



The Task

**A Guide for Tutors in the
Rutgers Writing Centers**

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PRINCIPLES

The Task of Tutoring

"Making the student do all the work" has become the mantra of what is called "minimalist tutoring," as first described by Jeff Brooks and as practiced at the Rutgers Writing Centers (and at practically every writing center across the country). The idea of the minimalist model is that the writing tutor should not be a proofreader, fact-checker, editor, ghost writer, collaborator, or human thesaurus. In the minimalist model, the writing tutor is a mentor, coach, or task master who guides students through the process of revision and helps keep them focused on the project at hand by breaking it down into smaller and more manageable tasks. In a sense, tutors help their clients to dismantle the wall of their "writer's block" – one brick at a time.

In the minimalist model, tutors don't do students' work for them, but they do a certain kind of work. The goal of this booklet is to describe the work that tutors do and to help tutors stay focused on giving clients writing tasks that they can accomplish during the tutoring session. It's our hope that, if nothing else, this booklet will expand the repertoire of tasks that tutors have available to them for addressing the typical problems that students experience at each stage of the writing process.

Authentic Tasks

As a new tutor, you have intuitive knowledge of how writing gets done and expertise in accomplishing writing tasks. The goal of tutor training is to help you formulate your intuition into principles and break down your expertise into specific practices. This booklet is not intended to be a "tutor by the numbers" guide. We do hope that the specific practices contained in this booklet will help get any student started writing. Ultimately, though, you still have to be a "creative problem solver," able to apply the principles of minimalist tutoring mixed with the specific situation your client finds him or herself in, plus some of your own knowledge of successful writing processes in order to invent new tasks or modify existing ones to fit your client's specific needs. Our goal, after all, is always to teach people to fish and not to do the fishing for them.

No book can tell you exactly what to do in any given situation. You have to respond to the needs of your client. That begins with listening to the client and paying close attention to all the details of what they say, then looking at any supporting materials they have brought (including the assignment question, the student's draft, or graded papers with the teacher's comments). Use the clues of the situation to develop tasks that are most appropriate for the client's needs. We call these "authentic tasks," because they connect with students and address their real needs. What you will find in this booklet are suggestions for basic kinds of tasks you can tailor to fit the needs of each individual client during the time that you meet.

The Ten Commandments of Tutoring

Before we turn to the practices of tutoring, it's useful to review some of the guiding principles that should help shape our conversations with clients. We set these principles

forth as "The Ten Commandments of Minimalist Tutoring," though we didn't exactly find them on a mountain top and etched in stone. They are simply our best attempt to describe a set of rules that have worked well for us and which can help to guide your own work. And, unlike the Biblical edicts, we tried to come up with some "thou shalts" to accompany the "shalt nots."

I. Be positive and do no harm.

“Doing harm” in this context means doing anything that interferes with a client’s desire or ability to write. Doing harm could be making fun of a student’s pronunciation or grammar or being overly critical of their behavior. Many students come to writing with a lot of negative baggage connected to their previous experiences of writing in school. Ask any of them to tell their "institutional writing autobiography," and you may hear stories of ruler smacks, mean comments, uninspired teaching, or what President Bush has called "the soft bigotry of low expectations." I cannot tell you how many students have said to me over the years that they "always got As" in high school writing but knew that the standards were too low to inspire their best efforts. While some high school teachers of English create a negative atmosphere in the classroom, some others play the role of self-esteem boosters and do not push their students to achieve anything close to their true potential. As a tutor, you get to be the best writing coach a student ever had by personalizing your lessons, keeping a positive attitude toward student success, and helping each student measure up to the high standards that the Writing Program holds.

II. Be friendly but don’t “socialize.”

Tutors are expected to find a balance between “peer” and “authority,” as Peter Carino has suggested. We are coaches, not teachers or friends. Establishing this relationship can feel strange, especially if you are younger than your client. Just remember that your client sought your help because you have the more advanced skills in this particular field. The client’s transition to advanced skills is a process that will take place over time.

III. Cut the talking and get them writing.

The more a tutor talks, the less the client writes. A session in which a tutor and client “discuss” ideas may feel satisfying, but the discussion is often abstract and the client leaves the Writing Center with little writing and quickly fading memories of the “discussion” in which the tutor did most of the talking. The student has made no progress with the paper. Instead, you want to move your clients quickly toward generating text and developing their ideas on paper. The most productive tutoring sessions are those that allow students to leave with tangible results: notes and pre-writing that they have developed by working closely with a few key moments in the text, substantial revisions to one or more paragraphs in their drafts, or at the very least, written notes about the direction their next at home writing session should take.

On the other hand, a little conversation (as opposed to lecturing) is a good thing. First, you can establish a relationship with the client through conversation, and the writing center should be a place where a student can feel known. Talking can also be a time saver at the beginning of the session in establishing a focus or finding out what the client may have learned in class or in office hours since you last met. You can also ascertain what he or she understands about the comments the teacher has written, or any lingering sources of anxiety.

IV. Think long term and don't let "paper panic" shape the session.

While students want to focus on the last grade they got or the next grade they will get, we want to urge them to focus on their overall progress and skills they are developing over the course of the semester. We show them how to receive teacher's grades and comments calmly as barometers of progress and as guidance for their next set of tasks. Do not discourage students from taking grades seriously, but lead them away from early despair. Try to get them to concentrate on the comments more than the letter grades. However, if a student seems to be making no progress over two or three papers, please speak with the coordinator.

If a student is frantic because he or she hasn't started a paper that is due in two days (or two hours), you can gently suggest that students who come to tutoring with the most preliminary work done make the most progress. Then go on to do what we always do—begin the assignment with appropriate tasks, reminding the student that he or she will continue the work you begin on her own and that you have several sessions to "nail" the writing process. Even if a student is in danger of failing the course late in the term, we should still focus on the long term. After all, if the student cannot pass this term, he or she gets another semester to reach greater potential as a writer.

V. Keep the tasks authentic – there are no "generic" tasks.

There should be nothing formulaic about tutoring. Each student brings different strengths and weaknesses, each writing project has its own logic, and each step in the writing and revision process has its own requirements. Tasks that address the unique writing situation and the unique writer will be "authentic." A plan for one student's paper may be inappropriate for another's, or will surely be inappropriate for the same student's next paper. Rather than assuming that the "Writing Process" is a sequential set of steps carved in stone, we help students identify the practices and writing strategies that are most productive for them.

You have three sources to consider when devising the right tasks for the right students in the right sessions. First, you have the teacher's comments on the last paper. Next, you have the student's assessment of his or her own writing. And finally, you have the student's writing itself. No session should go by without you having read a student's whole draft, or what there is of it. Practically speaking, you can't always do this before assigning a start-up task, but you need to make time as quickly as possible to read what the student has written with respect and interest. Otherwise, you will be resorting to inauthentic or generic "tutoring tasks."

VI. Don't try to address everything – think "triage."

The first time you see a student paper with lots of problems, you may think that you have to try to deal with everything that's wrong or everything that might keep the student from passing. You don't. And don't even try, or you'll go crazy trying to cover it all and the student will not even be able to absorb it. Instead, think like an Emergency Room triage nurse and just identify the three areas that need the most help. Ask "where is the bleeding most severe?" and "what problems are most likely to be fatal?" Recognize that the student will be back next week – and hopefully for five weeks – so you have plenty of opportunities to work on the less fatal issues during the rest of the term. The paper before you might perish, but even a student who fails some papers can still be saved.

VII. Supplement and don't supplant the teacher

Your work complements class work. It does not replicate or replace it. Teachers must focus primarily on results and what is of “universal” concern to the group; tutors focus on process and what is of specific concern to the individual student. You have the luxury of customizing assignments, strategies, and short-term goals. Teachers have syllabi to “keep up with.” You can break down each discrete “writing moment” as much as your student needs you to. Thus, you want to focus on very specific reading, writing, and critical thinking strategies rather than engaging in general conversations about the texts or the topic. Encourage students to take advantage of teacher office hours as a different sort of help from tutoring – one that can help address the larger issues of the assignment. Ask students to report back on what they learned in office hours.

Most importantly, maintain your role as tutor and not teacher. Do not challenge the instructor's authority or question the instructor's methods – at least not in front of your client, anyway. If you do see a problem with the teaching, bring it to the attention of the Writing Center director. Often what you see as a problem will really be a misunderstanding or miscommunication. But sometimes it will be a sign of a teacher who has gone astray and may need some quick intervention to set back on track.

VIII. Be their coach, not their savior

If you're half as invested in your students' success as most tutors, you may be secretly disheartened when your student does poorly on a paper. Keep it to yourself. Remember that what happens in tutoring is only a tiny portion of what goes into producing a paper. You may need to remind your client that *you* are not responsible for the paper's success or failure. The onus for success is on the writer, not the tutor. Don't let your students get dependent on you. To avoid dependency, do not give students your email address or phone number, and do not meet them outside your scheduled session. You may seem like the world's “nicest tutor,” but you will just be encouraging tutor-dependence and helping your students to continue to feel disempowered when it comes to writing.

IX. Start with ideas, then work on form

Too many tutoring sessions get derailed before they start with a focus on “the thesis statement,” as though every paper needed one to get started. A “thesis statement” is rarely a starting place for writing. “The thesis statement” is simply the formal presentation of the writer's ideas – and those ideas can only emerge through the writing process. Much work can and should come before it. It's also common to look at a paper for the first time and immediately be struck by the need to get it organized or cleaned up. In fact, many problems in form are a manifestation of conceptual confusion, misunderstanding the assignment, misreading the texts, relying on underdeveloped ideas, making flimsy connections, etc. There is no point “fixing” a seriously flawed paper when clarifying connections and thoughts will often help a student regain control of grammar and syntax. Address concepts and ideas first.

A challenge may arise when a teacher sends a student to the Writing Center because the student keeps losing structural and formal control. Of course, we want to help students write organized and correct papers, but those issues should not become our primary concern. Work you do with students on these issues should be:

- tied to the content of their papers (“Let’s work on these pronouns so your reader will be clear about which of Gertner’s researchers made which discoveries”).
- geared toward strategies they can repeat on their own.
- discussed in clear ordinary English. (Who needs to know what to call ablative absolutes?)
- come after seriously revising ideas.

With students who have serious presentation issues, you should spend at least some time in each session addressing those issues directly. But generally that work should only come near the end of the session, after the larger conceptual tasks are completed.

X. Teach the writer, not the writing.

Don’t try to create the perfect paper. Try to create a better writer. In many ways, this commandment sums up all the others.

The nine principles above provide the pedagogical basis for all that we do in the Writing Center. Likewise, those same principles dictate what tutors do not do in the writing center – despite the temptations.

Tutoring “Don’ts”

1. Don’t proofread or edit, no matter how much the student begs.
2. Don’t interpret texts for their students or suggest connections.
3. Don’t provide a thesis, rearrange paragraphs, or otherwise do the work of interpretation or revision for a student.
4. Don’t master a few “generic exercises” that they use in the same way for many students.
5. Don’t assign “inauthentic tasks” – tasks that won’t help a student write a better paper – nor do they assign tasks the tutee could easily do at home: look up fifteen vocabulary words (one might be relevant to the task at hand), answer the questions at the end of the selection; answer all the teacher’s “corollary questions” following the assignment question. (Conversation might, however, point to one or two that deserve your time.)
6. Don’t speculate about the grade a paper will receive or should have received. When you want to praise a student, focus on how hard the student has worked on the specific task the session focused on.
7. Don’t join students in “teacher bashing,” no matter what we think of the question, the comments, or the grade. If you have real concerns, try to get a chance to photocopy the paper during the session and bring it to the coordinator.
8. Don’t leave them alone for too long. This means that whenever you assign a tutee to do something, you will always come back and revisit what she has done, mining it for

writing wisdom and material. This means you will have to budget your time, especially at the end of the session, so you can “decompress” with each of your students. Freewriting, for example, needs to be revisited with a highlighter, to select ideas that the student can develop into paragraphs. Ask questions about what the student has accomplished, what kinds of obstacles she encountered, and how she would describe the skill she just used in her own words. Similarly, never set a student to reading for more than 20 minutes. If a student (alas!) comes in without having read the text, assign it a couple of pages at a time, and have the student write about key terms, ideas, positions, etc., or identify and write about significant quotes in the section she has just read.

9. Don't abandon one of your students. Ideally, you are working toward 20 minute independent work periods for each student, but in the beginning, you will want to assign smaller tasks, and you will always want to check in every five or ten minutes – even if only visually – to make sure the student knows what to do and is using the time fruitfully. Although DCWC is crowded, it is often good to keep within “spying distance” of your students while they are working. If you can't, then circulate.
10. Don't expect downtime during your sessions. We enjoy “the tutors' lounge,” and socializing with one another, between periods also. But stay focused on the task at hand in the hours for which you are paid. During the 90 minute tutoring session, you should be working with one student or the other, reading papers, thinking up (or looking up) new tasks, or (ah the luxury!) reading the assigned essays. And remember: computers are for students and for work related tasks during paid time. You may use them to check e-mail and find information, but only between periods please, and only when the computers are not needed by students.

A Writing Program Glossary

The Rutgers Writing Program has developed an entire “insider” vocabulary that can sometimes be mystifying to students and tutors alike. The following glossary is meant to help you understand and explain some key terms to students.

Thesis? Argument? Project? Claim?

The Rutgers Writing program opts for the word “thesis” to describe the central idea a writer wants to explore in her paper, the guiding idea that will unify and focus the paper. “Thesis” is, after all, the word that students will encounter, most consistently, in future courses. We still eschew the kind of “argument” that connotes something you want to win or prove right or wrong (the kind of argument Tannen decries) although the word “argument” itself, properly understood, is not evil. An ideal expos thesis is somewhat open and exploratory. Your main goal as a tutor is to move a student away from ungrounded opinion. All claims must be rooted in the essays under discussion, and in a way that is responsible to the texts. The student’s thesis arises from the process of writing as discovery and aims to “make new knowledge” or gain new insights by means of connective, analytical thinking. Usually, the student will take a position (albeit not an absolutist one) on a question posed by a teacher. Remind your student that a thesis worth exploring is both “debatable” and important—a reasonable person might disagree with her position, and the topic is of importance to society.

Connective Thinking versus Mimetic Thinking

Mimetic thinking (think here of “mimic”) is the process of learning to reproduce information already established by others. Memorizing the periodic table or knowing which year King Lear was composed: these are examples of mimetic thinking. So are knowing what Sacks originally thought about blindness, or how Stout’s patient described a “fugue state.” The 101 course asks students to recognize that important knowledge is not fixed; that there is no simple “right” or “wrong.” As the students read essays from The New Humanities Reader, they will discover that authors disagree, that perspectives on issues vary, that ideas in one essay can illuminate an issue in another. Students must learn to think across domains of knowledge. They must learn how to connect the ideas of seemingly disconnected essays in order to discover what the essays can say to each other. This is called connective thinking. This is not the same as the “compare and contrast” model of writing although that is what many students believe we mean by “connection.” Anything can be the same as something else; anything can be different from something else: A does and doesn’t equal B, where A and B become too general to be meaningful. This simple math says nothing new. Connective thinking ponders the implications. What do the ideas in Essay A say about the examples found in Essay B? How do the implications of Author A’s essay impact the solution proposed by Author B?

Essays versus Stories

Students are fond of calling the essays “stories.” They probably read lots of stories in high school and very few critical essays. While there is one short story in The New Humanities Reader (Tim O’Brien’s “How to Tell a True War Story”), the rest of the texts are essays. When students refer to essays as “stories,” they reflect a misunderstanding about the genre of the essay. Unlike a story, which is a fictional narrative, an essay is an analytical

composition. Both genres seek insight and truth, but very differently. An essay is an attempt to interpret or understand a problem or important issue. It is not the last word on a subject, but part of an ongoing conversation. Good essays are examples of connective thinking. Students are writing essays in the course as a way of joining that conversation. Reminding students of the difference between essays and stories can help them understand what the course is asking them to do in their own writing.

Textual Responsibility

One of the skills students learn in Writing Program courses is to be responsible to the texts that they are analyzing in their papers. Being responsible is, at the very least, being fair. Being responsible to the text means that when they create a project to lead them to a thesis and position, student writers take into account what the texts they are studying say about that topic. The student writer does not misrepresent the published writer's ideas.

Textual Protocols

Students can refer to an author's ideas by directly quoting them, by paraphrasing them (expressing the same ideas in their own words), or by summarizing them (expressing the ideas in shortened form). Students in 100 and 101 are encouraged to use direct quotations – usually at least two (from two different authors) in each body paragraph – but they should also know when paraphrase and summary are appropriate. For the most part, we want to see less and less summary and more and more interpretation of idea quotes. A very general guideline is two to three lines of interpretation for every line of quoted text. Regardless of which textual protocol a student uses, he must cite it in MLA form.

Conversation

Writing program teachers always ask students to put the authors of the texts into conversation with one another (and ultimately with the students' own ideas as well). We use the word conversation to avoid comparison, contrast, argument, debate, report, and other dismissive terms. I like to play up the familiarity of the word conversation. What did Miss Manners (or your mother) teach you about being a good conversationalist?

- You listen attentively, respectfully, and with interest.
- You draw all of your guests into the conversation by suggesting points of mutual interest.
- You let your guests determine what the conversation will be about.
- You find something to say that indicates you are thinking reflectively about what your guests have said: you don't stare blankly at them when they finish speaking. You encourage them to say more.

PRACTICES

Start Up Tasks

The tasks tutors assign should be as well-suited and specific for the student as possible, based on the tutor's assessment of the paper as well as the teacher's comments. In order to give time to go through these materials, tutors should assign "start up" tasks so as not to waste time with their students. Start up tasks go against our philosophy a little, as most of them are ready-made and are not tailored to the student's specific needs, but an effective start up task may get a student in the correct frame of mind for tutoring—or at least remind him or her of what the paper is about. And the strongest tutors always find ways to personalize them based on their previous work with the student or a quick check of where they are at in the drafting process.

Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses with Self-Critique

Instead of guessing what your students need to work on, have them go through their papers on their own and identify the weakest parts (and what is weak about them), the strongest parts (and what is strong about them), and the most improved parts (and what has been improved).

You can begin by discussing these points and how students can strengthen the weak points and include more of the strong points throughout.

This can also be done by utilizing the teacher's comments from your students' previous papers. Have students go through each comment and check to see if they fixed those problems in their new drafts or continued to incorporate positive aspects of their previous papers into their new drafts.

The better you get to know your students, the more you can revisit recurrent problems; those problems may be good places to begin each session.

*See also: Tasks Using Teacher Materials.
Keywords: teacher's comments, weaknesses.*

Loosening Up with "Free-writing"

Free-writing is simply sitting down and writing in response to a specific direction or task. Though not always useful, it can be used to get students thinking about the assignment, to make a plan of action, or to set down their initial responses to a topic. Here are some ways it might be used as a start-up task:

- After they've completed the readings but before writing up a draft, you can have students free-write responses to the readings before taking a closer look at the assignment question. Although they may not be able or willing to articulate direct connections between the texts, they probably have some intuitive sense of what issues or topics may connect the readings.

- Textbooks for composition classes frequently have sample writing questions at the end of the selection or in a special section at the end of the book. These questions (ideally) have little role in the classroom, but they can be of great advantage to tutors. Have students free-write in response to one or more of these questions to get them thinking about the reading assignment and its potential connections to other reading assignments. This can be done using the teacher’s supplementary questions on the assignment sheet as well.
- For students who have completed a draft but are still struggling to find a thesis for the papers, have them free-write for a while on what they want to say on the topic without specifically addressing the texts with which they are working. You can then work with them to distill what they’ve written into a tighter and more coherent thesis statement that can be incorporated into future revision.
- In the case of students in a research writing class who are having problems identifying a thesis, have them free-write for a while describing the various positions of their research sources and framing texts. Then ask the students to identify their own position in relation to what they’ve written and write that up. Students can then continue to refine that statement in order to produce a coherent and concise thesis statement.

In the later stages of the research writing drafts, you can have students free-write counterarguments to their position to help develop a more sophisticated argument. Have them identify the thesis of their paper and then think about possible objections to the way they’ve framed their topic or the way they’ve set up their argument. Then have them respond to those objections.

*See also: Connection Tasks, Paper Strengthening Tasks, Tasks Using Teacher Materials.
Keywords: connections, counter arguments, free-writing, supplementary questions, thesis.*

Making Lists

For students who do not enjoy writing, it may be easier for them to get their ideas out by making lists instead of writing prose. You and your students can use the lists they write for a start up task as a checklist to ensure that you make time for their concerns as well as your own. Students might list:

- What they discussed with their teachers during office hours;
- What has been said in class discussions and how it can apply to their papers;
- Key terms that the authors use and that may impact how students read the essay;
- The weakest or strongest parts of their papers;
- Specific areas they would like to work on during the session;
- Questions about the material they would like to answer by the end of the session.

Keywords: class discussions, key terms, students’ ideas, teacher’s comments, weaknesses

Comparing Past and Present Papers

Finished, graded papers can be valuable resources to students if they are used effectively. Have students compare the draft they are working on to their previous papers, looking for improvements as they read. Ask them to circle any areas they feel they cannot fix and work on them together when you return.

Keywords: teacher's comments, weaknesses

Reading Tasks

As many experienced tutors will tell you, reading the texts and understanding them are two very different things, and that difference is not always apparent to students at the writing center. A student who does not read each text carefully will not be able to write adequate papers; unfortunately, convincing students to do this is one of the most challenging parts of being a tutor. Of course, all students should come to their tutoring sessions with the texts carefully read, but even those who try to do this may not be as prepared as they need to be. These are some strategies for helping students understand the texts as well as read them.

Getting to Know the Text

For students with reading comprehension problems, have them begin by looking at the title and subheads, and skim the beginning and end of the essay. You should ask questions to encourage students to think about the text in new ways:

- Why did the author choose this title?
- Why does the author choose these examples?
- What ideas or words are repeated throughout the essay?
- Why would the author include so much description or imagery?
- What is the author's tone?

You should have enough knowledge of the essay to know whether their guesses are right or wrong; if they are wrong, guide them with questions towards the correct answer. When students refer back to the text for answers, have them highlight the text they choose for later use.

This will only work if the tutor has enough knowledge of the text to guide his or her students' assertions about the overall ideas of the text. If you are not that familiar with the essay, do not use this task!

Keywords: reading the essay

Starting from Scratch—Still Not Having Read the Essay

When students come in with only an essay to read (which they should not do), give them five to ten minutes to read and take notes. Then, go back and ask them to explain what they just read and to find one sentence that sums it up. Students should then find at least one connection between that sentence or their notes and another text they have already read. Having students refer back to the text to explain what they have read rather than simply summarize it in their own words is a good idea because:

- it reinforces the author’s ideas;
- it provides a clear opportunity for you to ask them to expand on those ideas with their own input; and
- it allows a tutor who is unfamiliar with the text to see exactly what is being analyzed and how, preventing students from accidentally misinterpreting the text.

See also: Connection Tasks.

Keywords: connections, reading the essay

Breaking Down the Text

Ask students to find a paragraph they “guess” is probably important but that they didn’t understand. (Assure them that especially difficult paragraphs often yield the most to write about once we untangle them.) Ask them to work sentence by sentence to try to summarize the paragraph. Eventually, you will want them to write about connections between the “new, hard” paragraphs and the ones they already understood.

See also: Connection Tasks.

Keywords: connections, reading the essay, summary

Attributing Quotes

Students often have trouble distinguishing between an idea an author describes and their position on that idea. You will usually want to ask:

- Who said it?
- To whom?
- Under what circumstances?
- Does the author challenge, agree with, or modify the idea?
- How does it relate to the author’s position?
- How does it relate to Author B’s position?
- How does it relate to your position?

Students should hold onto these answers as they write their papers so that they can refer back to them when they get confused. The list should be referenced each time a quote from that paper is used or analyzed to make sure they are interpreting the text correctly.

Understanding Big Words

Often times, a student’s misinterpretation of the text can be boiled down to simply not knowing the meanings of certain words in the text. Dictionary exercises and key term exercises can be helpful if used judiciously, but they should not be an end to themselves. Students work to understand words and terms **in order to put them in the context of the author’s thesis**. It isn’t helpful to have students look up every word they don’t know – anybody can do that at home – but rather to find meanings that work **in context** in order to better understand an author’s claim. If your students are having trouble with big words, have them look those words up in a dictionary, but only if you then have them choose the correct definition based on the context, and then reanalyze the text with that definition in mind.

Keywords: *vocabulary*

Relating Passages

Sometimes students understand discrete parts of the essays but don't see how they work together. Pick a few pages of the essay (not the whole thing!) and have your students write a one-sentence summary of each paragraph on those pages. Then ask them to write a sentence to go *between* each of the summary sentences, explaining how they fit together. This task also works when connecting two different essays, which the student insists have “nothing to do with each other.”

See also: *Connection Tasks.*

Keywords: *connections, summary*

Doing “Close Reading”

“Close reading” may be entirely new to your students, but teachers may ask them to do it for a paper. Close reading focuses on short passages and explores the implications of the text -- asking why an author chose every word, every tense, every metaphor or image and trying to make coherent sense of those choices. Why does Nafisi say she had to “deprive” (417) her house of items rather than simply saying she “removed” them? How does that word choice fit into the overall theme being developed in the text? Practicing close reading with your students will help them to feel more comfortable doing it on their own.

Keywords: *close reading*

Charting Main Ideas

To help students understand the main ideas of each text in order to connect them, try beginning by selecting an excerpt of a few paragraphs from each text and discussing how they are connected to the titles. By doing this, students are often unknowingly talking about the argument, and you are able to reveal this to them once the hard part has been done. After they outline these connections and write them down, have your students identify several important ideas from the first text and write them down, one after the other. Then choose an idea to discuss and ask how it relates to the other author (“if author B were to comment on author A’s idea, what would he say? Why?”). When they finish the chart, they will have an organized and thorough list of connections between the authors.

If students are confused by one or both texts, it may also help to begin with excerpts that the students have identified as particularly difficult. That way, the students will gain a better understanding of the texts and can immediately begin making use of those ideas.

See also: *Connection Tasks.*

Keywords: *connections, main idea*

Finding the Author’s Main Idea

Get students to write out in their own words what they believe to be the overall thesis of the essay. Then when you have a difficult passage identified, work with the students to get at what the passage is doing in the essay – not just *what* it says but *why* – and try to connect that

to the overall thesis of the assigned reading. This will not only help the students to get the know and understand the essay, but it may help them find quotes that may be useful in their own papers, as well as get them used to linking the thesis statement and supporting arguments of a paper together so that they may better do it on their own.

See also: Quotation Tasks.

Keywords: main idea, quotes, thesis

Connection Tasks

Helping students find connections between the texts can be very much like trying to push down a brick wall: sometimes, they just don't get it. Every tutor has heard students lament that "These essays are not related at all!" and on the surface, they are right. For college-level writing, however, we want students to dig for connections beneath the surface, and many of them have never been asked to do that before. The following tasks may help students uncover connections between the essays they could not see before.

Clarifying Connections

Some students choose good quotes and see the connections themselves, but do not articulate them in their papers. Have these students write those two quotes out on a separate piece of paper, then ask them *why* they put those quotes in the same paragraph. Have them write several sentences answering why, then use what was written to formulate connections between the quotes. Most importantly, explain that the *connection* they just established is what the paragraph should be written about, not the authors themselves or the quotes they selected. If the students have problems creating topic sentences, this is a good way to address that as well.

See also: Quotation Tasks

Free-writing with Structure

Putting limits on what your students should free-write about can help eliminate useless ideas and focus their results to only the most useful topics. It helps to have students pick out a quote or idea from text A and free-write about why they think it is important or what it means. Then, have them do the same thing with text B, and finally, have them free-write on the connection between the two. For students who are so far gone that they cannot express any opinion about either text on their own, chances are they will be broad enough ideas that they will connect in some way. If they do not, however, have them go back to the free-writing they did for text A and pick out something new from text B that they thinks might relate, and try the exercise again.

See also: Start Up Tasks.

Keywords: free-writing

Drawing Concept Maps

An effective way to help students see connections between papers, especially for visual learners, is by creating a concept map. Have your students begin by picking a theme from one essay and branch off from that theme other related ideas either mentioned in the essay or that they came up with on their own. Have them do the same thing with another essay, and then ask them to connect the essays through the related ideas branching off of the main

themes. This way, they can see not only how small, minor ideas relate, but how overall themes within the texts relate as well.

This can also be used to make connections between texts while sticking closely to the assignment question. Rather than having students identify themes within the texts, use key words from the assignment question as the starting points and then branch off ideas that should relate to each text. This should help them come up with ideas that relate the texts not only to each other but to the assignment question as well, making it more difficult for them to get off track.

See also: Tasks Using Teacher Materials.
Keywords: concept map, assignment questions

Breaking Jargon Barriers

Sometimes, the vocabulary or jargon that authors use can confuse students enough to get in the way of connections between the two texts. Utilization of a certain vocabulary can make the text seem like it could not apply to anything that does not also use that vocabulary. It may help those students to try rewriting important passages from author A using jargon employed by author B. This should help students see how each author's ideas can relate, despite the differences in vocabulary or discourse.

See also: Reading Tasks. Keywords: reading the essay, vocabulary

Constructing Connection Columns

“Connection columns” is a favorite tutoring exercise of which there are many versions. Have students divide a blank sheet of paper into two or three columns, one column for each author. They should then write out all the quotes that even potentially pertain to the assignment question. Have them look for words in each quote that share certain connotations, meanings and context with words in another author's quote. Develop a chain of quotes. Maybe quote 3 from Author A goes with quote 19 from Author B. But then what links to quote 19? If there are three authors, the next one should be from Author C. If there are only two authors, the third quote can be from either A or B. The point is that your students are not developing isolated pairs of quotes. They are developing a single, unified theme, which can become a thesis as they explore these ideas.

Students may need help with the next step. Have them write one sentence that “goes between” every quote and the one after it, describing *what kind of relationship* exists between them. As your students advance, reach beyond comparison and contrast to complication, extension, illustration, etc.

If your students have trouble doing this with quotes, try having them write down ideas. Once the connections have been made, you can help them go back to ideas they used and find quotes from those sections of the texts.

See also: Quotation Tasks.
Keywords: quotes

Quotation Tasks

Quotes are an integral part of any writing program paper; they show that students are not only able to read and understand the texts, but are able to analyze and interpret them, too. This comes naturally to some students, but for others, choosing and using quotes is a brand-new concept, and it can seem like a mystery. The biggest hurdle is often just getting students comfortable with using quotes, and these tasks should help tutors do just that.

Quoting by Example

Begin by either looking at an 'A' paper or some of the client's own quote analysis that either received positive comments from the teacher or seems better than other passages. Ask the client, "What did you/the 'A' paper author do with this quote?" Have the client break down the quote analysis as much as possible. Then, together, come up with a specific 'good method' that this quote analysis uses. After finding a way to articulate the different "good methods," ask the client to write a sentence or two explaining why each rule works. The client can include his or her own quote analysis as an example. This helps by encouraging students not only to use past quote analysis as an example, but also by helping them understand why that analysis is so good. For students who are working on drafts, have them then rework their own quote analysis using the methods they came up with.

See also: Tasks Using Teacher Materials.
Keywords: student materials, weaknesses

Justifying Your Quotes

For each quotation the student wants to use (and pick only a few to work on in the tutoring session), have him or her write four follow up sentences. To get started, the sentences could take this form:

- (1) What does the author mean?
- (2) What are the implications of what the author has written? (How does it help develop his or her thesis?)
- (3) How does the quote connect to the other text(s) you are discussing?
- (4) How does the quote connect to your position?

Do this exercise on separate paper with the quote on top of the page and the four following sentences below it. When you "decompress" with students about this activity, make sure you discuss which of these sentences or ideas should or shouldn't actually appear in their papers.

This exercise can be used at a more simplified level as well. If your students have identified basic points made in each essay but cannot yet pull adequate quotes to explain those points, have them begin by connecting ideas. Once they become more comfortable with the texts and the connections have been made, have them go back into the texts and look for quotes again. Often, simply having this closer interaction with the texts can make them appear much more approachable.

*See also: Connection Tasks, Reading Tasks.
Keywords: connections, reading the essay*

Catching “Drop Quotes”

Integrating quotes is both a technical and interpretive task. Avoid “drop quotes” (aka “quote bombs”). Show your students how grammatically integrating quotes into their sentences also forces them to explain the relationships between the quotes they use and the arguments they are constructing. Believe it or not, this may actually take more reinforcement than you think, so be prepared to go over this multiple times.

Distinguishing between “Fact Quotes” and “Idea Quotes”

Sometimes a paragraph is simple and two-dimensional because, though the quotes the student uses are relevant, they are a mere statement of facts, or a “fact quote.” By explaining the difference between fact quotes and “idea quotes” that can be expanded, analyzed, and related to another idea, your students will understand why their quotes need to be replaced, and how replacing them will make their papers stronger.

Outline Tasks

Not everyone is a fan of outlines, but for students with organizational problems, they can be a lifesaver. Outlines help students structure papers before they begin revising, minimizing confusion and helping them feel more comfortable with the choices they make. Outlines are ideal for students who have lots of great ideas but are stumped when it comes to writing those ideas down. Below are some classic organizing tasks.

Essay Organizer

Ask students to make an “essay organizer,” not an outline. An essay organizer is like an outline, but with a focus on the order, purpose, and length of ideas instead of ideas themselves; thus, an essay organizer can be completed when students have only some parts of the essay figured out. If students have quotes but no topic sentences, for instance, ask them to “advance organize” the paragraph. For example:

1. Topic sentence goes here
2. Transition from topic sentence to set up first quote. This will probably be 3 sentences
3. Quote A
4. Some analysis. Probably 2 sentences on the quote then one sentence transition into next quote
5. Quote B
6. Some analysis where I connect the two quotes. Maybe 3 sentences?
7. Transition into the next idea

Framing the paragraph this way allows students to start wherever they feel comfortable, and also helps them to remember how much to write for each part. Asking students to write down how many sentences they need for each part may seem arbitrary, and indeed the projected number of sentences might be quite different from the final product. “Advance organizing” the length of the essay also helps students avoid writing too much for one part or writing too little for another part.

Ask students to keep this advance organizer separate from their written essays, rather than “filling in” the organizer. This will help them check their essays after they are written, to make sure their essays are doing what they want them to do.

See also: Tasks to Avoid Summary.

Keywords: analysis, quotes, thesis, topic sentences

Post-draft (or Reverse) Outline

Ask students to write a brief outline of their papers after they are written. This way, students have a shorthand way of looking at the paper as a whole, and can consider whether everything is articulated and organized correctly. There are a couple of ways to do post-draft outlines:

- Write down your thesis statement. Then copy, in order, as if continuing a paragraph, the topic sentence of every body paragraph, and end with a one-sentence summary of your conclusion. This “paragraph” should link ideas together logically and coherently. If there are jarring “gaps” between ideas, the paper has a problem that needs fixing.
- Alternatively, after the thesis statement, write a sentence or two summarizing the main point of each paragraph. This should amount to almost the same thing as the “topic sentence” approach above.

The post-draft outline becomes even more useful when the student has his “advance organizer” handy. Students can compare their final essay with the project they set out to complete to see if they left anything out. The advance organizer will also help them to check the length of their essays at the paragraph level.

See also: Topic Sentence Tasks.

Keywords: connections, post-draft outline, reverse outline

The Magic Paragraph Formula

For some students, it helps to explain paragraph structure the way you would explain the structure of a paper. Learning to structure paragraphs this way will indeed be magic – Exposé Becomes Clear! Some aren’t ready for the whole 9-sentence formula, so you can extract the main ideas from the exercise. Others can do it, and will benefit from it, with a lot of hand holding at first. The strongest students or the hardest workers will quickly start moving beyond the formula to more organic prose.

Build the paragraph (sometimes from the middle out or often from sentence three to seven and then add the beginning and ending) sentence by sentence according to this “formula.”

- Sentence one: A topic sentence that makes an original claim.

- Sentence two: Introduction of Quote one (from author A) by pointing to main idea you want your reader to notice or providing background necessary to understand the quote.
- Sentence three: Quote 1 integrated smoothly into your own sentence.
- Sentence four: Interpret or analyze the first quote.
- Sentence five: A sentence that explains the relationship of the idea from the first author to the idea from the second author. It is a bridge, transition, or connection between quote one and quote two.
- Sentence six: Introduce the 2nd quote (from Author B) by pointing to the main idea you want your reader to notice or providing background necessary to understand the quote.
- Sentence seven: Quote 2, incorporated smoothly into your own sentence.
- Sentence eight: Interpretation or analysis of the 2nd quote
- Sentence nine: An original claim or idea about the insight you've gained from working with the two quotes together.

See also: Quotation Tasks, Tasks to Avoid Summary.

Keywords: analysis, connections, quotes, thesis, topic sentences

Reorganizing Ideas

For students who have strong ideas but have trouble organizing them, it might help to work from the paper to pull out usable ideas and work from there. Have students write out the main idea of each paragraph, then go back and highlight all of the parts of the paper that directly related to those ideas. This should result in a rough outline (or at least a bunch of material) for each paragraph composed of only the strongest quotes and analyses.

Keywords: main idea, student materials

Topic Sentence Tasks

Students don't always know it, but topic sentences are some of the most important sentences in a paper. Frequently, instead of receiving the care and attention they deserve, they are ignored completely, only to turn up in odd spots, or not at all! Structurally, topic sentences are meant to make the paper easier to read and write, but many students actually make their papers more confusing by neglecting them. These tasks should help composition students write topic sentences that do the job they are meant to do, which is to set forth a claim that the paragraph supports and develops.

Finding Lost Topic Sentences

Students who have trouble writing topic sentences in their own papers may find that the

problem is actually not that they can't write topic sentences, but that they have trouble identifying them. To help students see this, refer to the topic sentences as the "main idea," and ask them to find the main idea of each paragraph in their papers. They will likely point to a sentence in the middle or at the end of the paragraph, and they can be confused because it is not where a topic sentence "should" go. This exercise can help students understand that topic sentences serve a purpose beyond occupying the first sentence of the paragraph, which may in turn help them put topic sentences in the correct place from the beginning.

See also: Outline Tasks

Topic Sentence = Main Idea

This is another way of tricking students into writing topic sentences. For students that do have trouble writing topic sentences but have written the rest of their paragraphs, have them go through each paragraph and ask them to write the main idea of each paragraph at the top of the page or in the margin. If they still cannot do this, try having them read the paragraph over again, and then ask why they chose to include those connections in their papers, or how they relate to the thesis statement. Their answers should eventually turn into topic sentences.

See also: Connection Tasks.
Keywords: main idea

Sticking to Topic Sentences

Though it is easier for students to stay on topic when their topic sentences are strong, sometimes students develop great topic sentences, but they do not support them throughout the rest of the paragraphs. In this case, ask students to identify their topic sentences, and then to go through each paragraph finding sentences that directly support their topic sentences. Nearly every sentence in a paragraph, even quote analysis, should support the topic sentence, and often, students do not realize how easy it is to stray off course.

Very often, students who complete this exercise find that their topic sentences are not completely on-topic, either. Remember: just because a student fixes her topic sentences does not mean the rest of his or her paragraphs will fix themselves!

A similar exercise can be done on a larger scale with the thesis statement as well. A student's topic sentences should directly support his or her thesis statement in this way. Doing this with the thesis will likely result in a version of the post-draft outline

See also: Outline Tasks.
Keywords: staying on task, thesis

Dressing Up Your Topic Sentences

Many students who come to the writing center do not know how to write in the appropriate style. Some write short, unsophisticated sentences, while others write wordy run-ons in an effort at sounding professional. Topic sentences are a great place to begin helping students improve their style because they are some of the most important sentences in the paper. Have students write two variations of the same topic sentence, and ask them to pick which they think is the best. Then, challenge them to write an even better one. This should show them how the writing process works and help them to understand that their writing can

always improve, no matter how good it is.

See also: Paper Strengthening Tasks.
Keywords: student materials

Thesis Tasks

Students know that the thesis statement is the most important sentence (or sentences) in their papers. A thesis is the main idea of the paper, and without it, teachers, tutors, and even the writers themselves cannot tell what a paper is about. Unfortunately, students often find thesis statements the most difficult to write! First, calm your students down – they will come up with a thesis statement eventually. Then, try any number of these tasks for a little extra help with the most important part of their papers.

“Solving the Thesis” to Find “Real” Answers

Breaking the assignment question down into “real problems” can make the question more approachable for some students, and thus, make it easier to form a thesis statement. For example, the sample assignment asks, “How does Twenge call into question Jenkins’s positive portrayal of Generation Y’s literacy?” Ask the student, “what is the real problem here when we look at these two essays; what real-life problem does this assignment want me to solve?” You and the student can break the question down into a “real problem” for the reader/writer (“what do I make of this?”), and a “real problem” for the world (“so what does this mean?”). This task can help students connect to their own essays because it represents them as writers *and* as original thinkers.

See also: Connection Tasks.

Keywords: connections

Articulating Thesis Statements Before, During, After

Most students will not write a usable thesis statement on the first try, so breaking it down into stages can be helpful. Ask students to respond to the assignment question immediately before writing the essay. Emphasize that this “pre-thesis” does not have to be perfectly written, and it can be as long as they like. However, do ask students to write this “pre-thesis” in complete sentences to avoid being vague. Then, students can begin working on an outline, a body paragraph, or quote selection; they can approach writing with whatever tactic works best for them.

Whenever they reach some sort of milestone (finishing a body paragraph, picking two quotes, finishing up part of the outline), ask them to write the thesis again, without looking. Since they have delved deeper into the writing process, the thesis may have become clearer, more complex, or entirely different. By self-checking in this way, they are both making sure that the content of their essays fits their theses, and that their theses works for the content of their essays.

The “post-thesis” or “final-thesis” is a re-writing of the thesis with the pre- and mid-theses in mind. This task helps students who have trouble writing thesis statements that clearly articulate their complex ideas.

Finding a Thesis in the Conclusion

The best thesis sentences are often hiding in students’ conclusions. Have students look at their conclusions to see if they can find a sentence that would make a sturdier thesis statement than the one they currently have. Ask them to make a list of possible sentences

from their paper that could be used to replace the thesis statement. Even if some sentences are not used as the thesis, you can have students refine them before reinserting them into the paper so that they are also improving the quality of their writing.

See also: Start Up Tasks, Paper Strengthening Tasks.
Keywords: main idea

Finding the Weaknesses in Your Thesis

Another way to get your students thinking is by asking: “What difference would it make if Davis is right? Or partly right? Or if she is wrong? Or partly wrong? To whom would it make a difference? Why?” Finally and most importantly, “What difference would it make **to my thesis** if this idea is right? Wrong? Incomplete? Too simple?” If it would make a difference, make sure that students account for or explain these differences in their papers.

Keywords: weaknesses

Developing a Thesis Pyramid

For students who are completely lost when it comes to the thesis statement, it may help to explain the thesis as a connection between all of their ideas. This is especially helpful for students who have already made adequate connections between quotes because they will have had practice with the basic principle. Have your students write out each topic sentence, and then write out a connection between each idea. If they have trouble connecting three or four ideas together at once, have them first connect two ideas, or the topic sentences of two paragraphs. Once they have a connection written out, repeat the process, but this time use their new connection and the topic sentence for another paragraph, until they have gone through all of their topic sentences and are left with one big connection between them. That connection can then be reworked into a more sophisticated thesis statement.

See also: Connection Tasks.
Keywords: connections, main idea, thesis pyramid, topics sentences

The Anti-Thesis Route

Some tutees have a lot of trouble articulating exactly what they are trying to argue. Try having them write out what they are *not* arguing instead. Once they have compiled a short list of what they do not believe, challenge them: ask *why* they are *not* arguing those ideas. Sometimes, students know what they think, but they have a hard time saying it. This task can help them bring their ideas together into a thesis statement they can work with.

Another benefit to this task is that, in listing the things they do not believe, they may very well be coming up with supporting ideas for their thesis statements. It will take a bit of revision, but it is not unlikely for the ideas they are **not** arguing to lead to supporting ideas for their thesis statements.

Keywords: anti-thesis

Tasks to Avoid Summary

Students are often taught in high school that they must summarize the texts they are using in a paper, and this makes students very resistant to ridding their papers of summary in college. A little summary can be O.K., but most students use it as a crutch to avoid interpreting the text or to meet the length requirement. The following are a few suggestions for how to help students let go of summary and embrace the exciting world of textual analysis!

Using Open-Ended Questions

With students who tend to write too much summary, ask them to list the questions that their work with the text answers: Who? What? When? Where? Release them! Ask them to write about “how?” and “why?” Those questions are much more difficult to answer with one word or statement directly from the text, and will require students to consider what the summary they have identified means for their paper.

Doing the Balancing Act

For visual learners, using color to differentiate between the separate areas of a paragraph can be extremely helpful. Have students color everything pertaining to author A yellow, everything pertaining to author B blue, and everything original green. Are there hunks of solid color, or a nice swirly rainbow? The colors should not only be integrated with one another, but the yellow and blue should be at least equal, if not outweighed by, the amount of green.

This can also be used to distinguish summary from quote analysis. In each paragraph, have students highlight every quote in yellow. Then, have them highlight every line of interpretation or analysis in pink. Is there at least 2-3 times more pink than yellow? There should be.

See also: Quotation Tasks. Keywords: analysis, quotes

Separating the Necessary from the Summary

Sometimes, students do not understand why it is not necessary, and is in fact bad, to summarize the texts in their papers. It might help to explain that having to weed through a lot of summary keeps the reader from getting to the main point of your students' papers, but even if they seem to understand that, they often will not fix it on their own. Try asking the student to highlight all of the summary in the paper. Then go through and ask exactly *how* and *why* those sentences are related to the main idea

Paper Strengthening Tasks

Not all students who come to the writing center are getting NPs on their papers. But we believe that anyone, even the most advanced Expos students, can benefit from tutoring. These advanced students are often more difficult to tutor because they don't come around as often, and therefore, tutors don't always have a lot of appropriate tasks at their fingertips. In this section are a few ideas for motivating passing students and turning good papers into great ones.

Anticipating Counter Arguments

Just because a student develops an argument and connects the authors does not mean he or she has written a strong paper. It is important for students to anticipate disagreements with their claims and acknowledge them in their papers. To get your students thinking about it, have them write down any possible counter arguments to their thesis statements. Then, have them write out their rebuttals to those counter arguments. Explain how they should be incorporating those rebuttals into their papers.

For students who are already at a high writing level, including a strong counter argument in his paper can show sophistication and high critical thinking skills, which Expos teachers love to see. Many students think that a good Expos paper is one that proves a point, but by including counter arguments and then explaining why their original argument is still better, students show that they understand all sides of the debate.

See also: Start Up Tasks.
Keywords: counter arguments

Using the Essay as a Model

With students who have written coherent papers that still have a lot of weak spots, encourage them to approach their own writing the way they would a new essay. Go through an essay in the NHR with them, and each time they mention one of the writer's arguments, ask "why?" and ask how that argument connects to the author's thesis. Then, do the same thing with their own essay. This should bring out holes in their arguments. Once students see these weak spots, have him them revise their paragraphs to account for those weaknesses the way other writers do.

See also: Reading Tasks.
Keywords: main idea, reading the essay, student materials

Discovering the Secondary Emerging Thesis

Students who are already at a high level of writing can improve their papers even further by introducing a new thesis at the end of their papers. An emerging thesis is a new argument that is a logical conclusion of a student's original argument. Though students will not have time to argue second theses in their papers, setting the new argument up at the conclusion shows a level of sophistication of both the writing skills and the thesis statement itself.

See also: Thesis Tasks.
Keywords: emerging thesis

Making Transitions

Sometimes a student has produced a draft and has paired quotes, but the connections only exist only in space, not in the actual paper. When this happens, ask students to write a sentence or two about the quotes in each paragraph telling why they put those two quotes together and what they wanted those quotes to help them accomplish in their paragraphs.

This same exercise can help with transitions, which are notorious trouble spots for many students. If the word “transition” is giving your student trouble, it may help to explain transitions as connections between paragraphs, just like the connections they include between quotes. Have them then execute this task between paragraphs, but rather than connecting the authors’ ideas, they are connecting their own.

See also: Connection Tasks, Quotation Tasks.

Keywords: connections, quotes, transitions

Eliminating Repetition

Often, students think that by repeating their thesis statement or topic sentence over and over, they are relating their ideas back to the thesis. These students need help understanding the difference between returning to the thesis and repeating the same idea. Begin by having students highlight every sentence they think is a connection to the thesis statement. Then, ask them to rewrite each sentence in other terms. How similar are those revisions to the thesis? Trash those repetitions, and then help your students find a happy medium between repetition and connection.

Keywords: connections, repetition, thesis, topic sentence

Since most expos teachers require four page rough drafts and five page final drafts, students may think of revision as “needing to add a page.” We hope the fifth page emerges organically, as a consequence of exploring ideas more fully and considering complications. But there are also other places to look for “missing pages.”

Thinking Back to Class Discussion

Students often have difficulty meeting the length requirement because they do not use all of the resources that are available to them, such as feedback from teachers or peers and class discussions. Stimulating questions to ask your students include:

- What passages were discussed in class that you didn’t include in your paper? Could they be important?
- How might those passages challenge, support, or extend your thesis?
- Are there quotes you considered but rejected because you didn’t understand them?

Make sure your students understand that anything they “add” to their papers at this point must relate back to their thesis, whether it supports it or complicates it. Discourage them

from including class discussions that, while they may be important, are not relevant to their papers at this late stage.

This task could be applied to the assignment question as well. Many teachers do not require students to answer every supplementary question in their papers, but if student having difficulty expanding their papers, utilizing these questions as they relate to their thesis statements may help. Get out the assignment paper again. Look at all the parts of the question. Are there parts of the question you haven't addressed?

See also: Outline Tasks, Tasks Using Teacher Materials.

Keywords: quotes, reading the essay, teacher's comments, thesis, supplementary questions

Grammar Tasks

Since tutors are discouraged from proofreading students' papers, tutoring grammar can be difficult, as it requires students to be able to identify grammar errors on their own. That does not mean students with grammar problems are lost causes, however: there are lots of ways to help students recognize grammar mistakes and learn how to fix them by themselves. Here are a few tasks to help tutors help students with grammar.

Creating a Grammar Checklist

One way to help students with grammar without proofreading is to use their teachers' comments to compile a checklist of common grammar mistakes from past papers that they should consult before handing in a final draft. Students should make a list of the sentence-level errors their teachers pointed out. If they do not understand what is incorrect about a particular sentence, explain the rule, then have them write the connection next to the error on the list. That list can then be used to double check their grammar before they hand in their papers, and when they finds mistakes, they will know exactly how to fix them.

Asking your students to make a list of their recurrent grammar mistakes may help hammer home their errors and keep it on their minds as they edit. Once your students have written a rough draft, ask them to list the grammar mistakes they make most frequently. When they have finished listing all of the errors they thinks they make, encourage them to go back into past papers and look at comments from their teachers and peers to complete the list.

See also: Tasks Using Teacher Materials

Keywords: grammar checklist

Listening to Your Paper

Students frequently write papers riddled with typos and grammar mistakes, but are either unable or unwilling to fix them. This problem can be especially difficult with ESL students, many of whom speak well but have trouble making their writing grammatically correct. Suggest that these students read their papers out loud to try to hear their mistakes rather than looking for them on paper. Hearing their papers can often make them sound completely different to students than when they read them silently, and it may bring the errors they had been overlooking to the surface.

If this does not immediately work, try reading the paper out loud to students and see if hearing their words in your voice helps them to hear their mistakes as well. Emphasize how

important it is for these students to read their papers out loud or to ask friends to read their papers for them outside of the writing center as well.

Keywords: proofreading

Going on a Grammar Hunt

If students seem to think that a passage from their paper is free from error, despite the presence of numerous mistakes, circle a paragraph, count the number of errors that you can find, and write the total in the margin. Ask students to see if they can match your total by circling each error that they find. You and your students will probably never have the same number, but they will pick up lots of valuable proofreading experience.

Keywords: grammar hunt, proofreading

Simplifying the Grammar

Many errors arise because the students' sentences are too ambitious for their level of ability. If this is the case, direct students to write shorter, clearer sentences, typically in active rather than passive voice. This will not necessarily fix grammatical errors or teach those students grammar rules, but it should help to minimize the number of mistakes on each page.

Tasks Using Teacher Materials

Many students don't realize it, but their teachers can actually be a tremendous resource for them. Teachers are, after all, the ones giving students their grades, and that is why students need to learn how to make use of the valuable feedback and helpful hints they can gain from visiting office hours, reading the comments teachers leave on their final drafts, and hunting for clues in the assignments. Tutors cannot escort students to office hours, but these tasks should help with some of the other strategies.

Picking Supplemental Questions

If teachers provide “suggested” or “supplementary” questions to think about, help students pick the one or ones that most clearly relate to their thinking about the question. Then brainstorm (by free-writing, clustering, or listing) ways to answer the question.

Tutors can also take advantage of these supplementary questions to help students distinguish the authors' opinions from their own. Ask students to answer each supplementary question according to what author A, author B, and author C would say. Then, ask them to answer each question based on what they would say. Even if their answers closely resemble one of the author's, it will help to see to which author your students are more closely aligned, and then to focus on distinguishing your students' ideas from that author's.

If answering these questions for the authors first proves to affect your student's ideas, try having the student answer first, then answer based on what each author would say. Then, have the student write how his or her position is different from each author's.

See also: Start Up Tasks, Reading Tasks
Keywords: supplementary questions

Deconstructing the Assignment Question

Sometimes students need the same kind of support “reading” the assignment question as they do reading the text. Guide them in deconstructing it. Describe the relationships among its parts. What's the point? Have them define any words they do not already know, answer any supplementary questions, or rewrite the assignment in their own words to make it more accessible.

Charting the Supplementary Questions

Sometimes students can develop a 3-column chart of responses to supplementary questions. The first column has one of the questions. The next column is “How would Author A answer this question?” The next column is “How would Author B answer this question?” Eventually, students can add “And how would I answer this question?” Ultimately, we want the student to be able to write a sentence about the relationship between A's and B's (and later *my's*) answers. (On papers 3 and 6, you need a column for Author C.)

See also: Connection Tasks.
Keywords: connections, supplementary questions

Doing What Your Teacher Tells You

Students (and sometimes tutors) can forget how important it is to look at teachers' comments beyond the letter grade. Many students will not think to pay that much attention to those comments, but if tutors encourage it, they may. Try having students rewrite their teachers' comments, positive and negative, more clearly so that they will have them to refer to for their next paper. When they finish the next paper, have them take that list out and use it as a checklist. Did they fix what his teacher said was wrong with the last paper? Did they continue to do what their teacher liked about the last paper? If not, have them add it in.

See also: Start Up Tasks.

Keywords: student materials

Using Grading Rubrics and Sample Papers

Though tutors should never speculate on grades, some teachers include grading rubrics with their students' papers so that they can see what aspects of their papers are at which grade levels. If your student has been given a grading rubric, especially if his or her teacher has written comments on it, utilize that information. Have students go through their papers for all of the parts of the grading rubric, and talk with them about what makes each part C-level, B-level, etc. Then ask them what they could do to improve those aspects of their paper in the future. It might also help to have your students use their old papers as well, rewriting sections to boost the quality so that they have practice for future papers.

If a teacher has given a student a sample "A-level" paper to use as a model, you can use this in the writing center as well. Have students go through and highlight the positive aspects of the model, and ask them to write what makes those sections A-level. If they have a draft to work on, they can then compare the A paper to their own, looking for weaknesses and ways to improve.

See also: Paper Strengthening Tasks.

Keywords: grading rubrics, sample papers, student materials

THEORY

Minimalist Tutoring: Making Students Do All the Work By Jeff Brooks

A writing center worst case scenario: A student comes in with a draft of a paper. It is reasonably well-written and is on a subject in which you have both expertise and interest. You point out the mechanical errors and suggest a number of improvement that could be made in the paper's organization; the student agrees and make the changes. You supply some factual information that will strengthen the paper; the student incorporates it. You work hard, enjoy yourself, and when the student leaves the paper is much improved. A week later, the student returns to the writing center to see you: "I got an A! Thanks for all the help!"

This scenario is hard to avoid, because it make everyone involved feel good: the student goes away happy with a good grade, admiring you; you feel intelligent, useful, helpful – everything a good teacher ought to be. Everything about it seems right. That this is bad points out the central difficulty out the central difficulty we confront as tutors: we sit down with imperfect papers, but our job is to improve their writers.

When you "improve" a student's paper, you haven't been a tutor at all; you've been an editor. You may have been an exceedingly good editor, but you've been of little service to your student. I think most writing center tutors agree that we must not become editors for our students and that the goal of each tutoring session is learning, not a perfect paper. But faced with students who want us to "fix" their papers as well as our own desire to create "perfect" documents, we often find it easier and more satisfying to charge, to muscle in on student's paper, red pen in hand.

To avoid the trap, we need to make the student the primary agent in the writing center session. The student, not the tutor, should "own" the paper and take full responsibility for it. The tutor should take on the secondary role, serving mainly to keep the student focused on his own than he was when he walked in. He may leave with an improved paper, but he will not have learned much.

A writing teacher or tutor cannot and should not expect to make the student papers "better"; that is neither our obligation, nor is it a realistic goal. The moment we consider it our duty to improve the paper, we automatically relegate ourselves to the role of editor.

If we can't fix papers, is there anything left for us to do? I would like to suggest that when we refuse to edit, we become more active than ever as educators. In the writing center, we have the luxury of time the classroom teacher does not have. We can spend time talking and listening, always focusing on the paper at hand. The primary value of the writing center tutor to the students as a living human body who is willing to sit patiently and help the student spend time with her paper. This alone is more than most teachers can do, and will likely do as much to improve the paper as a hurried proofreader can. Second, we can talk to the student as an individual about the on paper before us. We can discuss strategies for effective writing and principles for structure, we can draw students' attention to features in their writing, and we can give them support and encouragement (writing papers, we

shouldn't forget, is a daunting activity).

Assumptions

All of this can be painfully difficult to do. Every instinct we have tells us that we must work for perfection; likewise, students pressure us in the same direction. I have found two assumptions useful in keeping myself from editing:

1. The most common difficulty for student writers is paying attention to their writing. Because of this, student papers seldom reflect their writers' full capabilities. Writing paper is a dull and unrewarding activity for most students, so they do it in noisy surroundings, at the last minute, their minds turning constantly to more pressing concerns. It is little wonder that so much student writing seems haphazard, unfocused, and disorganized. A good many errors are made that the students could easily have avoided. If we can get students to reread a paper even once before handing it is, in most cases we have rendered an improvement. We ought to encourage students to treat their own writings as texts that deserve the same kind of close attention we usually reserve for literary texts.

Our message to students should be: "Your paper has value as a piece of writing. It is worth reading and thinking about like any other piece of writing."

2. While student writings are texts, they are unlike other texts in one important way: the process is far more important than the product. Most "real world" writing has a goal beyond the page; anything that can be done to that writing to make it more effective ought to be done. Student writing, on the other hand, had no real goal beyond getting it on the page. In the real world, when you need to have something important written "perfectly," you hire a professional writer when a student hires a professional writer, it is a high crime called plagiarism.

This fairly obvious difference is something we often forget. We are so used to real-world writing, where perfection is paramount, they we forget that students write to learn, not to make perfect papers. Most writing teachers probably have a vision of a "perfect" freshman paper (it probably looks exactly like the pieces in the readers and win a Bedford prize); we should probably resign ourselves to the fact that we seldom see such a creature. Most students simply do not have the skill, experience, or talent to write the perfect paper.

Basic Minimalist Tutoring

Given these assumptions, there are a number of concrete ways we can put theory into practice. Our body language will do more to signal our intentions (both to our students and to ourselves) than anything we say. These four steps should establish a tone that unmistakably shows that the paper belongs to the student and that the tutor is not an editor.

1. Sit beside the student, not across a desk – that is where job interviewers and other authorities sit. This first signal is important for showing the student that you are not the person "in charge" of the paper.

2. Try to get the student to be physically to her paper than you are. You should be, in a

sense, an outsider, looking over her shoulder while she works on her paper.

3. If you are right-handed, sit on the student's right; this will make it more difficult for you to write on the paper. Better yet, don't let yourself have a pencil in your hand. By all means, if you must hold something, don't make it a red pen!

4. Have the student read the paper aloud to you, and suggest that he hold a pencil while doing so. Aside from saving your eyes in the case of bad handwriting, this will accomplish three things. First, it will bypass that awkward first few moments of the session when you are in complete control of the paper and the student is left out of the action while you read his paper. Second, this will actively involve the student in the paper, quite likely for the first time since he wrote it. I find that many students are able to find and correct usage errors, awkward wording, even logic problems without and prompting from me. Third, this will help establish the sometimes slippery principle that good writing should sound good.

I am convinced that if you follow these four steps, even if you do nothing else, you will have served the student better than you would if you "edited" his paper.

Advanced Minimalist Tutoring

Of course, there is quite a bit more you can do for the student in the time you have. You can use your keen intelligence and fine critical sense to help the student without directing the paper. As always, the main goal is to keep the student active and involved in the paper. I have three suggestions:

1. Concentrate on success in the paper, not failure. Make it a practice to find something nice to say about every paper, no matter how hard you have to search. This isn't easy to do; errors are what we usually focus on. But by pointing out to a student when he is doing something right, you reinforce behavior that may have started as a felicitous accident. This also demonstrates to the student that the paper is a "text" to be analyzed, with strengths as well as weaknesses. This is where the tutor can radically depart from the role of the editor.

2. Get the student to talk. It's her paper; she is the expert on it. Ask questions – perhaps "leading" questions – as often as possible. When there are sentence-level problems, make the student find and (if possible) correct them. When something is unclear, don't say "This is unclear"; rather, say, "What do you mean by this?" Instead of saying, "You don't have a thesis," ask the student, "Can you show me your thesis?" "What's your reason for putting Q before N?" is more effective than "N should have come before Q." It is much easier to point out mistakes than it is to point the student toward finding them, but your questions will do much more to establish the student as sole owner of the paper and you as merely an interested outsider.

3. If you have time during your session, give the student a discrete writing task, then go away for a few minutes and let him do it. For instance, having established that the paper has no thesis, tell the student to write the thesis while you step outside for a few minutes. The fact that you will return and see what he has accomplished (or not accomplished) will force him to work on the task you have given him probably with more concentration than he usually gives his writing. For most students, the only deadline pressure for their paper is the

teacher's final due date. Any experienced writer knows that a deadline is the ultimate energizer. Creating that energy for a small part of the paper is almost the best favor you can do for a student.

Defensive Minimalist Tutoring

So far, I have been assuming that the student is cooperative or at least open to whatever methods you might use. This, of course, is not a very realistic assumption. There are many students who fight a non-editing tutor all the way. They know you know how to fix their paper, and that is what they came to have done. Some find ingenious ways of forcing you into the role of the editor: some withdraw from the paper, leaving it in front of you; some refuse to write anything down until you tell them word for word what to write; others will keep asking you questions ("What should I do here Is this part okay?"). Don't underestimate the abilities of these students, they will fatigue you into submission if they can.

To fight back, I would suggest we learn some techniques from the experts: the uncooperative students themselves.

1. Borrow student body language. When a student doesn't want to be involved in his paper, he will slump back in his chair, getting as far away from it as possible. If you find a student pushing you too hard into editing his paper, physically move away from it – slump back into your chair or scoot away. If a student is making a productive session impossible with his demands, yawn, look at the clock, rearrange your things. This language will speak clearly to the student: "You cannot make me edit your paper."
2. Be completely honest with the student who is giving you a hard time. If she says, "What should I do here?" you can say in a friendly, non-threatening way, "I can't tell you that – it's your grade, not mine," or, "I don't know, it's your paper." I have found this approach doesn't upset students as it might seem it would; they know what they are doing, and when you show that you know too, they accept that.

All of the suggestions I have made should be just a beginning of the ideas we can use to improve our value to our students. I hope that they lead to other ideas and tutoring techniques.

The less we do to the paper, the better. Our primary object in the writing center session is not the paper, but the student. Fixing flawed papers is easy; showing the students how to fix their own papers is complex and difficult. Ideally, the student should be the only active agent in improving their paper. The tutor's activity should focus on the student. If, at the end of the session, a paper is improved, it should be because the student did all the work.

Small Victories: The Practice and Process of Tutoring By Anthony Lioi

In the Introduction to *The New Humanities Reader*, Richard Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer delineate the difference between "mimetic thinking," designed to demonstrate mastery of a pre-established realm of knowledge, and "connective thinking," which links disparate realms of learning in new and unexpected patterns to solve problems unanticipated by traditional forms of knowledge (17). *The New Humanities Reader* is designed to provoke connective thinking from student writers; it follows that a tutoring system meant to support the NHR's pedagogy would want to support connective thinking. One technique that can accomplish these goals is minimalist tutoring, a method that requires students to solve their own problems under the supervision of a tutor who acts as a coach, a more experienced peer, rather than an editor. Though the strategies I discuss below were developed in the context of the writing center, teachers can employ them during office hours and class workshops with equal ease. However, teaching others to put them into practice is more complicated than it seems, not only because of student expectations, but because of tutor expectations as well. If, as Spellmeyer and Miller contend, the traditional humanities have emphasized mimetic over connective thinking, this emphasis manifests in the writing center as the student who wants to summarize the thoughts of other writers as the core activity of essay-writing, or who wants to rant on a topic related to class reading without entering into dialogue with that reading. In each case, the goal is to reproduce, in writing, a position the writer already knows, avoiding connective thinking entirely. A writer with either of these goals in mind will, upon entering tutoring for the first time, expect the tutor to correct their mimesis: to edit sentence-level error, add additional and superior content, correct interpretation of the readings, and so on. Many tutors—as expert practitioners of mimetic thinking—share these assumptions with their less-experienced counterparts, and expect to be trained to do the same things students expect them to do.

These expectations of mimesis pose a problem for writing center staff who wish to foster connective thinking in student writers, and require a disruption of expectations that has long been a goal of practitioners of minimalist tutoring. This concern is reflected in Jeff Brooks' essay "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," when he describes the desire of both tutor and student for the traditional techniques of improvement:

When you "improve" a student's paper, you haven't been a tutor at all: you've been an editor. You may have been an exceedingly good editor, but you've been of little service to your student. I think most writing center tutors agree that we must not become editors for our students and that the goal of each tutoring session is learning, not a perfect paper. But faced with students who want us to "fix" their papers as well as our own desire to create "perfect" documents, we often find it easier and more satisfying to take charge, to muscle in on the student's paper, pen in hand. (2)

Brooks puts his finger on a student-tutor dynamic that can undermine the most sincere efforts at minimalist tutoring. If a tutor has been trained to coach and not to edit, but then

caves in to student demands for editing, the problem lies not only with the student, whose prior educational experience may entirely support the goal of mimetic thinking, but also with the tutor, whose desire to "muscle in" on student writing, to create a "perfect" paper, is also the product of experience and cultural training. Mimetic thinking and the desire to take control of student writing are both rooted, after all, in long-standing goals of the modern university to use knowledge to dominate both nature and human cultures more effectively. Therefore, in the face of student and tutor resistance to connective thinking and minimalist tutoring, writing center staff should remember that the powerful patterns of desire and reward undergirding such resistance cannot be quickly undone, no matter how effective the writing center's rhetoric may be. Rather, writing center staff must coordinate with writing program pedagogy and teacher-training to reveal the benefits of connective thinking, not only across the span of the semester, but throughout a larger undergraduate education.

Minimalist Tutoring

The challenge of promoting connective thinking through tutoring begins with the tutors themselves. As undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members, or other members of the academic community, tutors are accomplished writers of academic prose, distinguished by their ability to enact, in their own work, the connective thinking required by *The New Humanities Reader*. But therein lies the danger: they must help other students to acquire skills like theirs without directly applying their own skills. As I have said to many tutors: "We've chosen you for your superior abilities as academic writers, but now we're going to ask you to set them aside." This is, initially, a shocking request. Don't students learn by imitating a good example? Aren't tutors meant to be that example? To these questions, we usually say yes, students learn by example, but they won't develop new skills merely by watching other people correct their grammatical errors, interpret their assignments, and write their arguments. Students do learn by imitation, but they should imitate the process of composition that more experienced writers often take for granted.

This claim, that students need to learn the process of more experienced writers, is often taken by beginning tutors to mean my students should copy my process. But the practice of an experienced writer cannot be directly translated into the practice of the beginning writer. This is because experienced writers often synthesize many steps of writing into a larger movement which seems not to have distinguishable parts. These larger movements often overwhelm the beginning writer and lead to paralysis. Therefore, the first thing a tutor must do, once the needs of the writer are identified, is to separate a long, fluid gesture into discrete blocks of action that will not overwhelm a beginner. This involves breaking down an intuitive process into component parts, remembering what composition was like before proficiency was attained. An excellent example of this challenge is the issue of the thesis statement.

Most students have been trained to write in the order of reading, from beginning to end. Because the thesis statement is the first thing to appear in a well-structured expository essay, tutors want to insist that students make a thesis first and then follow it through to the end of the paper. The traditional outline, with its Roman numerals and hierarchy of topics, reflects the structure that tutors want, so they ask students to outline their papers, beginning with the thesis statement. This strategy leads to writer's block for the beginner, however, because most beginners—and, indeed, many experienced writers—write their way into the

paper, with the clearest and most useful ideas appearing at the end of the rough draft. This strategy of writing to find out what you think, rather than knowing what you're going to say from the start, often produces a draft that looks like failure to a tutor, precisely because it cannot be poured into a traditional outline. Tutors often say things like "This writer has to find a thesis first, before he does anything else" when faced with this kind of draft. That position is, of course, a product of their own training, and probably reflects what writing teachers have said to them in the past, and may be difficult to dislodge. Nonetheless, we ask tutors to do the unintuitive thing and discard the expectation of a thesis as the first step in the process of writing. Instead, we ask them to work first in developing an argument, which can then later be reflected in a thesis statement. And this process of developing the argument must itself be broken into smaller steps for the student.

The Structure of a Session

Therefore, the tutoring session is structured like a flow chart, a series of if-then statements, rather than a linear outline. Each node in the flow chart corresponds to a task modest enough to be approached (not necessarily completed) in ten to twenty minutes. Let's begin with a situation most tutors dread: the student comes in with the assignment but no written work. Rather than asking the student to define the thesis of a non-existent paper, we ask the student to reread one of the source texts, keeping the question in mind and locating relevant passages in the reading. For instance, if the student has been told, "Make an argument about genetically modified foods and human rights in dialogue with Michael Pollan and Martha Nussbaum," the tutor would ask the student to reread Pollan or Nussbaum, trying to identify passages to which she could respond. Then the tutor would get up and leave the student to do that task. Once the tutor sees that ten to twenty minutes have elapsed, or the student has ceased to work, she would return and ask the student about the passages he's found. If the student has not succeeded in finding passages that warrant response, the tutor might discuss how to find a passage that contains interesting and useful ideas and then again leave the student alone. If the student has succeeded in finding such passages, the tutor would then explain the next step: to paraphrase the content of the passage and then respond in dialogue with its ideas in the larger context of the assignment's question. Then the tutor walks away again. Returning to find that the student has both accurately paraphrased his Nussbaum passage—no mean task itself—and responded to it with a position on human rights and genetically modified foods, the tutor might have the student repeat the whole exercise with a quotation from Pollan, and finally put both exercises side by side, asking the writer to spend the final fifteen minutes of the period building a bridge between the Nussbaum and Pollan discussions.

The structure of the above tutoring session may puzzle the beginning tutor. It did not result in a thesis, or even a coherent argument, but in a series of positions taken towards bits of source text on the common ground of the assignment question. The student did not leave with a structure that could be poured into a linear outline, nor did she come close to finishing her paper in the span of one tutoring session. If the student and the tutor were looking for a finished product or a completed process, they were sorely disappointed. But from the perspective of minimalist tutoring, which values small victories on the way to greater student skill and independence, the session was a great success. The student came out with more writing than she had when she arrived; she addressed the assignment question; she chose suitable quotations from the source texts and engaged in dialogue with them; and

she left with more work to do in connecting the source texts with each other and her own position. In a process-centered model of tutoring, these are the desired results, and a session that produces all of them would be a great success. Therefore, tutors must be trained to see the success of a session in terms of small tasks of reading and writing that show a student how to break an intimidating job into more manageable parts.

This is not to say, however, that every tutoring session will produce as much as the one above. In my own experience, one session can sometimes be a matter of identifying a core problem and addressing it in a way that only begins to change a student's writing practice. I once had a student whose assignment included the idea of "the universe of discourse." He had already written a four-page draft that seemed to translate this key term from a source text as "things that people say." Skeptical of his understanding of the term, I handed him a dictionary and asked him to look up "discourse," which he dutifully did. Then I asked him to write a new definition of "universe of discourse" with this new information. Though he seemed to grasp the idea that discourse had to do with language, this advance in understanding a word in the phrase still had not made the phrase itself more understandable. I finally asked him to look up the word "universe" while I watched. Though he found the word in the dictionary, he then copied the definition above the entry rather than below it. Thus it became clear that his earlier protestations about using the dictionary had been true: he had simply been using it incorrectly. Our entire session had been devoted to the discovery of this one fact, and otherwise produced nothing. But we had located the crucial impediment to his progress on his paper: faced with unfamiliar words in an unfamiliar combination, he had used the right tool in the wrong way, not only in this essay, but in every essay before it. Though our session accomplished much less than a beginning tutor might have desired, its small victory changed the course of the student's expository writing career in a way neither he nor I could have anticipated. It is this improvisational quality of minimalist tutoring which requires attention to the student and his problems at the moment of tutoring instead of some rigid notion of what a session should accomplish.

The Post-Draft Outline

Because tutors improvise according to the needs of the student at the moment of tutoring, it's useful to have an array of strategies that can be arranged in different patterns according to circumstance. One of the most flexible techniques is called the Reverse or Post-Draft Outline. Unlike the traditional pre-draft outline, whose drawbacks have already been mentioned, the Post-Draft Outline works from a rough draft that already exists, and is useful for developing a coherent claim in each paragraph, transition sentence between paragraphs, a coherent flow of argument throughout the paper, and a thesis paragraph that accurately reflects the argument of the essay. It is especially helpful for the tutor who claims that "The paper is already good—there's nothing else for the student to do." These are the basics: first, the tutor asks the writer to ignore the thesis statement and closing of the draft, if these, in fact, exist. Then the tutor asks the writer to take out a separate sheet of paper to write on—this will become the map of the draft's argument. Then the writer is asked to examine the first paragraph of the argument and summarize its claim in one or two sentences on the other piece of paper. The writer applies this technique to every paragraph of the argument until each one has been examined. (This first step usually takes a while, and is a good opportunity for the tutor to step away and allow the writer to work alone.) In the end, the writer will have a list of summarized claims on the second sheet of paper which reveals the

real structure of the argument, rather than the structure the writer thought he was following at the beginning of the writing process.

At this point, the tutor can help the writer work on any number of important questions, depending on the content of the new outline. For instance, the outline may reveal that certain paragraphs don't have a central claim, certain paragraphs do, and certain paragraphs have more than one. Though the writer may not have seen this while staring at the draft as a whole, the outline serves to make the skeleton of the argument visible. Once this happens, the tutor can help the writer find a claim in the claimless paragraphs, clarify existing claims, and split the paragraphs with more than one claim into several new paragraphs. Once this has been done, the tutor can ask the writer to return to the outline, write the new claims in, and turn to the question of the connections between each claim. Many times, the connections between the claims of each paragraph are implicit in the writer's mind, but not expressed as transition sentences. This problem can be turned into another writing task by asking the writer to compose a sentence or two between claims that expresses their relationship or connection. This exercise often produces the first conscious understanding in the writer of what the essay is about. For students unused to constructing transition sentences, the tutor can then demonstrate how to integrate the new writing into the earlier draft to produce paragraphs that actually speak to each other, forming a whole for the reader as well as the writer. Once this has been accomplished, if there is time left in the tutoring session, the thesis paragraph can be revised. Beginning students in college composition classes are often shocked to learn that a thesis statement can be more than one sentence long, having been taught in some earlier context that the thesis must be brief. Using the list of claims and the adjacent list of connections between them, the student can revise the thesis paragraph as a map or summary of the essay. If the Post-Draft Outline has been successful, most of the work of writing a thesis has already been accomplished in the earlier steps of revision: the writer can use the claim- and transition-sentences as the bulk of the thesis paragraph. This technique is especially helpful to students who have previous training in journalistic or creative writing, where the idea of a broad "introduction" is more familiar than a sharp, focused thesis.

Writing as Dialogue

The Post-Draft Outline is useful for students who are already in dialogue with the source texts, already able to take a position on some common ground with the readings. To other students, however, The New Humanities Reader will seem more intimidating, and the task of responding to its authors as an equal, entirely foreign. This problem will be especially acute for students who have been prevented in previous classes from taking a position of their own relative to class materials. If mimetic thinking was rewarded and connective thinking actively discouraged, students may know what they think but be afraid to express themselves. In more advanced cases, punishment for connective thinking may prevent students from recognizing that they have a position in the first place. In either situation, it is useful to ask the student to respond to an assignment out loud, with the tutor and the student both taking notes as the student discusses the readings in light of a central question. Because most students have oral skills far in advance of their written skills, and are therefore more confident in the realm of speech, it often turns out that students can speak themselves into dialogue with a source text where they could not write themselves into it due to earlier training. Students in tutoring love to talk as a way of avoiding writing, so the tutor must be

very careful to turn talking into writing as the next step in the process. This can be accomplished by comparing notes on what was said, identifying the most promising ideas and connections in the discussion, and proceeding into a writing exercise that organizes and clarifies the oral work. This transformation of student-tutor dialogue into a written dialogue between student, source texts, and assignment can be an effective way past many kinds of blocks, including those put in place by earlier instruction, but only if the tutor shows the student how to take the technique out of the writing center and into the world beyond tutoring. If a technique ultimately depends on the presence of the tutor, the student will not become a more skilled writer.

There is no end to the making of tutoring techniques, and this essay should serve as a beginning to that happy process. Ideally, tutors and other writing center staff should come together after working with *The New Humanities Reader* to discuss the techniques they have found useful in promoting connective thinking and writing among students. In this way, the small victories of individual tutors and students can inform the practice of an entire community.

I'd like to acknowledge that the philosophy and methods described in this essay are not mine alone, but the product of an oral tradition of the Rutgers Writing Centers larger than any one person. The following list is only partial, marking my own sense of lineage and community, but I hope representative nonetheless. For their great service to the Centers, and for everything they've taught me, I would like to thank Kristen Abbey, Susan Arvay, Barclay Barrios, Nicole Beaulieu, Carol Denise Bork, Eleanor Creedon, Diane DeLauro, Beth Desmond, Darcy Gioia, Karin Gosselink, Angela Hewitt, Priti Joshi, Katherine Lynes, Christopher Pizzino, Mary Porecca, Emma Rumen, Piper Kendrix Williams, Tara Williams, and Mahfuza Zaman.

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What Do We Mean By Peers?

By Peter Carino

Peer tutoring has been a powerful pedagogy for writing center teaching and student learning. However, when the word peer has been interpreted in the extreme, it has been distorted to support the kind of nondirective tutoring that understandably rankles some center scholars and practitioners. At the same time, the enshrinement of nondirective tutoring is understandable in the context of writing center history. On the one hand, as Clark and Healy (1996) argue, this pedagogy helped deflect charges of plagiarism, but on the other, I would argue that center workers were as concerned about plagiarism as teachers were, and developed nondirective pedagogy not only to deflect criticism, but also because they believed it worked. Based on questioning methods, whether designated Socratic or Rogerian, nondirective tutoring can cue students to recall knowledge they have and construct new knowledge that they do not. Anyone who has worked in writing centers knows that when nondirective tutoring clicks, it is wonderful, and its effectiveness accounts for some of the zealotry of those who endorse it but then impose it upon situations where other strategies are necessary.

An ideal peer tutorial in the nondirective mode proceeds something like this. A third-year chemistry major comes into the center with a draft of a lab report and meets with a tutor, let's say a second-year literature major and skilled writer. The two are peers in that both are students and both are committed to being good writers:

Tutor: You seem to have your thesis at the end and the first part talks about your steps in the experiment. Is that the way you want it?

Student: Yes, we are supposed to use an inductive pattern and draw a conclusion.

Tutor: Ok, that's good. Now, on the third page, you talk about mixing the chemicals and then heating them, but you don't explain why. Do you see what I mean? Could you add a transition to get the reader from one to the other?

Student: Yes, I could say how I mixed the chemicals until they got syrupy, that's how they should be, before I put them on the Bunsen burner, something like "Once the chemicals thickened to a reddish syrupy consistency, they were placed on the Bunsen burner." And then add some stuff about the temperature...

Tutor: Yes, that would really help.

This snippet illustrates non-directive peer tutoring at its best. The tutor asks questions; the student answers in ways that lead to improving the writing. The student takes responsibility for the content, which the tutor, a literature major, cannot be expected to know, justifying the placement of her thesis based on knowledge of the rhetorical structure of the lab report, and even takes step towards becoming a better writer in supplying a concrete example of the tutor's reference to an abstract rhetorical term – transition.

This tutorial not only exemplifies the effectiveness of nondirective tutoring, but Bruffian collaborative learning as well, with the tutor learning that a thesis in a lab report (though usually called something else) is more desirable as a conclusion based on induction, something he can file for future reference, just as the student can the definition of transition. Both student and tutor share authority and engage in collaborative operations to improve the text. It is important to remember that in adopting a nonhierarchical pedagogy of peer collaboration, centers were heavily influenced by Kenneth Bruffee's work on collaborative learning (1993), which originated when he was directing the writing center at Brooklyn College. Coupling the mutual benefits to tutor and student with the theoretical underpinning of Bruffian collaborative learning, this tutorial is exactly the way writing centers would like to represent their work – effective in practice and underpinned by theory. In fact, this tutorial works so well that it becomes a myth for self-justification. Unfortunately, the myth is seductive, and directors want to believe such tutorials happen far more often than they do, use them to represent center work, and try to train tutors to approximate, if not attain, them consistently, all the time knowing at heart that such tutorials are rare, many are messier, and most are far messier.

Furthermore, to pretend this tutorial is exemplary is not only to ignore its rarity but to misread Bruffee somewhat. While certainly he placed much faith in students' ability to learn from one another, his sense of collaboration included the assumption that the tutor had some authority. Discussing training tutors at Brooklyn under Bruffee's supervision, Marcia Silver (1978) argues "probably the single most important condition for teaching writing is the willingness on the part of the student writer to accept criticism and grow as a result of it" (435). This is tough love, not the egalitarian, nonhierarchical presentation of tutor and student as "two friends" cited in Hawkins (1980) at the outset of this essay. The tutor is expected to criticize, and the student is expected to have a skin touch enough to put the criticism to good use. However, blind adherence to a nonhierarchical ethic of peer tutoring treats the student as if he or she is a high-strung child, and can also lead to inefficiency if the tutor refuses to take authority when necessary.

Witness this tutorial in which the tutor will not deviate from nondirective principles. This time the tutor is a journalism major minoring in theater; the student, an undeclared freshman writing a review of a campus production for an introduction to theater class:

Tutor: After reading through your paper, I am wondering why you spent the first page writing about you and your friends on the way to the theater.

Student: I don't know. That's what happened. We met in town, then drove to campus, and had a hard time finding a parking space, like I said.

Tutor: Do you think that is important for the reader to know?

Student: Well, I thought I would put it in to get started and I thought it was neat the way we got lucky and got a space just when we thought we'd be late. I wanted to start with something interesting, and I thought the play was really serious, heavy.

Tutor: Is it interesting, but how do you see it relating to the play?

Student: I don't know. Should I take it out?

Tutor: That's up to you. What do you think?

Here the tutor continues nondirective questioning to a fault in the name of preserving the peer relationship. It is obvious that the student lacks the knowledge of the conventional play review, but instead of taking authority for teaching him, the tutor coyly "wonders" about the way the student opens the paper. No one can implicate this tutorial for plagiarism, and the tutor certainly maintains a nonhierarchical peer relationship with the student, but it is doubtful that anything other than adherence to principle has been achieved. If the student does cut the superfluous introduction, it is likely the cut will be more the influence of the tutor's doubts about it than from a writerly decision by the student.

Compare a second version of the same tutorial, in which the tutor draws upon his knowledge in journalism and theater, takes some authority for the text, and exercises some power in directing the student:

Tutor: After reading your paper, I see you have a long part about getting to the theater. Have you ever written a play review before?

Student: No. I put that in because I thought it was interesting the way we got the parking space at the last minute. I wanted to start with something interesting before doing all the stuff on the play, which I thought was really serious, heavy.

Tutor: Yes, it is good to start with something interesting, but did your teacher explain anything about how to write the review?

Student: No, we just have that little sheet I gave you saying we had to write the review, how many pages, and when the play is on.

Tutor: Well, in a play review, you might have a short introduction, but you should start as close to the play as possible because your purpose is to help the reader decide if they want to see the play or not. You need to cut the part about getting to the theater and start with the sentence where you say "Oleanna is a play that will make people think." That is a short direct sentence, and it previews what follows.

Clearly, the tutor here takes more authority, is more responsible for the shape the paper will take. In addition, the tutor uses her authority – familiarity with the conventions of play reviews and the rhetorical need to consider audience – to provide instruction that will be useful to the student in completing the paper as well as others in the future. Strict adherents to nondirective methods might argue that the tutor is appropriating the student's paper in directly telling him to cut the long introduction, or wielding too much power over a student who seems to have little himself in terms of this assignment. Although beneath the surface of the first exchanges there may be a slight bit of contentiousness on the tutor's part and defensiveness on the student's, the tutor does not belittle or exclude the student, but uses her authority to transmit knowledge and power to direct the student of the purpose of helping him complete the task. Undoubtedly there is not the sharing of authority seen in the tutorial on the chemistry lab report, where the student is much more knowledgeable, but

nevertheless there is a sharing of the work as the student, though lacking authority, remains attentive and explains his motivations to the tutor.

Tutorials, then, I would argue, depend on authority and power, authority about the nature of the writing and the power to proceed from or resist what the authority says. Either tutor and student must share authority, producing a pleasant but rare collaborative peer situation as in the tutorial on the lab report, or one or the other must have it, and in writing centers the one with it is more often the tutor, as is the case in the second tutorial on the play review. Writing centers should not be ashamed of this fact. Of course, there are caveats. In some tutorials, authority may be lacking on both parts, because every tutor cannot be an expert in all types of writing. Or power can be misdirected. For example, the student writing the theater review has the power to resist the tutor and not cut the irrelevant introduction. Or the tutor may wield power without authority, misleading the student, as is evident in the following excerpt, again with a literature major tutoring a chemistry student, this one less able, on a lab report.

Tutor: You seem to have your thesis at the end and the paper talks about your steps in the experiment. Is that the way you want it?

Student: I don't know. Why? This is chemistry. I thought thesis sentences were for English papers.

Tutor: No, most papers have a thesis and usually it comes at the beginning.

Student: You mean the part where I say the chemicals turned into a clear gel when heated to a certain temperature.

Tutor: Yes, can you put that in the first paragraph so the reader knows what you found?

Student: Ok, I get it now.

This tutorial goes immediately astray because the tutor lacks authority, in that he misdirects the student based on his own experience of placing the thesis sentence first, something generally not done in lab reports. The student, though somewhat suspicious, does not wield power to resist, because the institution of the writing center and the position of authority it awards the tutor cowers him into acting on the tutor's misleading advice. The only benefit of the nondirective technique here is that it somewhat preserves the environment of the center as "safe house", because the tutor's question gently raises the possibility of moving the thesis rather than directly telling the student about the (mis)perceived thesis problem. Yet, in the end, the "safe house" is not safe at all because the non-directive method is worthless without some authoritative knowledge on the structure of lab reports. Nor would directive tutoring work in this case, because without the knowledge of the conventions of the lab report, the tutor would be unable to help – to direct – the student about the placement of the thesis.

In this case, the tutor, lacking knowledge, lacks power and authority beyond that conferred by being the tutor – a situation analogous to that which Palmeri (2000) describes when he cannot show the student how to cite sources in her discipline. Granted the tutorials

above are invited, but I would argue that similar tutorials happen regularly. Invented or not, they illustrate the wide variety of tutorials that occur in writing centers every day, a variety conditioned by the degree of power and authority brought into the tutorial by tutor, student, and assignment. All of these tutorials demonstrate that no matter what techniques are used, both parties (ideally) or one (more commonly) must have some knowledge at hand, must occupy the position of power and authority in a hierarchical relationship. In the first tutorial on the lab report, the student fortuitously had the knowledge and only needed it to be drawn out by the tutor's cues; thus the tutorial worked exceedingly well. In the second, neither knew the conventions of the lab report, and the tutorial went awry because knowledge was not available. In the tutorials on the play review, the first tutor had the knowledge but chose to withhold it in the name of egalitarianism, thus abusing power and authority, while the second exercised them responsibly to instruct the student. I realize here that I am seeming to treat knowledge as an entity, a thing, rather than something constructed, as is readily accepted in postmodern thought, but in many tutorials the knowledge, for student and tutor, is something to be received or transmitted. Though the conventions of the lab report and the play review are constructions in that they are agreed upon by writers and readers of such pieces, for the tutor and student the conventions are fixed and transmittable knowledge, because neither has the authority or power to change them without negative consequences in the situation offered by the assignment and tutorial.