Tutoring Writing Effectively: A Focus on Pedagogy

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Objectives

• Describe the procedures for training and observation this school year.
• Distinguish between editing and tutoring.
• Explain the principles and practices of “minimalist tutoring.”
• Describe the stages of the writing process.
• Provide guidelines for helping students improve grammar and punctuation.
• Assign reading for the next training.
Training and Observation

Professional Development for Writing Tutors
Professional Development

• **Six meetings a semester**
  - **Required readings:** selections from *A Tutor’s Guide*, edited by Ben Rafoth
  - **Tutor presentations:** tutors will select strategies from either the UNC or the Purdue (OWL) writing center websites

• **Observing tutoring appointments**
  - **One to two times per semester**
  - **Individual meeting and targeted feedback**
Editing v. Tutoring

What’s the difference?
“We meet with students [. . .] and talk about their projects, their goals, their papers, and their revision strategies. We discuss everything from writer’s block to the passive voice, from a student’s writing schedule to proper citation. . . . We don’t edit, proofread, or otherwise write on students’ drafts; rather, we teach students to identify and address problems themselves.”
So what is editing?

Editing is correction in the absence of instruction.
The Wrong and Right Questions

• Wrong question: Am I allowed to write on a student’s paper?
• Right question: Are my tutoring practices primarily instructional in nature, or are they primarily correctional in nature?
Further Questions

• How might a tutor edit without writing on a student’s paper?
• How might a tutor write on a student’s paper without editing?
• Editing is correction in the absence of instruction.

• Tutoring writing is an individualized and dynamic instructional practice that uses the student’s current writing task to help the student become a better writer.

Editing v. Tutoring

“In a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction.” – Stephen M. North (1984)
“Minimalist Tutoring”

Brooks, Jeff. “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work.” Writing Lab Newsletter 15.6 (1991).
• Sit beside the student instead of across from the student.
• Make sure the student is physically closer to the paper than you are.
• Sit on the student’s right side if the student is right-handed, and vice-versa.
• Have the student read the paper aloud and hold a pencil while doing so.

Basic Minimalist Tutoring

“We sit down with imperfect papers, but our job is to improve their writers.” – Jeff Brooks (1991)
• Start by pointing out success in the paper.
• Prompt the student to do most of the talking.
• When appropriate, give the student a specific writing task, then walk away for a few minutes and let the student do it independently.

“If we can get students to reread a paper even once before handing it in, in most cases we have rendered an improvement. We ought to encourage students to treat their own writings as texts that deserve the same kind of close attention we usually reserve for literary texts.” – Jeff Brooks (1991)
The Writing Process

Tutoring with the Writing Process in Mind
The Stages and Sub-stages of the Writing Process

- **Pre-writing**: gathering and generating the ideas and resources necessary to begin drafting
  - Assignment analysis: identifying the specific requirements of the writing assignment
  - Brainstorming: generating ideas to respond to the assignment
  - Researching: identifying sources to support the paper’s claims
  - Organizing: arranging ideas and sources into a logical order (e.g., outline)
- **Drafting**: transforming pre-writing activities into a composition (i.e., writing and re-writing)
- **Revising**: reviewing the paper to identify opportunities for improvement and re-writing accordingly
  - Editing: revising for clarity, content, structure, and style
  - Proofreading: revising for citation format, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- **Publishing**: submitting the paper for the instructor or others to read
  - Identify submission requirements (e.g., print and bring to class, submit online, etc.)
  - Follow submission instructions.
Helping Students Improve Grammar and Punctuation

Tutoring Students During the Proofreading Stage of the Writing Process
Grammar and Punctuation

1. Explain to the student that the best way to proceed is to read the paper aloud. Encourage the student to do the out-loud reading, but if he or she is resistant, you can take that role.
2. While the student (or you) reads the paper aloud, look for patterns of nonstandard grammar and punctuation.
3. Identify no more than three of the most common patterns to address after the first reading. Wait until the two of you have finished reading the entire paper before addressing the patterns.
4. Teach students the grammar or punctuation conventions that correspond to the patterns you identified.
5. Have the student (or yourself) reread the paper aloud. While reading, prompt the student to identify the selected patterns of nonacademic grammar and punctuation and to revise accordingly.
Conclusion

• Editing is correction in the absence of instruction.
• “We sit down with imperfect papers, but our job is to improve their writers.” – Jeff Brooks (1991)
• Tutoring writing is an individualized and dynamic instructional practice that uses the student’s current writing task to help the student become a better writer.
• When tutoring students during the proofreading stage, teach them to identify patterns, rather than just point out their mistakes for them.
• Our primary job when tutoring writing is not simply to help students improve their papers but rather to help students develop the habits and skills of an effective writer.
Reading for Next Meeting

References

Brooks, Jeff. “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work.” Writing Lab Newsletter 15.6 (1991).


ASPSA Training for Writing Tutors: 2014-15

Tutors will attend a minimum of three training workshops during the fall semester and again in the spring semester. Each session utilizes the book “A Tutor’s Guide: Helping Writers One to One” and are available on the following dates:

Fall 2014
- October 9: Workshop 1: “What Line? I Didn’t See Any Line” (Chapter 2)
- October 23: Workshop 2: “Can You Proofread This?” (Chapter 16)
- November 4: Workshop 4: “Tutoring in Unfamiliar Subjects” (Chapter 13)
- November 11: Workshop 5: “Organizing Ideas: Focus is the Key” (Chapter 11)
- November 20: Workshop 6: “Helping Writers to Write Analytically” (Chapter 12)

Spring 2015
- Dates TBA