

## Project Two

### *How We Tutor*

The Writing Center is an important place on any university campus. It is somewhere where students, and even faculty, can come to get advice and help on their writing. The tutors cater to all styles of writing and all types of problems. They basically offer a service that edits, proofreads, and helps organize and structure people's papers. There are many different ways that the tutors can help the tutees. These methods are discussed in this paper, along with what not to do in certain situations.

Every tutor has different methods and different ways of dealing with their job and their tutees. The first thing I do when sitting down with someone and looking at the writing that person brought with them, is to ask questions and then *listen*. Listening is very important to every tutor as it gives the tutor a chance to figure out what's going on in the tutee's paper and in the tutee's head, and also gives the tutee a feeling of being in control of the situation. It is important to give the tutee this control so that they're not scared, shy, or embarrassed about the session.

The tutor should ask some general questions to start out the session. I usually begin with the need-to-knows, which are: what was the assignment, what were the professor's specific instructions, the tutee's understanding of those instructions, and what are the tutee's specific concerns about their writing. For that last question, most tutees will generally say "grammar and punctuation," which are givens. What most students don't realize is that while grammar and punctuation are important to the look, readability,

and credibility of the paper, the tutor should concentrate more on things such as structure, organization, and content. If the paper is not well organized it takes away from the credibility of the writer. Not being able to follow a paper because of the lack of organization is just as frustrating to a professor as not being able to read it because of the grammar and punctuation.

After getting over the basics of the session, reading the tutee's work is the next step. There are many different ways to go about this. One suggested method is to have the tutee read his or her paper out loud. However, the method most commonly used, at least in Northern Michigan University's Writing Center, is the tutor reads through the whole paper, making the necessary marks and comments. The tutor then goes over their findings with the tutee.

As mentioned before, the top concerns with any paper are usually the content and organization. It is important for every paper to be clear, concise, and well-structured. If a paper does not meet these requirements, there are many different steps a tutor can use to help the tutee to better organize a paper. Some of these different methods include glossing, free-writing, outlining, and asking the tutee questions about their thesis.

Glossing is my favorite method when dealing with tutees' organizational problems. Instead of trying to figure out what the tutee has done wrong content-wise, and what they could do to fix those mistakes, this method involves giving helpful advice. In this method, the tutor asks the tutee what the main idea, in one or two words, of each supporting paragraph is, and writes it off to the side. This is to make sure that each of the paragraphs is about a different idea, and that all those ideas match up with the thesis. Then that one or two words can be used to decide where the paragraphs belong in the

paper, if they even do at all, and maybe also to write a topic sentence to start off each paragraph. Most tutees find this method extremely helpful in organization and say they will use it again on other papers.

Free writing is another method that I have suggested to tutees. This method is used more for those who don't even know how to start their papers, or how to go about the writing process in general. Telling them to just free write is a good way to get their fingers typing and their brains working. A lot of times, students have a lot of ideas, and know what they want to say, but they are too concerned with the organization and the thesis to start writing. If they free write and get down on paper all of their ideas, then they can go back and organize later without having to worry if they have everything down or not. This worked particularly well with one student I tutored. He had no idea where to start and when I told him to free write and get all his ideas down, the ideas just started flowing.

Outlining is another popular method in the writing process. In this method, the tutee writes down their main idea and then each of their supporting ideas and the facts that go along with them. This helps them to make an outline of what their paper should look like when it's done. This method isn't the best for everyone since some people will stick rigidly to that outline. This can be a problem because writing shouldn't be that structured. There is always room for new ideas and extra supporting information. This process can however be very helpful to others who have problems with organization.

The last method I've used is just general question asking. I have found that when the tutor asks the right questions about the paper and the thesis, then the tutee can answer those questions orally much better than they wrote those answers in the paper.

Explaining their main ideas to someone else helps them to see what they might have done wrong in their paper, or even what they may have left out. Sometimes watching a tutee answer these questions, the tutor can see a light flash on in their eyes. They realize the mistakes they've made this way and know how to easily fix them. Also, the tutee can realize their grammar mistakes this way. When you have someone read an ungrammatical sentence out loud, they more times than not can correct it themselves because they know it sounds wrong.

It is important that while you are tutoring, especially when going over simple proofreading marks, that you don't make the student feel inadequate. Making negative comment after negative comment often leads to a block between tutor and tutee. If there are negative feelings towards the tutor, the tutee will be much less prepared to take the advice and learn from the session. I always start off with a positive comment about the tutee's paper, no matter how small it may be, just to make them feel like they aren't an incompetent writer and to open them up to the rest of the discussion.

Of course, there are so many more methods that can be used in tutoring sessions. This only skimmed the surface of the tutoring process. I just described here some of the more popular methods, and the ones that I use the most in my tutoring sessions. I don't think I've ever had a tutee yet that has gone away feeling unhappy about their session, or inadequate about their writing. The Writing Center plays a huge part in the writing process and it's important for us to keep up good relations and techniques with the tutees.