

A Job's a Job

Greetings, newly-hired tutor. Congratulations on getting a job, and best of luck in keeping it.

In all honesty, there really is not much to say that will help you more in your tutoring endeavors than what ELIT/LRNA 97 and experience would do for you. The class helps insofar as it provides the basic theoretical groundwork upon which further practical knowledge is built. It goes over the importance of utilizing metacognitive questions to guide the tutees toward discovering and rectifying their own mistakes, as so doing makes for a much more valuable and memorable learning experience for them, not only helping them in that specific area but in their ability to cope with future difficulties. This goes with the strategy of minimalist tutoring, which aims to provide direction to tutees without giving away answers outright or merely editing their work. Additionally, this entails acting as more of a peer in supporting tutees as opposed to a figure of greater authority, such as a professor. It helps to delineate early on in the tutoring sessions that you are but one resource among many, and, moreover that you will not always hold the answers, since so doing encourages them to utilize other resources on their own to reach an understanding of the material with which they are struggling.

One issue that you might face if you are a native English learner is a lack of knowledge in regards to actual grammar rules. If this is the case, it may behoove you to brush up on this knowledge with grammar textbooks, as it can be quite beneficial for interactions with ESL tutees, most of whom focus on textbook definitions as opposed to conversational aspects of learning. It is also personally beneficial insofar as it provides a firmer understanding of grammar and a greater ability to articulate the rationale (or lack thereof) behind certain usage practices.

Another common issue in tutoring is setting an agenda at the start of a session and wrapping things up at the end. Many of the tutors in this class struggled with this initially, as we were unsure by what process we were supposed to do this. For the agenda, it is best to first ask what the tutees' concerns are, and then to focus on any global issues in their writing before getting to smaller, more localized issues. This is tantamount to valuing content over presentation, as even the best presentation cannot salvage nonsensical content. Telling tutees upfront what you believe would be best to cover in the limited amount of time you have available helps in prioritizing, as well as in laying out the next steps tutees should take on their own following the session. This is reiterated at the close of the session along with a brief recap of what has been accomplished within the course of the session, succinctly wrapping things up.

For all that advice and advance warning are helpful, in the end, there is no better teacher than experience coupled with the desire to improve. This is true both for tutees and for tutors. As such, it is worth remembering that others' words of wisdom must be taken with a grain of salt, for every individual's experience is different. My struggles may not be your struggles, and it is ultimately at your discretion to navigate the difficulties you encounter. Make use of the resources at your disposal, including your fellow tutors and supervisors, and do the best you can with every situation, no matter how trying. Good luck, and don't give up—remember, if nothing else, at least you still get paid.