

efficient and, second, to begin compiling suggestions that you might offer students who seek your help.

EXERCISE 2G Reflecting on Being Tutored

When your group has finished Exercise 2F and discussed your writing processes, shift your attention to the two tutoring sessions that you each had in Exercise 2E. One of the best ways to discover how people feel about an experience is to put yourself in their shoes. You are learning to be a tutor, but you have just had the experience of sitting in the other chair—that of the writer being tutored—twice. Take five minutes to jot down your responses to the following questions, and then discuss your answers.

- How did you feel about getting help from a tutor?
- What did the tutor do or suggest that you found helpful, in terms of both completing your assignment and making you feel more comfortable about getting help with your writing?
- Conversely, what, if anything, did the tutor do or say that confused you or made you feel uncomfortable?

New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010.

3

Inside the Tutoring Session

The following strategies for working with writers in tutoring sessions are equally appropriate and applicable for face-to-face or synchronous tutoring scenarios. When referring to online tutoring, we use the terms *synchronous* and *asynchronous*. Synchronous tutoring is in real time; it usually takes place in chat forums and the writer and tutor have a real-time conversation online. Asynchronous tutoring is not conducted in real time; the writer submits a question or draft for review, and the tutor responds within an allotted time. When a strategy unique to the asynchronous tutoring session is called for, we have included it here.

Getting Started

It is not by accident that many writing centers appear welcoming and friendly. To make writers feel more comfortable, centers are often furnished with plants, bright posters, comfortable chairs, and tables instead of desks. Online writing centers do their part by offering attractive Web pages with helpful, user-friendly language and links and by having a presence in forums such as Facebook or Second Life. Whether you meet writers face-to-face or online, you should try to put them at ease. A casual but interested greeting and a smile—or an emoticon—can immediately make them less apprehensive about the prospect of sharing their writing. At a face-to-face writing center, be alert for those reluctant writers who hover about the doorway, unsure of what to do. Invite them in with a cheerful “Can I help you?” In an online writing center, especially in asynchronous sessions, look for those “quiet” writers who submit their papers without any information about what kind of help they are looking for. Write an encouraging note and ask for a more detailed description of the assignment or what they struggled with as they wrote their papers.

The following are tips to help establish rapport at the beginning of the tutoring session:

- **Introduce yourself.** Smile and ask the writer his or her name. Once you have settled into a comfortable place for the two of you to work, ask about the assignment and how it is going. If you have worked with the writer before, ask how the last assignment went. The exchange of pleasantries at the beginning of a session helps put the writer at ease and gets the session off to a good start.

In an online environment, you may be able to access records of the writer's previous submissions that you can then ask about or refer to. Even if the writer cannot respond to you immediately, he or she will be more inclined to provide additional information with the next submission.

- **Sit side-by-side.** Such a setup is the best arrangement for tutoring; it suggests that you are an ally, not an authoritarian figure who dispenses advice from behind a desk. Sitting side-by-side allows you and the writer to look at the work in progress together, but you can still position your chairs to look at one another as you converse if you like. If you do use a desk, have the writer sit at the side of it rather than across from you.

Just as this arrangement conveys a nonverbal message, be aware that your body language and clothing also express unspoken messages. Sit in a relaxed and comfortable manner, and demonstrate interest in the writer's words by leaning forward and making eye contact. Dress casually but appropriately for work.

- **Give the student control of the paper.** Keep the paper in front of the student as much as possible. As a general rule, if you are working at a computer, let the writer control the keyboard and monitor. Positioning the writer in front of the paper or computer serves to remind him or her (and sometimes the tutor) that the writing is that of the student. Having the writer at the keyboard also ensures that you serve as the audience: two people cannot type simultaneously on the same keyboard.

In an online environment, resist the urge to correct and edit mistakes as you read. Instead, indicate patterns of error and ask leading, probing questions that will require the writer to take control of the paper when he or she reads and considers your advice.

- **Keep resources and tools nearby.** Have scrap paper and pencils handy. Though it is generally a good idea to let the student do most of the writing, you may occasionally wish to demonstrate a point in writing, or it may be more expedient for you to make notes for the writer. It is wise for online tutors to keep a list of resource links in a Favorites folder so that they can be embedded in the comments. As you work, have print and online resources—like a dictionary, thesaurus, and grammar handbook—readily available.

Setting the Agenda

During the first several minutes, you and the writer will be setting at least a tentative agenda for the tutoring session, and the best way to do that is to talk or chat. Conversation not only establishes rapport but also engages the writer in the session immediately. In addition, it allows you to learn fairly quickly about the assignment and the writer and about his or her approaches to and concerns about the task at hand, as well as writing in general—all necessary information to determine how to spend your time together most effectively and efficiently.

As a new tutor, you may feel uncomfortable with an extended conversation. You may think that looking at the assignment description and the student's paper gives you something concrete to do, and you may worry that a conversation could go in unpredictable directions. Recognize, however, that this initial conversation allows you not only to establish a comfortable acquaintance but also to gather information and assess the writer's needs. As an intelligent, interested, and friendly audience, you will find it relatively easy to talk and learn more about the assignment and the writer. Then, you can put your newly acquired tutoring skills to work more easily and productively.

How to begin? Quite simply, ask questions and show interest.

- "What can I help you with?"
- "What assignment are you working on?"
- "Who is your audience?"
- "What are you writing about?"
- "What a fascinating topic! Why did you choose it?"
- "What approach did you take?"
- "Can you tell me (briefly) how you set up your argument?"

As the writer answers, seek clarification with follow-up questions that encourage him or her to talk more. This time spent talking means that when you finally look at the paper, you will be able to match the writer's goals more adequately with what actually appears in the paper and more readily offer suggestions to make the writing more effective.

If the assignment is unfamiliar, read through the description quickly to be sure the writer has not forgotten or misunderstood any details, but not so quickly that you miss any important information. (Even if the assignment is a common one, it is probably a good idea to glance through the description in case the instructor has made any changes.) Rather than have the writer wait for the session to begin, engage him or her with comments or questions as you read, like "I see you have to..." or "What did you choose for...?" Asking writers to articulate the assignment—and their approach to it—often allows you to uncover any misunderstandings or apprehensions that they may have. A writer will often respond to your question "What can I help you with?" quite specifically, which simplifies setting an agenda.



Reprinted by permission of the artist.

for the session. The writer may explain, for example, that "the introduction just doesn't seem to do what I want it to" or "the paper reads too much like a list." However, be aware that some writers will simply ask for help with "proofreading," "editing," or "grammar," using these terms to cover any aspect of revising from major reorganizing to eliminating wordiness to correcting punctuation.

How you and the writer ultimately spend your time depends on the following factors:

- Where is the writer in the composing process?
- What are the constraints imposed by the assignment itself—the inherent limitations and those imposed by the teacher (such as length, number of resources to be used, and so on)?
- How much time remains before the paper is due?
- How willing is the writer to work with the tutor in order to improve the paper?

When working asynchronously, you must still set the agenda, even if it is just to ensure that you use your time appropriately. Carefully consider the above questions and try to prioritize the areas that need the most attention.

Another important factor is the length of time allotted for each tutoring session. Most writing centers allow an hour or less for each session. Probably no session should last more than an hour. If it does, chances are the writer will be overwhelmed by suggestions or the tutor may end up doing

too much of the work for the writer. For online asynchronous sessions, time is also a factor. Asynchronous sessions tend to take much longer than face-to-face or synchronous sessions because, unless you have audio software, you must type out your responses. Some online writing centers simply ask that you keep your advising session to an hour or so.

If you and the writer do not jointly agree on the focus of the session at the outset, then determine what can be realistically accomplished in the time that you have, given the writer's needs. For example, some writers expect a tutor to review every page of a long paper, which is just not possible in a short time. In such a case, suggest working on a particularly troublesome section; ask the writer to identify the section of the paper giving him or her the most difficulty. You can also explain that sentence-level problems in early pages will likely recur in later pages; you can then offer suggestions for improvement on a page or two that the writer may apply to subsequent pages. Depending on the circumstances, offer options and recommend what you think are realistic goals for the session.

As you talk with the writer and look through the assignment and essay, make a list of concerns and items, either on paper or in conversation, that should or could be covered. Ultimately, this list should be understandable to both you and the writer. But how do you decide what to cover in the session? First, prioritize the list; then take into account the writer's willingness (or ability) to spend time and still meet the due date (or, on rare occasions, request an extension). Both of you can then determine what to cover in this session. Remember that it is better to cover larger, more global issues like content and organization before dealing with matters like sentence structure and surface errors. Perhaps you can factor in scheduling subsequent sessions if the list is long. Or the writer may prefer simply to concentrate on certain aspects this time and on others at another time. She or he may recognize the need to work with a tutor earlier in the writing process for future assignments.

Sometimes, a writer lacks sufficient time to truly benefit from the tutor's suggestions. There may be problems with the content or organization, for example, but the writer may only have time to correct sentence-level errors. When you encounter such a situation, explain to the writer that you cannot deal with all aspects of the paper that may need attention but will focus on the most expedient ones. Nonetheless, it is important to point out the other problem areas, and maybe some potential resources, so that the writer is aware of them as he or she writes future papers.

Three Effective, Powerful Tools

As a tutor, you have three powerful tools at your disposal:

- Active listening
- Facilitating by responding as a reader
- Silence and wait time to allow a writer time to think

Used in combination, these tools can help you to learn and understand better what students' concerns or problems with writing may be. You can use them to induce writers to think more clearly and specifically about their audience, their purpose, their writing plan, or what they have already written. These tools also provide an excellent means of getting feedback to determine how well writers understand the suggestions or advice that you have given them.

ACTIVE LISTENING

After exchanging pleasantries and settling down at a table, Dwight and his tutor, Kristen, begin their session. As you follow their conversation, pay particular attention to Kristen's responses to Dwight's comments and concerns.

Kristen: So, tell me what you're working on. What's your assignment, and what can I do to help?

Dwight: I'm taking this speech course on gender and communication.

For our final paper, we're supposed to take five rituals connected with courtship and marriage—like the engagement ring, bachelor and bachelorette parties, the father giving away the bride, the white wedding dress—and analyze them. We're supposed to relate them to some of the concepts we've been discussing all semester. And it's due next Tuesday.

Kristen: That sounds like a really interesting assignment, like it would be fun to do. I haven't heard of that assignment before, so I'm a little confused. Do you have to do research for it? Tell me more.

Dwight: No. No research. Not really. Just what we've been doing in class. I don't know. Five to seven pages! I think it's kind of hard. I can think of rituals, but there are so many. How do I choose five that are good? I don't want to do the same ones everyone else is doing. By the time Dr. Timmons looks at my paper, he might be tired of reading about engagement rings and white wedding dresses. And then I don't know how to put them into some kind of order. I could put the most significant one first, but then I'll end up probably trailing off into the least exciting one. Boring! And I have to have a coherent paper, so I need an introduction that kind of ties these five rituals together. How do I do that?

Kristen: What I'm hearing you say is that this assignment is really frustrating you, and you just can't get started. It sounds like you're worrying about all of it at once. Let's see if we can get some kind of handle on this. Okay. You have to select five rituals.

Dwight: Yes, like the ones I mentioned. But they're the obvious ones.

Kristen: Perhaps. But I also heard you say that you're concerned about the length of your paper. Let's start with the rituals. You have to discuss five, but earlier you mentioned four of them—engagement rings, bachelor and bachelorette parties, wedding gowns, and fathers giving brides away.

Dwight: Well, the white wedding gown. I know, but those are so obvious.

Kristen: Are those rituals that you think you might have something to say about? Why did you choose those?

Dwight: Yeah, you might be right. You don't think they're too common? Too obvious?

Kristen: Maybe not. I can hear that you're very concerned that they're obvious, but if you have a lot to say about each, your paper could be really good. Probably better than if you picked something you might not know much about, like bridal shower games. Tell me more about the first one you mentioned. Let's see—the engagement ring.

When Dwight talks about his assignment, he is clearly overwhelmed and frustrated. Rather than sorting the assignment into workable tasks, he worries simultaneously about the paper's content, length, organization, due date, and engaging the reader.

What Kristen demonstrates in this scenario is active listening, a skill that takes energy and concentration. Instead of dismissing Dwight's concerns, Kristen grants them validity with statements like "What I'm hearing you say is . . .," "It sounds like . . .," "And I also heard you say that . . .," and "I can hear that . . ." She feeds back what she believes to be his message.

As the session continues, Kristen *paraphrases* Dwight's list of rituals, mirroring what she heard him say earlier. This paraphrasing accomplishes two purposes: It lets Dwight know that she has heard and understood him, but it also serves as a way to check perceptions and correct any possible misunderstandings. For example, as Dwight notes, it is not just the wedding gown that is important but the fact that it is white.

Kristen also uses questions to invite Dwight to expand on or continue his thoughts. She asks, "Why did you choose those?" and urges him to elaborate by saying, "Tell me more about . . ." Notice that these questions are open. Rather than requiring decisive *yes* or *no* responses, they give Dwight room to continue his thoughts and to develop them.

Finally, Kristen uses *I* statements when she says "I'm a little confused" and "I can hear . . ." This approach places the burden of understanding on her rather than on Dwight. If she had said, "You're not explaining things clearly," Dwight might well have become defensive. Because Kristen's questions and comments are not antagonistic, Dwight is more likely to seek out and remedy the causes for her confusion rather than to justify his apprehensions.

What we can't see in this scenario is Kristen's physical engagement in the conversation—her body language. An active listener generally communicates interest and concern by posture and eye contact. Kristen is probably leaning slightly forward, with her feet on the floor, looking directly at Dwight. Her gestures of friendliness and approval, like nodding or smiling in agreement, also help to assure him that she is interested and following what he is saying.

A Note about Asking Questions

Questions can help you learn more about a writer's attitudes and specific problems with writing or with particular assignments. Questions fall into two broad categories — open and closed.

An open question — like “What have you been working on in class?” or “What can I do to help?” — is broad in scope and requires more than a few words in response. Usually, an open question begins with *what*, *why*, *when*, or *how*. Responses to such questions, especially at the beginning of a tutoring session, can help you to determine the writer's attitude toward the task at hand. Asking “What can I help you with?” invites more response than “I see you're working on a definition paper.” A question like “How is the class going?” may help you to learn about the writer's performance as well as his or her expectations.

A closed question is one like “Have you got a description of your assignment?” “When is your paper due?” or “Do you have some ideas for that section?” Such questions require a *yes* or *no* or a brief, limited response and yield specific information. On the other hand, the answer to a closed question like “Who is your teacher?” may tell you something about the class or assignment, especially if you have already dealt with other students from that class.

When working asynchronously online, tutors do not have the benefit of back-and-forth conversation. However, they can still “listen” to the writer and use language like “I can tell...” and “It seems like you...” to show that they are engaged with the writing. The writer may have provided information about the assignment or about his or her concerns with the assignment. The tutor may also glean information from the writing itself—hesitancy when addressing a certain point or a sudden insertion of passionate (but unsupported) personal opinion.

FACILITATING

Nikki initiates a chat with an online consultant. She has the first draft of a paper for an Introduction to Poetry class and she pastes the first two paragraphs into the chat window:

Emily Dickinson, her poetry, and her style of writing all reflect her own feelings as well as her own ultimate dreams. Her withdrawal from the world and her impassioned art were also inspired in part I think by a tragic romance. A series of tormented and often frankly erotic letters were found to prove that this unsuccessful romance had a strong impact on her emotions—enough impact to seclude her from any outside life. This paper concerns two of Emily Dickinson's poems, number 288 and number 384, which are both prime examples that reflect the dejection she was experiencing.

In poem number 288, Dickinson reveals her loneliness. In line number one, she introduces herself as “Nobody,” as if it is her plural name. Nobody also

refers to someone that people do not know much about. I think the word *Nobody* uses both meanings in this poem. She then asks the reader if he or she is *Nobody* too.

Nikki's paragraphs probably raise many questions for you. Looking only at the first sentence, for example, you might wonder: What feelings are reflected? What dreams? How does Dickinson's style reflect these? But such questions only mirror the confusion that Nikki is experiencing at this stage in her writing. Though it is clear that she has thought about some ideas, she remains unfocused. She needs help with sorting through, clarifying, and articulating those ideas.

The best way to assist Nikki is to focus on her thoughts and ideas rather than on the paper itself. Instead of making judgments about her draft, describe your reactions as a reader, and ask questions that invite her to further examine, explore, and clarify her ideas and approaches. By reacting as a reader, you are facilitating—that is, assisting and making the process easier.

The following paragraphs discuss the functions that facilitative questions and comments may serve. They offer examples as well as suggestions for applying them to Nikki's paper.

Reacting as a reader. Comments like “I'm confused,” “I get lost here,” “From your introduction, I expected to read...,” and “This is what this sentence or paragraph means to me. Do I have the right idea? Is that what you meant?” simply and honestly convey your response to a paper as you read it. They invite writers to elaborate and, in so doing, to clarify ideas for you and for themselves.

■ **What you might write to Nikki:** “In your introduction, you say that Dickinson's poetry reflects her feelings and dreams and her dejection about the unhappy romance that inspired it. But when I finish that paragraph, I'm confused. I'm not sure exactly what your paper's going to be about.” Since Nikki's introduction mentions several aspects of Dickinson's poetry and it is unclear which one(s) her paper will focus on, I statements place the burden for the confusion on you, not Nikki, and invite her to resolve it. She will perhaps struggle to articulate her intended focus and may come to some new realizations about that focus.

Requesting information. Questions such as “Can you tell me more about...?” can help students to clarify their thinking, consider the whole paper or an aspect of it more critically, refocus their thoughts, or continue a line of thinking further.

■ **What you might write to Nikki:** “Why did you choose these two poems? Can you tell me more about them?” Of the many poems written by Emily Dickinson, Nikki chose two to discuss. Your requests give her an opportunity to articulate and examine the reasons for her choice. Doing so should help her to understand more clearly what it is she wants to say about the poems.

Requesting clarification. When students' answers or writing is vague, encourage them to clarify points by asking, "What is your idea here?" "What are you thinking?" "What do you want to say?" "What do you want your reader to know in this paragraph?" "How does this idea connect with what you said before?" "What do you mean by...?" or "Tell me more about..."

To be sure you are following and understanding what a writer intends, restate the content of the message: "What I'm hearing you say is... Do I have it right?"

■ **What you might write to Nikki:** "You say Dickinson's poetry reflects her feelings. What do you mean by 'feelings'? Which feelings?" Nikki's reference to feelings is vague, so questions will lead Nikki to consider her intentions more carefully and come to a clearer understanding of what she means to say. As she responds, you could encourage her to relate her answers to the two poems by asking, "How are Dickinson's feelings reflected in the two poems you chose?"

Developing critical awareness. Writers sometimes plan or write whole papers without adequately evaluating audience or purpose, and one of the best questions that you can pose is "So what?" That question, or versions of it—such as "Why does anyone [your audience] want or need to know about that?"—forces writers to think about their purpose in addressing their audience. "So what?" also makes them consider and justify other points in the paper, as do questions like "Why would that be so?" and "Can you give me an example of...?"

■ **What you might write to Nikki:** "You indicate that the word *Nobody* is important in this poem. Why would that be so?" You might ask these questions because Nikki has singled out the word *Nobody* as being significant, but she does not clearly explain why. Your questions should encourage her to justify its importance.

Refocusing. To get writers to refocus or rethink their writing, it is useful to get them to relate their approach to another idea or approach, using questions like "How would someone who disagrees respond to your argument?" "How is that related to...?" or "If that's so, what would happen if...?"

■ **What you might write to Nikki:** "You mentioned Dickinson's 'withdrawal from the world.' Didn't Dickinson also have a phobia, a fear of public places? How might that relate to her 'withdrawal from the world?'" Nikki's draft is not far enough along to begin refocusing her material, but suppose that you know something about Nikki's topic—like Dickinson's phobia—an aspect that she could at least bear in mind as she re-evaluates. Your request does not demand that Nikki address this aspect in her paper; it merely alerts her to a dimension she may be unaware of and asks her to examine whether she should consider it.

Prompting. To get writers to continue or follow their line of thinking further, encourage them with questions like "What happens after that?" or "If that is so, then what happens?"

■ **What you might write to Nikki:** "What words or phrases suggest to you that she was lonely? How do those words or phrases show loneliness?" As Nikki articulates her ideas about Dickinson's poetry reflecting "feelings," she will probably mention loneliness because she includes that word in her draft. Encourage her to continue thinking along those lines.

As a facilitator, you function as a sounding board or mirror, reflecting back to writers what you hear them trying to communicate. Your stance is an objective one, for your purpose is to evoke and promote writers' ideas, not to contribute your own. As you become increasingly comfortable with tutoring and better able to size up the writers with whom you work, you may feel more at ease with occasionally offering opinions about or suggestions for content, but beware: The paper must remain the responsibility of the writer.

SILENCE AND WAIT TIME

Try this experiment. Get a watch or clock with a second hand. At the start of a minute, turn around or place the clock out of sight. When you think that a minute has elapsed, look back. How close did you come? Thirty seconds? Forty-five? Chances are you stopped a little too soon, and that is what we tend to do when we try to make ourselves wait: We jump in a little too soon.

As a tutor, you should learn when and how to pause and be silent in a tutoring session. Occasionally, writers need time to digest what has been discussed or to formulate a question. They also need time to think about a response when you pose a question. Often, tutors are tempted to quickly rephrase a question or even answer it themselves when a writer does not respond after a moment or two. If you feel this temptation, try waiting a little longer than you think you should; then wait some more. This deliberate use of wait time communicates to writers that they are expected to think and arrive at answers on their own. You might even create an excuse to get up and leave for a few minutes; go to the restroom or get a drink of water. In a synchronous session, online silence is sometimes even more difficult to bear, as the blinking cursor seems to demand an immediate response. Feel free to type "take your time" or "I have to leave the computer for a couple of minutes; I'll be right back!" to give the writer some online breathing room.

Thinking time is especially important when a new aspect of a topic arises, and writers may even need a few moments on their own to do some writing. Try initiating short breaks that allow writers five or even ten minutes to freewrite, brainstorm, or draft a section of a paper. On other occasions, you might give them time to complete an activity that relates to what you have just been discussing. You might ask them to revise a portion of their draft or correct certain problems with grammar, mechanics, or punctuation. Or they might complete a short grammar exercise. When they finish, you can review their work with them. When chatting, simply give them

a set amount of time to work on a discrete task ("I'm going to give you five minutes; I'll be here when you want to resume."). Resist the urge to maintain constant online chatter; instead, give them the time and space necessary to compose their thoughts.

WRAPPING UP A SESSION

Some sessions end gracefully when you and the writer finish addressing the writer's concerns and needs; however, not all sessions are ready to end when the allotted time is almost up. There may even be awkwardness: Another writer may be waiting for you, or you may be anxious to pack up and run to class. One good way to handle wrapping up a session is to watch the clock unobtrusively and announce when there are five to ten minutes left. You and the writer can finish what you are working on, plan the writer's next steps or next session, and answer any last questions. Another approach is to ask the writer if there is anything specific that he or she wants to cover in those last minutes; you might begin by briefly summarizing what you've worked on—or ask the writer to summarize the session—then ask if there is any other question you can answer before he or she leaves. In some writing centers, tutors complete a report form summing up what was accomplished; inviting the writer to contribute or comment on the form can also serve as a graceful way to wrap up a session. Online tutors often provide a final checklist; if working synchronously, the tutor can ask the writer to help generate the list.

The Many Hats Tutors Wear

A tutor's role varies from session to session. With one writer, you ask question after question to help him figure out what he has to say about a scene in *Beowulf*. With the next, you explain the various ways of defining a term in a definition paper. In the midst of this session, the student vents some frustrations about being a returning student and balancing her time, so you direct her to a series of workshops for returning students. Then, a second language writer arrives. He cannot get his subjects and verbs to agree; you pull out a piece of paper and start explaining. In your tutoring, you function variously as an ally, a coach, a commentator, a collaborator, a writing "expert," a learner, and a counselor.

THE ALLY

You are a friend who offers support to a writer coping with a difficult task—writing a paper. You are sympathetic, empathetic, and encouraging, and best of all, you are supportive and helpful. You explain things in terms that the writer can understand. You answer questions that may seem silly or stupid, but you take them seriously. You smile (in person or online: ☺). You

understand. After all, didn't you just explain that you have a history paper due tomorrow, and you do not expect to get much sleep tonight either?

THE COACH

In sports, coaches instruct players and direct team strategy. They do not actually do the work for the team, but rather they stand on the sidelines observing how the team functions, looking at what is going well and what needs improvement. Likewise, you stand on the sidelines. The work of writers needs to be their own, but by asking questions, making comments, and functioning as a reader, you encourage writers to think through problems and to find their own answers. You suggest ways of accomplishing tasks. You describe how to organize a comparison and contrast paper, clarify the rules for using a semicolon, or explain and help students implement strategies for invention.

THE COMMENTATOR

Sports commentators give play-by-play accounts, but they also give a picture of the whole game as it progresses. Likewise, you describe process and progress in a broader context than a writer might otherwise see. As former Purdue University professor and writing lab director Muriel Harris explains, "The tutor-commentator provides perspective, makes connections to larger issues, gives students a sense of when and how they are moving forward."¹ You enable writers to see a paper as a whole by working with them to establish goals and by explaining what work lies ahead. You help them to acquire strategies and skills that will work not just for this paper but for others as well. You point out that making a correction in spelling or punctuation is not simply a matter of following a convention but rather of making their writing more accessible for a reader.

THE COLLABORATOR

You know that writers are supposed to do all of the work themselves, but you are discussing ideas for a paper with a particularly sharp writer. She has read Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and has focused on examining the color imagery in it. You have just read the book, so you know what she is talking about. She mentions the dinner scene, and you have an idea about the color yellow in it. Do you keep it to yourself? Probably not. More likely, the two of you discuss ideas about the imagery in a mutually engaging and even exhilarating exchange; she profits from your input and you from hers.

Such an exchange may seem like the best part of tutoring, but if you do share your ideas with writers, be wary of two potential problems. First,

¹Muriel Harris. "The Roles a Tutor Plays: Effective Tutoring Techniques." *English Journal* 69.9 (1980): 62–65.



© 1987 United Features Syndicate, Inc.

writers should always be responsible for and in control of their own papers. Lazy or unsure writers may try to rely on you to produce most or all of the ideas for papers—in effect, to write the paper—which should be their own work. Conversely, the overzealous tutor may usurp papers, interjecting too many ideas and leaving writers confused, no longer in control of the paper, and perhaps less confident about their writing abilities.

THE WRITING “EXPERT”

You may not be a writing teacher or a writing expert; nonetheless, students usually come to you assuming that you know more about writing than they do. The truth is that you probably do. Just by being a tutor, you become more knowledgeable about writing. You are an example of the adage that we learn best when we explain something to someone else.

But what do you do when you realize that you are in over your head, that you do not know how to explain a grammatical point or the options available when writing a résumé? The simple answer is to admit that you do not know and then to seek help. Check—or have the student check—a textbook, handbook, or Web site; thus, you model how one can use available resources. You can also ask another tutor, who can often be an excellent resource. Occasionally, you may need to turn the writer over to a more knowledgeable tutor. In that case, you might sit in (or read the advice if tutoring online) and learn something for the next time that you encounter a similar situation.

THE LEARNER

This role is slightly different than the others in this list because, while it has some benefits for writers, you are the one who really gains. Students submit papers on a wide variety of topics, some of which will be partially or entirely new to you. What, for example, causes chondromalacia, or “runner’s knee,” and how is it treated? How is oil extracted from shale? What does Chief Seattle say about environmental issues in his 1854 speech? What is “ghost dancing,” and how did it contribute to the massacre at Wounded Knee on the South Dakota Pine Ridge reservation? As you talk with writers, you get to enjoy learning about these and other topics. Even if you are familiar with a topic, the perspective that the writer takes may help you see it in a new or

different way. For example, a student’s discussion of Isabella in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* as a kind of “typical teenager” may lead you to consider that character differently.

Knowing little or nothing about a topic often makes you a perfect audience for a paper, so writers actually gain from your lack of expertise. Writers often have difficulty accommodating an audience; as they answer your questions and clarify their writing for you, they will learn how to adapt their texts for an audience.

THE COUNSELOR

A student’s life includes much more than the writing assignment at hand, and often other issues and concerns interfere with completing the assignment. Sometimes you may find yourself playing the role of counselor, listening to writers’ concerns and dealing with such issues as attitude and motivation. You may encounter a transfer student who is disgruntled because she has lost credits in changing schools, a returning student who wonders if he can continue to juggle his job and school successfully, or a graduating senior who has lost interest in school and just can’t seem to get motivated. In such cases, you offer support, sympathy, and suggestions as appropriate. You refer students to workshops or programs on campus: for example, conversation groups for learners of English as a second language, time-management or study-skills seminars, résumé workshops, or GRE reviews.

You may encounter a writer whose paper is deeply personal and reveals worrisome content that makes you feel uncomfortable or ill-prepared to address. If you think a student needs professional help, speak with your director or other administrator; he or she will know the appropriate campus resources and can refer the student.

When Is a Tutor Not a Tutor?

Once your friends and neighbors—or even students you work with—realize that you are a writing tutor, they may seek your help with assignments outside the writing center. Except in special cases that only you can decide (helping a roommate or co-worker, for example), it is best to restrict your tutoring to the writing center. Otherwise, you may find yourself coerced into spending your study, sleep, or family time working on someone else’s paper. If you have difficulty establishing boundaries with people requesting help outside of writing center hours, talk with your director or other administrator.