

Tutoring

Goals

- A. To appreciate the goal of tutoring.
- B. To understand the relationship a tutor has with a student and with the student's subject matter teacher.
- C. To recognize the importance of diagnosing students' academic problems
- D. To understand tutoring techniques and strategies.
- E. Troubleshooting Problems and Evaluating Tutoring.

A. Goal of Tutoring

The goal of the tutoring is to help students overcome academic challenges and lead them to autonomous or independent learning.

It is a special kind of teaching that is different from the teaching performed by teachers, friends, and parents. You offer students one-on-one attention, individualized explanation, and a chance to ask as many questions as they like (some of which they may not ask people they know) in a non-judgmental atmosphere. But remember, the goal of overcoming academic challenges must be realized by promoting academic independence in the tutee and not dependence on the tutor.

An academic problem a student faces may be a very particular challenge, as specific as a spelling or math question. A teacher who is asked a spelling or math question may respond by saying to look up the word in a dictionary or the problem in a math book, because they do not have the time to give the student one-on-one attention. It is likely not to be a response which will overcome the student's problem or lead to independent learning.

Independent learning involves learning how to learn. It involves empowering a student to overcome their own academic problems autonomously. A parent or friend may respond to the same spelling or math question by spelling out the word or solving the problem for the student. But such a response makes the student less confident and more dependent on the parent or friend. It overcomes an academic challenge but does not lead to independent learning.

Tutoring always tries to liberate students by helping them become academically autonomous and not to entrap students by making them academically dependent.

B. Tutoring context and relationships.

The goal of helping students overcome academic challenges and lead them to independent learning can only be realized in a particular social context and tutor-tutee relationships.

The **social context** of tutoring refers to the social norms in the setting. Social norms are the rules in a particular context for what is appropriate behavior. For example, people may say and do

different things when sitting in church than in a classroom. Questions and comments appropriate for one setting may be inappropriate in another.

To some extent you as a tutor create the norms for your tutoring sessions. The norms you create should allow for open, honest, and respectful communication about academic matters and for casual social and personal dialogue. But you are not the students' "friends" so you will need to create boundaries between the academic and the personal. If crossed, the boundary can be reinstated gently but firmly redirecting the conversation back to the academic topic. However, as will be discussed later, if conversations arise of a legal or ethical issue, you will have to address them head on with the proper authorities.

As a tutor you have an implicit relationship with the **classroom teacher**. You need to know what the teacher expects of your student. The teacher may have a particular way to teach topics, solve problems, or manage students' behavior. Knowledge of such expectations is typically inferred from what your students say about their teacher. You need listen very carefully to these comments and if you are unclear, feel free to ask the teacher about these issues.

Perhaps the most important relationship which you have to manage is the one between a **student and his or her classroom teacher**. Students have relationships with teachers which you must be protected and respected. Try to promote trust and respect between the student and teacher, but stay out of their relationship just as you would in any other relationships between people you do not know so well. But encourage students to talk to the classroom teacher about confusions or concerns they may share with you.

Finally, the **tutor-student** relationship is key one for a tutor to manage in order to be effective. To form an effective relationship, the tutor should promote an open, honest, and respectful communication which supports the emotional well being of students.

C. Diagnosing Academic Problems

One of the most important jobs you have is to diagnose your students' academic problem. Think of an academic problem as the tip of an iceberg. The specific math or English problem your student is facing is likely a symptom of a deeper misunderstanding. Think of treating the academic problem as the short-term goal and treating the deeper misunderstanding as the long-term goal. By overcoming these misunderstandings, you would be promoting independent learning – the students will learn to help themselves with their academic problems.

We offer 3 steps in diagnosing such academic problems.

1. Listening for students' misunderstanding of the academic material: Listen carefully to students' own characterization of their academic problems as it may hold the key to their deeper misunderstandings. Consider this as data for a diagnosis of the broader academic problem which is undermining the students' ability to solve a particular problem.

Sometimes the problems will be clear, but other times students may not know why they are confused. To provide you with more clarification, ask students to perform a variety of related tasks while explaining their thinking in solving the problem. Use this as an opportunity to see whether they reliably go wrong. Listen carefully without interrupting, supporting them to do their best. It will be important to respect cultural

differences in verbal and nonverbal communication. Finally, resist attempts to help them solve the specific problem. Until you have a sense of the deeper problem which is causing the math problem. A math problem may be easily corrected, but the correction may not address the deeper misunderstanding which resulted in the problem in the first place.

2. Diagnosing students' academic problems: Students may come to you to get you to do their work! To them, the request, HELP ME WITH THIS really means the demand that the tutor DO THIS FOR ME. Your job is to help them understand why they are struggling to do the work. Understanding what their struggle is may be the most difficult of all challenges. Deeper misunderstandings reflect problems which occur in different setting and tasks, occur regularly, and are difficult to overcome with simple instruction.

3. Overcoming student misconceptions: To be effective, students should be made to reflect on their misunderstanding and understand what makes it a MISunderstanding. This may take some discussion and explanation not to mention modeling appropriate performance. The goal is for them to reflect on and revise their misconceptions and misunderstandings.

D. Practical Tutoring Tips (from: www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lisu/)

Three key tips:

1. Use questions to enhance teaching:

Questioning can be useful to establish rapport, build confidence, find what a student knows or to share experiences. Recognize and use different types of questions:

Closed questions can be useful for finding out information, and can provide of structure to a situation, BUT they can result in a yes/no answer that leaves you none the wiser. For example: Do you like maths / computers / writing essays?

It's possible to emotionally load the question so heavily that people are pressured into lying to you to save face. The following questions are all closed questions that are likely to receive a negative, or defensive, reply.

Can't you do this exercise?
Have you finished all the Homework I gave you?
You must know how to do logs!
Haven't you done referencing!

Be sensitive to your student and avoid using questions to point out deficits.

Open-ended questions stimulate a longer response than one syllable or one word. Open questions encourage discussion, exploration of ideas, and sharing. It's also important to ask questions that are non-directive - the student should not feel pressured into answering in a particular way. The use of open ended questioning techniques to get students to reflect on their own work, can assist students to improve their understanding and become more independent learners For example,

instead of “Haven’t you done your Homework yet?” how about “What’s the Homework situation?”

Use questions as an opportunity to build up confidence, “You’re really good at long division, how do you feel about multiplication?”

Try to create a context in which students will feel like sharing their concerns, “I always hated doing book reviews, what instructions have you been given?”

Questions need to be asked at an appropriate level. Easy questions may be considered patronizing and questions that are too difficult may be threatening. Lack of response to a question may indicate poor phrasing of the question, rather than a lack of understanding on the student’s part. If in doubt, try rephrasing the question.

Allow an adequate time for a student to respond to a question, even if this involves an awkward period of silence, rather than jumping in and providing the answer. A big part of your role as a tutor is listening to the student. Encourage him or her to talk about their knowledge and study issues.

Finally, respond warmly, naturally and positively to all student answers. If a response is inadequate, it may be possible to praise part of the answer while also indicating sections which need further elaboration or correction.

Students should also feel comfortable to ask questions. A two-way dialogue is indicative of a positive relationship between the tutor and student.

2. Assist Learning by Demonstrating Skills

Model styles of thinking, analytical and critical reading, argumentation or problem solving in your field. This can include modeling:

- a. how to present material, e.g., Structure of an essay, method of setting out a problem
- b different writing styles e.g., reflective and personal vs analytical and objective
- c different types of evidence e.g., an example to illustrate a point vs. reference to a primary source.
- d use of vocabulary specific to the subject e.g., alliteration, irony, satire
- e appropriate referencing procedures e.g., footnotes, how to incorporate references into text.
- f the style and standard of work expected.

3. Provide Quality Feedback and Evaluation

All students gain from continual evaluation. For students who lack confidence, constructive feedback on their work will really help progress.

From the general (“well done”; “that’s great”; “you’re really good at that”) to the specific (“that paragraph was very effective”; “good choice of words”; “you have a prodigious knowledge of place value!”)

Evaluation is an important part of your teaching. Both you and your student need to feel you are progressing. Make regular checks of your student’s performance against the objectives you have set (e.g. improved writing skills, knowledge of topics, improvement in spelling, increased complexity in sentence structure, vocabulary development, or problem solving abilities).

4. Keep Records

Record details of your tutoring sessions, particularly if you are tutoring more than one student. Include the date of the session, what you planned to cover, what you actually covered, suggested follow up ideas and a record of progress. This record can be useful if disputes arise over incomplete work, lost drafts or inadequate preparation by either you or the student.

E. Troubleshooting Problems and Evaluating Tutoring.

1. Know the limitations of your role and skills.

Knowing your role and the limitations of your responsibility. As a tutor you are not a special education teacher, psychologist, or social worker, a teacher, an administrator, or a parent. Many problems arise from wrong expectations. If the student (or his or her teacher or parents) expect you to provide something beyond the responsibilities of your role you can often feel responsible, even when you’re not responsible. Speak and act from your understanding of your role and not from any wish to be friends with the parties concerned. It is very important that you talk to the supervisor or professor about any concerns you may have.

2. Evaluate your own performance as a tutor

The following checklist of questions may provide a useful starting point to reflect on your own tutoring practice and may help you to identify your strengths and areas to be improved:

- Was an academic problem diagnosed as reflecting a deeper misconception?
- Were the deeper misconceptions dealt with as effectively as the academic problem?
- Were you adequately prepared and familiar with the material to be taught?
- Did the plan work? If not, why not? If not were you able to adapt flexibly?
- What were the most successful and least successful aspects of the sessions?
- Would I do it differently if I were tutoring this student or topic again?
- Did the session cover essential concepts or did you get sidetracked?
- Did you try and deal with too much?
- Was the student prepared? If not, how can you encourage him or her to be better prepared in future?
- Who did most of the talking in the session?
- Did you draw things together at the end of a session?