

10 “TUTOR DO’S”

1. Recognize achievement

Find something in the student’s work to praise before you begin to discuss the weaknesses. Encourage the student to feel that he or she is able to complete the assignment. Reassure the student that tutors are available to provide support throughout the writing process.

2. Maintain student privacy and dignity

It is never appropriate to identify tutees by name in conversations with friends or acquaintances. While it is inevitable that you will occasionally discuss your work in the tutoring center, be careful to speak in ways that do not reveal a student’s identity or disparage student effort. Even if you do not name a particular tutee, students who have come in or are considering coming in for tutoring will be cautious about seeking help if they feel they may later be the subject of ridicule or a joke. Respect the tutee’s work and sense of self.

3. Encourage student input

Begin the tutoring session by asking the student, “What would you like to work on today?” Allow the student to provide direction for what areas of the paper need attention. Make every effort to respond to specific comments and questions in order to create an atmosphere of real engagement and conversation.

4. Incorporate learning strategies

Use your own experience as a college student to suggest ways a struggling student could organize the parts of an assignment, annotate a complex text, or understand a difficult grammar concept. This kind of assistance is crucial to our philosophy of dealing with the student as a learner, and not just working to create perfect papers. Remember to treat the student as a peer, someone with whom you are sharing ideas, not “talking down to” or lecturing.

5. Use examples and life experiences to enhance learning

Employ examples from the news, campus events, or daily life to help students see the relevance and importance of what they are writing about. Difficult or abstract concepts are often easier to grasp and afforded more importance when they are connected to students’ lives.

6. Make connections between assignments

Point out similarities between previous writing situations and the student’s current assignment. For instance, if the student is evaluating an author’s use of language, make a comparison to an earlier evaluation of an author’s use of support. Point out what types of questions you might ask for both analyses, and what questions regarding support might not be appropriate in an evaluation of language.

7. Display enthusiasm while tutoring

Demonstrate your interest in the student's progress through eye contact, liveliness, appropriate responses, upright posture, and a tight focus on the assignment you are working on. Do not look off in another direction at fellow tutors, join in on nearby conversations, slouch, read the student's paper silently, text message, or seem bored.

8. Engage in professional development

Improve upon your own tutoring skills and writing expertise by reading the professional journals and tutoring texts, as well as familiarizing yourself with the Writing texts, all readily available in the Writing Center. There are tutoring websites at almost every college or university—explore some during your tutoring hours!

9. Ask the student to give you information

Encourage the student to share what information he or she has about a topic. This serves two purposes: first, by asking the tutee to tell you something, you shift the typical power dynamic within the tutoring session from a situation where the tutor is the “answer giver” to one where the tutor, through a conversation, receives information from the tutee. Even more importantly, by asking students to share what they know, tutors can help facilitate the manner in which students refine their beliefs on a topic in order to reason out a critical response and extend their thought process. In many work situations, the act of “thinking out loud,” often in large groups, is a productive means of solving problems.

10. Break assignments into practical, logical parts

It can often seem overwhelming to a student when a tutor tries to cover all of the grammar, organization, syntax, thesis control, and content issues in a paper. Many assignments lend themselves to developing a plan of action—either in the very beginning stages of the writing process or during revision. Work with the student to develop a strategy for completing the assignment in a timely, productive manner. For a paper that is in the early stages, help the student make an outline (however formal or informal); for a paper that needs revision, focus on a page or two of the body of the assignment in a single session. This control over the writing process can increase a student's confidence as reasonable goals are met and develop the student's ability to organize and execute a successful paper.