The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors

Sixth Edition

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Gillespie, and Brad Hughes—who wanted to assess in tangible ways the impact of tutors' writing center training and experience on their lives and jobs post-graduation. Go to www.writing.wisc.edu/pwtarp/ to get started with their step-by-step guide.

- **Publish.** Share what you learn with your campus community! If your writing center or school publishes a newsletter or newspaper, consider submitting an article about your writing center's history based on your research.

EXERCISE 1D: Exploring Tutors' Roles

The roles described in this chapter are not the only ones that tutors play. Sometimes, you may find yourself functioning as parent, therapist, actor, guru, or comedian. Exploring these potential roles can be interesting and informative.

Make a list of all the roles you can imagine tutors playing, then list the strengths and weaknesses of each: What is positive or negative about each role within a tutoring session? How do these strengths and weaknesses affect tutoring? If you are working with other tutors, you might do this exercise in groups, with each group exploring the same or different roles.

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Inside the Tutoring Session

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. Writing centers often extend that friendly ambience online, with a web and social media presence that is active and helpful and offers user-friendly language and resources. Whether you meet writers in person 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. Be alert for those reluctant writers who hover about the doorway or hang out quietly in a writing center online chatroom, unsure of what to do or how to begin. Engage them with a cheerful "Can I help you?"

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

- **Introduce yourself.** Smile and ask the writer 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, also ask the writer if she has had any technical difficulties or concerns that you can help resolve before you start.
- **Sit side-by-side.** Such a setup 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 each other as you converse if

you like. If you do use a desk, you can have the writer sit at the side of it rather than across from you.

Just as this seating 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. If you use a webcam when tutoring online, remember that the writer can see your facial expressions as you read his draft.

- **Give the writer control of the paper.** Keep the paper in front of the writer as much as possible. As a general rule, if you are working at a laptop or desktop computer, give the writer control of the keyboard. Positioning the writer in front of the document—whether on screen or on paper—serves to remind her (and sometimes you, the tutor!) that the writing is that of the student. Similarly, when working virtually, you can ask the writer to control the cursor (especially if you use software that enables desktop sharing).

  In both face-to-face and virtual environments, resist the urge to correct and edit mistakes as you read. Instead, indicate patterns of error, model a correction or two, and then encourage the writer to practice her own editing skills.

- **Keep resources and tools nearby.** Have scrap paper, sticky notes, highlighters, and pens and pencils handy. Also have print and online resources—like a dictionary, thesaurus, and grammar handbook—readily available. Online tutors can keep a list of resource links in a Favorites folder. Consider making other creative resources available, like a stress ball or Rubik's cube. Some writing centers keep a tactile tool or game at each tutoring station, including kinetic sand and wooden jigsaw puzzles, so that writers can do something with their hands as they talk or when they get nervous.

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, you can learn fairly quickly about the writer, the assignment, and his approaches to and concerns about both the task at hand and about 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
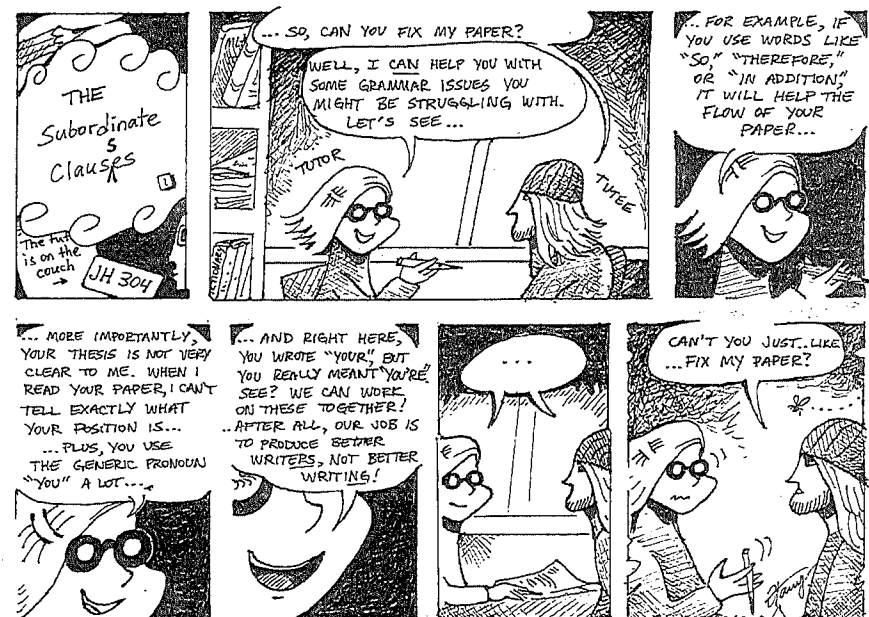
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writer's paper gives you something concrete to do, and you may worry that a conversation could go in unpredictable directions. Recognize, however, that this initial conversation allows you both to establish a comfortable acquaintance and to gather 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?"
- "Can you tell me a little more about your writing process for this paper—how you started, how much time you gave yourself for research, and so on?"

As the writer answers, seek clarification with follow-up questions. This time devoted to conversation will reap rewards later: when you look at the paper,

you will be able to match the writer's goals with what actually appears in the paper and can then more readily offer suggestions to make the writing—and the writer's approach to it—more effective.

If the assignment is unfamiliar, read through the description to be sure the writer has not forgotten or misunderstood any details. (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.) As you read the description, engage the writer with comments or questions like "I see you have to …" or "What did you choose for … ?" Asking writers to articulate the assignment—and their approach to it—often helps you 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 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," "flow," 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?
- How long is the tutoring appointment: Thirty minutes? One hour?

If you and the writer do not jointly agree on the focus of the session at the outset, then together you can determine what might be realistically accomplished in the time that you have. Managing expectations can lead to a more productive tutoring 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 could be covered. Ultimately, this list should be understandable to both you and the writer. Next, prioritize the list, taking into consideration the due date. Remember that it is better to cover issues like content and organization before dealing with matters like sentence structure and grammatical 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.

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 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 areas of concern, and maybe some potential resources, so that the writer is aware of them as she writes future papers.

Other times, a writer expects a tutor to review every page of a long paper, which is just not possible in a short time. In such a case, ask the writer to identify the section of the paper giving him 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.

FOUR EFFECTIVE, POWERFUL TOOLS

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

- Asking questions
- Listening actively
- Facilitating by responding as a reader
- Using silence and wait time to allow a writer time to think

Used in combination, these tools can help you learn and understand better what writers' 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.

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—closed and open. Equally useful, closed and open questions generate different responses depending on the context.

A closed question is one like "Do you have a description of your assignment?" or "When is your paper due?" Such questions require a *yes* or *no* or a brief, limited response and yield specific information. This specific information can be very helpful. For example, 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 tutored other students from that class.

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,* 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 literature review." A question like "How is the class going?" may help you to learn about the writer's performance as well as his expectations.

You can often easily and quickly modify a question from closed to open if it doesn't generate much response. For example, a simple modification of "Do you have some ideas for that section?" to "What are your ideas for that section?" asks the writer to provide those ideas instead of just saying "yes" or "no."

Listening Actively

Active listening means making a conscious effort not only to hear another person's words, but also to understand the complete message being sent. Here we examine the power of active listening through the interaction between Dwight and his tutor, Kristen. After exchanging pleasantries and settling down at a table, the two begin their session. As you follow their conversation, note Kristen's use of questions, and pay particular attention to her 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 Business Communication course and we just completed a unit on intercultural communication. For our final paper, we're supposed to explain how understanding cross-cultural differences and nonverbal language is critical to our own professional development. We have to use at least five examples in our paper.

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 additional research. Not really. We are supposed to use examples from our book—there is a whole chapter on this—and from a video we watched in class. I don't know. Five to seven pages! I think it's kind of hard. I can think of cross-cultural differences from the chapter and video, but there are so many. How do I choose the best ones? I don't want to do the same ones everyone else is doing. By the time Professor Timmons looks at my paper, she might be tired of reading about handshakes and direct eye contact. And then I don't know how to put them into some kind of order. And here's the other thing: I'm kinda worried about making a stereotype. What if I end up writing something offensive?

Kristen: What I'm hearing you say is that this assignment is really frustrating you, for a whole bunch of reasons, 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 at least five examples of cross-cultural differences in nonverbal communication, right?

Dwight: Yes, like the one I mentioned—how American business people expect a firm handshake and direct eye contact in introductions. But they're the obvious ones.

Kristen: Perhaps. I also heard you say that you were worried about accidentally calling up a stereotype, right? But you also told me that part of the assignment is explaining how understanding these cultural differences is important for your own professional development. Do you think you might start there, with the examples that will help you, as an American, be more aware and sensitive in intercultural exchanges? Maybe that would be an interesting place to brainstorm.

Dwight: Well, sure—there's the business greeting, how meetings are conducted, what to do at a business lunch or dinner.

Kristen: Great! And see, you've already started to organize your examples yourself. You mention the various encounters an American business person might have on a business trip and how intercultural nonverbal communication is important in each.

Dwight: You know, I was concerned because I didn't want to make stereotypes, but if I go into these differences, then I can actually explain how these differences have meaning for their cultures.

Kristen: What do you mean? Can you help me understand more?

Dwight: Like, for example, if doing business in China, it is expected that we first greet the most senior official present, and formally, too, with a title. This is a sign of respect.

Kristen: So, that has to do with the greeting. Do you have other comparative examples besides China and America?

Dwight: Sure. I know that the video had an example from Sweden—or maybe it was France? I'll review it again. And then I can move into how the business meeting is conducted. For example, my book explained that in Brazil there is a good amount of casual, small talk before getting down to serious business.

Kristen: Interesting. But remember your point that you want to provide more than just an example; you told me that you also want to provide the cultural significance behind that example.

Dwight: Oh, I can! You see, in Brazil relationship-building is really important, and so establishing a friendly, casual atmosphere at the start of a business meeting is a step toward that.

Kristen: Well it sounds to me like you have a lot to start with. And you even have a good idea of how to organize the paper.

When Dwight initially 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, and due date, and about engaging the reader. He also worries about inadvertently calling up a stereotype.

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 ..." She feeds back what she understands to be his message.

As the session continues, Kristen *paraphrases* Dwight's explanation of the assignment and his examples, 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, and then Kristen reminds him, it is not just the differences that are important, but the cultural meaning and significance behind those differences.

Kristen also uses questions to invite Dwight to expand on or continue his thoughts. She asks, "Do you think you might start there, with the examples that will help you, as an American, be more aware and sensitive in intercultural exchanges?" Notice that this question is closed (it can be answered by a decisive *yes* or *no* response), but it is nonetheless quite effective: Dwight immediately generates a list of categories of business relations. If Dwight had simply said "yes," then Kristen could have shifted to an open variation of the question, such as "Can you list as many examples as you can remember right now?" or "What examples were particularly interesting to you and why?" to nudge Dwight to continue his thoughts and to develop them. Kristen uses open questions when she asks, "What do you mean? Can you help me understand more?" These questions require Dwight to give very specific examples to clarify and support his claim.

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. As Dwight's assignment reminds us, the cultural backdrop of your writing center will affect your interactions with writers; the important thing is to be mindful of how your nonverbal communication can further support and encourage writers.

Facilitating by Responding as a Reader

When a tutor responds as a reader, he provides the feedback and impressions he imagines the writer's audience might have. He does not presume to know all of the answers, but rather poses questions and offers feedback that help bridge the gap between the writer and her audience. Take, for example, the following situation. Jane initiates a chat with her online tutor, Javier. Jane has written the first draft of a paper for an *Introduction to Poetry* class and she pastes the first two paragraphs into the chat window:

> ○ **Chat Example: Responding as a Reader**
>
> *Jane entered the room.*
> *Javier entered the room.*
>
> **Javier says:**   Hi! What can I help you with?
> **Jane says:**   Here is my paper so far. What do you think?
>
> 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.

Jane's paragraphs probably raise many questions for Javier. Looking at only the first sentence, for example, he might wonder: "What feelings are reflected? What dreams? How does Dickinson's style reflect these?" But such

questions only mirror the confusion that Jane 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. Javier can assist by reacting as a reader, requesting more information and clarification, helping the writer develop critical awareness, and refocusing and prompting the writer.

REACTING AS A READER. One way a tutor can assist a writer is to react as a reader as they go through the text. Typically, responding as a reader means one of them reads aloud, then as the tutor reacts to what has been written, the writer can observe or listen. Where does the tutor smile with pleasure or understanding? Nod in agreement or appreciation? Wrinkle his brow in confusion or frustration? Not only can he show the writer where she connects well with her audience, but he can use his responses to reflect or indicate places where a lack of clarity perplexes or distracts him, and elicit more information about the writer's intended meaning. Then, instead of making judgments about the draft with statements like "This list isn't clear," he can describe his reactions using "I" statements, and ask questions that invite the writer to further examine, explore, and clarify her ideas and approaches. He might, for example, say "I'm not sure what you mean by listing A, B, and C in that order. Did you do that for a specific reason?"

⊙ Chat Example: Reacting as a Reader

Javier says: 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 a bit confused. I'm not sure exactly what your paper is going to be about. Can you briefly explain what the overall purpose of your paper is in here?

Jane says: Ok. Well, basically, I wanted to make the case that 'tragic romance' is a kind of major theme for the poems I chose.

Jane's introduction mentions several aspects of Dickinson's poetry, and it is unclear to Javier which one(s) her paper will focus on. *I* statements allow Javier, the tutor, to show Jane his experience and confusion as a reader, 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 that clarify it for both herself and her audience.

    Javier used comments that simply and honestly conveyed his response to Jane's paper as he (or she) read it. Some writing centers use the term *practice audience* to describe the tutor's role as he reacts as a reader, a phrase that may help to clarify that role for the writer. This term gives the tutor authority to

respond as he models the potential reactions of a future audience, one who will not have the writer nearby to answer questions or offer explanations, and it also makes him appear less judgmental.

REQUESTING INFORMATION. Questions such as "Can you tell me more about . . . ?" can help writers 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.

⊙ Chat Example: Requesting Information

Javier says: Why did you choose these two poems? Can you tell me more about them?

Jane says: They were the ones we covered in class. But there were two others that were in the book that I thought might work. Do you think I should include those, too?

Of the many poems written by Emily Dickinson, Jane chose only two to discuss. Javier's question gives Jane an opportunity to articulate and examine the reasons for her choice. In this case, the reason was simply that she was limiting her choice to poems covered in class. Including the other poems may help Jane understand more clearly the claims she wants to make in her paper.

REQUESTING CLARIFICATION. When writers' 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?"

⊙ Chat Example: Requesting Clarification

Javier says: You say Dickinson's poetry reflects her feelings. What do you mean by 'feelings'? Which feelings?

Jane says: I thought it was obvious? I talk about loneliness in the first paragraph.

Javier says: Yes, I see that. Is that the only "feeling" you will be discussing? Are there others?

Jane's reference to feelings in the introduction is vague, so Javier's questions lead Jane to consider her intentions more carefully and come to a clearer understanding of what she means to say. As she responds, he could encourage her to relate her answers to the poems by asking, "How are Dickinson's feelings reflected in the 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?"—encourages 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 . . . ?"

> **◯ Chat Example: Developing Critical Awareness**
>
> **Javier says:** You indicate that the word *Nobody* is important in this poem. Why would that be so?
>
> **Jane says:** Well, it's connected to the feeling of loneliness. Actually, now that I think about it, I think it's tied to sadness, too.

Javier asks this question because Jane has singled out the word *Nobody* as being significant, but she does not clearly explain why. His question encourages Jane to justify its importance and relate it more concretely to the poems.

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 . . . ?"

> **◯ Chat Example: Refocusing**
>
> **Javier says:** 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"?
>
> **Jane says:** That's right! We talked about that in class. That definitely seems related to her theme of loneliness. . . .

Because Javier knows something about Jane's topic—Dickinson's phobia—he contributes an aspect that she could at least bear in mind as she re-evaluates. His question does not demand that Jane address this aspect in her paper; it merely alerts her to a dimension she forgot to include 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?"

> **◯ Chat Example: Prompting**
>
> **Javier says:** What words or phrases suggest to you that she was lonely? How do those words or phrases show loneliness?
>
> **Jane says:** Oh, I underlined a bunch of lines. They don't all mention the word "lonely," but they seem to imply it.
>
> **Javier says:** Can you show me a few, so we can discuss how they relate to your paper?

Javier's questions encourage Jane to pursue her line of thinking about loneliness and references to loneliness within the poems.

As a facilitator, you function as a sounding board or mirror, reflecting back to writers what you hear them trying to communicate. Your primary purpose is to evoke and promote writers' ideas. 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.

Using 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

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. When working online with writers, 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, draft, or revise a section of a paper, or to complete an activity that relates to what you have just been discussing. When they finish, you can review their work with them. When chatting online, simply give writers 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.

USING A HANDBOOK

A handbook serves as a concise and ready reference or manual on a particular subject. The late Diana Hacker described *The Bedford Handbook* as "small enough to hold in your hand . . . [and able to] answer most of the questions you are likely to ask as you plan, draft, and revise a piece of writing."[1] Whether seeking general help on new ways to think about narrowing a topic or more specific advice on a grammatical point or documentation, even the best writers frequently consult a handbook; no one knows all the answers by heart. As you work with writers, do not hesitate to consult a handbook and suggest that they bring their own handbooks to future tutoring sessions. Together, you can mark sections that writers may want to reference again as they continue to revise. Not only can you help them answer their questions accurately, but you will also be modeling the behavior of good writers.

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

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[1]Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. *The Bedford Handbook*, 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/

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. After finishing up what you are working on, you can ask the writer if there is anything specific that he wants to cover in those last minutes or if he has any remaining questions you can answer before he 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; the tutor can ask the writer to help generate the list.

All of these ideas may also help you and the writer plan her next steps for revision. This planning is a critical step in the writing process, as writers often feel at a loss—even just a few hours after they've met with you—when they are once again alone with their papers. In addition to asking the writer to summarize what was accomplished in the session, you can ask her to articulate what specific writing tasks she still needs to complete. She may need help prioritizing and sorting these tasks. Should she go through and correct the comma splices first? Or should she revise her thesis and send the revision to her professor to review?

Just as you greet the writer with a smile, close similarly by congratulating him on his progress and by wishing him the best of luck as he continues his work. One positive way to close the session is to set up the next appointment in the writing center, either with you or another tutor!

EXERCISE 2A: Observing Tutors' and Writers' Body Language

View a video of a tutoring session with the sound off. Alternatively, watch ten minutes of a situation comedy, drama, or interview on television, again with no sound. Observe the body language and facial expressions of the tutor and writer or the TV characters. What messages are communicated? How?

EXERCISE 2B: Observing Tutoring Sessions

Observe several experienced tutors in sessions as they work with writers. (Be sure to first get permission to sit in from both tutor and writer.) Notice how tutors greet writers and establish rapport. Pay attention to the ways in which tutors learn what writers want help with and decide what to work on. How does the tutor engage the writer, phrase questions, and respond to the writer's concerns? What does body language convey about tutors and writers? How is a session ended?

If you are an online tutor, read chat sessions or advice from experienced

an online medium? How do they explain difficult concepts? What kinds of examples do they use?

When each session ends, talk with the tutor. Ask specific questions about how and why the tutor conducted the session as he or she did. You may want to complete a form like the one below for each session you observe.

TUTOR OBSERVATION SHEET

Your name: _____

Tutor's name: _____

Date: _____ Length of session: _____

Class the student's paper is for, or other reason for coming to the center:

_____

_____

Description of the assignment: _____

Areas covered in the session:

What helped the student or worked in the session?

What was tried but didn't help the student or didn't work?

Comments and reflections on the session:

Final thoughts:

EXERCISE 2C: Working with Handbooks and Other References

When you are tutoring, questions will come up that you cannot answer on your own. You may be uncertain about the parts of a proposal, a rule for using semicolons, or documentation according to the American Psychological Association (APA) format. In these cases, you may have to check references as you help writers. Such resources vary from writing center to writing center, but most centers have a collection of writing guides and handbooks, a list of helpful online resources, and handouts with explanations and exercises.

To familiarize yourself with the resources available at your writing center, explore them and note at least two places—one text-based and one online—where you could find the following information:

1. Accepted formats for business letters
2. An explanation and exercise on subject-verb agreement
3. Discussion of thesis statement, with examples
4. Strategies for tightening wordy sentences
5. Guidelines for evaluating a website
6. Rules for when to spell out numbers or use figures
7. Exercises for correcting comma splices
8. Advice on writing and formatting résumés
9. A discussion of subordination for emphasis
10. An explanation of cause and effect as a pattern of development
11. Guidelines for putting together a PowerPoint presentation
12. The format for documenting a selection in an anthology using the Modern Language Association (MLA) style
13. The rules for use of *who* and *whom*
14. Ways to avoid using sexist language
15. A list of common spelling errors
16. An explanation of passive and active voice
17. The conventions for referring to authors in the text of a literary paper
18. A list of logical fallacies with explanations and examples
19. Guidelines for creating an entry in an annotated bibliography
20. Information on what to consider with scannable résumés
21. Explanations and examples of paraphrasing effectively
22. The correct spelling for the past tenses of *cancel* and *travel*
23. Information on e-mail etiquette ("netiquette")
24. Rules for subject-verb agreement with collective nouns like *committee*, *audience*, and *couple*
25. Rules for using abbreviations with proper names

EXERCISE 2D: Role-playing the Tutoring Session

Role-playing activities will help you to practice the tutoring techniques that are discussed in this chapter. If you are not using this book in conjunction with a class or training program, try to gather a group of tutors from your writing center who are willing to participate. Various role-playing scenarios are listed in Appendix C.