

Time Management: A Collaborative Effort

From observation and personal experience, I have formulated various explanations for wasted time in a writing tutorial session. Among these explanations are: unrealistic expectations of the writing tutor and/or tutee, inter-relational issues, miscommunication/misunderstanding, and loss of focus. And so now the question arises: How can we spend time more wisely in the Tutorial Center? With a collaborative effort from both the writing tutor and tutee, time spent in the tutorial center can be time well spent, on both writing and non-writing related matter.

While the focus of each tutorial session should be the tutee's writing skills, time can still be wisely spent on non-writing related matter, such as setting precise meeting times, greeting each other, and establishing expectations. These three activities each have value in the effectiveness of a tutoring session but require collaboration. In order to actively engage in tutoring sessions, a writing tutor and tutee ought to invest time together on such activities.

When a writing tutor at De Anza's Tutorial Center receives an accepted tutee application, the next required step is to correspond with the student and work out a schedule. Yes, the new tutee had previously specified his or her times of availability, but class schedules and personal life situations can change unexpectedly. Agreeing solidly and as soon as possible on the best time to meet for tutoring helps to establish respect for each others' schedules and eliminate the unprogressive, on-the-fence experience (California Reading Skills Program, CRSP, 19). For instance, if either the tutor or tutee says, "Monday morning? Yeah, I might be able to make it," then the person on the receiving end might not feel at ease; he or she might get the impression that meeting times are flexible. In actuality, the tutorial center has a strict late/no-show policy, for both the tutor and the tutee. Agreeing on a precise meeting time prevents time-wasting misunderstandings and implies a partnership. Therefore, time spent together on such an activity is an investment for future sessions.

Writing tutors and tutees can also invest time in partaking in other non-writing related matters, such as greeting and getting acquainted with each other's expectations. Greeting creates an

environment of trust and friendliness, accomplishing the writing tutor's role as an "ally" to the tutee (Ryan and Zimmerelli 18). This alliance is not to be underestimated. For instance, without such a bond, a tutee might feel uncomfortable contributing ideas to discussions or brainstorming sessions, and time might be wasted trying to pry the suppressed words out. Also, greeting can help a tutor and tutee look ahead for possible scheduling conflicts (CRSP 4). Imagine the following situation:

Tutor: "Hello, how are you today?"

Tutee: "I'm great. I'm also excited, because I'm going to see a concert next week!"

If the tutor is actively listening, then he or she might have spotted the potential dilemma. When is the concert? Will it affect the tutee's attendance or essay-writing time? Such observations can help the tutor and tutee plan ahead and address such issues before they become time-wasting problems: an unexpected no-show, or a forgotten essay. Time spent greeting each other can be time well spent.

Establishing each other's expectations can certainly prevent wasted time. This matter of expectations serves as a clarification of goals as well as an establishment of responsibilities of both a writing tutor and tutee. What does the tutee expect from the tutor, and what in turn can the tutor expect from the tutee? One of the main questions on the tutee application form inquires as to what the tutee expects from sessions in the Tutorial Center. A tutee might expect to improve on a multitude of writing aspects: grammar, paragraph writing, critical thinking skills, or maybe just general English writing practice. If the tutee indeed has such goals, then the tutee also expects the tutor to facilitate these goals as best as possible (CRSP 7). In turn, the tutor expects the tutee to pull his/her fair share: attend all meetings, do the work on time, and actively participate in every session.

The time spent establishing writing and commitment expectations can also be used to establish learning style expectations. At this point, if the tutee is comfortable with the tutor, then the tutee might admit to struggling with certain learning strategies:

"Just to warn you, I can procrastinate."

"What do you mean by 'procrastinate'?"

"Well, I think about my assignment a lot, but I'm not quite sure what to write until much later."

“It sounds like you just prefer to allow more time for your ideas to develop in your mind. Everyone has different styles of processing, but working on improving your writing skills might be difficult in tutoring sessions if we don’t have anything solid to work with.”

In the previous example, the tutor promotes metacognition, which is constructive, versus self-condemnation, which is destructive. Some writing instructors even prefer the term “percolation” to “procrastination”, because “procrastination” tends to ring of shame (Connor and Cushman). In this open manner, no time is wasted fighting against weaknesses, but rather time is invested in working with strengths. Once these strengths are acknowledged, then reducing tutor-tutee conflict and working towards the writing tutee’s goals becomes more possible. And thus, time spent getting to know each other and establishing expectations saves much time in future sessions.

In direct regards to writing, both the tutee and tutor ought to take an active role in allotting session time responsibly. Setting an agenda, taking notes, and wrapping up sessions are main writing-related areas in which a tutee and tutor can work together to successfully accomplish a tutee’s writing goals. This collaborative effort follows along the “Two heads are better than one” concept, and time spent together in these areas can be time well-invested.

Setting an agenda together helps to prioritize a writing tutee’s goals and to map out the ways in which a writing tutor can facilitate learning. Under the “Setting Agendas” heading of De Anza College’s Tutoring Cycle Observation Form, writing tutors are advised to actively involve tutee(s) in planning the session. This plan does not need to be formal and unbending, as the observation form later advises: “Readjust agenda when necessary, keep track of time” (the Tutoring Cycle Observation Form). The De Anza Tutoring Center encourages both parties to take part in regulating the amount of time spent on activities. Together, with an awareness of what the tutee wants to focus on, and with an awareness of the clock on the wall, a tutor and tutee can appropriately and realistically readjust a session plan. Without this agenda-setting, a session lacks focus and can result in minimal accomplishment and an overall unsatisfactory

tutoring experience. Writing tutors and tutees do not plan to fail. We sometimes just fail to plan.

A writing tutor and tutee can also use time responsibly by taking notes together during each tutoring session. These notes serve as a record of information and can save time in future sessions. A tutor can refer to notes to keep track of a tutee's understanding and progress, and a tutee can refer to notes to keep track of new writing concepts learned. Instead of having to re-learn a concept forgotten from a previous session, a tutee can easily go back through his or her notes and find the needed information. And since the notes are organized and written in such a way that the tutee best understands (in his/her own words), the information can be reviewed more effectively (CRSP 16). Taking notes together is certainly a time-effective method of learning.

Wrapping up a tutoring session is another time-management strategy that is best done collaboratively, in order to ensure the retaining of information learned. Tutors should avoid turning session wrap-ups into individualistic lectures, because a tutee might not fully understand the problems that still need to be addressed. With dual participation, however, both a tutor and tutee can review strengths and weaknesses, as well as discuss necessary steps to be taken toward improvement (CRSP 15). Session wrap-ups reiterate the skills that have been accomplished and address problems still needing improvement, and both a writing tutee and tutor can have input on such a matter. Even if not everything wanted was accomplished, a tutor and tutee can still use the last few minutes of a session to make a plan to manage time spent on writing. Maybe the tutor can even assign homework for the tutee, should the situation require. An effective session wrap-up not only gives both a tutor and tutee a feeling of accomplishment, but it also promotes the importance of time-management in the preparation for future meetings.

Time spent wrapping up a session, taking notes, and setting an agenda together as a team can be a time investment for writing tutors and tutees. Along with collaboratively setting precise meeting times, greeting each other, and establishing personal expectations, writing tutors and tutees can prevent much wasted time in the

Tutorial Center. No doubt, the best way to watch the clock is together.

Works Cited

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