Our final assignment is to look back and reflect on our development. Looking back on what I’ve learned, I’d say a good majority was invaluable. When I first started with the tutor training I felt confident about my English skills because I had done so well in my EWRT classes. It was when I dove into the training that I realized that regardless of my skills, there was still so much that I didn’t know. Grammar was a distant memory (say, sixth grade!) and EL students were not were not who I thought I would have as tutees. I became really nervous. Luckily, I wasn’t the only one with these concerns. I soon found out my peers shared similar anxieties. Somehow, knowing you’re not alone is kind of comforting… In time, the skills we learned in the training helped me feel a lot more comfortable, which allowed me to focus on the tutee’s needs instead of my fears. I’m a fairly confident person, but the confidence stems from knowing or understanding what I’m doing. If I don’t have a firm grasp on that, I’m going to be distracted with worry. Of all the things I learned however, the two most important skills I was: listening and organizing. Listening to the tutee and waiting for them to give you the answer is important because they usually know what the answer is. The way to make sure they know the answer is that they explain it in their own words, not the answer from the book. Then there is organizing the work - what is the biggest problem with the work before you and what is the least important? The teachers of EL students realize that they are not going to get a perfect paper, but whatever they learn in tutoring they’ll apply in the next paper, and the paper after that (it’s like all math teachers say, “It’s all cumulative!”), you’ll be able to get to another problem…. in a perfect world anyway. It takes time to get those kinds of results.

Despite my background, I have come away from the training with a lot! For example, while I’ve worked with plenty of foreign exchange students in class, I’ve never been in a position of authority where the student would look to me for answers. This is a huge responsibility. Something that I hadn’t considered before taking the training was working with an English Learner. It is so important to consider this type of student’s previous experience in language arts in their country. They’re learning an entirely different style of writing than what we are used to. The idea of thesis statements and structure are different in other places in the world. That said, it’s good to keep it in mind and consider it when you see a “mess” of a paper- it could simply be the product of cultural differences. Keeping cultural difference in mind, it would also behoove you to keep a professional demeanor. While some students are used to more physical contact (pat
on the back), some are used to less (high five). Students (as well as tutors) are pretty nervous at first, so keeping it professional is the easiest way to start on a path to a comfortable rapport. Speaking of comfortable, don’t overwhelm yourself!! The skills learned in the training were really useful in this respect. Though I’ve already mentioned it, I feel it is that important to mention once more: the best way to avoid overwhelming yourself and your tutee is to think about ORGANIZATION! Rome wasn’t built in a day; therefore, that first meeting, that first assignment your tutee presents you, will not be perfect at the end of your session. If you focus on the two really big issues your tutee’s work faces, you’ve won half the battle and your tutee’s teacher will appreciate it. The training will provide you with how to organize the workload from the biggest issues to consider to the issues you can ignore. Start small. Look at the sentences, forget about the spelling and the articles for a second and look at the sentence structure. Are there patterns in the sentences like run-ons? Where is the thesis? Is your student meeting the prompt’s criteria? These are the biggies. Prioritize, it’ll save you headaches.

Prioritization is just one of the few techniques you’ll gain while in training. Just as valuable, is listening—another thing I’ve already mentioned. It’s so important to listen to the way your tutee speaks!! Sometimes, the way they speak is much better than the way they write. Your tutee may so caught up with the grammar rules- trying to keep all those rules straight in their heads, they miss the prompt or the grammar is wonky, they end up missing the forest for the trees. Often, they’re not even aware of how well they sound so they need to be made aware of their skills. Additionally, it is important to take care of your tutee’s ego (to some extent). They’re a bit fragile and vulnerable. They feel really self-conscious about their skills and asking for help. As a tutor, you need to walk a fine line between blunt and subtle. Don’t use a red pen, use a pencil (it’s erasable- i.e. temporary). The words, “You did this wrong,” may be true, but some people will shut down and sulk. There are more constructive ways of saying, “You did this wrong,” like, “You could do this better.” You’re using an active AND positive voice.

Not all tutees are a dream to work with. Some will require more cajoling than others. It’s important to observe your tutee. Are they not ready when they arrive? Are they late? Do they seem as though they don’t want to be there? These things aren’t your fault, but as a tutor, you can help. If they’re always late- re-adjust your meeting time to make it convenient for you and them but also remind them that this is their own time they are cutting into. Are they not prepared? Remind your tutee that they need to have their work with
them; otherwise, your time spent together will not be the best use of anyone’s time. If they don’t want to be there, talk about it. Some students resist the idea of getting help due to culture or personal biases. That’s okay, there is only so much you can do as a tutor before you can cut your losses. Sometimes, students are receptive and will listen. You don’t know it, until you try. Furthermore, if your tutee is a jerk, you don’t have to put up with it. Be firm- you’re here to help, that means helping them find the answer, you’re not supposed to give them the answer. If they continue being difficult- use your senior tutor, talk to one of the advisers-- they are your advocates. You are not expected to know how to handle every situation, plus it is a sign of wisdom and maturity when you can admit you don’t know what to do and ask for help. You’re part of a staff! Use the tools available to you, that’s what they’re there for.

I probably didn’t cover every single thing a tutor can come across but this is just what I’ve learned in my own experience and what I’ve observed.

Best Wishes,

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ps. This training was one of the highlights of my academic experience. Not only because I got to help people but also, I made some really great friends! The tutors you train with, if they are anything like the ones I trained with, will be AWESOME. They're a great group of people with MAD English skills. I appreciated working with them and they made the training a fulfilling experience.