

Four Questions Asked and Answered

Four Questions Asked and Answered by a Math Tutor

1. What do I do if the student asks me to help with a take home quiz?

Politely but firmly state that the tutor is not allowed to help in quizzes etc., but can only guide him on the topic. Use the probing techniques and ask him questions so that his answers will lead him to the solution. And most important of all is putting down the pencil. All the work has to be done by the tutee. If any concept is difficult to understand, one can give examples that would help the student along. You can ask him to go over the examples that were done in previous sessions. You could lead him to the answer by reminding him of what observations he had made in the previous sessions etc. Ask questions at each step so that the responsibility of doing the problem lies on the tutee. You can refuse to help further if the tutee does not comply with your procedure.

2. What do I do even after 1 hour of trying different approaches the student still does not understand what is going on?

It is best to take a different approach than was adopted before. One can try and break up the problem into simpler steps and go over each step by giving examples. One can give examples using ideas that the student can relate to. You can even try and show how you would go about doing the problem if that was given to you. And if all else fails, then you have to call it a day and move on to other topics and come back to that one in a later session. Probably you could ask the tutee to read about it further and think about the topic before you meet next. You could even ask him to discuss it with other students taking that class. And you could read up about that topic too and think about other ways of presenting the topic.

3. What exactly are the responsibilities of a tutor? The video says that the tutor should help make the student help themselves and become independent. But Is it really applicable under our circumstances where we spend just 2 hours a week with the student and he/she is more interested in completing homework/quizzes/exams?

Most definitely yes! The tutor does become a tutee's mentor and there is a kind of trust that is developed between the two. This encourages an environment where suggestions made by the tutors are taken well and is implemented upon. The tutor should try and make the student self reliant and try and remove the hatred/fear of math that many tutees feel, with encouraging words. A tutor should be sympathetic towards the tutees problems and make the best about the situation .For example, if the tutee is unable to come for a session, the tutor should try and accommodate him at some other time if possible. I observed that the most important factor in making the tutee become self reliant is the strategy of "putting the pencil down". This transfers the responsibility onto the student and when he is working out the solution by writing it himself, he will understand better and get more confident in the topic. Nothing beats this strategy. Probably one other strategy that comes close to this would be "probing" and questioning. This puts the tutee in the thinking mode and guiding him towards the solution by making him tell out the answer would

clear up his understanding. Also association over a few weeks albeit for just 2 hours a week gives the tutor knowledge about the tutee's weaknesses in the subject. This enables the tutor to chalk out strategies that would work for a particular tutee and that would make the tutee more comfortable in the subject. For example the tutor could ask the student to make a data sheet of the formulas that he would be working on and also some small notes on various topics that he is covered. And if he finds that the tutee would respond to challenges then he could use this resort to make the tutee learn and work on some problems that he assigns .

4. How do I make sure that I have answered a student's question thoroughly and to their satisfaction?

The tutor can adopt various strategies to achieve this:

1. I think the best way to go about this is to have the student work out more problems of the same type. And if the student fumbles, then guide him towards his answer.
2. Have the student recap on what he learnt in that session.
3. Give him some similar problems and ask him to show how to go about setting them up.
4. Make him explain to you the concepts that were discussed that day.
5. If it is a word problem ask him to draw it out and setup the problem.