Note: Much of the material that follows is taken from What the Writing Tutor Needs to Know and The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors. These are both excellent guides to tutoring. If you’d like to read them, we have copies available in both the Escondido and San Marcos centers. The
places marked by asterisks (*) have “Tutor Training Questions” for you at the conclusion of this document.

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Tutor Training Questions
A. General introduction

1. Our facilities and people

2. Levels of English at Palomar *

3. Key points of academic writing and grammar *
   - English 10 practice final exam
   - English 50 rubric
   - English 50 essay to read and respond to

4. Research strategies

5. Stages of writing process
   - prewriting -- generating ideas: freewriting, brainstorming, clustering, researching, observing; organization/outline; ideas; purpose; thesis; topic sentences
   - writing -- an initial/rough draft
   - revising -- global revision (the big picture -- content, organization, tone; thesis; supporting details; sentence-level revision (wordiness, sentence structure/sentence variety, usage)
   - editing -- grammar, punctuation, and mechanics

6. Use of technology in writing—computer, online *

7. Professionalism -- report on time; call and/or e-mail beforehand if prevented from working; keep your voice down; tidy up your workstation; never write any part of a student’s paper; never comment negatively to students about a teacher’s methods/assignments/personality/grading policies; don’t guess at the grade the paper may get; don’t criticize the grade that the teacher has given a paper

8. Working with various learning styles *
   - visual—point to, circle, highlight, take notes, use color
   - auditory—read aloud, repeat/rephrase instructions, ask writer to paraphrase what you said
kinesthetic -- ask students to do the writing/underlining/highlighting, have students point to material as you talk about, use file cards, use self-stick notes for parts of the paper

9. Various roles of the tutor *

ally (sympathetic, encouraging, supportive)

coach (the work needs to be the student’s own, encourage them to think through problems and find their own answers, suggest ways of accomplishing tasks)

commentator (describe process and progress in a broader context than the writer might otherwise see)

collaborator (sharing ideas with a particularly sharp writer, but don’t take over the paper)

writing expert (you know more than the student, but it’s okay to admit when you don’t know something -- find out the answer)

learner (knowing little or nothing about a topic makes you a good audience for a paper -- the writer can answer your questions and clarify writing)

B. At the start of a tutoring session *

1. Sit side-by-side (you are an ally, not an authoritarian figure)

2. Have a pen, a pad/scrap paper, a handbook, and a dictionary nearby

3. Let the person know something about you; be pleasant and courteous

4. Demonstrate your enthusiasm -- you are looking forward to working with the student

5. Explain what it is that writing tutors do

6. Find out the student’s reason for coming and the writing assignment (What can I help you with? What assignment are you working on? What are you writing about?)

7. Give the student control of the paper -- keep the paper in front of the student; let the student read the paper aloud; if at a computer, let the writer control the keyboard; you and the writer will set a tentative agenda for the session

8. As you talk with the writer and look through the assignment, make a list of concerns and items to cover -- prioritize the list
C. Responding to the student paper

1. Use three powerful tools -- active listening (what I’m hearing you say is . . ., it sounds like . . .), responding as a reader (I’m a little confused here, I get lost here, is that what you meant, can you tell me more here, so what/why does anyone need to know about that), be a naïve reader (act like you need more information all the time, stop at the end of a paragraph to summarize/explain what you anticipate will follow, use silence/wait time to indicate that the writer is expected to think and arrive at answers on his/her own) *

2. Avoid negative comments about a writer’s topic -- writer may have personal reasons for it

3. Honor the confidentiality of the tutoring relationship (don’t comment on or discuss writer or the paper with teacher or in front of other people)

4. Don’t overload/overwhelm the student -- prioritize (big problems first) *

5. Use opening questions -- What works best in your paper? What do you like best or feel most satisfied about? What works least in the paper? Which part did you have trouble writing? Which parts don’t feel right?

6. Try tri-level response
   
   first-level response -- respond like an ordinary reader ("I’m confused -- explain this")

   second-level response -- express your reaction as a reader and explain the reasons for your reactions ("I got lost here because you did not indicate clearly enough the relationships between these two statements")

   third-level response -- suggest how to solve the problem

7. Be positive – praise where you can

8. Be honest – limit compliments to specific parts of the paper

9. Do not rewrite the paper – circle wrong words rather than replacing them (same with punctuation)

10. Consider using checklists – strengths/focus/organization/ argument/support/style/grammar, punctuation, spelling

11. Give the writer a chance to solve a problem before you offer specific solutions
D. Concluding the session *

1. Summarize the ideas for revision -- have positive as well as negative

2. Ask the student if he/she has additional questions

3. Remind the writer he/she can return to the writing center with another draft

4. Be friendly as you say good bye

E. Specific student problems *

1. Lacks a complete draft -- ask why

2. Isn’t sure of the assignment--review the assignment with the writer

3. Can’t get started-- discuss strategies for fighting it (break down into smaller pieces, rewards, shut out the voice of criticism, freewrite /brainstorm/cluster); use structured questioning (if it is a character analysis, ask, Who is the main character? What is his problem? Does he solve it?)

4. Has difficulty in reading-- go over the text together

5. Has a passive/unresponsive attitude-- empathize (you too have been in the same position, having to accomplish some task in college which you did not relish); acknowledge the student’s lack of interest in writing (I hate to write -- you say, well okay but the fact that you came here means you want to get a decent grade, right?); help the student talk about his/her fears (I’m a terrible writer -- you say I wish I had a dollar for every student who makes that statement); if too distracted – ask if there’s something more pressing and if the answer is yes, recommend person reschedules; be patient; remind the writer you are there to help; make the session short but helpful; engage the writer as much as possible; recognize even your best efforts may not change writer’s attitude

6. Has antagonistic attitude—be patient; allow writer to vent; acknowledge the anger, if writer becomes verbally aggressive, politely tell him/her you’re not willing to accept such behavior; remind writer your suggestions can be accepted or rejected

7. Has examples of plagiarism -- become familiar with the school’s code of academic integrity, explain importance of carefully taking notes from sources, realize some writers concentrate on content rather than citing, explain that acknowledging sources is an ethical issue, speak with director if unsure how to handle it
8. Has writing anxiety—present yourself as a sympathetic ally, tell of your own writing frustrations and satisfaction of producing a well-written paper, explain the writing process (start soon, allow plenty of time), help writer break the assignment into a sequence of specific/manageable tasks and set up a schedule to complete these parts, suggest that writer sets firm writing appointments with self and build in rewards, remind writer that a rough draft is rough.

9. Brings in a longer paper—break into smaller, more easily achievable tasks; ask the writer to prioritize the writing difficulties, ask the writer to identify a manageable portion of the paper with these difficulties; don't feel obligated to get through the whole paper.

10. Comes in at the last minute before paper is due—be kind and sympathetic, consider other options, help set goals for future papers.

F. Things to check

1. The draft meets all the objectives of the assignment (a student may omit part of the assignment).

2. The paper has a strong thesis (may be too general or buried too deep in the body of paper)*; if not, suggest the student review the keywords of the assignment (compare, argue,...); help the student clarify his/her ideas about the topic; explain that the introductory paragraph should address these ideas.

3. There is depth to the paper—enough support (facts, stories, examples, . . .)*

4. The essay is organized—time, space, order of importance; have a student list main points/do outline after writing the draft.

5. The writer avoids stylistic problems—the choice of words (formal, informal, colloquial, academic), wordiness; other elements of academic style (no contractions, no colloquial language, no use of “I think/I feel”)

6. The writer has edited for grammar/punctuation/spelling problems—read aloud; point out problem once, then let student find same problem later; explain that such errors distract readers from the paper's content; be flexible with your vocabulary (fused/run-on)

7. The paper avoids inappropriate topics/offensive language—be patient, remind writer he/she is writing for an academic community, respond as a reader, asked the writer to respond as a reader (imagine yourself as a member of your audience--how might you respond to this statement), show writer how to make language more flexible, suggest student should check with teacher about the topic/use of language if he/she insists on doing it his/her own way.
G. Tutoring special students

1. Nonstandard dialect and ESL students -- standard American English is the dialect of the American academic world, other institutions, and businesses which require formal written English. Always remain aware of the writer’s feelings – refer to usage as “inappropriate” rather than “wrong” or “incorrect”;

ESL students are not hampered by psychological barriers of those who speak nonstandard dialects

ESL student may be reluctant to ask you a question, to admit he/she doesn’t understand something, may require different personal space

ESL student may have a different way of presenting information (indirect)

Recommendations – give directions plainly, ask the person to explain what you have said, rephrase the comments if the student doesn’t understand rather than raising your voice to repeating the same words, use a simple dictionary, brush up on your grammar, watch for peculiar connotations, watch for plagiarism (in some cultures borrowing from other sources is okay), give sympathy and encouragement, rephrase comments that confuse students, noticed student expressions and body language, be patient, respond first to the content and organization rather than sentences, realize some writers may regard you as an expert and expect you to provide the answers, don’t overwhelm with a lot of advice, take special care to establish a comfortable rapport, give directions plainly – watch expression and ask questions to see if he/she comprehends your explanations, ask him or her to explain what you have said or to give you an example, it may be helpful for you to serve as a scribe – jot down key words or phrases in the writer’s words, don’t focus only on mechanical errors

2. Students lacking basic writing skills – these students focus on personal content, they rely on clichés, they’re unfamiliar with academic writing/argumentation, they have many errors on the sentence level, or they don’t know how to support their points

Strategies – use the same ones as with ESL/second dialect student: identify group of similar errors rather than individual ones, try to understand the reasons for the errors – the person either lacks knowledge or is using an invented system of writing, respect student’s intelligence, be supportive/respectful/patient/encouraging, acknowledge what the writer does well, help person understand the writing process starts with messiness (he/she doesn’t have to produce perfectly formed ideas from the start), have writer read the paper aloud, do not
overwhelm writer with too much information or too many suggestions, developed a strategy for the writer to cope with problems

3. Students with learning disabilities -- if the student admits a problem and you are not successful with him/her, refer to person on campus who can deal with learning disabilities; ask what you can do that will best help the writer -- teach to a writer’s favored learning style; be patient and repeat if necessary; make lists or outlines or notes that could later help the writer; support and praise often

4. Returning students -- they are often disciplined and organized, many have a greater tolerance for criticism; however, some may lack confidence and have anxiety about starting over

Strategies -- don’t talk down to older student; tutor who is an adult learner can be successful here; begin by asking some questions to break the ice; see if writer wants comprehensive reviews of errors; be considerate of their time, be sensitive to their anxiety, be aware of age differences and your demeanor, help writers use real-world experience appropriate to his/her academic paper; set the agenda and summarize the session (person may be very goal oriented); do not allow the adult learner to become too dependent on your help

5. Good student writers

Strategies – find out what the student is hoping to accomplish through the writing assignment beyond a grade since he/she may view the writing as a creative act; ask if the person can think of other possible strategies for making the paper even more effective; check for the clarity of the argument (coherence can make a difference in grades); check for style -- parallelism, interesting word choice, creative openers and conclusions; identify and discuss particularly strong passages

H. Students from classes other than English*

The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors includes useful checklists for the following types of assignments (page numbers refer to the fifth edition):

1. Research papers (p. 88)
2. Lab reports and scientific papers (p. 89)
3. Argument or position papers (p. 90)
4. Literature papers (p. 91)
5. Book/film/play reviews (p. 91-92)
6. PowerPoint presentations (p. 92-93)
7. Resumes (p. 94-96)
8. Cover letters (p. 96)
9. Essays of application (p. 98)

I. Teacher expectations

1. If tutoring in a field that is new to you, try to become familiar with teacher expectations regarding format/style/documentation of that field
2. Understand the instructor’s criteria for an A paper
3. Try to meet with instructors who routinely send their students to the Writing Center
4. Check to see if instructor has sent the writing center a list of assignments/criteria sheet

J. Unclear/poorly designed assignments

1. Sometimes the page limit will be unrealistic given what the student is asked to accomplish in the assignment
2. Other assignments may require students to write about unfamiliar subjects
3. If the above are the case, you may want to ask the director to contact the instructor
4. Suggest to the student he/she should check with the instructor after class

K. For further help

1. Check out the website for the International Writing Centers Association (writingcenters.org)
2. This organization publishes Writing Center Journal and Writing Lab Newsletter
L. Good questions for tutors to think about


2. Discuss with other tutors or the director if you see a question of interest *

Tutor Training Questions

A 2 – Palomar College offers several English composition classes: 10, 50,100,202,203. Explain what each one covers.

A 3 -- Go to palomar.edu/english. Click on "Faculty Resources." Click on "English 10 Resources." Look at the practice final exam. Which sections do you need to brush up on?

A 3 -- While you are still on the English Department web page, click on "English 50 Resources." Read the overview, the rubric, two or three of the past final exams, and one or two of the sample graded essays. What insights do you have to the English 50 class?

A 3 -- Talk to other tutors and students. Find out which levels of English are represented the most in the writing center where you work.

A 6 -- What tips would you give students who plan to use the computer and online resources for writing and research?

A 8 -- Considering students don’t know their own learning styles and you don’t know the students, is there anything you can do in this area to be helpful?

A 9 -- Think about the last two students you helped. Which roles listed here did you take on?

B -- Consider the last student you helped. Which of these were you able to implement? Which were the toughest?

C 1 -- Try using these three tools. What happened?

C 4 -- For one of your previous students, describe how you were able to set priorities.

D -- What worked here?

E -- Consider the last two or three students you worked with. Which of these problems did you encounter? How did you solve the problem?

F 2 -- Students often have difficulty writing a good thesis. What did you notice in the last two or three students regarding this problem?
F 3 -- How did you encourage sufficient support?

G 1 -- ESL students can be difficult to work with. What ideas here help you the most?

H -- Have you worked with papers in other disciplines than English? What were they? How did it go?

L 2 – What good advice did you get from other tutors? Any questions for me?