

<http://istudy.psu.edu/FirstYearModules/PeerTutoring/PeerTutorInfo.htm>

Information about Peer Tutoring

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Establishing the Environment

Before peer tutoring starts, it is important to establish a neutral and casual environment for the tutoring session. This should be a space where both the tutor and tutee feel comfortable to ask questions and explore ideas. For example, meeting in a dorm room or office is less desirable because this gives one of the participants a "home-court" advantage.

Also, make sure the location is quiet and free from distractions. For example, the open areas and eating areas in the Student Union buildings are not as practical as an open, empty classroom because of all of the other people and distractions. The library may not be ideal either, because the imposed quiet might stifle conversation.

Finally, make sure to have the assignment sheet available for reference & extra paper for scratch work.

Building Rapport

When you have a good rapport with someone, you look forward to meeting with them. You feel free to talk openly with them about a variety of subjects and you appreciate their thoughts and ideas, as well. Establishing a good rapport between the tutee and the tutor is essential in peer tutoring. Because the peer tutoring session is not intended as a traditional teacher-student relationship, but rather as a conversational dialogue, it is important that both parties are engaged in the process. Always keep in mind that a conversation needs two speakers. Both the tutor and the tutee need to feel free to ask questions and reflect on ideas.

- **Make eye contact.** Looking someone in the eye is an easy way to let them know that you are paying attention and feel confident. Because this look is traditionally challenging, try not to meet the eye for too long. Maintain contact for as long as you feel is necessary, and then look somewhere else.
- **Keep your body relaxed.** Tension spreads through people. When someone is nervous and tense, other people have that same sense of urgency. Take deep breaths and let yourself relax. Try to let arms hang loose and keep shoulders and head in a relaxed and straight position.
- **Break the invisible wall.** People often keep a sphere of personal space around themselves. Stepping into this space for a minute will help gain confidence. Touching a hand, shoulder or shaking hands are all signs of confidence and strength.
- **Facial expressions.** Your facial expressions play a big part in projecting a good impression, so be sure to look interested by maintaining good eye contact, smiling and nodding appropriately while you listen.
- **Unconscious gestures.** Be wary of actions like fidgeting in your seat, shaking your legs under the table, biting your nails, touching your hair, fiddling with your ring or earrings or constantly glancing at your watch. Not only are these gestures distracting, they also give the impression that you are nervous, not confident, uninterested or in a hurry to get the session over with.
- **Smile!** Smiling adds warmth and an aura of confidence. Others will be more receptive if you remember to check your expression.
- **Lean in.** The angle of your body gives an indication to others about what's going through your head. Leaning in says, "Tell me more." Leaning away signals you've heard enough.
- **Remember posture.** Your posture is just as important as your grandmother always said it was. Sit or stand erect if you want to be seen as alert and enthusiastic. When you slump in your chair or lean on the wall, you look tired. No one wants to do business with someone who has no energy.



Approaching the Work

As you "read" your tutee and begin to establish a genuine rapport, you also need to begin to approach the material in question. However, it is important to keep a few ideas in mind as you start.

- Remember that you are a tutor, not a teacher. It is not your role to instruct, but rather to investigate the material with a peer. You do not need to be an expert to be a tutor. A tutor needs simply to be informed and open to exploring information.
- You are not there to correct. The tutor is there to listen, to ask questions, to offer feedback and to facilitate a dialogue about a given subject.
- You should not hold the pen. This means that the tutee should do the work.

So, as a tutor, the two roles you want to avoid are:

- Don't be the teacher
- Don't be the author



Listening, Questioning, and Responding

Listen Carefully

As a tutor, one of your more important roles is to be an effective listener. A good tutor is able to listen to the concerns of the tutee and reflect those back. If the tutor cannot listen to the needs and questions of the tutee, then the conversational aspect of the session degrades into an instructional teacher-student relationship.

Listening Tips:

- **Resist assuming you know** what tutees are going to say. Let the tutee completely finish speaking before you answer. Speakers appreciate having the chance to say everything they would like to say without being interrupted. When you interrupt, it looks like you aren't listening, even if you really are.
- **Listen carefully through distractions**, such as other students in the hallway. Give your full attention on the person who is speaking. Don't look out the window or at what else is going on in the room.
- **Make sure your mind is focused.** It can be easy to let your mind wander if you think you know what the person is going to say next, but you might

be wrong! If you feel your mind wandering, change the position of your body and try to concentrate on the tutee's words.

- **Avoid emotional involvement.** Listen as objectively as possible. Begin listening to others from a neutral, open-minded state. This allows you to really concentrate and focus on what others are saying to you.
- **Give extra time.** Avoid upstaging tutees or answering before a student has finished speaking. Instead, give the tutee extra time to consider and respond to your questions. Allow yourself time to finish listening and think about what the tutee has said or written before you begin to speak. You can't really listen if you are busy thinking about what you want to say next.
- **Notice subtext.** Pay attention not only to the logical content of what someone is saying but also to how they say it, that is, how they feel about the subject under discussion. It turns out that how people feel about an issue or a person is a key determinant in decision-making. If you listen for emotions rather than words, you'll notice an interesting thing--you'll absorb both and understanding will be deeper.
- **Show you are listening.** While a tutee is speaking, use your body language to show you are listening.
- **Show respect for the other person.** Respond in such a way that proves you are taking the other person seriously. Demonstrate respect for their point of view.

Ask Effective Questions

Another key role that a tutor performs is to ask effective and stimulating discussion questions. By asking the right questions, a tutor can help create a dialogue for the tutee that the tutee can replay later by him/herself.

As you listen, you will naturally find yourself asking questions. Ask questions to engage the tutee, to clarify what has been said, and to show that you've been listening. Effective questioning helps to continue to build rapport as well as provide information about the work at hand.

Tips for Asking Effective Questions:

- **Be sure the question you are asking is clear** in your own mind. Think through what you want from the student before you ask the question. Avoid ambiguous questions. Questions should be purposeful and direct. Since tutoring sessions are usually brief, questions need to accomplish a lot in a small amount of time.
- **Ask only one question at a time.**
- **Use "probing."** Probing is the use of further questions to force the student to put together his or her partial knowledge into a more complete answer. Probing often involves the use of follow-on or leading questions to

help the student answer the initial question or to provide a more complete answer.

- **Avoid leading questions.** Questions, such as "Don't you all think that ...?" will not encourage students to offer their opinions and views on the subject. Students often believe that they should wait to be told the answer and that they should think the same way as the tutor.
- **Avoid yes/no questions and questions that require only a one-word response.** It is difficult to get a discussion going or foster an active learning environment by asking students questions that only require a one-word response.
- **Admit when you don't know the answer.** You'll lose more credibility by trying to fake an answer than by stating that you don't know. If you don't know the answer to a student's question, say so, "That's a good question. I'm not sure about that." Follow up by looking for the answer.
- **Try to use natural language.** Tutees tend to be intimidated by technical talk.
- **Try to focus on what is needed rather than what is missing** (e.g., "You need an analysis section" vs. "You failed to analyze . . .").
- **Acknowledge.** Make sure that each comment is greeted with some gesture of acknowledgment: a head nod, a smile, a verbal "Good" or "Interesting" or "I see what you mean."
- **Look for chances to give positive feedback,** (e.g., "Now that's an intriguing way to look at it" or "Exactly, you've hit the nail on the head.") Use more positive than negative language in verbal responses. Use encouraging statements to show your interest and to keep the student talking about an important area. These include the simple "I see", "uh-huh" and "yes, keep going."
- **Handle "wrong" answers by dignifying students' responses.** Dignify an erroneous response by indicating what question the answer *is* correct for, and then clarifying why it's not correct for the question you asked (e.g., "That would be correct if X were true, but remember that this situation is different because of Y," or "I see why you might think that, because the terms are easy to confuse. However, keep in mind that we're talking about Z.").
- **If a student does not or cannot respond, don't force the issue.** Try rephrasing the question or probing to get to the question you have asked. Avoid answering the question yourself. Allow the tutee plenty of time to think and respond.
- **Look for chances to refer back to a student's earlier contribution** to weave into the current discussion (e.g., "That ties in nicely to what you said earlier about X.").

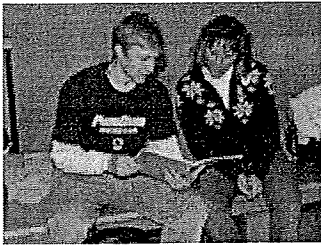
Make Effective Verbal Responses

As you are working with and listening to your tutee, you will want to continue to progress through the task at hand by building the dialog

and showing that you are interested and involved. Making effective verbal responses will also help to clarify the materials being discussed as well as reinforce the rapport you are building.

Tips for Responding:

- **Praise.** Remember to give praise whenever possible.
- **Restate.** Restating means that you repeat what you have heard to validate that you understand.
- **Summarize.** Summarizing means that you take a lot of information and restate it in a very high-level way to again validate that you heard correctly.
- **Reflect.** This is similar to restating, except that you bring the student's feeling into the mix. This includes statements like "I see you are passionate about this idea. Let me make sure I have the information right," or "You seem to feel that ...," or "My perception is that you don't think this is a good idea."
- **Encourage the tutee and compliment any strengths.** Positive feedback is important in developing an enjoyment of learning. We always want to let the tutee know that he or she is working on an engaging topic, or, for example, has excellent ideas and solid organization.
- **Try to determine the reason the tutee has trouble** with a certain area. For example, maybe the thesis statement is missing because the tutee thinks of it as a stupid part of some teacher's mechanical formula for writing a paper. We might then explain that a good thesis statement will tell the reader what the paper will be about, and will help the reader develop an interest in reading the paper to see how the thesis is supported.
- **"Always ask."** Asking questions ensures that the tutee is thinking along with us and increases the probability that he or she will remember what we have discussed. Once tutees get used to answering questions, they will also start to ask the questions themselves, so the questioning technique helps avoid the problem of tutees becoming over-dependent on tutors.
- **Do not assign or anticipate grades.** Our tutorials are based on the learning process as a whole. While some self-evaluation from a tutor may prove to be beneficial in helping to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the tutee's understanding of a particular concept, tutors should not allow themselves to be tempted into predicting what grade an assignment will receive. Let instructors worry about grades.
- **Try to avoid evaluative language.** Using words like "good" or "bad" implies a universal truth. Instead provide feedback based on your own opinions of the assignment (e.g. "I like how you used transitions here.").



Feedback

Finally, as you are addressing the work with your tutee, it is your job to offer useful feedback. Remember that it is not the tutor's responsibility to make sure the paper or assignment is perfect. Your job is to help the tutee further understand key concepts. Therefore, when offering feedback keep these ideas in mind:

- **Prioritize the information you discuss.** Don't discuss every detail, because that can overwhelm and frustrate a tutee more than it can help. Focus on key concepts and help the tutee work through those.
- **Try bouncing questions back to the tutee.** Occasionally, it is OK to answer direct questions, but more often, try to encourage tutees to work through ideas and come up with their own answers. (e.g.: "What do you think?")

Tips for Giving Effective Feedback:

- **Prioritize areas that would benefit from attention.** An effective and logical guideline is one that proceeds from the "global" to the particular. For example, in a writing assignment, there's no point in revising sentence structure, if the organization needs work and sentences may be dropped anyway. For global concerns, we can examine whether the paper fits the criteria for the assignment or is written effectively for the intended audience. We can also discuss how well the content of the paper is developed and if the ideas exhibit unity. We might also look at how those ideas are organized and presented and what type of tone or style the paper uses. After those concerns have been addressed, the mechanics of the paper, such as punctuation and grammar, can be reviewed
- **Focus on sharing ideas and information, rather than giving advice.** Feedback tends to be more effective when it is two-way. Encourage discussion. Both praise and constructive criticism should be included. If feedback is always negative, then motivation will be low. (e.g. "I know when I write, I often get frustrated with introductions because there are so many ways to start. What frustrates you about this intro?")
- Research has shown that **regular and continuous feedback** is a major factor in enhancing performance and motivation because it enables

individuals to judge more clearly how they are performing against their objectives/targets and other expectations.

- **Encourage self-criticism.** People are more willing to accept criticism when they have recognized their own strengths and weaknesses. Start by encouraging them to appraise themselves and then build on their own insights. (e.g. "What do you feel gives you the most trouble with writing? Where do you feel that algebra loses you?")
- **Be helpful rather than critical.** Negative feedback can destroy confidence and motivation. Balance out and keep a sense of perspective. (e.g. "I really like your attention to description in this paragraph. It draws me in as the reader. Are there other places you could add more of this descriptive detail?")
- **Be specific whether you are criticizing or praising.** Detailed information is more likely to reinforce what happened than vague or woolly statements. Own the feedback. Use "I" statements based on your observation. (e.g. "I think your introduction paragraph is solid and well-crafted, but I'm not sure what your point is in this second paragraph. I feel that it is either about X or Y. How do you feel about it?")
- **Be selective.** Give as much information as they can use. Too many examples or points will dilute the feedback and could lead to complacency or defensiveness.
- **Be forward looking.** Offer constructive comments that offer alternatives on what could be done differently in the future. Even though it's cliched, remember the old saying: Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime.
- **Discuss it.** Don't give the feedback and run. Stay to explore the topic in more detail. Have they understood? Do they want to discuss future action plans in more detail? Would they like feedback on other aspects?
- **Listen.** You can't make any judgments on validity if you have a closed mind. If you are convinced that there is only one way for the tutee to solve the problem, then you are limiting the options available for revision and/or discovery. For instance, if you are convinced that the corrected sentence must read -- *While Jake roasted the potatoes, Jill sat ready with her fork.* - - then you are limiting the tutee's ability to scrap the sentence and/or add a completely new idea, such as: *Jake sat roasting potatoes, as he had done for years in Montana. This was second nature to him, so he didn't much notice Jill, who sat tapping her fork on her plate.*
- **Suspend judgment.** Try not to put your own thoughts in until you take your time and make some mental notes to check out later.
- **Let them finish.** Don't jump in, wait for the tutee to finish talking and you have a full picture.
- **Avoid arguing, denying, justifying or minimizing.** It's their point of view; decide what you want to do with the information.

Rapport is the "glue" that makes the tutor/tutee relationship productive. Therefore, an important aspect of the tutorial experience is that you, as a tutor, are able to 'read' your tutee and make him or her feel at ease in the situation. Being aware of body language -- both your own and your tutee's -- and understanding the subtext of your tutee's verbal responses will help make sure that both you and your tutee are engaged.

Begin by introducing yourself. The initial greeting and chit-chat is when you can connect with your fellow student and begin to establish a rapport which will determine the direction the session will take. This is where you begin to get acquainted with the tutee. Find out if this is her or his first visit. If it is, describe what to expect.



If tutees are uncomfortable or apprehensive, try to put them at ease through conversation, but also through body language. A good acronym to remember about body language when beginning to build a rapport is **LOOSER**. Each letter of the word will help you remember the six points listed below.

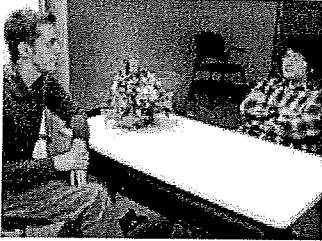
- L: Lean in towards the tutee; approach the tutee.
- O: Offer hospitality (a handshake, a soft drink, to hang up coat).
- O: Open posture, legs not crossed, arms not crossed.
- S: Smile, nod.
- E: Eye contact.
- R: Relax.

If your tutee continues to be tense in spite of your efforts to help her feel more comfortable and establish a rapport, you might try getting her to relax by modeling a relaxed -- but attentive -- posture. Try mirroring the tutee's stance, then gradually uncross your arms and legs. It's human nature for the tutee to mirror you. At the same time, you need to be aware of your own body language -- just as it's natural for the tutee to mirror you, it's also natural for you to mirror the tutee!

When starting a tutoring session, it is important to help the student feel comfortable. Some of the things you might have suggested doing in your answer would be:

- to make eye contact with the student
- introduce yourself
- shake hands with the student

- smile and act friendly
- offer to take the student's coat
- look for ways to make the student physically comfortable, for instance, offer him or her a comfortable chair to sit in
- find a general topic to chat about
- find out if this is the student's first visit for tutoring
- let the student know you are interested by listening carefully and responding attentively to what he or she says



Establishing Proper Body Language

As you can see from the information you just read, when establishing a rapport and working with a tutee your body language is just as important as your verbal language. Here are some tips below. These tips will help you be aware of the messages you are sending, as well as the messages the tutee is sending. Remember to consciously "read" the tutee, so you can help them feel more comfortable without forgetting to pay attention to the messages you are sending with your own body language.

Body Language Tips:

- **Limit arm-folding.** Folded arms communicate distance and create a barrier. Though you may simply fold your arms as a relaxed way to stand or to keep yourself warm, the gesture can be distancing to others no matter what the intention.
- **Limit hands-on-hips.** Hands-on-hips can be a threatening or confrontational gesture.
- **Avoid finger-pointing.** This gesture is traditionally a reprimand, an accusation, a way of targeting the culprit. Instead, gesture to students with an open, upturned palm.
- **Show animation.** Try to use your hands while you speak. Making hand motions increases the chances that people will pay attention to you. Hand movements can also help clarify your points.
- **Pay attention.** One of the key aspects of good body language is paying attention to someone, and also looking like you are paying attention. Nodding the head occasionally and making positive remarks will let someone know that you are interested in what they are saying. Take notes, if that is appropriate.