THE ALLYN AND BACON GUIDE TO PEER TUTORING

SECOND EDITION

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THE TUTORING PROCESS

In this chapter, we want to take you through the entire tutoring process—from opening a session to closing one—and provide some powerful tutoring strategies. We'll expand on these strategies in subsequent chapters as we take you from anticipating (Chapter 4), observing (Chapter 5), and then participating in sessions, first with your fellow trainees (Chapter 6), and then on your own (Chapter 7). We'll also offer ways to think about specific situations you'll encounter: helping students with their reading (Chapter 8), helping nonnative English speakers (Chapter 9), analyzing your sessions (Chapter 11) and, finally, troubleshooting those many difficult situations that all tutors encounter (Chapter 13).

We'll frame our overview of the tutoring process by showing how tutors approach each stage of a session and contrast that with what editors might do in the same situation. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the most important contrasts in writing center work is the difference between editing and tutoring. You are probably already a skilled editor, and your services are in demand from friends and classmates. Also, by no means do we want to denigrate the good work that many editors do (after all, you might choose that career); however, writing center work is based on the belief that writers need to do the writing, not their tutors. Like any of the contrasts we presented, the tutor/editor one is on a continuum, and there'll probably be instances outside of the writing center where you'll be closer to the editing end (and hopefully be paid for that challenging service). In the writing center, though, we advise you to tutor, not to edit; after all, it's the writer whose name is going on that paper, who's paying for those credits,

and who'll be getting the grade. But before we get too strident, we need to define in more detail the differences between editing and tutoring.

When you think of an editor, you might think of a cranky, hard-bitten, cigar-chomping Perry White, calling all the shots and making all the decisions, sending Clark Kent and Lois Lane off on assignments. Or you might think of someone who is responsible for making someone else's good writing perfect—that is, a proofreader. Real editors of various kinds probably wouldn't like these stereotypes of their work, but these descriptions come close to what a lot of friends do when they are asked to look over a paper. That is, your friend hands over the paper, picks up your last slice of pizza, and loses himself in *Days of Our Lives* while you go to work with a pen or a pencil.

You might limit your looking over of the paper to proofreading, and this usually involves making corrections for your friend; it may go beyond proofreading and involve suggesting a better word or a better sentence; it may even involve some advice: "I had a class with her, and she always wants you to . . ." When you do this kind of editing for your friends, you are assuming a large measure of control over their papers (and often they want you to). For tutors, however, this control can squelch any real learning on the writer's part.

THE TUTOR DOES NOT—AND DOES—HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT

An important difference between editors and tutors has to do with the idea of being an expert. Editors are often seen as expert wordsmiths, always knowing the right word, the correct grammatical fix, or the key passage to delete. The writers you work with might indeed put you in this role, just as some of your friends might have, but tutoring expertise is quite different.

As a tutor, you don't have to be an expert on the subject matter of the paper the writer is working on, and you don't even have to be an expert on grammar and correctness—knowing that something isn't right is probably enough (though having a good working knowledge of English grammar and usage can often be helpful, particularly with nonnative English speakers who will know those rules quite well). But you do have to be an expert in some things, each of which we'll explain in more detail in this chapter: knowing how to set a good tone for the conference and making the writer feel comfortable; knowing which kinds of issues to address first; being patient and listening to the entire paper, since it's easy to get hung up on an early section when the real challenge might come later; knowing how to ask questions that are open-ended (not questions that can be answered with a yes or no) and that you really want answers to and don't know already; knowing techniques that let the writer make the decisions; knowing that sometimes our questions take time to answer and having the patience to wait for the writer to come up with a reply; and knowing that when the writer revises, many of the problems with correctness will improve.

As a tutor, rather than as an editor, you'll have to know when more is needed—that is, when there are so many problems that you can't deal with them all in one session—and you'll have to know what to do with students who can't complete everything. You'll have to get a sense that with some writers, you can't address every last problem in the paper, and you'll have to be able to choose one or two to begin with, but then encourage the writer to come for more help. You'll have to know when a writer needs to come back after revision to work on correctness. You'll know that scheduling another appointment at the end of the session is a good way to help the writer stick to her resolve to revise and that the next session should be with you again, if schedules permit. You'll have to be sensitive to due dates; if the writer only has an hour, she may appreciate knowing that she needs to rethink her organization, but chances are she won't be able to do much about it, so you and she can focus on correctness. But you'll also have to know that it's a good idea to invite her back so she'll have a better sense of how to organize and what effect organization has on readers.

All of that is a lot to learn. But as you see, being an expert on grammar didn't even come up. And the writer is responsible for being the expert on her subject matter. If you know the subject well, that's wonderful, but if you don't, it's all right. You can usually still tell what kind of paper is appropriate, whether or not the arguments are well supported, if the organization is clear to you, and whether the audience is being addressed in an effective way.

Nevertheless, we need to mention that there are times that disciplinary expertise will be important. For example, a writing tutor who is a biology major will have much more knowledge of how to approach writing up scientific data than would someone who's never had to approach that task, and a business major will know more about the specifics of writing a business plan than would a theology major. In other words, depending on your major and your experience, you might have specific knowledge about the writing conventions of particular majors or disciplines. Now, this isn't to say that, as a tutor, you'll merely tell the writers, "No, the results of your experiments do not go in your methods section." Instead, you'll have even greater knowledge of the important questions to ask than would a more "general" tutor: "Why did you put your results in the methods section? How have other writers dealt with that placement in some of the research articles you've read?" Your goal is still to let writers control their own work, but your expertise in these matters can be quite valuable. Many writing centers have recognized this value and recruit tutors—often graduate students—from a wide variety of majors, encouraging writers to match up with someone in their discipline. But we also want to repeat a warning: As a

tutor, rather than an editor, your job isn't to offer content expertise and launch into a protracted lecture on the roots of the Russian Revolution. You need to respect writers' need to discover—with your help—the information they need to clarify a point or expand an argument.

BREAKING THE ICE

Dawna commented in her tutor-training class one day that her first visit to the writing center a few months before had been a disappointment because of *her* expectations. She'd had a presentation in her literature class by a tutor and had been told about the role of the writing center but still believed that the writing center was a place where experts told you how to fix your paper. She felt that the tutor wasn't doing a good job because he expected her to do all the revising. She asked if there wasn't a good way to let writers know when they first arrive what will happen in the session. As a result, we've started asking writers, "Have you been here before?" If they have, then we can relax and get started. If not, after we ask some initial questions about the assignment and the stage of the project, we give writers a good idea of what will happen and possibly help them to avoid disappointment or frustration.

Writers can come to the writing center with either clear or vague ideas of what will happen, but many come with apprehensions and vulnerabilities. Some see it as a sign that they are not strong writers (it isn't, necessarily). Most are nervous. So taking a few minutes to get to know the writer is really important. Even if you only have a short time to work together, it's important to set a collegial, congenial, friendly tone during those crucial first minutes.

Here are some e-journal entries based on a question about making writers comfortable.

> I think the two main reasons that students are so afraid to come to the WC is because they are afraid to show their work and also because they may not feel as smart as they really are. It boils down to a confidence issue, and I think it is part of the job as a tutor, to help them maintain their confidence.
>
> —Kip

> I think that students feel awkward enough having something as personal as their writing examined and shared with another. . . . It's important to establish a rapport with them that lets them know you're on their level, not this abstract pedestal of English superiority. As a tutor, I think it's important to develop skills that let you gauge and read a person, get a feeling from them. A lot of times, you can just try to be warm and friendly, and humorous. That seems to ease most people. Some writers who are more shy may be scared off by that. In that case, I think it could help just to be more gentle, more reassuring.
>
> —Maggie

> In most of my observations, the tutors begin the session by asking the writer what they know about the Writing Center. This allows the tutor to explain why the writer is going to read the paper aloud, which seems to make the writer a bit more comfortable. I've also noticed that the MORE dialogue that takes place before the paper is read, the MORE comfortable the writer seems to feel. It is almost as though the writer needs to establish a "relationship" with you before just diving into the tutoring session.
>
> —Stephanie N

> The most effective session I have watched is one in which Katie had an ESL student. I could tell that he was very apprehensive about reading his paper because his English wasn't very good, and here he had two people to read it to. . . . To get the session going, she just asked him about what he was trying to say (it was a personal statement for an application) and then really listened to him tell the story in his own words and then we worked to put that more concisely than he had it.
>
> —Liz K

START WITH QUESTIONS

So, you're on your first shift in the writing center, you've broken the ice, and now you're ready to help that first eager writer, paper clutched in his hand. What do you do? Think about the way you might look over a friend's paper when you are in the role of editor. Chances are, you take the paper and probably go off with it, perhaps somewhere quiet, where you can concentrate.

As a tutor, you're going to do this process differently. We train our tutors to start by asking writers a few basic questions before they even consider the draft:

- What was the assignment?
- What is your central point or main argument? (We don't say "what is your thesis?" or the writer is likely to read us a sentence that won't help us much. When the writer sums the paper up and we write that down,

sometimes the summary is a better thesis than the one in the paper. We can then help the writer see that, so write down the paraphrase for later.)
- What concerns you, or what do you want me to pay careful attention to? (And we write this down, because we'll surely come back to it later and either reassure the writer or address the issue that's raised.)

After you write those answers down, you're ready to work with the writer on the draft.

READING ALOUD

The next step is probably a major shift from what you're used to doing: We recommend that you ask the writer to read the paper aloud to you while you take notes. If you've never done this before, we know that this idea takes some getting used to. But think of the action of taking your friend's paper and going off with it or writing on it. You're in control. You're calling the shots. And the writer in a writing center is probably someone you don't know, someone who doesn't have your pizza to eat and doesn't have a TV handy. If you were to read silently, there would be an awkward moment as he waits for your diagnosis. That metaphor from medicine equating bad writing with sickness or disease comes too easily to mind for this to be a good thing, we think.

When the writer reads the paper, he accomplishes several things, in addition to keeping in control. As you listen, you make a mental note not to interrupt, except to ask him to repeat something you didn't catch, and you listen to the whole paper. Listening to the whole thing from start to finish and taking notes puts you in the role of the learner and the writer in the role of the expert. And our anecdotal evidence is pretty good that the reader is listening, too, to the way the draft is working. Sometimes he'll pause and make a mark in the margin. Sometimes he'll say, "Oh, that sounds bad," and you can say, "Put a checkmark next to it and we'll come back to it." But he's giving his draft a critical reading in ways that will help him revise.

You're taking notes, listening. As we've already pointed out, he's the expert, since it's his paper. We talked about the editor's making all the final decisions, but in a good tutorial, the tutor asks questions, and the writer decides what to do with a draft.

Not all writers benefit equally from the practice of reading aloud, however. Some ESL writers will have great difficulty reading aloud, though their speech will be fine. If writers feel hesitant, don't force the issue. Offer to read for them. TJ writes an e-journal entry that shows how this can work out:

> In one session I observed of Paula tutoring, the writer said she really did not want to read the paper, so I read it for her. Throughout the session she became increasingly comfortable and open to discussion. At the end of the discussion, when all the barriers had been knocked down, she confided that she had a learning disability that made reading hard for her. This was unnoticeable by her writing style, but I can only imagine how much more comfortable she must have been when someone else read for her so she would not have to expose herself before she really wanted to.
>
> —TJ

AN EXAMPLE OF OPENING A TUTORING SESSION

Because what we've described up to this point is so important, we include the following transcript as an example, and we recommend that you read it aloud, preferably with a partner taking the second speaking role. This excerpt comes from the beginning of a session and starts with the writer asking for general feedback on her paper, and then the tutor asks about what the writer is working on:

Writer: This is an analytical paper.

Tutor: Okay.

Writer: It's basically regarding a reading passage assigned in the class, and we're supposed to do a critique on that.

Tutor: Okay. And two things: First, what was the reading passage?

Writer: The reading passage was "The Tourist," by Jamaica Kincaid.

Tutor: Jamaica Kincaid, yeah, I know her, but I don't know that [piece]. Was it an entire essay or just a passage from an essay?

Writer: Actually it was a short essay.

Tutor: Mm, hmm. And when you say critique it, what is your conception of what that involves, what that task involves?

Writer: Well, I'm supposed to take a stand, whether I agree with her or I have a different opinion, and I guess I have a different opinion.

Tutor: Okay. So tell me two things, what was her position?

Writer: She doesn't like tourism . . . because she comes from a different country, I guess.

Tutor: Yeah.

Writer: And she doesn't like tourists going to her country because they exploit her country in such a way.

Tutor: Mm, hmm. That's her main reason?

Writer: Right.

Tutor: Because it constitutes exploitation? And does she give examples of the exploitation, what that might look like?

Writer: Well, in the paper I have some of her viewpoints but, and then basically she says that, at the very end she says that the natives, every native would like to travel, that's for sure, but most of the natives in this world are very poor and so they are not able to, they cannot afford to go to other countries, so they would envy you and the fact that you, as a tourist, come to their country, it makes them jealous more.

Tutor: Mm, hmm. So her audience is, the readers she has in mind, sounds like those who would be tourists?

Writer: Right.

Tutor: I'll tell you what, will you read it to me? Reading's a good way, you can tell me, in a sense, what I should listen for, what your concerns are with this draft. And reading it out loud is a good way for you to get a feel for how it's shaping up, what your language is like.

Writer: Okay.

Notice several things in this excerpt about what the tutor does. He doesn't just ask about what the assignment is (an "analytical paper," according to the writer), but he also probes further by asking questions. What did the writer have to read? (And notice that the tutor immediately acknowledges that he's not familiar with the reading passage, thus putting the writer into the position of teaching him the essay's content.) What is the writer's conception of an analytical paper? And once she describes that task ("I'm supposed to take a stand, whether I agree with her or have a different opinion"), he asks more questions to preview the paper itself: What is the author's position? What evidence does she present to support that position? Who seems to be the author's intended audience—whom is she trying to persuade?

These questions accomplish several things. They probe the writer's understanding of the assigned task and of the reading itself. They also introduce some of the elements of a critique essay: a summary of the author's main claim, a presentation of her evidence, and a sense of her intended audience. Once the writer gives this information, it provides the foundation for what will happen once the writer reads the paper itself, a means of checking back on whether or not the writer has included these elements and is consistent with what she told her tutor, compared with what she wrote.

Notice, too, that the tutor asks the writer to read her work aloud, giving a short justification. Thus, in this passage the tutor establishes his responsibilities: to ask about the task and the context, to help the writer better understand the task, and to evaluate how well the writer fulfills her stated purpose. Overall, he's putting himself in the position of reader of her essay, making as visible as possible what he'll be expecting and listening for as she reads her essay aloud.

Now consider that the dialogue on the previous page took up only about two-and-a-half minutes! The first few minutes of a session are crucial to establish a rapport with the writer, set goals, and lay a foundation for what next occurs. The exchange that time was brief, but what occurred was certainly crucial to the success of the session as a whole.

Here's another way of thinking about the opening of a session. The series of activities we engage in offer the writer repeated opportunities for reflection about the paper and about ways of talking about the draft. Here is a handout we give to tutor trainees at Marquette. We make it clear we don't expect tutors to follow it as a blueprint, but it lays out the various opportunities for the writer to think analytically and critically about a draft they bring.

The First Steps in a Conference Where the Writer Has a Draft

The Activity	*The Purpose/Intent*
Greet the writer and *ask* what he is working on.	Create a friendly relationship or break the ice
Have the writer fill out a writing conference record (WCR—see the example on page 43).	Collect information for our database with an eventual eye to communicating the information to others Find out the *due date* of the work Learn what the writer defines as the main issue or problem or challenge or goal *Provide the writer with the opportunity to see how she describes writing tasks* *Provide the writer with an opportunity to reflect on her purpose*

The Activity	*The Purpose/Intent*
Look carefully at the WCR.	Determine what, at first, seems to be the writer's goal Create an agenda for the conference and prioritize based upon the writer's needs
Ask: What is your main point or argument? If the writer begins to read the thesis, ask him to look away and paraphrase. Write these words down, to refer to later.	*Provide the writer with a chance to rethink what the argument is or should be* *Show the writer that his ideas are important*
Ask: Would you read your draft aloud? Tell the writer you will take notes on what she says and ask questions afterwards.	*Provide the writer with an opportunity to revisit the draft, rethink it in the light of hearing it* *Provide an attentive reader for the piece* *Assure the writer that what you are writing down is not criticism, but notes and questions*
If the writer feels awkward about reading, offer to read for him. Ask him to note parts he wants to change.	*Show the writer that reading aloud is an important revision strategy* *Give the writer a chance to hear his writing in another voice*
Before the writer reads, ask "What would you like me to listen for?" After the writer reads, ask "Now that you've heard your paper, what do you want to do to revise it?"	*Give the writer a chance to rethink the categories she/he checked on the WCR* *Provide an additional opportunity for the writer to self-assess*

The writer has now experienced incremental opportunities for self assessment.

HIGHER-ORDER CONCERNS COME FIRST

Okay, you've started the session with questions, you've taken notes, and the writer has read her paper aloud. Now what do you do? One way to create the right atmosphere is for you first to comment on something you like in the paper (and this is a major contrast between the work of tutors and what editors do). We all want praise, and the writers with whom you'll work make themselves quite vulnerable by sharing their writing with you. However, don't push it. Writers will know if you're being phony and will feel patronized. But there's generally something good in every piece of writing. Find it. If words fail you, you can comment (if this is true), "Wow. You've really done a lot of work on this." Or "You've really done a good job of finding research sources," or "Great topic." But only say those things if they're true for you.

As we mentioned in talking about the writing process, one of the most important things you can do as a tutor is to deal first with what Thomas Reigstad and Donald MacAndrew call higher-order concerns. As a tutor, you'll save grammar and correctness for later (and, as we noted in Chapter 2, we'll call these matters later-order concerns). Higher-order concerns are the big issues in the paper, ones that aren't addressed by proofreading or editing for grammar and word choice. This isn't to say that proofreading isn't important for writers to learn, but we can tell you that, from our experience, if we help writers proofread first, a lot of writers—especially those who are inexperienced or hesitant—won't want to change anything in their papers, even to make things better, because they feel that once they have their sentences and punctuation right, all will be well with their writing (and perhaps you felt this way as well at some point in your writing history).

When dealing with higher-order concerns, you'll think about such questions as these.

- Is the writer really addressing the assignment and fulfilling its terms?
- Is there a need for a thesis, and if so, is there one?
- Do arguments have the support they need? Is there an organization I can relate to as a reader? Is this piece addressing an audience in an effective way?
- Does the piece show appropriate levels of critical thinking?

In the ideal world (where writing tutors would be out of a job!), we'd answer these questions with yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes. But quite often the answer is no, and then we have a focus for our session.

Let's say the draft has some problems that the questions above will identify. As an editor, you would tell the writer what to do. You'd tell the

writer that she needs a thesis, and maybe you'd suggest one to her. You might even write one for her. But that's not necessarily what's best for the writer.

In his well-known essay "The Idea of a Writing Center," Stephen North says, "[I]n a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed. . . . [O]ur job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (438). As we pointed out, you're probably already a good editor and might have lots of good ideas for ways to improve the papers you'll be seeing, but it's better for the writer if she makes the decisions about the paper. Making decisions gives the writer a better sense of ownership of the paper and more pride in it when revisions go well. This emphasis on ownership will prompt us to ask questions not only about the paper in question, but about the writer's processes of composing:

- How many drafts has she written?
- What kind of revising has she done?
- Have any classmates or her teacher read any of the drafts and offered any advice?
- How does she feel about the advice?
- What are her revising strategies? (Does she have any?)

Some students who come to the writing center have never really revised a paper and have no idea how to go about rethinking a subject or even how to move paragraphs around. You need to find out how comfortable the writer is with these moves. Sometimes it's good to save the questions about revising for the end of the session when the writer has a better sense that she may need to make some sweeping changes.

If we see an organization that seems odd to us, we might ask the writer, "What made you put this section on X right here between this section on A and this one on B?" When we ask such questions, we're showing the writer that we trust her decisions. Maybe there's a connection that we didn't see. If we didn't see it, and the writer explains it, we can ask if some sort of explanation or clarification belongs in the draft, or what's more likely, the writer will say, "Oh, I need to make that clear, don't I?"

There are lots of good questions we can keep handy for tutorials. One of the best ones was a suggestion of one of our tutors, Dan Giard. Dan always likes to ask, right after the writer has read the draft, "Now that you hear it again, what do you want to do with it next?" This keeps the writer in the role of expert (and after all, she's likely to have done plenty of research on her topic; if not, and if it's needed, you need to ask more questions about the content). Another good question starts with a thumbnail sketch of the organization of the essay as you heard it and as you took notes about it. Then, the question is simply, "Is this what you wanted me to get out of your paper?"

These questions show that we trust the writer and the writer's decisions. We're not trying to take over the writing process. We're trying to help the writer see what kinds of questions she should be asking of her own paper. If we model these questions for the writer, then it's our hope that next time, she will ask them herself.

ANOTHER CONTRAST: CONVERSATION AND QUESTIONS

What does the ideal session, the totally textbook session look like? It would look like two peers having *a conversation* about writing, where each is equally likely to ask a question, move the conversation forward or point out his or her confusion as a reader. (We'll accept that these two peers are unequal in their expertise, but that's probably true in most conversations.) The tutor might be asking questions but not in the role of the teacher drawing the right answers out of the writer. Muriel Harris says of conferences with teachers, "When a student in a writing conference mistakenly thinks the teacher has the answers, all real thought ceases while the student begins searching or guessing for answers the teacher will accept" (62). We believe this is often the case with tutors as well. Nick Carbone sums this up well in a discussion on WCenter, a computer listserv for writing center directors and tutors:

> Question-asking the wrong way can become a kind of inquisition. Very often tutors ask questions in the hopes of leading the writer to some "right" answer. . . . But some tutors are just really good at question placement in the context of conversation. So there are the get-to-know/ice-breaker/context questions . . . : about the assignment, dates due, purpose of the essay, and so on (and you don't always need to ask these up front, it can trickle in as needed). But the real trick is moving to a conversation about the writing, where as a tutor you can talk to the writer, be a good listener, hear the ideas, ask questions about those the way an interested friend will ask questions about some event you're telling them about. Part of that means talking with the writer about the idea, sharing opinions, disagreeing, agreeing, thinking of examples, the way people do when they get together and talk about things.

So what are the right and wrong ways of asking questions? Ask questions only if you really want to know the answer. This might mean letting go of an answer you may *think* you know and trusting the writer to know a good answer. You may ask, "Why did you choose to put this section here?" The writer is still going to hear this question as "This doesn't belong here." She may ask, "Should I move it?" You can then rephrase the question: "Is there

a good reason why it belongs here?" That allows her to assert that indeed it does but that maybe she needs to show the reader why.

There are all kinds of questions that work well and that don't have canned answers. Content-clarifying questions can be important: "What does this term mean?" "What is this paragraph's function?" Overall, avoid questions that put the writer in the position of trying to guess the answer that's in your head; those sorts of closed questions are usually not at all productive.

Sometimes, though, questions are not the best route. Let's imagine that you see a major weakness in a paper; for example, the paper is not fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. This is probably not a good time to ask a question. You might ask to see the assignment sheet again, and in a way this is a kind of question that indicates your concern. But there's no law against saying, "I'm concerned about the way your paper addresses the assignment." This kind of statement puts you in a position of expert, but at the same time shows the writer honest respect. There might be all kinds of leading questions that might get the writer to see this problem himself, but those kinds of questions would be somewhat transparent or might seem manipulative and might erode the trust you build with the writer when you withhold expert knowledge. Instead, you and the writer could get right to work on that most pressing problem. Then new questions will move the session forward.

WHAT IF THERE'S NO ESSAY?

If you've had any experience with a writing center (maybe you've visited yours as a writer already), you know that not all sessions start with a draft of a paper. Writing center directors do a lot of public relations trying to let writers know that the earlier in the process they come in, the better they are helped. You probably know from your own experience how helpful it is to talk over your assignments with your friends, classmates, or instructors before you ever do any writing. And once you start writing, you know how your ideas can take shape if you just take time to talk them over again. This is another kind of help we offer as tutors and that contrasts with the work of editors.

A good way to begin such a session as this is to have the writer paraphrase the assignment for you. This will give you a good sense of how well he knows what's expected of him. If he's stumbling around and pulls out an assignment sheet, that could mean he's having a hard time just understanding what's expected. You can help here, looking over the sheet with him, asking questions about the assignment, and encouraging him to clarify any ambiguous points with his instructor.

You know from your own experience that you'll write the best papers on topics you care about, so it's good to help the writer identify parts of the assignment that are meaningful or that draw from his life experiences in some way or that touch on subjects he may be interested in as he plans his career. Sometimes writers find topics that simply fascinate them, and they will write well about them, because they want to know more and because they want to share what they know.

Sometimes writers come to us with a lack of trust in their own perceptions of things. Many schools begin with an assignment that asks them to relate their experiences, giving such directions as "Write about a time when writing went really well for you" or "Describe an experience that changed you." Inexperienced writers can be very uncomfortable with those assignments, because many of them have been taught "Never use first person," or "Never give your opinion. Just the facts." They have to unlearn these rules, and talking about the assignment can help them warm up to these writing tasks. The research paper will come soon enough in most schools.

As we pointed out in Chapter 2, there are many ways that you can help writers generate material or figure out what it is they want to say. We like to help writers get their first thoughts and preconceptions out of the way by writing them down. (Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff call this Loop Writing.[1]) Now you can point your questions toward refinements of those first thoughts. Lots of beginning writers will go with those first thoughts and use them for a paper topic; however, for most college assignments, this won't be good enough. They will probably be common knowledge, certain to put the instructor to sleep. As a tutor, you can ask the writer what interests him most about those ideas he's generated already. What would he like to know more about? Does he know how to find good research sources? Or does the assignment call for him to write about his own experiences?

HELPING WITH LATER-ORDER CONCERNS

Imagine that all those higher-order concerns are fine in a writer's draft, but there are some errors. Or imagine that you've already spent a session or two on the higher-order concerns and can now address later-order concerns. How do you know there are errors if you've only listened to the writer read the paper? Chances are that you don't, unless you heard some awkward

[1]They then have writers develop either moments, stories, or portraits, then generate some dialogue; then they have them vary their audience or chronology; and then they have them think of lies, errors, or sayings about the topic. Some of these techniques will be more valuable than others, depending on the assignment.

sentences (the ones that just didn't make sense to you) and unless you heard the writer misuse some words. To address later-order concerns, you have to *see* the paper. We suggest that you sit next to the writer for this process, and *you're* going to reread the essay, perhaps now reading one sentence or paragraph at a time. Once again, we're going to trust the writer. Maybe this time you'll read the paper aloud as you both look it over, but instead of going all the way through it, you'll stop when you spot an error or think you do. In your editor role, you'd have corrected the error. But tutors have better ways of helping students, ways that make them better writers.

Many sentence-level problems are not the result of a writer's carelessness or lack of understanding about correctness. All of us will often write confusing sentences when we're trying to convey ideas that are particularly complex or only partially formed in our minds, or when we're writing in ways that we're really not familiar with (as in writers who tell us, "I've never written a critique essay and have no idea how to approach it"). Few writers get it right the first time, but many have the capability to correct their sentence-level problems with your help; rather than acting as an editor, you'll be teaching writers techniques so they can become good editors. An example of this technique is to say, "There's a sentence in the middle, in that paragraph about . . . that confuses me. Could you paraphrase it for me?" Write down what the writer says. Chances are that the paraphrase will be clear, because there's a clear context for it and a specific audience (you) that makes it easier for the writer. Then you can give feedback: "I really understood what you just said." Show the writer what you wrote down—and be sure not to correct or to add your own words to it, but keep it in the writer's own words. You might ask about the writing process at this stage and see if the writer can reflect a bit on what was going on during the composition of the unclear sentence. Sometimes she will be able to see what she needs to do to make things clearer.

For a writer whose entire paper was full of unclear sentences, we've tape-recorded the entire tutoring session. She'd read a sentence, paraphrase it, and move on quickly, and we then loaned her the tape. Writers are very grateful for that kind of help.

ERROR ANALYSIS

We often find that new tutors are most terrified by the idea of a writer's paper that is just full of errors. Where do you start? Well, as we've emphasized, you start with higher-order concerns, but there will come a time when you'll need to help writers work to correct those repeated errors and become better editors of their own work. Composition researchers such as Mina Shaughnessy and David Bartholomae have given

us a great deal of insight into the study of errors that writers make. Most important, you need to view errors not as manifestations of carelessness or sloth or stupidity but instead as stages in any writer's development. So what does this mean for you as a tutor? Well, trying to understand the logic behind a writer's errors is perhaps the most important help you can offer. While editors wield red pens and circle errors like stains on the page, tutors try to get at the reasons why writers made the choices they did. This process isn't particularly different from the way you addressed higher-order concerns. You asked what the writer already knew about the sort of essay she had to write or you asked about why she ordered the paragraphs in the manner she did or chose particular details, and then you tried to build upon that prior knowledge. With error analysis, you'll take the same approach to comma use or subject-verb agreement or sentence boundaries. Your most powerful question for the writer is, "Why did you make that choice?"

One other important strategy in error analysis is to look for patterns. As you read through the essay, perhaps a paragraph at a time, you can look for certain types of errors that the writer makes repeatedly. A common example is a comma splice or two independent clauses joined with only a comma (and we've also found that writers are often quite aware of the types of errors they make since they've been told repeatedly that they have that problem but often aren't shown how to correct it). Imagine that you are reading the paragraph and see several instances of comma splices. Your best bet is to ask the writer, "Why did you put this comma here?" While this is sort of a leading question (and most writers will reply, "Is that wrong?"), many will explain a logic behind the comma placement, perhaps that they felt that the clauses on each side of the comma were short or closely related or that they heard a pause at that spot and thought the rule with commas was to put one wherever they paused in their writing. Sometimes a writer will have memorized rules that are wrong.

At that point, you would tell him that it's an error, let's say, to put a comma alone between independent clauses. You may need to explain the idea of the independent clause to him, perhaps looking the concept up in the handbook that your writing center most commonly uses. Referring to the handbook is a good idea if you know something is wrong but don't have the answer at your fingertips, and it also models a behavior we want writers to imitate: to go for the handbook and look up the rule.

In more step-by-step form, error analysis looks like the following:

1. You see an error. First, you want to know if the writer spots it and can correct it. So you ask, "Do you see an error in this sentence?" Chances are that the writer will find and correct it without any problem. But let's say that the writer doesn't see it. Then we get to the next step.

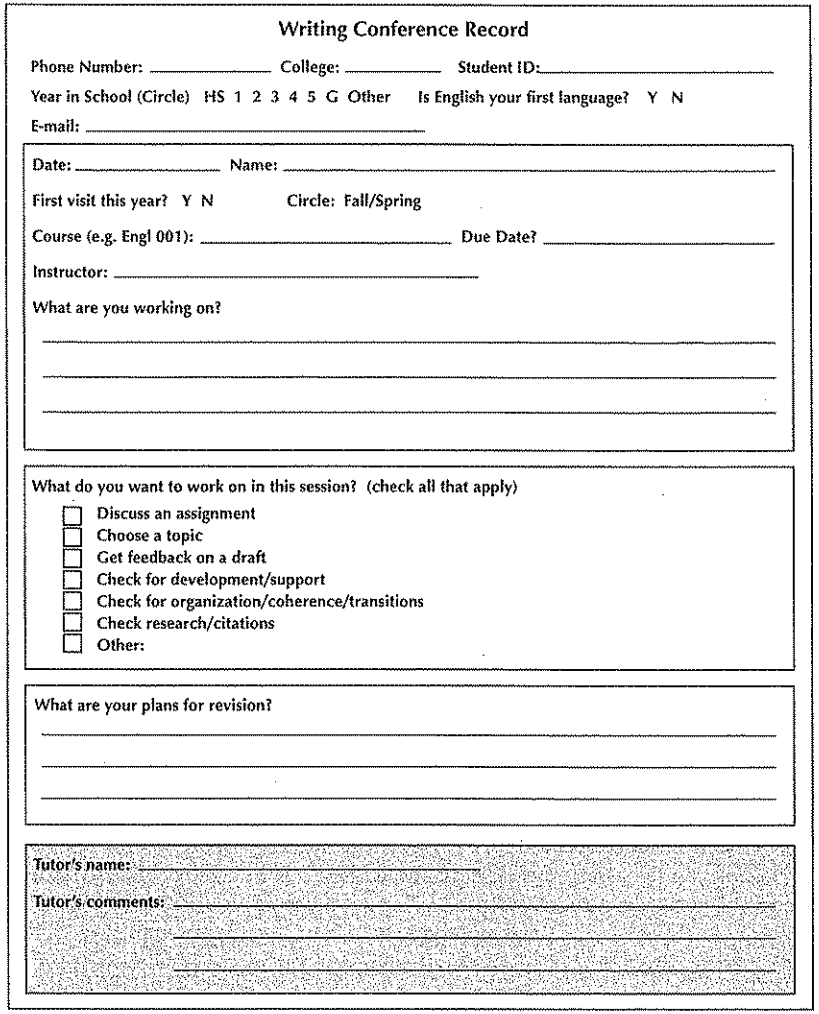
2. Talk about the general class of errors, saying, "The problem is with your verb, " or "There's a punctuation error." Give the writer time to spot it, and if he still doesn't see it, it is time for the next step.
3. Point out the error to him. "The problem is with this comma." Ask about the writer's logic behind making the error. See if he knows how to fix it. If not, ask him what rule he used to decide to put a comma where he did. As we noted above, writers often misinterpret or misapply rules. If the writer still hasn't made the correction, proceed to the next step.
4. Explain the specific rule (and refer to the handbook, as we pointed out), and have the writer apply it to his error. Help him make the fix if you need to, but explain as thoroughly as you can why you're making the choices that you made.
5. Go on to the next example of this error, but try to have the writer apply what you've taught in the previous example. And then treat each error in this fashion. For many writers, you'll soon not need even to point out the problem—they will recognize and fix the error on their own.

As you can see, error analysis can be a slow process and completely different from telling the writer what to do (as an editor would). As an effective tutor, you're having the writer do as much of the work as possible and teaching the writer the ways to correct errors. If you've noted patterns of errors, we advise you not to deal with more than three different types in a single tutoring session. That's all you'll have time and energy for, and it's all most writers can learn to correct in one session.

Another important role you can play in error analysis is not to focus just on errors but to find and point out instances where the writer has made correct choices. For instance, in the case of a writer who has a few comma splices, like the one we described previously, you then see that there is a sentence where he has punctuated two independent clauses correctly. Point it out to him. It's a process of giving positive reinforcement, not just of finding errors, and you want to maintain the good rapport you have established with the writer, not come across as a representative of the grammar police.

ENDING THE SESSION

A good session will fly by, so you'll have to be aware of time. If there's no clock where you tutor, have a watch handy. It's often a good idea to offer the writer something such as, "We have ten minutes left; do you still want to talk about the five pages we haven't looked at or is there another priority we should address?" When the time is almost up, it's a good idea to get a sense of what the writer got out of the session. "What do you plan to do next?" is a good question to ask. As the writer tells you, you can encourage him to write those plans down. If a lot more remains to be done, you'll want to schedule another appointment, or maybe even two, if your center allows that. Schedule those appointments with you if at all possible, because you know the assignment, you know the writer's revision plans (and you'll keep a record of that), and you'll be able to jump right into the session



Writing Conference Record

Phone Number: _____ College: _____ Student ID: _____

Year in School (Circle) HS 1 2 3 4 5 G Other Is English your first language? Y N

E-mail: _____

Date: _____ Name: _____

First visit this year? Y N Circle: Fall/Spring

Course (e.g. Engl 001): _____ Due Date? _____

Instructor: _____

What are you working on?

_____

_____

_____

What do you want to work on in this session? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Discuss an assignment
- ☐ Choose a topic
- ☐ Get feedback on a draft
- ☐ Check for development/support
- ☐ Check for organization/coherence/transitions
- ☐ Check research/citations
- ☐ Other:

What are your plans for revision?

_____

_____

_____

Tutor's name: _____

Tutor's comments: _____

_____

_____

without a lot of explanations. You're also building a relationship with the writer, and you want him to feel comfortable about coming back to you with this or other writing projects.

AFTER THE SESSION

Most writing centers ask you to write down some notes on the session you've just completed. Sometimes this is a note for instructors, and sometimes it's just a memo for the next tutor this writer may work with ("We worked on a paper on jet lag. We looked at his organization and he clarified for me how he meant it to be set up. He'll reorganize it, get more research, and come back on Wednesday"). Always be aware of your audience with these notes. If the writer has any access to them, be sure there are no notes you'd be embarrassed to have him see. You'll have to be sure you leave time to do this between sessions, because believe it or not, after three sessions with writers, you're likely to have forgotten a lot about the first two.

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

To sum up this chapter, we want to point out that while its content comes from our own experiences as writers, tutors, and writing center directors, it also comes from our ethics of tutoring. We don't use the word *ethics* lightly. Ethics are usually associated with values and morals, a sense of right and wrong, a framework for behavior. In tutoring writing, ethics are synonymous with responsible conduct. For instance, as a tutor you're responsible to yourself, to the writers with whom you work, to your tutor colleagues, to your writing center director or equivalent, to your writing center itself, to your school, and even to the writing center field. Your conduct in any single session can have an impact on these various interested parties. For instance, showing up late to your tutoring shift can affect your own standing in the eyes of your director and of the writer signed up to meet with you, your colleagues' opinion of you, and your writing center's reputation. As a tutor, your responsible conduct has a ripple effect, demonstrating to all parties with a stake in the matter that the work you do is meaningful.

Your responsible conduct also has larger meaning, particularly in the contrast between tutors and editors. When we remind you that writers should own their texts or that tutors shouldn't simply clean up writers' texts and then hand them back as if they were dry cleaners, we show certain values and responsibilities that imbue writing center work. Your work as a tutor will require an ethical code, a conscious system of behavior that is reasoned, thoughtful, and responsible. And this code includes not only local responsibilities (for instance, treating all writers and colleagues with respect, fulfilling your job's duties, not using the writing center as a dating service!), but responsibilities that you now bear as a member of the writing center field. After all, we want our work to be taken seriously by those outside of our field. Responsible conduct—and continual discussion and examination of those responsibilities—is essential to this goal.

EDITORS VERSUS TUTORS—A SUMMARY

What we've described about the tutoring process is very different from what went on in the TV lounge of your residence hall as those friendly neighborhood editors went about their business. We'll end by summarizing the contrast between tutors and editors:

Editors	*Tutors*
Focus on the text	Focus on the writer's development and establish rapport
Take ownership of the text	Make sure the writer takes ownership
Proofread	Start with higher-order concerns and worry about correctness last
Give advice	Ask questions
Read silently	Ask the writer to read aloud
Look mainly for things to improve	Comment on things that are working well
Work with an ideal text	Trust the writer's idea of a text
Make corrections on the page	Keep hands off and let writers make corrections; help them learn correctness
Tell writers what to do	Ask them their plans for revision