Dear future tutor,

Take a deep breath right now. It begins.

I’m sure you’re aware that you’re about to start on the road to becoming a changer of lives and English-speaker extraordinaire. What you’re probably not aware of is that it’ll actually change you, help you grow, and teach you a thing or two both about yourself and the people around you. There are very few lows on the roller coaster of being a tutor (okay, so I guess it’s more of a hot air balloon than a roller coaster… even though hot air balloons are much less epic) but those lows will be pretty enlightening in the long run, and the highs are deeply fulfilling. Let me walk you through my personal learning experiences and adventures in tutoring, and hopefully give you an idea of what you can expect from the coming quarter.

First up: the class. Going into EWRT 97 I was pretty ambivalent toward having a weekly class just to vent about the week’s problems and talk about grammar rules I thought I already knew. If you’re in that boat, prepare to be proven wrong. As soon as I got my tutees I realized why the class was absolutely indispensable to me as a tutor – it gives you a place to talk out your issues, to grow, and to really think about the how and the why of grammar.

For me, the most valuable part of the course was the discussion. I could never have predicted the problems that would come up in tutoring sessions, like how to motivate a disorganized tutee, how to get past language barriers, how not to tutor too much, how to set an agenda... If I had to handle all of it alone I don’t think I would have survived. Diana and Ken have a ton of insight to provide, and your fellow tutors are right there with you to celebrate or commiserate as necessary. And don’t overlook your fellow tutees and senior tutors as a source of knowledge/advice/fun/empathy! What really made my experience this quarter was the people, whether it was fellow tutors, senior tutors, my tutees, or even the WRC staff.

Some of the things I really felt like I worked at and improved on throughout the quarter were establishing confidence with the tutee, agenda-setting, and finding root issues. Your end-of-quarter list might look different, but the bottom line is that you’ll learn. Unfortunately, you won’t necessarily learn everything all at once. I personally still struggle with addressing the “why” question on grammar rules, among other things. The beautiful thing about it all, though, is that I want to learn because I’ve come to really care about my tutees. I care so much about their goals and their progress and I really do want the best for them; I hope you will too, because it’s really a deeply fulfilling feeling.

Lastly, a couple of odds and ends from my day-to-day tutoring experiences that I think might help you out: Don’t ever underestimate the power of pictures and charts, ever! Countless times I’ve tried to explain some vocabulary that is much better shown than told. But obviously, don’t be all Da Vinci for the whole session. Balance is key. Also, that tutor packet you’ll get on the first day of class? Peruse it at random once a week, outside of the assigned readings from class. It really enhanced my sessions because I would find some new tips or bits of knowledge every time. And finally, send your tutees off with resources when you can. Handouts, websites, movies, etc. are actually very helpful to them, and they (usually) do actually check out the things you recommend!

You’ll get the most out of this experience if you come in with an open mind and a willingness to learn. Actually, even if you don’t you’ll be forced to open your mind and learn a few things, if only so that you don’t look silly when your tutee asks you those terrifying why questions. So really, no matter how you approach the class and the WRC, it should be a really positive learning experience for you. I know it definitely was for me!

Good luck and happy hot air ballooning!

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