SUCCESSFUL TUTORING SESSIONS

**THE FIRST SESSION**

• Get to know the student by finding out their interests and background. This is time well spent in establishing a relaxed atmosphere and helping the student feel comfortable asking for help.

• Begin to diagnose the problem by listening, observing, and questioning. You will need to help the student analyze both the course tasks and assignments, and their behaviors. Analyzing the tasks and assignments with the student may be time consuming but is very important for setting the stage for your work. Review the syllabus and texts. Look at the major and minor concepts and then the skills the student must have to complete the tasks. You might see if the student understands the discrete steps of a task. During this process, you will be working back to the basics and to where the uncertainty or questions begin. Analyzing the student's behaviors involves asking the following types of questions:
  • Are you differentiating between the critical and less relevant concepts?
  • Are you using your study time well?
  • Is the reading overwhelming or difficult to understand?
  • Are you have difficulty with writing?
  • Are your class notes detailed and complete?

• Share your responsibilities and general goals as a peer tutor. This explanation of your job and its limits will help to ensure that the student does not become over-dependent on you. Once again ask the student what their tutoring expectations and needs are, and explain their responsibilities as a tutee.
  • Set short-term goals for the session and be clear about the amount of time you have to work together.
  • Consider whether the difficulties are specifically defined by the subject or involve broader study skills problems. You may always refer a student to the Academic Advising Office to explore other on campus resources.

**SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS**

• Be prepared and plan ahead.
• Follow up on previous sessions by asking specific questions about course assignments or what you suggested the student do at the end of the last session.
• At the beginning of each session establish priorities, set clear goals, and agree on the amount of time you will work together. Although you might discuss long-term goals with the student, you need to focus on short-term goals.
• Take time at the end of each session to review what you have covered and to clarify the tutee's next steps and specific study goals.
• Be a role model of an efficient student by being on time for appointments, coming to meetings prepared, setting goals, and keeping to the schedule.
THE TUTEE’S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

*Research shows that active involvement enhances learning and leads to independence. Your job is to suggest ways a student can be actively involved and then to model those learning behaviors. (Remember that during the tutoring session the tutee, not you, should be doing the work.) Here are some suggestions.*

• Probe the student's background knowledge and help them to connect the new to the known. One of the critical elements in understanding is the information or data a student already holds in their memory. A student brings this knowledge to the task and then constructs new knowledge or restructures existing knowledge.

• Teach the student to ask questions, predict, and then seek answers. These mental processes of asking and seeking allow students to build meaning over time and as more information is added. The focus of tutoring becomes learning how to learn rather than just finding answers.

• Show the student how to set clear purposes for learning. Have the student analyze their class and task. Having a purpose for reading, studying, or thinking influences what one understands and learns.

• Teach the student to think about their own thinking and how they learn. Effective learners consciously monitor their thinking and control it through implementing a wide range of strategies. Consider demonstrating how to "think aloud." For example, you might model out loud the way you generate questions as you read and then predict and seek the answers. You might also share some mistakes you have made, how you learned from them, and how you monitored for further difficulties.

• Ask the student to verbalize, rephrase, and summarize what you have explained and what they have learned. Putting information into one's own words solidifies understanding and helps memory.

• Focus on organization of ideas (as well as time, space and materials). Problems may occur because a student does not understand: 1) how to arrange information according to meaningful classifications, 2) how to fit the new information into what they already hold in their memory, or 3) how the author uses organization to represent ideas and meet a particular purpose. Consider using graphic organizers or maps as another way of presenting the organization of information.
EFFECTIVE TUTORING BEHAVIORS

1. Be friendly. This seems obvious, but remember that some students feel very uncomfortable and insecure about asking for help. Being friendly is the first step in helping students feel comfortable and welcome.

2. Be clever, creative, and flexible. Tutoring is hard because you have to constantly devise new ways of presenting information and strategies, as well as ways to have the student practice.

3. Be patient (and encourage the student to be patient). Learning takes time.

4. Build confidence. Do not always focus on what the student is doing wrong but give equal time to what the student is doing right.

5. Be sensitive, respectful, and understanding. If learning is partially dependent on background knowledge and experiences, you might need to consider a student’s racial, ethnic or cultural background.

6. Empathize with your students. One of the reasons peer tutoring works so well is that tutors can share their recent experiences in learning a new concept or skill, making mistakes, feeling pressured, and struggling with learning.

7. Do not be afraid to make mistakes and admit that you do not know. Mistakes are a necessary part of learning and discussing them is an excellent teaching tool.

8. Do not feel guilty if your tutee does not do well on an assignment or task. Review what they did well, the mistakes they made, and the next steps to getting back on track.

9. Maintain confidentiality about students and professors. Be careful of where conversations take place and who might be listening.

10. Be dependable. Be on time for your tutoring appointments and expect the same from the tutee.

11. Be professional. This includes being respectful of professors. Help students develop constructive strategies for dealing with issues or frustrations they might have with professors.
TUTORING TECHNIQUES

MODEL CLEAR THINKING
- Take time during the session to gather and clarify your thoughts.

MODEL STRATEGIC THINKING AND LEARNING
- Share a wide range of strategies that you and others have found effective and explain that developing effective strategies leads to independence.
- There are many study skills that are discipline specific, so part of your job is helping students understand and practice how to read, write, and study effectively for that specific discipline. For example, share memorization techniques and tricks that work for you or others and might be specific to the discipline.
- Make sure you build on the skills and strategies that the tutee is already using. Research suggests that if a student has a strategy that is partially working, it is more effective to help the student adapt, adjust or refine that strategy, rather than introducing a new strategy.
- Suggest a variety of ways the student might practice and apply what they are learning.
- Do not do the work for the student. Your tutee needs to understand that your job is to help them develop effective learning strategies and find answers for herself, not to give them the answers. In this process you will need to focus both on asking questions and on modeling clear thinking, strategies, and behaviors.
- Do not hold a pencil. This is hard to do, but is important. All the writing should be done by the tutee to make sure they are doing the work.

LISTEN AND OBSERVE
- Ask a lot of questions. Monitor how much you talk and your tutee talks. Think about ways to ask questions and then how to follow-up on those questions to both diagnose the problem and guide the tutee's understanding and learning. Consider your wait time after asking a question, and consider appropriate ways to answer a student's question with another question.

MONITOR YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR TUTEE
- You may use certain words or phrases that may mean something entirely different or may mean nothing at all to your tutee. Think about the subtle as well as more obvious ways you communicate information. Consider your body language, nonverbal communication, tone of voice, pace, and wait time when you ask questions.

FOCUS ON CRITICAL VOCABULARY
- Confusion often can be traced back to misunderstandings about the major vocabulary of a discipline.
**Consider Learning Style**

- Both you and your tutee have a preferred style of taking-in and conveying information. Your learning styles may be similar or different. Think about ways to share information in several different formats, for example auditory, visually, or kinesthetically.
- Consider ways of breaking ideas and tasks into smaller parts and ways of making the information or skills as concrete as possible. Try to think about a teaching progression that moves from the concrete to the semi-concrete to the abstract.

**Encourage Good Study Behaviors**

- Review lecture notes with your tutee to determine whether they are differentiating the key information from the less relevant or organizing information in a logical and effective way. Teach ways to take notes more effectively.
- Suggest that the student join a study group. Study groups help everyone, those who are working successfully in a course and those struggling.
- Encourage the student to attend the professor's weekly office hours. It is important to continue asking the professor for help even when a student is working with a tutor.
- Consider whether the tutee's difficulties might be the result of a language-based problem. If the tutee is not a native speaker of English or you think they may have learning issues, encourage them to seek help by meeting with their Academic Advisor.

**Learn from Your Fellow Tutors**

- Talk with other tutors about their approaches and strategies that work.
- Brainstorm alternatives, but remember to maintain confidentiality about specific students.
**Tutoring Tips**

**Be Patient**
It is often tempting to give the tutee the answer to a difficult problem, but this approach is not beneficial. Instead, try giving hints in the form of questions. Ask questions to help the tutee progress step-by-step. This technique helps the tutee reason through the problems. If the tutee is still struggling, ask them to explain the basic concepts to you. Often this will make the tutee realize their mistakes.

**Be Understanding**
Determine the tutee’s background knowledge by asking review questions. It is also helpful to examine mistakes the tutee has made on previous homework or exams to see if there is a pattern. Try to approach the problem from the tutee’s perspective. Ask to see the tutee’s notes and listen fully to the tutee’s question before answering it. However, do not engage in negative conversations about the professor. Remembering your own experience, have realistic expectations and do not cover too much information in one session.

**Make the Tutee Feel Comfortable**
Because many students are apprehensive about seeking help, it is important that tutees feel comfortable. Start with questions you know the tutee can answer to build confidence. Talk positive to the tutee, congratulate them for the material they do know, and praise improvement. Never laugh or make fun of a tutee, but a little bit of humor helps to ease the frustration. Make good eye contact and do not talk too fast. Most importantly be friendly, flexible, and punctual.

**Explain Things Multiple Ways**
If a student does not understand something, try to explain it another way. Relating concepts to practical examples often makes the concepts easier to grasp. Ask the tutee the main idea of the section and try using visual aids such as analogies and diagrams. When problem solving, break down your process into small steps. Have the tutee write as much as possible and encourage them to repeat what you have explained. Then ask the tutee to apply these steps to another problem without your assistance.

**Especially for Group Tutors**
In drop-in sessions make each tutee feel equally important. Help one student at a time; however, if the number of students overwhelms you suggest that they work together. Do not be afraid to tell a tutee that they need to work on their own first and encourage all tutees to prepare specific questions.
THE SKILL OF PUBLIC SPEAKING SUGGESTIONS FOR TUTORS

**QUESTION - WHAT CAN I DO IF:**
1. My communication is with a tutee is not working?
2. I find myself giving long explanations and doing all the talking?
3. I'm having difficulty determining the tutee's specific needs?

The ability to ask probing questions is critical for a tutor. Successful tutors must also depend on oral communication to teach subject-specific course material and study skills, answer questions, provide feedback to students and professors, and help students maximize their knowledge and skills. This handout provides suggestions for oral communication for tutors.

**PREPARATION FOR TUTORING SESSIONS**
- Develop thoughtful questions. Be prepared to debate, address controversial questions, play devil’s advocate, admit when you don’t have an answer, and make the tutee think beyond the assignment.
- Think about ways to organize a tutoring session (for example sequential such as time, place, importance; cause and effect; problem and solution; comparison and contrast; theory to practice; specific to general).
- Consider ways to start a session: discuss objectives of the assignment; ask a question or ask what questions the tutee has; highlight a section of the text.
- Consider ways to end a session: summarize; review what the tutee has done well; suggest an answer or approach; ask a question; review next steps.

**COMMUNICATION WITH TUTEE DURING SESSIONS**
- Ask questions to diagnose the tutee’s strengths and areas of need.
- Monitor how much you and the tutee talk. Remember to talk to a tutee and not at them.
- Ask questions and wait for responses. Remember this is leading a discussion and not a solo presentation.
- Encourage questions and anticipate a range of responses. Do not impose your own opinion.
- Be careful not to make the question harder than it really is – simple answers are often all that the tutee wants. If in doubt, ask for clarification.
- Stay flexible but keep the conversation on topic. Stay organized during the discussion, yet be flexible enough to accommodate unplanned relevant topics that may come up.
- Be confident, enthusiastic and positive. Make good eye contact. Be relaxed and open to ideas and responses. Do not be afraid of moments of silence.
- If you don’t know the answer, don’t bluff. Admit that you don’t know and refer the student to the professor.
- Verbal communication skills rely on volume, speed, pauses, pitch, inflection, and emphasis. If you need a moment to gather your thoughts, simply pause. Don’t rush to answer. Pauses can be powerful and give you time to formulate an answer. Avoid verbal fillers such as “Uh, umm, like, you know, OK.”
- Non-verbal communication skills are as important in one-on-one sessions as group presentations. Consider eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture, movement, and nervous mannerisms.
- Think about humor and wit to engage the tutee.
**TYPICAL TUTORING PROBLEMS**

**A TUTEE WHO IS NOT PREPARED FOR THE SESSION OR IS SHOWING LITTLE EFFORT:**
- Students may be unprepared at the first session because they don't understand what tutoring is all about.
- If your tutee continues to be unprepared or shows little effort, explain them commitment and responsibilities to tutoring, as well as yours. The tutee needs to make a commitment to prepare for the tutoring sessions and to show some real effort. Talk with them about this and remember to let them do the work.
- Try encouraging the student to return later, and make it clear you will only work with them if they come prepared.

**AN ANGRY STUDENT OR ONE WHO IS OVERLY DEMANDING:**
- Some students might get very frustrated and even angry if they do not understand your explanations or cannot apply your suggestions. Be patient.
- Try analyzing the concept or task in more detail to see where the problem really occurs.
- Go back to basics. Try another method.
- Share you responsibilities and general goals as a peer tutor. Be sure they understand the limits of your job responsibilities.
- Encourage them to meet with their professor.

**A TUTEE WHOSE ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES APPEAR MORE EXTENSIVE THAN JUST THAT ONE COURSE:**
- Do not hesitate to refer students to the Academic Advising Office, Learning Success Center, ASUU Tutoring Center, Private Tutors, etc.
- If you are having difficulty helping the tutee with a problem, ask them to see their course instructor.
- As a tutor, you are there to help facilitate learning, but the instructor has the ultimate responsibility. Check the referral list for other suggestions.

**A TUTEE THAT IS BECOMING TOO DEPENDENT:**
- If you feel your tutee is becoming over-dependent on you or you are too involved with their needs, begin by reviewing your responsibilities and goals with them. This explanation might help them to see the limits of your job as a peer tutor.
- Consider ways you can wean the student by doing less and less for them. You might need to suggest another tutor. Remember that as a tutor you must learn how to maintain professional objectivity.

**A TUTEE WHO COMPLAINS ABOUT THE PROFESSOR:**
- Do not allow a session to become a complaint fest. You may need to take some time to calm down a student or discuss their options, but quickly refocus on the tutoring tasks.
- Do not share your personal feelings about faculty members.
**DURING GROUP TUTORING DROP-IN HOURS, TOO MANY STUDENTS ASKING FOR HELP AT ONCE:**

- Our basic model is first come, first served
- Try a triage system of getting everyone busy and then rotating, spending a few minutes with a student and then having them work as you move on to another.
- Consider asking students to work together, to explain information to each other, and to share their approaches to a problem.
- If this condition persists, speak to the Academic Advising Office to see if another tutor can be assigned to the help room or if hours can be extended