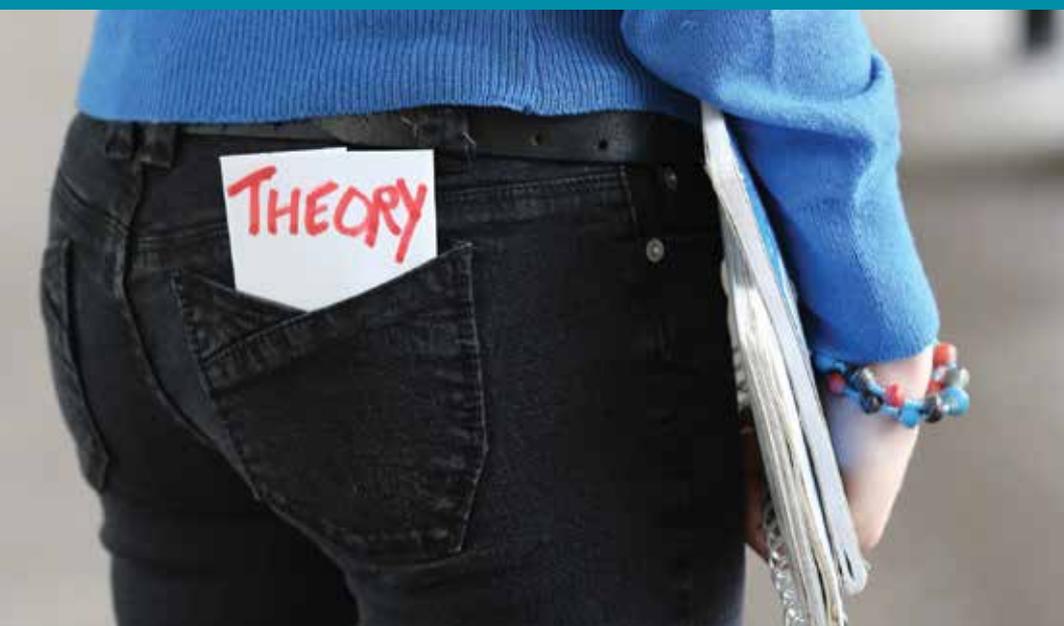


# IN THE POCKETS OF YESTERDAY'S PANTS:

Theory, practice, theory



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JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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# Learning Disabilities & the Peer Tutoring Relationship

Haley Alexander



The education system is one that is meant to accommodate millions of students each with their own individual needs and backgrounds with limited resources. With this struggle to teach all students at the same rate, students with learning disabilities (LD) fall behind and require the help of supplemental learning. Writing Centers have the ability to provide this resource by giving tutors the training required to help those students thrive. This first requires an understanding of LD student's needs. Writing Centers can better serve students learning disabilities by providing all students with a longer amount of time per session, allowing for tutor consistency and advocating for a more individualized approach to the tutoring process.

Researchers (Vogel, Fresco & Wertheim, 2007) conducted a study on over 65 college campuses and analyzed the effects of peer tutoring on students with various learning disabilities. They hoped to discover what could be done to better equip peer tutors employed by writing centers. Over the course of a year, the study found that tutees had a higher academic standing than they

did at the beginning of the year. However, the study showed that building a relationship between the tutee and the tutor was essential to the process. Therefore, in order to most effectively allow our students to benefit from our services it is imperative that we provide a consistent tutor. The study found that this practice allows the tutee to adapt to their teaching style and feel comfortable enough to communicate their needs. Consistent tutoring also allows tutors see the fruits of their labor and track the progress of the students they help. From a practical perspective, it also lets the tutor find which methods are most effective for the individual and the disability that they are trying to combat. Many writing centers do not have the option to book an appointment. In order to address this issue, writing centers must make the option of booking an appointment a common practice. The tutors who were involved in the study also said that they benefited from the relationships that were built and ended up developing a better understanding of the material following the conclusion of the study.

The average tutoring session in our center ranges from twenty minutes to an hour. The Vogel et al. study has shown that for the tutees to absorb the information required, they needed at least two hours with the tutors. Due to the student's difficulty to grasp simpler concepts, the sessions needed to be longer to grasp the same amount of information that is gone over in a typical session with a student without a learning disability. In addition to the concepts, students with learning disabilities also reported that their biggest hurdle was being able to communicate their needs and accommodating those needs. By allowing for longer tutoring sessions, tutees can take the time and allow their tutors the time to discover the best way to adjust to their specific needs. A study conducted in elementary schools studied this same phenomenon and yielded similar results.

Students that went through the program used for this research, were able to improve their reading comprehension and thus have the knowledge to better analyze and write out their thoughts. Their success was attributed to one-on-one supplemental tutoring that accompanies the traditional classroom experience. The authors also advocated for an equal emphasis on three main concepts vocabulary, reading comprehension and specific

grammar concepts. Their argument was that by putting an emphasis on reading, the writing aspect would follow close behind. This emphasis on lower order concerns coincides with the need for more time in the average tutoring session. For example, a student with dysgraphia who is not only dealing with cognitive barriers, but physical ones as well would require more attention than a half hour can feasibly provide (Osborn et al., 2007).

The Osborn et al. study was conducted on the elementary level, where building vocabulary and understanding sentence structure is the primary function of writing. On the college level, writing is used as a tool develop ideas and focus. In my experience, even typical students tend to begin a paper with a clear line of thinking and start to stray from their message in an effort to incorporate the required number of words and cited sources. This can be especially difficult for students with ADHD. When students with ADHD come to the writing center, they often produce a product that has all the components of a complete essay but lacks coherence. It is our job as tutors to give these students the direction that is required and allow them to focus their argument to produce the best result. This often manifests itself in conversation.

I have always thought that the best educators were what I like to call "knowledge ninjas". They have the ability to teach even the most complex of concepts without students even realizing they were being taught. Conversation is the perfect vehicle for this in a peer tutoring situation, especially in the form of anecdotal learning. Using "what ifs" and "why" questions, the tutees are better able to exercise eloquence without the pressure of putting it on the page. I have found that students with ADHD or dyslexia feel overwhelmed by the scale and shut down and decide that they are simply unable to complete the assignment. The idea that this occurs exclusively to students with a learning disability is simply incorrect. This phenomenon occurs with all students and makes it difficult to identify which students require the accommodations I have been proposing. Therefore, it is my hope that we grant every student that comes looking for our help with the same extra care as we would if we were aware of their circumstance. With the increasing number of people being diagnosed with these conditions, the

prognosis is clear. Instead of attempting to diagnose a student and adjust accordingly, we should spend the valuable time focusing on giving our students the best service possible by increasing the time allotted for each student; restructuring our system to provide consistency with tutors and working hard to get to know our tutees to better create an individualized approach to tutoring.

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# Shifting Gears!

Rivanold Tegomo

*Dr. Kathryn Byrne*



Reciprocity blended with writing, what a combination! Peer tutoring at the JCCC Writing Center has allowed me to pursue my passion for community service. In doing so, I wholly, without reservation, committed myself to the concept that tutoring evolves through developmental stages, marked with self-imposed checkpoints. These so-called “rites of passages” occurred after each of my sessions, when I carefully appraised my actions and derived a sense of accomplishment or failure. I cherished my breathtaking triumphs and sought to remedy the turbulent moments. On my quest to provide effective service, I reached the consensus that adaptability plays a crucial role in shifting through various tutoring hats.

Before this epiphany, I blindly approached each session with rigid protocols. I even made an outline!

“(1) Engage the student by asking about assignment goals. (2) Ask open-ended questions. (3) Explain the concept of reading aloud. (4) Review Higher Order Concerns. (5) Discuss Lower Order Concerns. (6) What will the student work on after the session? (7) Suggest a follow-up visit.”

Though all my points seem sound, I now consider them to be “bigoted protocols” that rejected multifactorial solutions. They made me stiff and unwilling to discuss other points with the student. As I faced this crucible, Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli, coauthors of *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, illuminated my perspective after discussing the various hats tutors wear.

Of the hats examined, I mostly identified with ally, coach, and collaborator. To illustrate how these hats function, let’s review one of my sessions, where a student requested help on how to articulate his response for an online class. At the beginning of our encounter, I allied the student by displaying empathy and support, especially since he was copying with a difficult task. The student was assigned to comment on a discussion that dealt with logical fallacies. At this point of the session, I altered identities and expressed the characteristics of a coach. This segment involved discussions, where we analyzed the core objects of the assignment, and I gave the student specific instructions for success. In fact, I suggested that he explore YouTube’s vast archives for working definitions and examples of logical fallacies. The student’s fulfillment of this task then prompted a final wardrobe shift, where I identified as a collaborator. While exchanging ideas with the student, I was reminded of the warning mentioned by Ryan and Zimmerelli, “the overzealous tutor may usurp papers, interjecting too many ideas and leaving writers confused... [and] perhaps less confident about their writing abilities,” (p.6). Therefore, I ensured the student led the discussions and remained engaged during our dialogue rather than feeding him information.

If we carefully reexamine this scene, we can obviously see the important role adaptability played in shifting between tutoring hats. By being more proactive and recognizing change as a necessary factor of tutoring, I was able to identify when to precisely transition between tutoring hats. Doing so allowed me to cater to the student’s specific needs and serve him as a whole. In reverse, facing sessions in a rigid manner neglects the multifaceted dimensions of services students require, such as empathy and motivation. Through my experiences, I’ve noticed how this “counterpart” style led me

to idolize assignment goals and dismiss students' personal and emotional connection to the assignment, which then frustrated their overly experience.

The next session shows how a rigid outline that idolizes the assignment goals leads to setbacks and an unfruitful encounter with the student. During this session, I neglected to formally greet the student and proceeded directly to discussing the purpose of his visit. Since he was crafting a synthesis essay, I immediately suggested that we make an outline to articulate his points in an organized manner. With this suggestion, we closed the session. Now looking back, I clearly see how I ignored the writer's self-esteem. I chose the "traditional" and subtle convenience of approaching the session with a set objective rather than showing a willingness to fellowship, listen to the writer's concerns, and possibly provide support and encouragement.

As the semester progressed, I realized that by excessively appraising my direct approach, I completely neglected the important role adaptability plays in shifting through tutoring hats. This led me to conclude that there is no "elegant design" to tutoring that allows me to input little effort and sufficiently serve the tutee. Writing reflects the intricate personality of students, so to truly equip them for success, I must shift through multiple tutoring hats. It is enough for students to seek advice on writing, so when they arrive at the JCCC Writing Center, it is my absolute duty to facilitate the reaping process. I do this by providing a continuum of adaptive services that enrich and develop student writing

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# The Importance of Positive Feedback

Sarah Dubbert



When I visited the Writing Center for the first time, my anxiety was tangible. A year prior to being hired as a writing tutor myself, I was seeking out resources to help my writing process which was uncharted territory for me. Despite having numerous teachers and peers that recommended the Writing Center's services, I'd put off going for months. Finally, I felt uneasy enough over a final term paper that my desire to receive constructive feedback outweighed my hesitancy to be vulnerable and face a very real fear of mine: sharing my writing and opening up to criticism.

Encountering a hesitant student who lacks confidence is not an uncommon occurrence in the Writing Center. College students today are overwhelmed with a plethora of responsibilities including, but not limited to, challenging classes, demanding jobs, and family obligations. The vulnerable position that students are put in when they walk through our doors of the Writing Center is also important to take into consideration. Writing is so often a personal pursuit, requiring the input of intimate narratives and opinions. Additionally, many students are insecure about their ability to write well, especially at a collegiate level. We as tutors ask the writer to read their

paper aloud in an environment where they can be overheard and must make themselves vulnerable to judgment and criticism. Maybe English isn't their first language. Maybe they struggle with anxiety. My hope is, as a tutor, I can show how to improve the writing skills of students by applying positive feedback strategies that ease this vulnerable process through creating a supportive environment, building the student's confidence, and empowering writers to be self-sufficient.

A session during my first semester as a writing tutor encompassed this aspiration to ease the tutoring process for the tutee. I sensed the writer's disposition before the session even began; dozens of papers were scattered across the table, and she was hunched over her laptop, fretfully reading a Word document. I asked about her assignment, and without taking a breath, she briefly explained her writing task before quickly transitioning to the little time she had to complete the assignment and how overwhelmed she was with her job and other coursework. A student that is overwhelmed like this can benefit from an approach called positive politeness. Positive politeness strategies are exactly what one might think; they generate rapport and a sense of solidarity between the tutor and tutee (Mackiewicz and Thompson 42). Strategies include noticing the student's accomplishments and giving praise, acknowledging difficulty and providing sympathy, and being optimistic. The key idea to focus on here is the use of conscious language. I often ask myself as a tutor, "If I were the tutee in this situation, how would I receive this information? Would I be encouraged to improve, or leave feeling dejected?" I built my rapport with the tutee by commending her on the finding and implementation of reliable, relevant sources. She smiled and took a deep breath, relaxing for the first time since she had arrived. A compliment, especially when provided in the midst of critiques, can be extremely effective in preventing a tutee from feeling disheartened. Awareness of how the tutee is feeling is imperative in ensuring they are receptive to improvement.

I encountered a similar, but uniquely challenging, tutoring scenario last Fall. Upon asking the tutee to read aloud, he immediately became nervous and confessed that he was "bad at writing" and not confident in his English.

He apprehensively agreed to read his essay aloud, and I utilized the positive politeness strategies to reassure him and offer praise before following up with critiques. However, I knew that I would need to be careful in the way I phrased them. For students who lack confidence, I have found that negative politeness, or the lessening of a criticism, can be an especially effective strategy (Mackiewicz and Thompson 49). Instead of telling him, "You should clarify the thesis statement," I alternatively said, "I would clarify the thesis statement." Speaking in "I would" statements instead of "you should" statements can avoid shaking the tutee's confidence by taking the blame off of them. The tutee was more receptive to my critiques because I phrased them as suggestions instead of interrogations. A simple change in language can have a drastic effect on student's confidence, and therefore their disposition toward writing in general.

Whilst keeping in mind how a writer is feeling is important, also crucial is that we don't lose sight of our central role as tutors: promoting students' active participation in the tutoring session. Mackiewicz's and Thompson's concept of motivational scaffolding, or the feedback, gives tutors elicits active participation (47). Motivational scaffolding is condensed into five major categories:

- 1) Praise
- 2) Statements of encouragement
- 3) Demonstrations of concern
- 4) Expressions of sympathy/empathy
- 5) Reinforcement of the students' feelings of ownership and control

The first four categories tie in with the previously discussed concepts of positive and negative politeness, and I perceive these four as a means to achieve the fifth category of successfully developing the writer's feeling of ownership. I have learned firsthand that I cannot increase a student's self-confidence unless they have been empowered to catch their own mistakes and provide their own creative solutions. Here is where the strategy of scaffolded feedback is particularly effective (Rassaei 98). In this strategy, students are encouraged to draw upon their own knowledge, and if the

student is unsuccessful, the tutor slowly increases the amount of explicit feedback given, making sure to give plenty of time between each prompt. A sequence of scaffolded feedback might play out as follows:

Do you notice a problem with this sentence?

Take a look at the verb tense.

Can you locate the verbs in the sentence?

What tense are the verbs? What tense should you be using?

Here, instead of succumbing to the temptation of pinpointing the error, the tutor gives the tutee a chance to identify the incorrect verb tense and provide a solution themselves. I have seen this process increase the student's understanding and empower them to improve on a multitude of occasions.

The implementation of positive feedback strategies may initially seem complex; however, with a heightened awareness, it becomes surprisingly intuitive. Being conscious of the language we use with writers, especially those that are lacking confidence or feeling overwhelmed, sets the tone for a supportive tutoring session that supplements active participation from the tutee. The ideas we communicate as tutors, as well as how we say them, can inspire a dispirited student to change the way they view writing.

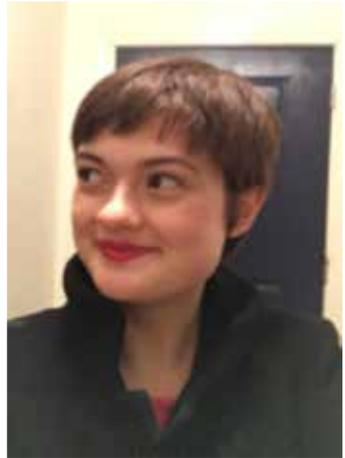
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# The Balance Beam: Directive and Non-directive Tutoring Approaches

Savannah Price



It requires immense concentration to stay on a balance beam. Sway to the left, and you lose your balance, toppling over. Sway to the right, and you fall with a magnificent thud. As tutors, we walk balance beams every day. We balance staying on task with building rapport, tweaking grammar with improving content. For me, navigating the use of directive and non-directive approaches to tutoring has proved a tricky balancing act. A directive tutoring approach involves calling attention to a student's errors and giving him advice. Non-directive tutoring approaches involve leading a student to discern her errors herself. Both methods face scrutiny: some say directive methods discourage tutees, ultimately disempowering them as writers by usurping their control. Others claim that non-directive methods leave tutees confused and frustrated. When I began working in the JCCC Writing Center, I feared discouraging students with negative feedback; giving direct answers and honest criticism intimidated me. But the non-direct questions I used didn't always lead students to the answers I wanted them to see. Thankfully, as I researched directiveness and experimented in my sessions, I discovered three ideas which revolutionized my concept of tutoring. Balanced tutoring involves constructive criticism,

empowering encouragement, and mutually-agreed upon goals.

Revolutionary idea number one: Directive and non-directive approaches can both disempower students. As Jeff Brooks points out, it's important to avoid usurping student control by acting as an editor rather than a tutor (2). Proofreading a paper hardly empowers the writer; if anything, it can strengthen bad habits by teaching that the Writing Center can clean up a messy paper. However, non-directive methods may not be the answer, either. Exit surveys collected at

the University of Texas at Austin Writing Center showed that writers most often complained about tutors' "non-directive non-productivity":



they perceived that because their tutors did not offer them direct answers or advice, their abilities and writing projects did not improve (Hedengren & Lockerd 137-138). Non-directive approaches left students feeling frustrated, not empowered.

During one of my earliest sessions, I met with a student whose narrative about a high school football game lacked emotive details. Instead of ending with reflection, Rod's essay concluded at the end of the game, without mention of how the game had impacted him. I felt nervous about directly telling Rod how to improve his paper; what if I overwhelmed him, usurped his control, or just "gave him answers" instead of helping him think for himself? So, I cushioned my advice in layers of qualifiers: "Sometimes it's nice to end a narrative with a reflective thought." I asked too many "what-do-you-think" questions. And although I questioned how well Rod understood my words, I hesitated to put him "on the spot" by making him write in front of me. Later, I realized that by dragging out the session with my questions, I'd bypassed the opportunity to give Rod on-the-spot writing practice and advice. With directness, my session could have been much more effective and efficient.

I now recognize that as tutors, we must aim for "asymmetrical collaboration" with students, as opposed to dialogic or hierarchal collaboration (Thompson

et. al. 97). To steer clear of hierarchical collaboration (i.e., the tutor acting as an authority over the student), many writing centers champion dialogic collaboration (the tutor relating to the student as an equally-experienced peer). However, dialogic collaboration encourages non-directiveness and downplays tutor expertise, diminishing student and tutor satisfaction. Asymmetrical collaboration emphasizes that the tutor offers advice as an experienced writer. Students control papers and set goals for sessions, while tutors provide expertise to help students reach their goals (Thompson et. al. 98). As a peer tutor, it's easy for me to fear giving advice and worry about how students will learn from it. But I've learned that in order to truly strengthen students, I can't shrink away from directive methods. After all, students come to the Writing Center for help; offering them constructive criticism is my job.

*Revolutionary idea number two:* Directive methods do not equal discouragement. When I began tutoring, one of my chief concerns was how



to give students feedback without hurting their feelings. I equated directive approaches with negative feedback, and negative feedback

with discouragement. However, direction involves telling a student what to do, while negative feedback involves pointing out what is *wrong*. The two don't necessarily correlate. It's true that tutors must prioritize encouragement, which is linked to both student and tutor satisfaction (Thompson et. al. 95). However, encouragement can empower, not just generate happy feelings. As tutors, we can go beyond the role of a teacher and show students what to do—directness—by pointing out the strengths in their own writing—positive feedback (Brooks 3). This encourages and teaches students.

Furthermore, associating negative feedback with discouragement may not always be accurate. According to Isabelle Thompson and her co-authors, directive approaches often encourage students instead of hurting their confidence (95-98). After all, students expect directness. If students remain in control of their papers and receive quality encouragement, directness should not detract from



a session.

*Revolutionary idea number three:* Students can learn to write by reaching their *writing* goals. As Brooks

emphasizes, tutors should prioritize strengthening writers over strengthening *writing* (1-2). But who says we can't do both? Tutors come to the Writing Center with a specific set of goals; if we show them how to meet those goals, their writing skills can only improve.

Of course, tutees sometimes expect unrealistic results from their papers: tidy grammar, perfect citations, and an A+. Tutors, on the other hand, see higher-order concerns: the second paragraph seems weak, the body lacks organization, and where is the thesis? For learning and quality work to occur, students and tutors must agree on an agenda, one that satisfies both of their needs. When I first began tutoring, I attempted to use leading questions to guide the session away from unrealistic goals and towards more pressing need. But this often proved inefficient. Using overly-directive tutoring, on the other hand, can result in the tutor controlling the entire session, focusing on his own goals (at the expense of the writer's). How do we balance these tensions?

Enter the collaborative agenda. Instead of directing a session with open-ended questions alone, tutors can help students determine goals at the beginning of a session (Thompson et. al. 98). Once a mutually-agreed upon goal is reached, tutors can direct a session by referring back to the goals they've set. I've found this concept immensely helpful. By showing students that I'm committed to helping them succeed, I build trust. Also, when collaborative goals exist, I can more easily calm anxious students and keep them engaged, reminding them to focus on the specific tasks before us. Ultimately, it's true that, as writing tutors, we exist not to improve papers but to equip students as stronger writers. Thankfully, we can work towards both objectives. Through balancing student needs with tutor insight, tutors can help students learn by helping them reach their writing goals.

The key to staying on a balance beam isn't to carefully focus on not leaning left and not leaning right; if you do that, you'll quickly fall. Rather, a successful gymnast keeps her eyes straight ahead, staying aware of whether she tilts too far towards one side. Perhaps tutors keep their balance in similar ways, since "tutoring strategies have been found most satisfactory when they are flexibly used-- when they vary between assuring students' comfort and ownership of their writing and answering students' questions to improve writing quality" (Thompson et. al. 96). Ultimately, both methods have their strengths and weaknesses; a tutor's approach should change to meet the needs of the individual she serves. However, to achieve balance, we must always stay focused on our main goal: helping students grow as writers.

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# Like a Rolling Tone

Sean Smith



Upon entering any room, some immediate features scouted by an aspiring writer may include the following: the general atmosphere, available workspace, the elegance of seating options, caffeine quantities, and perhaps an open-minded, listening ear. Being a peer tutor at the JCCC Writing Center, I like to think of myself as sometimes classifying as that listening ear. By and large, every writing project I have seen has demanded one consistent trait: a writer who minces no words and can pinpoint explicitly the assertions that they are arguing, responding to, or simply putting on the table for the reader. I have encouraged the students that I have worked with to do this in their own invigorating, personable way.

Constructing an assertive, concrete tone as a writer that can be imagined just like a verbal conversation is essential. In doing this skill, central themes and ideas register more clearly, as well as the evidence that is offered. Tone provides a distinguishable and characterized voice that is attached to the subject matter, and despite what some may think, a reader can usually tell between passages that possess strong tone versus passages that drift away

from it. On a fundamental level, all readers yearn for a pattern of continuity to maintain their build-up of intrigue and further understanding as they invest more time and energy in the activity of reading another's work. One great way to provide this engagement is cultivating a tone.

Now, inspiration can come at any time, from anywhere and in any form. However, at certain times, when deadlines are mounting, stress is escalating, and the writing remains under construction, inspiration seems lost. During these times, a writer has to be more intentional and proactive. Being productive is undoubtedly made easier when one can place him or herself in a personal comfort zone with minimal distractions. It gives me joy to say that, for some students, the JCCC Writing Center has been a place meeting this description.

As the *New York Book Editors* say in their article "A Guide to Setting Up the Perfect Work Space," eliminating unnecessary obstacles can go an awful long way to boosting the likelihood of meeting one's goals.

While you may be able to eek out fantastical tales in a less than desirable setting, you don't have to and you shouldn't. In my experience, it's a lot harder to write something epic and moving when your desk is cluttered, you're overlooking the dumpster, and your chair is more uncomfortable than Thanksgiving dinner after an election year. (New York)

When push comes to shove, finding an ideal place to write offers the clarity needed to look inward and consider the nature of one's voice. I like to think of cultivating the tone of a written work a lot like meeting a stranger: within minutes, both intentionally and unintentionally, notable qualities have been introduced in the quest of establishing a rapport.

What I often try to remind exasperated students of is the very nature of communication: oftentimes the exact opposite of easy, it comes down to the simplicity of choosing words that seem appropriate at the time when speaking to another. In this sense, writing is no different. We invoke our recent experiences, thoughts, and emotions into various makeshift everyday expressions that suffice. Just like regular dialogue in the adult world, the

time and ability does not always exist in the heat of the moment to find the absolute *perfect* words to shape the tone of what I say. I personally need to remind myself of this over and over as I do my tutor.

Sean Williams of *The Daily Utah Chronicle* articulates this concept quite well in his article "Learning a Routine for Comfortable Writing."

Don't worry as much about trying to formulate the whole [writing] in your head beforehand. In reality, most writing comes in the moment as we work to bring together all the [material] we've learned into a single place. Every piece of writing, from a spontaneous free-write to a master's thesis, will have to, at some point, be set down, turning abstract ideas into words and paragraphs. (Williams)

While brainstorming and jotting down key points can irrefutably help, a writer can also get in their own way with too much planning. I encourage students that get lost in the carnival experience of brainstorming to start a sentence with a general word that opens the floodgates, such as *interestingly* or *indeed*, and then carry that momentum to what their views of their topic are. Meanwhile, as each paragraph progresses, a writer can begin to narrow his or her views down and according to the blueprints and the chronology laid out, all with an authentic tone.

Looking at writing from this lens, tone is largely attributed to the physical personality and mannerisms of the writer. Indeed, what makes each and every one of us unique is the very ammunition that we individually have working in our favor. With a carefully calculated amount of brainstorming and evaluation, the finding of a harmonious work-space, and staying true to one's personality, any writer can produce a vibrant tone in their work. Fundamentally, our backgrounds and strengths mold the nature of our perspective. Applying them to discover one's true tone can be tricky. Yet, once it has been accessed, tone is crucial to the success of a written work. Tone bursts through a door of its' own and takes ahold of every line, letting the reader sample a taste of the author's genuine personality

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# Pause with a Cause

Teresa Pedroza



Imagine someone coming up to you, asking how you are, and then immediately answering for you. How would that make you feel? Ignored? Angry? Though rushing to a conclusion may be unintentional, when we speak this way with a student writer, we may make them feel that they think too slow or that we don't really care about what they have to say. We can prevent anyone from feeling this way by using a helpful technique called "pause procedure" (Belanoff). Simply put, pause procedure is the practice of using pauses in dialogue to reinforce ideas and allow for student writers to better understand the concepts they are trying to develop.

This technique is important for student writers and tutors. In an article titled "Silence: Reflection, Literacy, and Teaching", the author, Pat Belanoff, makes a comparison that is applicable to tutoring. Belanoff writes that reflection works in the same way: "watching a video together of a prior game can provide members of a football team the opportunity to integrate what they see into what's already stored in their heads. Each player can isolate himself while viewing, but the act of mutual reflection can allow for sharing that, in turn, can lead to changes and (hoped-for) improvements in the functioning of both individuals and the team as a whole in the next game" (Belanoff 416). The process Belanoff describes is

parallel to what tutors do in writing centers; we review, we reflect, we improve.

I can personally vouch that putting pause procedure into action reaps outstanding results. For instance, I once worked with an ESL student who was having trouble with her thesis statement. Although she wasn't talking much, I could tell that she had some questions she wanted to ask based on her body language. To get her to open up more, I would look her in the eyes, nod, smile, but stay quiet to demonstrate that I was interested in what she had to say and would wait to hear her out. Encouragement through body language alongside silence is what helped this student find her voice. Not only did she proceed to ask more questions about her assignment, but she also verbalized her anxiety about how she was doing in her class. After this, I was able to offer her advice and point her in the direction of different resources that would be helpful to her.

Our job as tutors is to work not for the student, but rather with the student to produce an outstanding paper, speech, or other writing task. Working as a team requires us to be able to thoroughly understand each other, and using pauses during a session can greatly help that. Moreover, pause procedure helps prevent the tutor from doing the tutee's work. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* puts it best when stating that "This deliberate use of wait time communicates to the writers that they are expected to think and arrive at answers on their own" (Ryan and Zimmerelli 24). As we all know, we cannot do someone's work for them and expect to see them improve as a student, so pausing is a great strategy for making sure the tutee will be responsible for getting his or her assignment done at the end of the day.

Pause procedure benefits all kinds of students. One group of people who can benefit from occasional silence during tutoring sessions are ESL students. It is easy to take for granted the ease of learning in a language one is conversational or fluent in. For a lot of us native anglophones, we don't even have to think before we speak (unfortunately). Non-native English speakers do not always have the luxury of being able to immediately comprehend what is being asked, explained, taught, and so on. Consequently, ESL students need plenty of pause time to be able to fathom what is being taught to them so they can respond accordingly.

In "International Students and the Writing Lab," Mary Jane Ogawa mentions

that her tutoring sessions with ESL students involve a lot of long pauses, because they have to translate the information they are receiving into their native language before they can even begin to formulate a response (Devet et al. 2). We should all follow Ogawa's example, because taking longer pauses after explaining a new idea gives ESL students the chance to take in information, translate it into their native language, formulate a response, translate that response into English, and verbalize their answer. ASL students benefit from pause procedure also. If a tutor working with an ASL student just keeps questioning or talking, the student has absolutely no time to take in all of the information and then respond or ask for clarification.

Students with learning disabilities benefit from pause silences as well. When working with these students, one must be patient and listen closely to their needs. These writers will shut down if they don't understand a concept that is being explained, so different strategies that can help them build up their confidence when confronting difficult areas of writing must be given consideration. Pausing often to ensure the student's comfort can alleviate their confusion, frustration, and other difficult feelings.

The last group pause procedure is helpful for is—predictably—everyone else. Indeed, all writers with basic writing knowledge to the most skillful writer need time to sit and think. Rarely can a writer crank out a perfect research essay from start to finish in one sitting. Most writers benefit from reflecting on what he or she knows and then wrangling with the words to state it clearly.

Pause procedure requires knowing what to look for during cessations in dialogue. For example, shyer students and some students in general might hesitate before they pose an inquiry or follow-up question. By assessing the writer's body language, we can give them the opportunity to sort out what they want to say and give them time to ask said questions at their own pace. If the tutee has his or her head down and is rubbing the back of their neck, it's perhaps an indication of confusion, requiring a repeat explanation.

Observing body language provides insight when working with a doubtful student. As Ellen Mohr notes in "As students struggle with their writing, they may not know how to ask the questions or describe the problems they are having. They just know they need help" ("Listening" 4). Again, the tutor

provides some clarity simply by waiting and taking the time to assess physical queues during pauses. Pausing can be the difference between leaving your writer in confusion or helping them comprehend a new concept.

I used pause practice while working with a student who was clearly frustrated with her class when our session first started. While I tried to ask her about her assignment, the student kept interrupting me with comments about how much she disliked her professor. After she realized that I was willing to stop and listen to her concerns rather than give her a hollow response in passing, she was able to regain her composure and edit her paper peacefully and with confidence. Utilizing appropriate pauses during tutoring sessions leaves students in a receptive state that permits them to learn and work with others in a more efficient way.

During your next tutoring session, try to be cognizant of your pauses. Are they an appropriate length? Are they present at all? A lot of people don't like silence because it comes across as awkward or uncomfortable in our society. Stopping to pause when you have a really good idea to share is hard to do when a tutor is fully engaged in developing the paper and sharing ideas. Tutors who do not or cannot pause but continue to speak can be a detriment to the writer in spite of good intentions; by not pausing we get in the way of our writer's ability of presenting opportunities for themselves. It is important to remember that "[l]istening is not a passive act, in fact, it requires active participation, careful deliberation, and thoughtful consideration" (Mohr 5).

## **Works Cited**

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# Encouraging Independent Revision

Valerie Lewis



Every Writing Center has its regulars, and second language (L2) students are some of the most common regulars in writing centers. We see the same faces multiple times throughout the semester. Some students come in for every assignment to fix the grammar before turning it in the next morning. Some come in multiple times for the same assignment to ensure the ideal grade. Either way, L2 students are statistically more likely to work on only improving their paper in the Writing Center (Williams). In my own tutoring sessions with these students, I also noticed they tend to make hardly any changes on their own, instead preferring to rely on a tutor pointing out all their errors. This can cause a dependency on writing centers and tutors rather than encourage independent growth in their writing abilities, the essential purpose and goal of writing centers. Tutors can positively impact second language students' ability and willingness to revise independently by implementing a direct, active approach and using lower order concerns (LOCs) to highlight higher order concerns (HOCs).

One of the regulars at our writing center comes multiple times for help with every writing assignment. After a while, I noticed the only revisions this student made would be the ones suggested by the me – none of them were her own. At first, I believed her to be a student who simply was not interested in improving, but Jessica Williams’ research shows that much of the responsibility falls on the tutor and his or her approach (“Tutoring”). Williams and other researchers videotaped and transcribed five tutoring sessions with second language writers. The writers’ drafts immediately following the tutoring session were compared to the final draft submitted by the writer. In the revised drafts, the researchers looked for minor revisions, such as grammar and/or sentence level issues, significant changes, such as organization and/or complete rewrites, and how much the writers’ individual changes matched with the issues discussed in the tutoring session. Unsurprisingly, the nature and content of each tutoring session did indeed influence the individual revisions, and it was all about the type of tutoring approach used.

In these sessions, some of the tutors approached their sessions, by implying a possible change in order to encourage independent thinking. This tactic can be effective in sessions with unmotivated native language speakers; however, second language students tend to interpret those as unnecessary or simply not understand them. But Williams recommends direct rather than implicit suggestions as those seemed to be understood more by the student as evident in their own revisions. In my own sessions with the student, this approach lessened the communication barrier and caused her to be much more open to my suggestions. However, the recorded sessions also showed that when a tutor took the student’s word that he or she understood a suggestion and then moved on to the next suggestion, the student actually did not understand and apply the changes themselves. With my student, I started to pay more attention to the nods or one word answers and when this happened, I had her apply those suggested changes. Often, I would see if and where the student was confused; from there, I would apply Williams’ suggestion and explain my thought process with a statement like, “This would support this paragraph’s main idea, this is why I think that,

and here is how I came to that conclusion.” I ensured this student’s active participation by having her illustrate what I taught her. Then, by providing a step-by-step explanation of how I got there, the student was able and more willing to apply those changes on her own. All these methods showed significant differences in the amount of individual revisions completed by the student, in William’s research and in my own sessions.

Another second language student regularly posed a different challenge. This time, he only wanted to fix grammar and resisted any other suggestions, both in the sessions and in his own revisions. As a result, he only made mechanical changes; his content and organization did not improve. It’s a mutually accepted in writing centers that higher order concerns (HOCs) should always be given priority over lower order concerns (LOCs). However, some of my own experience and the research of Julie Columbo shows that this can be ineffective in certain instances when the student wants to focus on grammar only, a relatively quite common occurrence for second language students. According to Columbo’s research, more effective tutoring approaches exist other than the traditional HOCs then LOCs method for these specific situations and provide more independent revision.

Forcing the L2 student to focus on HOCs rather than their primary concerns can cause frustration for the student, leading to their unwillingness to make revisions based on suggestions relating to HOCs. Grammar mistakes, especially the amount often made by second language students, can cause a rippling effect, negatively impacting the writing process and content-level development. Unwillingness was the main obstacle I faced with my tutee as I attempted to focus on the higher order concerns. Our intentions created a communication barrier as did the clumsy grammar. Between the distracting grammar and each of us having a different agenda, confusion was dominating the session. To solve dilemmas like these, Columbo suggests starting with LOCs and using those issues to highlight the HOCs because it brings more clarity for the L2 student as well as more willingness from the student to cooperate. I tried this with the student focused on grammar by helping him correct his prepositions in his thesis statement. Once these issues we’re resolved, I was able to understand his main argument. By

showing how this misuse of prepositions in his thesis statement caused me as the reader to misinterpret his argument, he was much less resistant to my suggestions because I was helping him with what he deemed important while also improving his content and clarity. Through examples of her own tutoring sessions, Columbo shows that by linking the LOCs with the HOCs in sessions with second language students, a tutor can help the student become a more independent writer.

One of the most challenging obstacles in tutoring our second language student regulars is helping them become independent writers. I see how their insecurities with a less familiar language causes dependency on writing centers and tutors. We can help prevent this dependency through several methods. Tutors can show L2 students through example and by explaining the thought process. After showing the student how, tutors can have them try to apply it themselves – this may be the only indicator of how well the student is understanding it. For second language students focused on grammar, try linking HOCs through LOCs by using the L2 students' grammar concerns to bring clarity and make the HOCs more approachable for the student. These slightly adjusted tutoring approaches for second language students can help effectively transition them into becoming independent writers.

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- Williams, Jessica. "Tutoring and Revision: Second Language Writers in the Writing Center." *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol.13, no.3, Sept. 2004, pp. 173–201. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.009.



## Associations

### **International Writing Center Association**

<http://writingcenters.org/>

### **Midwest Writing Center Association**

<http://pages.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/>

### **National Association on Peer Tutoring in Writing**

<http://www.ncptw.org/>

### **CRLA (College Reading and Learning Association)**

<http://www.crla.net/>

## Helpful Links

### **Grammar Bytes**

<http://www.chompchomp.com/exercises.htm>

### **ONELook.com (dictionary resource)**

<http://www.onelook.com/>

## Journals and References

### **Kairos: a multimedia journal**

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/>

### **College Composition and Communication (JCCC link)**

<http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublication?journalCode=collcompcomm&>

### **CompPile (resource for Peer Writing Tutors)**

<http://compfaqs.org/WritingCenters/WritingCenters>

### **Writing Center Journal**

<http://casebuilder.rhet.ualr.edu/wcrp/wcjournal/search.cfm>

### **Praxis: A Writing Center Journal**

<http://projects.uwc.utexas.edu/praxis/>

### **Writing Lab Newsletter**

<http://www.writinglabnewsletter.org/>

## BLOGS

### **Friends of the Writing Center Journal**

<http://writingcenterjournal.blogspot.com/>

### **IWCA Discussion Forum**

<http://www.writingcenters.org/board/index.php>

### **Peer Centered**

<http://www.peercentered.org/>

