

Tutoring Can Be Fun

by Shunte Y., Political Science Adjunct Skills Tutor

Before the tutor sessions officially began, my mind was filled with questions. Thus, when asked to pick simply three questions to ask an experienced tutor, I laughed. How could I possibly choose three questions when I desperately wanted the answers to a thousand? To my amazement, however, my questions steadily began to decrease as the sessions passed by and I realized that, with a little perseverance, tutoring could be (gasp) fun.

One of my most pressing fears was the fear of not knowing the answer to everything. What if a tutee asked a question that I absolutely could not answer? Should I simply make something up and pray it wouldn't be on the exam? Thus, I crammed. The night before my first session, I read and reread my old notes, trying to memorize every statistic and minute detail. When the dreaded first session began, I braced myself for that inevitable moment when someone would ask a question, I would be silent, and everyone would roll their eyes, cursing themselves for enrolling in the adjunct skills program. Miraculously, that moment never appeared and I found myself actually being able to explain the concepts rather well.

As the sessions progressed, I was provided with a wealth of tips from both Heffner and the tutor training class. I frequently met with Heffner over the weeks who gave me one of the most memorable pieces of advice I've ever received: It's okay not to know everything. After all, I wasn't a credentialed teacher. I was merely a former student of Heffner's who did well in his class. I wasn't there to teach them new concepts, but to fill in the gaps as best as I could.

I also learned a quite sneaky trick from the tutor training class: Let your tutees do more of the talking than you. I admit I've used this technique during the rare moments when I wasn't quite sure of the answer. Instead of admitting I didn't know, I simply asked if anyone else knew. Thus, it gave the opportunity for someone to explain a concept and, at the same time, let me off the hook.

Furthermore, I feared not being able to actually use all of the whole hour I was expected to provide. What if I ran out of things to say? I knew I couldn't very well let the session out early (now I knew how teachers felt), but what if there really wasn't anything to discuss? However, the tutor training class taught me otherwise. I learned the priceless skill of setting an agenda for each session. Thus, I had a structure that I could depend on if I was unsure where to head. I also made sure to ask if they had any questions from last week's session that they would like to review. This way, they felt like they had somewhat of a control of the session and knew that they were encouraged to ask questions. If all else failed, I talked politics. I'm a political science major, so I truly enjoyed the subject I was tutoring. I found that it's important for a tutee to apply concepts learned in class to events in the real world and realize why the concept was important. What's the point of learning something without understanding why one should learn it?

Finally, another initial concern of mine was that my groups would, to put it bluntly, suck. What would happen if my groups were miserably quiet? I was enrolled in an adjunct skills group a few quarters back, and it was painful. Everyone was silent the whole hour and was content to listen to

the supplemental instructor and talk only when forced to. I did not want a group like that. To prevent this, I think I made an extra effort to connect individually with each person in my groups. I made sure to learn their names and use them regularly, and, most importantly, consciously tried to ask everyone in the groups a question at least once a session. This technique ensured that everyone was participating whether they liked it or not. Hey, who said this was a democracy? Fortunately, however, I honestly couldn't have asked for a better group. The group dynamic was unbelievable and I found myself having to shush them up more than once. Can I keep them for next quarter too?