will definitely make an impact on how smoothly and successfully your tutoring sessions will turn out.

However, having what you think is a “chill” personality might not be what everyone else thinks is “chill.” What you might think is appropriate in terms of personality and interaction style for a tutoring session might not be what everyone else expects or thinks is appropriate. In other words, tutoring is just another rhetorical session complete with audience, purpose, persona, text, and context. Audience awareness is critical: context means everything. There is no universal answer. Everything is context dependent and constantly changing. Tutors need to be adaptable to the diverse personalities and interaction styles and preferences of the individuals they will be tutoring.

It is important to gauge as soon as possible what your tutee is like. What are his or her expectations out of a tutor? Is he or she stressed out? Nervous? Intimidated? What is her or her own personality like and how can you adapt your own personality and interaction style to best suit that particular individual for that particular tutoring session? Before you are even really able to interact with the student to gauge what he or she is like and what he or she values, you must greet the student. Taking that initial step towards getting to know him or her is critical for determining how you’re going to adapt to that student’s needs and style. First impressions matter!

You want to be friendly, approachable and outgoing, but without lacking a sense of professionalism (at least for the moment). You don’t know the student yet, so you need to take the proper steps to get to know him or her. That doesn’t mean you need to overthink it – be natural with it. You don’t need to ask him or her one hundred questions about their life story or that you need to perform an in-depth psychoanalysis of how he or she is doing today. That could really turn some people off. Also, you want to be friendly, but not over the top. Let’s be real: you can seem enthusiastic about getting the change to help your student with his or her writing, but keep it within reason. Making your tutee believe you’re either: a) overdosed on Zoloft, or b) incredibly fake and chirpy is not the way to go. Don’t go crazy! Greet your tutee, introduce yourself, and ask your tutee a few initial questions. For example, you could start a session with something like “Hi, how are you? My name is X. What are you working on today? What were your concerns? What did you want me to focus on?”

Your student’s response to your initial interaction is going to be a big indicator for what their expectations are for that tutoring session and what type of personality and interactional styles are going to be the most effective. Is the student in a good or bad mood? Did he or she seem super stressed out about that particular assignment? Does he or she seem nervous or
intimidated by you? How did he or she respond to your initial meeting? Was he or she also friendly and eager to interact with you? Or did the student want to cut to the chase and get down to business about writing that paper? You are going to be able to tell a lot about what the student wants and expects from the tutoring session from these preliminary questions and by observing their attitudes own interactional style.

After getting a feel for your tutee, you need to adapt to how you can best suit his or her needs. If your tutee is super nervous, maybe you can ask a few more questions and find a way to add a little humor into your session in order to lower his or her stress level/affective filter. If he or she is super nervous, he or she might be afraid to ask you questions, engage with the text, and interact with you. If our tutee has decided to cut to the chase, that’s usually an indicator that you should get down to business. You might want to cut the jokes, get to work, and focus on getting as much down with their writing and what they want out of that particular session as possible. Additionally, it is important to note that people have different moods. One day, one of your regular tutees who is typically in a good mood might show up to a session in a bad mood because of personal affairs, and this might deviate from how that tutee normally interacts and behaves. Not only is every tutee different and will have different preferences, this can change for an individual from session to session depending on how they feel and what is going on with their daily lives.

So think about it: how can you modify your own personality and interactional styles to best suit your tutee during that particular tutoring session? You’re never going to be able to please everyone, but wouldn’t you rather be that friendly adaptable tutor that everyone requests or the tutor that everyone can connect to? As in writing, you don’t want to approach every situation with the same set of skills. As a tutor, you have to be critical, interested, and adaptable. That’s by far the best advice I could give you.
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.

• If the terms that your tutees use are unfamiliar, don’t be afraid to ask for clarification. After all, we work with tutees from various disciplines, and it is highly unlikely that you will be familiar with every subject they present in their writing. Keep in mind, that our tutees are writing for particular audiences who may have an established knowledge base on the subject. Ask the tutee about the audience, and

• 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.

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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.

Works Cited


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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.
The Invisible Wheelchair

A learning disability does not come with a wheelchair, a service dog or a prosthetic limb one can see. It lies hidden in the mind of the student, tucked away, only to be discovered if the student is incredibly brave or the tutor is incredibly astute. Those of us who tutor students with learning disabilities may think our writers stupid, slow, or incapable of learning. We may resent their lack of progress and be annoyed by incessantly correcting the same mistakes week after week, paper after paper. In every case, we should strive to put these feelings aside and tutor only in this moment, with what is right in front of us, as their apparent lack of knowledge is not their fault. It is simply the way their mind works.

Tutoring in the moment, for today only, can be difficult. We do not want to forget what our writers are working on, but, we do want to forget our exasperation with any mistakes they have made on past assignments they have shared with us. To remember this frustration and hold on to it does a disservice to both the writer and the tutor. By approaching each assignment with new eyes, we are able to cut our resentment over the apparent lack of attention on the writer’s part. When those resentments are gone, we are better tutors.

Students come to us from many different backgrounds, cultures and ability levels. Sometimes a student may be unaware they’ve a learning disability. Sometimes they may be painfully aware of their disability and feel a colossal pressure to hide it. They may have been made to feel inadequate and stupid for their impairment. Wherever they are, our job as tutors is to help make them better writers. By holding on to what we see as their shortcomings week after week, we encourage them to feel inadequate and we effectively block them from either receiving our help or seeking help in the future. Keeping the tutoring session focused on the positive, what can be done, avoiding harsh judgments and making the writer feel valued, can create the trust they need to better perform.

An exceedingly courageous student, that is aware of their disability, may share with you their problem and together you can work to find ways to help the student recognize where they are going astray in their writing. Their disability simply cannot be overcome and, as their tutor, you’ve got to be a lot more hands on in your approach to helping them. A student with dyslexia, for example, may never realize the letters, words or phrases in their writing are amiss. You might point it out to them a thousand times, and they will never have the ability to see it. In this case, it is in the best interest of the writer to simply fix what you know they cannot see. This is not taking over the student’s paper. Rather, it is being a good tutor. If the student can open up with you and share their disability, this can make tutoring them an easier proposition for us.

If, as is often the case, the student is ashamed of their disability, they may never be able to open up to you. They may try to hide their differences from you. Some may even be so resentful of their impairment, they may blame you for not helping them enough. As a tutor, it is imperative we not fall into the trap of the human mind and become resentful of this. Imagine you’ve spent your life being told you were inferior because of something entirely beyond your control, that there was something inherently wrong with you that you could never fix, that you were stupid. By putting yourself into that position, it is easier to feel what our writers may be dealing with. Sometimes, the student writers believe they are stupid, not worth your time, lucky to be in school and certain they cannot graduate. Patience is our best gift as a tutor.
We certainly should not take over a student’s work, even if we suspect them of having a learning disability. By accepting where they are, we are far more able to help them than if we allow our dissatisfaction of their progress to cloud our judgment of their work. By simply approaching each session with our writers as the only session, we can better help them with their writing and we can help them accept, not fatally, but realistically, where they are. We can help them see that they CAN do what they are doing, even if it is difficult. Perhaps we can also teach them to lose a bit of their shame surrounding their difference from other students and to accept their abilities and to know they are okay, just as they are.

Some student writers are naturally slower than others. None of us learn at the same pace. When I have a student that repeatedly makes the same mistake, I have them take notes on what I am telling them. If, for example, the writer cannot get the hang of the apostrophe, and I see this same mistake week after week, in paper after paper, I have them take notes on when to use the possessive and when not to. If they make the mistake again, I have them pull out their notes and see if they can determine where they went astray. If not, I try to hint them closer to the problem. They may just have difficulty with that single concept. However, if they are incapable of seeing the mistake, or if they can’t understand my explanations and different methods don’t work, there may be a problem.

If you are interested in possible learning problems your student may have, search the web, talk to people with knowledge about learning disabilities, possibly those in the Services to Students With Disabilities office in Lassen 1008. There is a lot of information available to us. I’m not advocating running all over campus, naming your student and expressing your concerns, but a more discreet approach could conceivably help your student. Any data you find, you can use to try different methods to assist your writer. If, after doing your research and carefully looking at the problem with the writer, you may find yourself wanting to suggest they get tested for a learning disability. Discuss the problem with the Writing Center coordinator or assistant coordinator first and come to a workable solution.

I would never advocate for a tutor to jump in and suggest to any student writer they may have a learning disability. We are tutors, and we are not capable of diagnosing a learning disability. We can seek help from those in charge of the Writing Center, but making a decision to approach the student regarding a possible disability should never lie solely with the tutor.

Certainly, it is not our job to diagnose a learning disability. Possibly, we have dealt with the disability the student has in the past, or we’ve some experience with it, so we recognize it. I would never recommend asking someone if they have a learning disability directly, but the subject can be brought up gently, with cautious questions as to past problems with writing, trouble they see in their academic selves and the things they have the most difficulty with. By learning what is best for the writer, we make our jobs as tutors easier.
Dyslexia in the Writing Center

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 paper in my 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 has all of ads with white men in them and alcohol; it seems to be targeted towards 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 learning disability 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 student's 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 student's, 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 student's 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. Secondy, 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.mtsu.edu/~studskl/hd/learn.html)
- [http://www.metamath.com/lsweb/dvclearn.htm](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 students 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.
Tutoring Hearing-Impaired Students in the Writing Center

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 as 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

Writing Tutors. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008. Print. This is an excellent reference article for a tutor who is tutoring a hearing impaired student. Weaver explores many of the differences between tutoring hearing and non-hearing students. The article also offers a bibliography to which the interested tutor may wish to refer.
Literacy

Attention to reading is such a fundamental aspect of the discourse of writing. Working with students and their written material sometimes de-emphasizes the importance of the “reading” aspect. One day, I was working with a student who was attempting to write a compare/contrast essay. She admitted to me that she was having a lot of difficulty narrowing down her ideas. I attempted to help her brainstorm, but she still seemed to be a little lost in terms of what direction she wanted to take. I then suggested to her that we take a look at the readings she planned to use for her paper. As we went over the readings, I realized that it was challenging for her to effectively analyze everything that she had read. Thus, when she attempted to write, the process had consequently proven to be very frustrating. In that moment, I realized that reading closely and analytically is related to writing effectively. Even native speakers of English may have a harder time with reading comprehension or analysis, and this can affect writing.

The University Reading and Writing Center is a place where, more often than not, people come to get help with writing. Yet, literacy is a person’s ability to read and write. Throughout the course of the semester, you will engage many theoretical approaches on how to assist students in the writing process. Yet, the reading process is one of the most critical and often overlooked. In fact, most academic essays begin with close reading of one text or more. Reading strategies, however, are not necessarily taught in a college classroom wherein everyone is expected to possess such skills; the focus is usually on analytical or other types of writing. In my experience, often when students find composition challenging, they are also experiencing difficulties with reading—and many times, without even their knowledge. Reading words from a text for basic comprehension may not be as challenging for most students; however, close reading of a text—analytical reading, let’s say, for an English course on Toni Morrison—requires specific skills. Possessing these skills will help ease the writing process for many students.

Even as tutors, we engage the close reading process when helping students with essays. When you read closely, essentially you observe the facts and details of text. You may focus on a particular passage when helping a student, or on the text as a whole. Your aim may be to pay attention to the rhetorical features, structural/organizational elements, or other selected features. Thus, helping students to develop close reading skills is similar to teaching them to do what you do as you read their essays and provide feedback.

Starting with the Title

For students who are having difficulty with comprehension, I find that it is most helpful to start with the obvious: the title (headings) of the piece about which they are going to write. Many books and essays offer informative titles and/or headings that help articulate the nature of the work. The point here is to get the student to begin thinking about the text in various ways. Questions you might ask a tutee to consider are:

- Why does the author choose this particular title?
- How might a reader interpret this title (heading) if he/she knew nothing about the text?
Questions, Questions, and More Questions

The strategy above brings up the importance of questions in reading and writing. Rather than outline a dozen and one steps to assist tutees with reading, it is perhaps more useful to elaborate on just this one. The value of questions cannot be underestimated!

In general as a tutor, you may not be completely familiar with a tutee’s text, but you may find that students often respond well to questions about the text. Their answers usually rely on information synthesized through their previous experience of reading along with the new paradigm, or viewpoint, incited by the questions. Essentially, students often find themselves “analyzing” out loud, and thoughts are also transformed from abstraction to spoken word. When you find that a student is “stumped” by a reading, it is often helpful to ask questions. For example, a student of mine (Alexa, we’ll call her) was having difficulty with the following passage from Toni Morrison’s, The Bluest Eye:

“It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different.”

Alexa found this passage to be particularly striking, and wanted to center her essay around this quote, but she could not effectively “get enough” out of it to write an essay; she could comprehend, but she was finding it difficult to analyze. To assist her, we had a conversation, and I managed to pose a series of questions:

- Why do you find this passage particularly interesting? What is its tone?
- What happened in the novel just before and after this passage?
- What do eyes signify in general? What about in this narrative?
- Do the “pictures” and “sights” held represent memories? Do they represent reality?
- What is beauty? Does the character believe that she can acquire beauty?
- What do eyes tell us about beauty, or how we know beauty?

After our conversation (interrogation), Alexa had not only discovered what she would write about, but she also discovered how to dissect a particular passage to recover the connotations and further significances. Questions are often the bridge between reading and writing. Most questions begin with “what,” “where,” “who,” “why,” and “how.” Consequently, most writing begins the same way. Often, readers/writers discover that interpretation is subjective, and questions often help formulate and articulate the basis of interpretive ideas that are important to individual writers.

And When Alone…

Though the writing center is designed to assist student with reading as well, the majority of students seem to request writing help. As mentioned, it is useful to remember that sometimes poor reading strategies can impact writing. Yet, the truth is, most students are reading while they are away from the writing center, alone perhaps. For those students, I recommend they always have at hand:

- A dictionary (to look up words/ideas that they do not understand)
- A highlighter (to frame important quotations/ideas/reactions)
- A pen (to annotate the text: write down important ideas/repetitions/actions/reactions/and of course questions!)
I make this suggestion to many of my tutees with much success. Even if they come to a session struggling, they often have written questions and annotations to assist them! It’s a win-win situation.
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 am 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.

ESL, Reading, and Prejudices

The thought gelling in my mind after most of a semester attempting to tutor writers in the CSUS Writing Center is: we are failing the ESL students. By we I do not mean the Writing Center, I mean the University and by inference our country’s educational system in general. These students are way ahead of the average American mope who speaks only English and still writes indifferently. Most of the students I have tutored are ESL students; graduate and undergraduate alike. They have amazing organizational skills, they know the rules of grammar better than I do, and they have wonderful original thinking and argumentative skills pertaining to their topics. However, they also have instructors who expect perfection in syntax and English expression. To quote a fellow tutor I overheard one day and to whom I would give attribution except that I do not know his name, “There is a reason that writers have editors.” Yes, there is a reason; we all need editors! That reason goes way beyond the HOCs and LOCs we deal with in the Writing Center. It also goes way beyond a professor’s fiefdom in their area of expertise. It goes to the very heart of what a University education is and is not. Should a University education be the regurgitation of rules or honing of original thinking skills? If the University demands the rules of English are rigidly adhered to does this not imply a concurrent responsibility to facilitate the learning of these rules by students who the University has accepted if they are not already a part of the student’s experience? The University accepts these English as a second language learners as students, but in practice often does not seem to accept them as people.

I do not know how to approach entrenched professors who nitpick English errors instead of looking at the content of a paper first. Maybe they need empathy lessons. Maybe they need to spend some time where they are not in charge of the language and culture. Many of my writers have instructors who red line the first paragraph or two of a paper and hand it back, in what my writers are interpreting as disgust, demanding a total rewrite before they will even look at it further. I wonder if these instructors realize or care that they are bludgeoning these students with a “You are not good enough” message, they seldom feel a “Your writing is not good enough” response, they internalize that they are lacking as a person. Is it the mission of the University to help educate these students or crush their spirits? The University needs an effective bridge for the ESL student in order for them to grow into proficient writers of English. It would benefit the instructor as well as the student writer to have a resource like a Reading and Editing Center which blends with classes to develop their own self-editing skills with the Center’s editing function for ESL writers. Many of these ESL writers need way more time than a weekly one hour tutoring session could ever offer.

It seems that language involves multiple senses at the same time in order to start to form a seamless sense of and be able to internalize the language. Developing proficiency in a language involves sight for reading as well as non-verbal cues, speaking aloud and hearing inflection and flow. Television and movies seem to have a special place in blending sight and sound in the mind of those new to a language, this may play a part in the fact that so many of the ESL writers can verbalize so proficiently in English. There are also many cultural cues involved in learning a language which inculcate social acceptability and which require intensely subtle perceptions.
I amazed at the grit and tenacity the ESL students bring to attaining a degree at an American university. These students as a group work twice as hard as the native English speakers. I feel I have always been three steps behind as a tutor to these ESL writers however; there are some things I have found helpful to the ESL writers I tutored within the scope of the Writing Center:

- One of the best skills I can bring to my ESL students is to listen to them, be interested in them and encourage them. They have fascinating international life experience. ESL students have whole layers of pressure on them that a native English speaker does not. Some attained their high school degrees or their undergraduate degrees in other countries. Some have no family or close friends here to support them. The transition from the culture and academic requirements of another country can be extremely daunting. Many seem to need to be heard and encouraged more than any other skill I can bring to helping them with their writing.

- I actively Encourage ESL writers to do more of their leisure reading in English. I cannot stress this enough. When we read we think in the language and we consciously and subconsciously absorb the essence of the prose. English is a very idiosyncratic language. It seems for every rule in our language there is an exception or maybe even multiple exceptions. The only thing that sets these in our minds is experience and reading is proof to our eyes of the variations, the homonyms, and the constantly changing nature of the language. When ESL students read for a class, there is no leisure involved; it is an added stress. In order to glean what their instructor wants them to glean and give the feedback that instructor wants the ESL student can hardly be expected to garner any enjoyment in the reading itself. Leisure reading is what gave me my love for literature, certainly not the literary dissection activities I have endured (let me be honest, it was generally an act of endurance). There is so much lost in these classes even for the native English speaker. It could be a useful maturing process for the native English speaker as well as the ESL student to participate in a leisure reading and discussion class based somewhat on a freeform book club. I lead and participate in three different book clubs in my work life at the Carmichael Library where a love of the language and literature is nurtured.

- I encourage ESL writers to read their writing out loud. Since the ESL writers I have tutored generally express themselves quite well in speech, I find they catch many of their own errors when they read their writing aloud. If I read their writing to them, I risk changing their ideas through my inflections, tone of voice, and even my views on the subject they are writing about. However, some writers are not as comfortable reading aloud and this discomfort can inhibit self-awareness which leads to developing self-editing skills. In this case we have traded off on reading aloud and then we have discussed what sounds correct and what sounds incorrect together.

Regardless of whether we tutors feel adequate to the job in the University Reading and Writing Center, the ESL students I have tutored have been very appreciative of the efforts made on their behalf. It is a tough but rewarding job to teach them “how to fish instead of just handing them a fish”.

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Language and Vocabulary Strategies for Generation 1.5 Students

Patience is a virtue. Generation 1.5 learners especially have to fully understand this maxim, for they have to simultaneously struggle to create and negotiate meaning between their first (L1) and second language (L2). They also constantly strive to improve vocabulary and syntax while acclimating to being immersed in an academic environment where they are expected to write as fluidly and academically as their native English speaking (NES) counterparts. “Familiar with U.S. culture and schooling, generation 1.5 students have different learning needs from other English language learners, such as immigrants with limited English proficiency and international students who travel to the United States for the express purpose of earning an American college degree”(Harklau), and this is why our tutoring approach will need to be tailored to meet the specific learning needs of these students. Since generation 1.5 students are socialized in English speaking schools, they have the ability to converse like native English speakers; however, they are usually less skilled in producing academic language considered appropriate for college writing success because they learned English orally, and only knowing vernacular English leaves students unfamiliar with complexities of standard academic discourse linguistic structures and rhetorical styles. For this reason, when we tutor in the writing center we need to remain flexible with our tutoring strategies and approach to corrective error feedback. Although generation 1.5 students speak the English language well, this student demographic needs extra support with reading and writing, and we can use a plethora of strategies to impart skills that empower students to self-correct, which is essential for academic success.

When we tutor in the writing center we need to keep in mind that second language learners have different needs, which not only varies from one tutee to the next, but also from one assignment to the next. As Terese Thonus explains, second-language writers attending U.S. colleges and universities generally fall into one of three groups: EFL writers who were educated in their mother tongue (L1) and are learning English as their L2 (referred to as foreign or international students), ESL writers who are recent immigrants to the United States, often with educational backgrounds in their L1, and generation 1.5 writers who are long-term U.S. residents and English learners fluent in spoken English (17). This classification of English language learners gives tutors a glimpse of a tutee’s English language background and illuminates the students’ learning needs, which better prepares us to assist students from any category. Specifically, according to the “Meeting in the Middle” article from our class reading, “generation 1.5 [students] are ear learners who are more apt to have phonetic spelling issues and have a difficult time expressing what they want to say using academic discourse” (96). These students also have difficulty “formulating new ideas...because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling” (Myles). Since generation 1.5 students also struggle with vocabulary acquisition, it is important to help them develop their language skills; moreover, we have to be prepared to help students of various levels of language and writing proficiency.

Some of the best strategies that we learned from our class readings to engage generation 1.5 students in writing as a process are to teach metalanguage and sociopragmatic conventions,
affirm the students’ linguistic and cultural heritage, and give explicit direction (Thonus, 2003, p. 22). We cannot expect students to know how to talk about their writing, so we have to teach them the metalanguage to discuss their writing. For example, not all generation 1.5 students know the function of or how to effectively produce, thesis statements, transitional statements, introductions, and conclusions. Moreover, for generation 1.5 students, creating outlines and drafts are often considered a waste of time. Generally, generation 1.5 students struggle with some of the same elements of writing as some native English speaking students; however, generation 1.5 students’ difficulty is exacerbated by their need to develop academic literacy and vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, “academic writing requires conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas” (Myles). In our first tutoring session, it is always best to explain the rules of the writing center and what the student can expect out of a tutoring session, for understanding these sociopragmatic conventions can enable students to have a more fulfilling experience at the writing center. Throughout the semester we will learn more about our student(s), so if they have assignments where they can include perspectives about their cultural background or language, we should be encourage them to include that element in their writing. Students’ life experiences can, depending on the rhetorical situation, be written as an example or evidence in a narrative or vignette. However, if the student is doing a lab report on cell division processes of mitosis and meiosis, I don’t think narrative evidence would work that well, but this mode of writing would definitely be well suited for certain essays in the humanities and social sciences.

Developing strong writers also involves developing students’ interpersonal and metacognitive skills, which is why it is imperative to provide the students with plenty of opportunities for self-correction by having them read their papers out loud. Explicit direction and modeling are also necessary entities of tutoring sessions because as Van states, “overt corrections might cause temporary improved performance but they don’t cause an actual change in the underlying implicit system, and they don’t cause lasting changes in the output-processing procedures” (85). In other words, if a generation 1.5 student consistently uses the word “Stuff” instead of “staff” and we overtly tell the student without any explanation, “I think you meant staff”, and then make the correction for the student, we are not changing the way the student processes the meaning of the words. The underlying implicit system for generation 1.5 students is that they spell words as they hear them, so simply having the word corrected by a tutor is not going to change the students’ future incorrect word choice, for their output processing procedures will continue to heavily rely on their auditory experiences. We can model correct word usage by using the two words in context in a sentence or two so that the students can see, hear, and use the words in correct contexts themselves. For example, we can explain that, as written “stuff” referrers to objects/matter or activities, as in “I have so much stuff to do”, or “What’s that stuff on your shirt?”. And of course, “staff” refers to people employed by a particular organization, as in “The library staff is very helpful”. After giving these examples, we can have the student use the words in different contexts themselves. According to Weddel, before we engage in error correction we should consider the following information:

**To Correct or Not to Correct?**

Why leave some errors uncorrected:

- Too many errors in one task
- Some errors don’t interfere with meaning
• Errors may not reflect/represent learner abilities
• Focus on content, meaning, communication is paramount
• Motivation and self-confidence are encouraged

When to indicate or mark errors on a student writing sample:
• When meaning is compromised
• When understanding is hampered
• When errors are consistent
• When asked for by the learner
• After a task is completed in total
• Independently, between the teacher and the learner

Why include self-correction as part of writing instruction?
• Learning how to learn
• Greater learner confidence
• Foster learning and facilitate long-term memory
• Encourage self-trust
• Preventative against future errors or making the same errors over and over again
• Learner transfer is facilitated (students transfer skills to other reading and writing contexts)

Self-Correction Techniques
• Proofreading checklist
• Teacher modeling and teacher notes
• Discussion or applying grammar rules
Adapted from *Let’s Talk About Writing* p. 6

Because generation 1.5 students are ear learners and generate many phonemic spelling errors, these students need help learning vocabulary. According to the findings of Lee’s study, words students can understand, read, and produce correctly in their own writing (i.e. productive vocabulary) greatly expands after direct instruction, which does more than develop definitional knowledge by increasing student’s contextual and functional knowledge of the words (550). Definitional knowledge refers to the dictionary meaning of words. Contextual word knowledge allows students to use words in multiple contexts and understand how the meaning of words can change from one situation to the next. Functional knowledge refers to understanding the parts of speech of a word as well as word order. Lee’s Vocabulary acquisition study also confirms that words students could read but could not accurately reproduce in their own writing also become integrated into their productive vocabulary in an immediate writing task (550). For example, in a reading assignment, even though the context of a sentence is understood and students may be able to read a particular word, they may not have the ability to reproduce that specific word in their own writing. Below is a vocabulary acquisition strategy that we can use in the writing center to increase students productive vocabulary.

- See the word (visual or spelling representation),
- Hear the word (teacher modeled pronunciation),
- Understand the word (definitional meaning and part of speech, negotiation, explanation, and elaboration of meaning in context and relation with other words)
• Say the word (repetition), and
• Use the word in context (writing).

(Lee, Soik H, 2003, p. 540)

Because learners do not automatically transfer words they recognize in print to productive use, using this strategy can be more effective than replacing the students’ wrong word choice with a more appropriate word or merely telling the students that they used the wrong word. In addition, this strategy can help students process vocabulary word(s) into their long-term memory since connections are made in various contexts in a writing activity. Therefore, students are better able to expand their vocabulary after explicit vocabulary instruction in which they have opportunities to reproduce newly learned vocabulary in a “contextually related writing task”(544). This writing task does not have to be a long essay or paragraph, as for our purposes in the writing center, I think that writing two to three sentences with the newly learned word(s) will help the students process its meaning and usage into their long term memory.

It is important to know the type of errors that generation 1.5 students make so that we will be prepared to offer explicit instruction to correct these errors. As Doolan’s and Miller’s study shows, “generation 1.5 students produce significantly more verb errors, prepositional phrases errors, and word form errors than their L1 classmates” (8), and we can help students recognize these errors by reading the paper aloud and pausing or raising the intonation of our voice to indicate a concern. One of the most important elements of tutoring generation 1.5 students, however, is to not get too technical with grammar terms but rather focus on functionality and how the student should use the word(s) correctly to clearly convey their intended message. In other words, we do not have to be experts on technical grammar jargon, nor do we have to teach this jargon to the students, for knowing what a dangling modifier error is is not as important as knowing how to fix a sentence with this type of error. Our goal should be to give students the tools to identify and correct their own errors, not label them. It is especially important that we help students learn how to edit and revise their paper since we can't train the tutee on every type or occurrence of errors they may produce. Focusing on the Lower Order Concern (LOC) that muddles meaning and interferes with Higher Order Concerns (HOC) may also be a good strategy to begin helping the students with their essays. Tutors do not have to experience extreme cognitive dissonance over the fact that they are in the writing center to help students become better writers and not fix errors (North); when generation 1.5 students ask for sentence level help, their requests don’t have to feel like a trap, as these students are continuously struggling to negotiate meaning, so they need help with developing language skills.

We can help our generation 1.5 students in the writing center when they bring in drafts of essays; it is particularly valuable to ask the students what they perceive their writing weaknesses to be since many errors will be eliminated during the process of revision and editing. By understanding students’ difficulty with writing we will be better able to predict which type of errors may survive the editing and revising process. When we correct errors using direct and or indirect methods, we need to make sure the tutee is aware of what is taking place within the sentences because each sentence will be situated in various contexts from one essay to the next; therefore, we will be equipping our tutees with the tools to “notice” errors, and most importantly fix them. For example, we can turn instances of error into “teaching moments” by explaining the error and offering examples to fix it; the next step would be to ask the students if they could identify similar errors and then go through and fix them together. Using this technique felicitates learner transfer, and students will be able to use newly learned writing, reading, and or editing
skills in various contexts. Error correction is important because we want to do our best to help students perform their best on assignments, however, as a cautionary note, focusing too much on the errors can make for an unproductive session, so it is just as important to comment on things the student did particularly well to offer genuine positive feedback.

As tutors, we need to have the flexibility to be able to approach sessions in different ways that correspond to each student’s level. Even from one assignment to the next, students’ skill level varies, which is why we need to help them develop strong metacognitive skills. Having these skills enables students to plan, evaluate and monitor their own writing, which ultimately makes it possible for them to become aware of their errors and become more aware of their writing process. Teaching students metacognitive skills empowers them to talk about their essays and develop their understanding of how assignments or prompts frame the scope of their writing; hence, students will be able to compose their introductions, conclusions, and thesis statements, etc., having a better idea of how to construct these elements of their essay to meet the requirements of the rhetorical situation. Learning a language takes time; this is especially true when generation 1.5 students need to write academically. Since native English speakers, too, struggle with writing academic discourse, the task is even more challenging for students who did not speak English as their first language. Therefore, it’s important to be encouraging and focus on ways to help students become better writers with corrective feedback and open-ended questions that can, in time, lead them to notice and correct their own errors in any writing task.

Bibliography


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
Do onto your students what you want them to do onto you

The goal of the Writing Center is to help writers with writing and reading assignments, lead writers through the process of writing if needed and help write a paper from scratch through brainstorming, developing and organizing ideas, draft revising and editing but not proofreading. The objective of writing center tutors is also to assist writers in understanding the prompt or other reading materials. When an ESL writer comes to the writing center, a student’s paper quite frequently needs editing on the sentence level and organization level. I think that our task as tutors is to help them with what they need the most but not merely through editing and proofreading but through direct and explicit instruction whether a paper written by an ESL writer has HOCs or LOCs.

Having been tutoring ESL and mainstream English students for five years at the community college, I came to the conclusion that Explicit Grammar Instruction is more beneficial for successful language acquisition than the Implicit Grammar Instruction. I have worked with many students during those productive years, and I have noticed that students do better when instruction is introduced deductively and grammar rules and linguistic patterns are explicitly stated. I believe that structured presentation of grammar content creates an optimal learning environment for effective language acquisition. Grammar errors are called Low Order Concerns (LOC), but when a writer’s paper is filled with grammar errors, it becomes challenging for a tutor or an instructor to fully comprehend it. Because of the recurrent sentence-level interventions, it might be quite challenging for a tutor to read a paper written by an L2 learner which often contains many LOC mistakes as well as High Order Concerns (HOC).

Inductive or implicit presentation of grammar patterns or having an ESL writer to read his/her paper out loud or reading his/her paper to him will not suffice. I am pretty sure that an ESL writer has already done it many times prior coming to the writing center seeking help. ESL writers usually come to the Writing Center hoping to receive explicit clear and direct explanations but not to discover their errors and mistakes on their own. When a tutor goes through a paper written by an ESL writer and notices error patterns, a tutor should not just correct the mistakes but ought to explain why the error should be corrected in a certain way. For example, many ESL writers commit sentence boundary crimes and have sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splice errors in their writings— or they have instances of comma overuse. Tutors ought to explain the use of the comma instead of merely correcting the writer’s masterpiece. For instance, many writers tend to insert a comma before subordinating conjunctions when a subordinator occurs in the middle of a sentence. They probably think that if a comma is needed before coordinating conjunctions—fan boys—a comma is also needed before subordinating conjunctions when subordinators are placed in the middle of a sentence.

Sentence boundaries errors are not the only errors that ESL writers have. Reducing LOC in the writing will improve papers written by ESL writers and make their papers readable and more logical, intelligible, and comprehensible. Overall ESL students are very smart. They might have LOCs and HOCs in their writings and accent while speaking, but they do not have accent nor do they have LOCs and HOCs in their brain.

Another issue I have noticed in the ESL writings is limited vocabulary or language issues. ESL writers usually have a lot to say but they quite often cannot express themselves in a
way that would not hurt sensitive ears of monolingual American readers. It is a challenge to write in a language that is not native and tutors should be aware of that. Constructing academic papers in the second language and following the EAP\textsuperscript{12} standards is even more challenging. ESL writers face increasing pressure to write in a language that is not in their native tongue. I think that when tutors encounter words or phrases that sound strange to their sensitive ears, they should non-offensively suggest the right American word; but it should be done nicely, so that the ESL writer can feel more confident in sharing their problems with a tutor. The writing center is not a fix-it-shop, but URWC tutors can help ESL writers improve their papers without directly fixing their errors but by clear and direct instruction. Each ESL writer needs a particular help – be it an explicit grammar instruction or leading an ESL writer through the writing process. Both LOCs and HOCs diminish the quality of an academic paper and lower a grade.

One of the most common problems seen in ESL writing is unnecessary tense switching. This superfluous tense shifting makes it difficult for a sensitive monolingual American reader to comprehend a paper written by an ESL writer, for it might be hard for a tutor to follow the ideas presented in a paper. If a time change is absolutely necessary, the transitional signals should be inserted before a time shift and it would be helpful if a tutor could suggest how to fix needless tense shifting. Consecutio temporum or tense harmony is important in an academic paper. In a nice way, tutors need to suggest establishing a primary tense, which should be the simple present tense in many academic papers – except history papers, though. In addition, tutors could also recommend ESL writers to remain consistent with the primary tense throughout the whole paper unless a tense succession should be changed to show timeframe; in this case, transition phrases should be used to indicate timeframe changing. For example, before Judy got married, she used to jog every morning, but now she sleeps until noon. Cultivating good writing habits is not an easy task for ESL writers but is not impossible.

Two additional problems that ESL writers face are the improper use of definite and indefinite articles and incorrect use of prepositions. The improper usage of articles is a trademark move for many ESL writers, for most languages do not have articles at all. How can tutors communicate to ESL writers the rules of article usage which almost always do not follow rules nor a common sense? The best way to start is to consider whether a noun is countable or uncountable. Tutors could introduce and explain the article usage rules if an ESL writer feels confused about the use of articles, and if it is possible tell everything they know about articles. It is known that prepositions practically cannot be taught. It takes a long time for an ESL learner to use them correctly. During 30 or 60 minute session, URWC tutors cannot teach everything they know about grammar and linguistic patterns, but they can give some tips such as suggesting memorizing some common expressions containing prepositions whenever students have time. Another good suggestion is also to suggest to ESL writers to read in English as often as they can and pay attention to set expressions, idiomatic and other common English phrases, word collocations and dialectal patterns.

Most ESL writings contain both HOCs and LOCs. As the ESL specialist Paul Matsuda explains “[i]t is wrong to assume that ESL writing can be broken down neatly into a linguistic component and a writing component and those linguistic problems will disappear after some additional instruction in remedial language courses”\textsuperscript{13}. Errors are significant to the process of second language acquisition, and they are slightly different from mistakes. Mistakes are occasional occurrences. Learners know how to use a certain grammar rule or a linguistic pattern

\textsuperscript{12} EAP – English for Academic Purposes.
\textsuperscript{13} (Murphy and Sherwood 283)
but do not apply it in their writings. Errors, on the other hand, are regular and systematic occurrences, and noticing them in ESL writings is indispensable for both writers and tutors, for errors show the development of an ESL student as a writer and what stages an ESL writer goes through acquiring a language. Both a writer and a tutor may learn from these systematic error occurrences. An ESL writer will need to cultivate a habit of writing academic papers and no amount of a tutor’s correction alone will make immediate transformation. Learning a second language takes time, and students will need sufficient amount of input processing, lots of oral and written practice, lots of time and devotion to accomplish the correct forms. Different languages have different rules and vary systematically. When an ESL writer makes an error or a mistake, it is not enough to simply give a writer the correct form, but the most efficient way is to explicitly explain them their errors – be these errors HOC or LOC – and give writers a chance to practice correct forms through writing.

Many SLA\textsuperscript{14} errors are influenced by the learners’ native language and should be treated as evidence of students’ learning strategies. Each ESL writer has distinctive styles of learning and unique styles of writing, and the tutor’s task is to help ESL writers to become better writers. Every learning experience is an individual experience, and each L2 student, whose learning experience varies depending on the individual factors, acquires second language differently.

\textsuperscript{14} SLA – Second Language Acquisition
Experiencing difference

Culture can include many things—ethnicity, language, religion, and tradition. I believe culture can also include our political beliefs, and our identities within specific groups. The books within our class were great in focusing on race and language. However, I don’t think the books give a relatively good “how-to” when faced with other forms of culture or identity. For example, political beliefs may circle around certain identifications, such as liberal, conservative, independent, socialist, communist, libertarian, etc. Someone may identify within the LGBTQ community, feminist communities, and specific religious communities that differ in values and beliefs. Sometimes our tutees identity or cultural background will differ from our own—and it can prove challenging.

You may find yourself in a position where you and the tutee differ on opinion. There have been a couple of times when I was in this position and didn’t know how to handle it. My immediate reaction was to say my opinion, tell them they’re wrong and send them on their merry way. But frankly, that is the opposite of what one should do. Despite feeling like Luke Skywalker when he found out Darth Vader was his father, I found myself stumbling with words. How do you approach work that leaves you in complete disagreement?

Strategies that helped me

1) Remember that this is NOT your work. You are a tutor, meaning you are there as a resource for the student. Don’t treat the assignment like it is your own.
2) Remember people are entitled to their opinions. They will differ from yours and it’s a fact of life.
3) If a student is unsure how to write down their opinion, ask them questions to get the ball rolling. This can be a decent ‘debate’ time where they can tell you their side so they can figure out what they want to write.
4) In forming ideas, have them write down their points for their argument so they can begin to structure their papers.
5) If the student does not have an opinion formed, don’t bombard them with your perspective. Look things up on the internet, form a pro/con list. Let them decide what side they want to take.
6) Change your strategy approaches as a tutor. I find it helpful taking a Minimalist approach when I oppose the content of the student’s work. Only become a “teacher” in improving their writing and content. I found that by asking them questions and playing the “devil’s advocate” gets them thinking about their content, support and analysis in their work.
7) Be respectful with your tutee and drop-ins. If you want them to be respectful to you then you show them the same courtesy. Don’t be blunt and tell them “they’re wrong” or their argument is stupid. They may be self-conscious as writers and being harsh does not provide improvement.
8) If their work is offensive to readers in terms of race, class, sex or sexuality, think of a good approach to addressing this. I would point how the content can be offensive to their readers and professor and ask them how they can say it in an appropriate way.
9) If students have any prompts, follow the guidelines. Ask them how their professors want papers and if there is extra information (i.e. notes, articles, books, etc).
These strategies helped me in dealing with these differences. What began as a challenge ended up being a good lesson learned. Don’t assume your students will have similar beliefs with you. Cultural diversity is a beautiful thing. If you can’t find yourself in agreement with a student’s work, look at it as an improvement for your own beliefs and theirs. The most important thing is to help students—even those that differ in opinions or values.

You may find yourself in the tutoring center with a student that is working on an argument that you may disagree with. Let’s call your student Bob. He doesn’t believe in global warming. You are totally green and would join Greenpeace in a heartbeat. Bob begins telling you his reasoning that global warming is the “leftist way to control the government,” etc, etc. You bite your tongue not knowing what to do. You love recycling and riding your bike…how dare he! But you have to keep calm and remember those little strategies I mentioned. Take a collaborative or minimalist approach when helping Bob. Ask him questions to help him if his content is not well-developed. You can’t force Bob to look at your (right) side of things. Even though you want to teach him all your knowledge, you can do so in a helpful way—by helping him write his paper. It may feel like you’re betraying everything you stand for by helping a “yippie” with his paper…but you’re also helping yourself with your beliefs and your position as a tutor.

Overall, it can be difficult to help students with different values or opinions. You just have to put aside the “reactionary side” that you would have and use your opposing views to help them if their arguments are weak. It is challenging but that is the beauty of free speech.
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.

**Tutoring Continental Student Writers**

Tatyana Moran

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>Continent (German-Romanic) tradition</th>
<th>Anglo-American tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Think”-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; long paragraphs; 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.

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 – it’s 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).

Grammar and 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 my 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


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.

- Regular plural endings omitted
  I’m takin five class this semester.

- 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
writer had trouble understanding your implicit/indirect feedback, try making it more and more explicit/direct until they do. Remember, since AAVE features are similar in many ways to ESL features, we may want to address them similarly as well.

- 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 angry 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.
Approaching ChE Writers

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 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 decents 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


Familiarizing Yourself with Format: A Tutor’s Quick Guide to APA, MLA, Turabian, and CSE

As tutors in the Reading and Writing Center (URWC), many of us are English majors, which means our papers are usually submitted in the MLA format. It is frustrating when we are confronted with a student who must follow an unfamiliar format. We want to know the answers to all of our tutees’ questions and possess the necessary knowledge to address all of their concerns; unfortunately, this is an impossible task. Knowledge of the required format is the tutee’s responsibility. However, we can educate ourselves with some of the various formats used in different disciplines to help our session run smoother. Students come in for help with papers due in APA, Turabian or CSE format. As English majors, we have not had much personal experience with any of these formats, while tutors from other disciplines may not have experience with MLA. Many students who come for help believe that tutors are experts in all matters of writing; this is a misconception. There are various resources for formats at our disposal in the Writing Center. However, basic competence of some of the other formats is important and beneficial to both the tutor and the tutee.

APA

What is APA?

APA stands for American Psychological Association. APA is a group of social and behavioral scientists whose mission is to “advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people’s lives” (“Basics of APA”). APA style emerged in 1929 out of a need to standardize a style format for scientists across the globe. It consists of several elements such as: the “selection of headings, tone, and length; punctuation and abbreviations; presentation of numbers and statistics; construction of tables and figures, citation of references; and many other elements that are a part of a manuscript” (“Basics of APA”).

Who should use APA style?

APA style can be used for writers and students in:
· Social Sciences, such as Psychology, Linguistics, Sociology, Economics, and Criminology
· Business
· Nursing

However, sometimes other disciplines use APA as well. You may encounter tutees using APA style from other majors.

What are important features of an APA styled paper?

Avoiding Biased Language
One of the important values of APA is for writers to avoid biased language. APA encourages writers to write about groups with accuracy and sensitivity. Writers can reduce bias in language by using specific language, being sensitive to labels, and acknowledging participation. For example, instead of writing “at-risk children,” it would be better to be more specific about risks and to write “children at risk for early high school dropout” (“Basics of APA”). Writers should also be careful to use nonsexist language, and to avoid using “he” when the gender is unknown. Tutors should advise tutees to use the gender neutral plural “they,” or “he/she” in order to be more gender inclusive.

Writers should also make sure to only mention differences when absolutely relevant. For instance, marital status, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity or the fact that a person has a disability should not be mentioned unless it is important and relevant to the study. Writers should additionally be careful about grammar, such as pronoun usage. The APA manual (2010) states that writers should only use “we” if referring to specifically yourself and your coauthors (p. 69).

Clarity and Conciseness

Clarity and conciseness is another crucial feature of an APA styled paper. The APA manual recommends that writers be specific and focused, eliminate repetition, write in the active voice, and organize manuscripts in an organized manner utilizing headings. They also suggest that writers develop continuity by utilizing transitional words to maintain a “flow of thought” (p. 65). The manual also notes that just because the subject is scientific, does not mean the writing should be lifeless or boring. Writers should avoid embellishment, flowery or poetic language and should be as clear and specific as possible, however, they should also write in a lively and engaged tone, addressing an audience who may be unfamiliar with the research.

Ultimately, the tone presented in your APA paper should be professional, and your prose should be economical. APA recommends that writers eliminate repetition, wordiness, and specialized or technical language (jargon) that readers may be unfamiliar with. They feel that such language hinders communication and “wastes space” (p. 68). Manuscripts should instead be clear, direct, and to the point. APA emphasizes brevity and conciseness because for scientific papers, it is important to be able to quickly grasp ideas. The goal of many APA papers is publication, and as the manual explains, there are only a limited amount of pages a journal can print (p. 67). Therefore, the “author who is frugal with words not only writes a more readable manuscript but also increases the chances that the manuscript will be accepted for publication” (p. 67).

Verb Tense and Active vs. Passive Voice

Another aspect of APA that sometimes gets confused is active versus passive voice and verb tense. According to the APA handbook, writers should prefer the active voice when appropriate. The following example is taken from the APA manual:

Preferred: We conducted the survey in a controlled setting.
Nonpreferred: The survey was conducted in a controlled setting (p. 77).

According to the manual, writers should use the passive voice when they want to place focus on the recipient of an action. The passive voice is more acceptable for the methods section of an APA paper, where the writer describes how the experiment or study was conducted (p. 29).
However, writers should compose in the active voice when possible. For verb tense, the APA manual directs writers to “use the past tense to express an action or a condition that occurred at a specific, definite time in the past, as when discussing another researcher’s work and when reporting your results” (p. 78). For example:

Correct: Sanchez (2000) presented similar results.
Incorrect: Sanchez (2000) presents similar results.

**What does an APA paper look like?**

A paper that utilizes APA style is divided into eight sections: title page, abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion, references, and appendices. For specific information about each of these sections, tutors and tutees can consult the following guides:

[http://psychology.vanguard.edu/faculty/douglas-degelman/apa-style/](http://psychology.vanguard.edu/faculty/douglas-degelman/apa-style/)

**How is the reference page formatted?**

APA style delineates specific ways of citing and attributing information that comes from other sources. Rather than duplicate a reference guide or citation guidelines, we wish to provide tutors with a list of sources that we’ve found useful for understanding and using APA style.

- American Psychological Association: APA Style [www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org)
- The Purdue Owl [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/)
- Diane Hacker’s Online Research and Documentation Guide: [http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch06_o.html](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch06_o.html)
- *APA Style Simplified* by Bernard C. Beins. E-book that you can access through the CSUS library webpage

**References**


What is MLA?

MLA stands for the Modern Language Association. Founded in 1883, they are an association of professionals dedicated to the study of language and literature. According to their website, the purpose of the MLA is to “promote study, criticism, and research in the more and less commonly taught modern languages and their literatures and to further the common interests of teachers of these subjects.” As a writer, MLA format will allow you to properly acknowledge those whose ideas you build upon in your writing and research. The MLA handbook explains that “by using MLA style, you will direct your readers to the sources you consulted in arriving at your findings, and you will enable them to build on your work” (xiii).

Who should use MLA style?

Students working on papers in the humanities will often use MLA. In particular, students who are studying English or literature will be required to write according to this format. For in-depth help with this style, the definitive style guides for MLA are: The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers and the MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing.

What are important features of an MLA styled paper?

MLA is known for being “simpler and more concise” than many other styles. The in-text citations are brief, and are mainly for helping you to find the complete source information in the works cited page. The handbook remarks that “by requiring in citations only the information readers need to locate a source in your list of works cited, MLA style makes reading a research paper easier on the eyes - and on the brain - than other styles do” (xiii). An MLA paper does not only adhere to specific citation format guidelines, but also offers suggestions and advice for all stages of your writing process. The MLA handbook gives useful suggestions about finding and selecting a topic, conducting research, keeping track of sources, evaluating sources, taking notes, outlining, writing drafts, language and style. For example, the MLA handbook recommends writing a thesis statement that “is your answer to the central question or problem you have raised” (42). They recommend considering your purpose and audience as you formulate your thesis.

What does an MLA paper look like?

An MLA paper will either begin with the first page or with a title page. If a title page is required, center your title on the title page and at the lower right hand corner list the following: name, course, date and professor name. If your professor does not require a title page, place your name, course, date and professor name in the upper left hand corner of the first page; next you will center your title and then begin your essay beneath the title. The body of the paper should be numbered in the upper right hand corner. The paper will consist of a clear thesis statement, a well developed body and a conclusion. It features in-text parenthetical citations, and an alphabetized, works cited list at the end of the text. If you quote more than five lines of prose or more than three lines of poetry, set it off from the text by indenting one inch (ten spaces) from the left margin; do not use quotation marks. If the quotations take up fewer lines than previously discussed, put it in quotation marks and integrate it into the text of the essay. Include a page
number in parenthesis after each quotation used. The last page of your paper will be your works cited page.

How is the works cited page formatted?

The works cited page gives publication information for each of the sources cited in your paper. Center the words ‘works cited’ on the page. List references alphabetically by authors last names; if a work has no author, alphabetize it by its title. Tutors and students alike can find examples of how to properly use MLA citation at the following links: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/09/ http://dianahacker.com/pdfs/hacker-daly-mla-wc.pdf

Works Cited


Turabian

What is Turabian Style?

There is often confusion when it comes to Turabian style. Many professors use “Turabian Style” and “Chicago Style” interchangeably although they are not the same. Kate Turabian, the dissertation secretary at the University of Chicago used The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) to create a style guide for students working on a paper, thesis, or dissertation. CMS was meant for publishers, editors, and authors of journal articles. Whenever there is a question, check with your professor on their preferences.

Who should use Turabian style?

According to Diana Hacker, Turabian style papers writers and students in humanities courses such as:
· History
· Political Science
· Social Sciences
· Anthropology

What are important features of a Turabian styled paper?
The most distinctive feature of Turabian papers is the inclusion of footnotes and endnotes. Turabian style typically requires the use of bibliography style with endnotes or bibliography style with footnotes. Footnotes and endnotes are used to clarify to the reader where the writer obtained their references from; this protects the writer from plagiarism. The footnote reference is completed by a superscript number which is always smaller than the rest of the text. The footnote text goes at the bottom of each page. The footnote text is smaller than the text of the paper; if the text of the essay is typed in 12 fonts, the text of the citation will be typed in 10 fonts. Endnotes will be placed at the end of the paper. A helpful software program for endnotes can be downloaded on the CSUS homepage for free in just a few steps:

· From the homepage select IT support from the current students tab
· Next, select Software
· Then, choose Software List
· You will be asked for your saclink username and password
· Scroll down to find Endnote (you will be given the option of Endnote for MAC or PC

What does a Turabian paper look like?

A paper typed in Turabian style should contain the following: margins at the top, bottom and sides of the page should be set at no less than 1” and no greater than 1.5”, font size should be no less than 10 pt. (preferably, 12 pt.) the text should be consistently double-spaced, with the following exceptions: Block quotations, table titles, and figure captions should be single-spaced (a prose quotation of five or more lines should be blocked). A blocked quotation does not get enclosed in quotation marks. Since Turabian guidelines give the writer options for margins and font size it is always best to confirm with your professor which you should use. Page numbers begin in the header of the first page of text with Arabic numeral 1; if the professor permits it, students may also include a short title or their last name in front of the page number. Class papers will either include a title page or include the title on the first page of the text. Hacherhandbooks.com states, “In titles of works, capitalize all words except articles (a, an, the), prepositions (at, from, between, and so on), coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet), and to and as — unless one of these words is first or last in the title or subtitle” (Hacker et al.). The following link will take you to examples of the entire Turabian formatted paper, from the title page to the bibliography: [http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch10_s1-0007.html](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch10_s1-0007.html)

Should your professor require a title page, use the following guidelines: Include the full title of your paper, your name, the course title, the instructor’s name and the date. Do not number the title page but count it in the manuscript numbering; so, the first page of text will be numbered 2. The title should be centered a third of the way down the page. For subtitles, end the title line with a colon and place the subtitle on the line below the title. Your name and class information should follow several lines later.

How is the bibliography page formatted?

In addition to the previously discussed footnotes and endnotes, a bibliography is typically included in a Turabian style paper. The bibliography will be separate from the text and is the last
page of the paper. This page is an alphabetized (by the last name of the authors or editors) list of publication information for all sources cited in the paper. You will begin each line of reference at the left margin and subsequent lines with a half inch indent. Single space references with a double space separating each reference. Center the title Bibliography one inch from the top of the page and number bibliography pages consecutively with the rest of the paper. Examples of documentation can be found at the provided link: [http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch10_s1-0001.html](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch10_s1-0001.html)

**Bibliography**


**CSE**

*What is CSE?*

CSE stands for the Council of Science Editors. It is a group of editorial professionals “dedicated to the responsible and effective communication of science.” Established in 1957 as the CBE (Council of Biology Editors), the group re-named themselves in 2000 as a result of their “expanding membership.” According to their web site, CSE’s purpose is “to serve editorial professionals in the sciences by creating a supportive network for career development, providing educational opportunities, and developing resources for identifying and implementing high-quality editorial practices” (1).

*Who should use CSE?*

Students who come to the Writing Center working on papers in the physical sciences, the life sciences, and mathematics will be required to use this format. For students requesting in-depth help with this format, the definitive style guide for CSE is *Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers* (2).

*What are important features of a CSE styled paper?*
Verb Tense and Active vs. Passive Voice

Historically, essays in the sciences have been constructed in the passive voice. However, currently, there is a move away from this trend, as there is no real reason to use it. Increasingly, the active voice is preferred in scientific writing. According to the University of Tortono’s writing guide (3), the reason for this is two-fold. They state, “one reason for this is a philosophical shift in our thinking about science: we are more ready to acknowledge the role of the observer or investigator in the shaping of knowledge.” The other reason they cite is stylistic, stating that the shift has occurred because the active voice is often clearer and more direct.

The main two tenses in CSE are past and present. “Future and present-perfect rank a distant third and fourth” (3). The past tense should be used when discussing methods and results and the present tense should be used when giving background information, or discussing previously established and accepted facts. The present is also used when the writer discusses his/her results and conclusions (4).

Clarity and Conciseness

In CSE, students should also attempt to be as concise as possible, using adjectives and adverbs rarely, if ever. Another distinct feature of CSE is the use of “jargon.” While in most styles this term connotes intentionally difficult to follow words or phrases, in CSE jargon is often necessary, as precise technical language is important for scientific clarity (3).

Scientific Language--Quick Tips

Because scientific language is often complex and can be confusing to both the student writer and the tutor, we have included some tips for writing in the sciences (4):

1.) The use of acronyms is acceptable in scientific papers, and often improves clarity. A writer should first establish a phrase by writing the full name of it once, but can then use an acronym to discuss it throughout the paper. For example, if the topic of the paper is “embryonic stem cells,” the writer would use full phrase once and then use the acronym “ES cells” throughout the rest of the essay.

2.) When using a name that includes genus and species, underline or italicize the name and capitalize only the genus. For example: 

   * Homo sapiens

3.) “Data” is plural. So, the writer would use the phrase “data were examined.”

4.) Paraphrasing is preferred over directly quoting. The writer should aim to concisely paraphrase his/her sources, only quoting when using a definition.

For more information on the stylistic attributes of a paper in CSE, the tutor can access this link: http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/

What does a CSE paper look like?

They may follow differing forms, but, typically, a research article in CSE will include the following (2):

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
Another distinction of CSE style is that there are variations within it according the specific field in which the author writes. There are three ways in which students can cite their sources in this format. CSE has titled them as the citation-sequence format, the citation-name format, and the name-year format. The tutor and student can check a current journal in the student’s field through the CSUS library database to figure out which he/should should use.

How is the reference page formatted?

Due to the three variations that one can use when following this format, the reference page will differ depending on the particular paper. The following is a list of sources that the tutor can use to determine how a student writer might style his/her reference page:

- The Everyday Writer by Andrea Lunsford
  http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch07_o.html

References

Although we as tutors are not required to have knowledge of all formats, knowing general information can increase both your confidence as well as the tutee’s confidence in your ability. Realizing how similar some of these formats are to ones you may already be accustomed to takes some of the fear out of being confronted with an unfamiliar format. As mentioned earlier, remember that you do not need to be an expert on these different formatting styles! The important thing will be to know how and where to find the answers to your research and citation questions, and to teach your tutees how to do the same. Tutors can familiarize themselves with as much basic knowledge as they feel comfortable with such as the information provided above. Inform the tutee that it is their responsibility to acquaint themselves with an intimate knowledge of their required format. There are a multitude of reference books in the URWC to guide them. Tutors can also provide them with the Owl Purdue link to help guide them. After all, it is their grade and tutors are not expected to do all of the work for their tutees.
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)
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:

<p>| FEEL MORE TRAINING/EDUCATION NEEDED TO MAINTAIN/INCREASE EARNING POWER DURING NEXT FEW YEARS |
| (Based on ever employed) |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>No %</th>
<th>DR/U F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49 years</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64 years</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 and over</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than H.S.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. grad.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voc/Community college</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some 4-year college</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College grad.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</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.

http://smartpei.typepad.com/robert_patersons_weblog/kathy%20sierra%20college%20ed.jpg

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifies and articulates a focus arising from the prompt:</strong> sets a meaningful task that addresses the readings provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articulates writer’s own position in analyzing a significant issue:</strong> meets the expectations of academic audience(s) with regard to establishing a controlling idea that is analytical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develops an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion that analyze major ideas surrounding the issue:</strong> produces a developed and cohesive academic composition employing conventions that are appropriate for the genre selected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develops writer’s position appropriately for an academic audience by incorporating support using specific details and examples:</strong> cites the readings provided, adequately integrating them into text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provides evidence of awareness of writing as a process:</strong> demonstrates awareness of or reflects critically on writer’s own literacy history and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstrates awareness of conventions of academic discourse:</strong> makes appropriate rhetorical choices regarding purpose, format, evidence, tone, conventions, and organization, and genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Displays evidence of editing with adequate control of grammar and mechanics appropriate to an early draft.</strong> Errors do not slow the reader, impede understanding, nor seriously undermine the authority of the writer. Grammatical errors, inappropriate word choice, or incorrect usage may occur throughout the essay but rarely interfere with effective communication.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4 M</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 M</td>
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</table>
An Expanded Composition Community Dictionary

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.

**English 20/20M: Discourse Communities**
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:

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION
(Rhetoric = the art of using language effectively and persuasively)
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!
Social Constructivism in Action

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**

Situated Acts of Writing and Tutoring

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**


*i* Jane went home early, *because* she was feeling sick.
   Jane went home early *because* she was feeling sick.
   *Because Jane was feeling sick, she went home early.*

*I* I will call you, *as soon as* I get home.
   I will call you *as soon as* I get home.
   *As soon as* I get home, I will call you.
   *indicates incorrect sentences*

ii Fan boys – (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
   Jane went home early, *for* she was feeling sick.
   Tom loves Mary, *and* Mary loves Tom.
   Bob doesn’t want to study, *nor* does he want to work.
   Tom loves Mary, *but* she loves Bob.
   We could eat out, *or* we could just eat leftovers.
   Jake studied hard for the exam, *yet* he failed it.
   Mary loves Bob, *so* Tom found another girl; there is a lot of fish in the sea.