An Introduction to Tutor Training

A Guide for New Tutors

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**Introduction**

Welcome to the Student Academic Success Center at the University of California, Davis. We are committed to providing students with qualified tutors who are capable of learning and applying strategies that promote student success.

As an employee of the Student Academic Success Center, you are expected to learn and apply these strategies as well as the techniques you will be learning in your tutor training classes. Effective tutoring is a learned skill and must be practiced with every student you work with in the SASC.

**Components to a Successful Tutoring Session**

1. *I am your tutor.  Nice to meet you!*  

When meeting your students for the first time, you should always take a moment to introduce yourself and allow your students to introduce themselves. This introduction will allow your students to feel more comfortable about seeking help from a stranger. The seating where your tutoring takes place should be arranged before your student arrives. The chairs and tables should be arranged so that your students can easily see you and any chalkboard that you will be using. When tutoring in an individual tutoring session, try to sit next to the student so the work remains in control of the student. Introductions between you and the student are important during the first meeting to help the student feel comfortable with you.

*During the first meeting it is also important for you and your student to review the following:*

- Student absence policies
- Session start and stop time
- How tutoring works
- Homework policies
- Other SASC resources

2. *What do you need help with today?*  

It is the student’s responsibility to decide which tasks (topics) that will be covered during a tutoring session. The task can be a specific problem, a set of problems, or even a concept that is difficult to understand or apply.

You may find that students have difficulty identifying the task and may attempt to get you to decide what problems to address. Through questioning of the student, you can determine specific problems that the student is experiencing with the subject material.
3. Create an agenda when possible.

Once the student has indicated the task(s), the tutor can set an informal agenda for the session. Write down what will be covered in numerical order. As a result of setting the agenda, both you and your students will know what to expect and work toward meeting those goals. The agenda can be written on the board, a piece of paper, or verbally provided to the student.

4. Problem Solving

Note: Before you introduce the steps required to solve any problem or to help students understand a concept, it is important to determine if the student is familiar with the background information required to understand the steps that will be used to solve the current problem. As the tutor, you should ask questions to ensure that the individual student or members of a group session are adequately prepared to attempt to solve a problem. Review of key concepts is important in helping your students be prepared to address the identified task and fill in any information gaps that may be missing.

This is the most important step to learn as a tutor. The tutor is responsible for showing the student a general approach (the steps) to solving a specific type of problem. The expected outcome is for the student to be able to use a general approach in solving similar problems independent of the tutoring sessions. This general approach is the method that you as a tutor would use to solve a problem.

Examples:

a. Identify the process for doing a specific type of task. What steps need to be taken to solve the problem or learn a problem?
b. Ask the student to explain to you how he/she believes the problem should be solved.
c. Keep the student moving in the right direction by providing feedback or missing information.
d. If necessary, find similar examples of the problem and explain the process while the student is working the problem. Practice is often necessary for the student to become comfortable with the process of arriving at an answer.

a. Identify the process for performing a specific type of task. The students in the group suggest possible solutions and steps to solve the problem.
b. The tutor suggests the best possible solution and provides confirmation that the group members are on the right track.
c. Test and implement the solution. Using the process discussed by the group, the tutor provides an example problem. If time permits, other students should work similar problems for the practice of solving a particular task.

As a tutor, you may become so familiar with the subject material that you forget to include basic steps that the students are required to learn to solve a problem. Remember to break the learning of a task into the smallest steps possible and not move on until those steps have been learned.

5. Teach by Asking Questions

While attempting to establish and provide students with a general approach for learning the steps in solving problems, tutors can use specific techniques that will help foster the learning process. The overall
objective is to maximize student involvement in the learning process through questioning instead of lecturing.

Asking open-ended questions while tutoring allows the students to become more involved in the learning process and helps you to determine the level of understanding for each participant. Take a moment to consider the type of student response that you would get from the following questions and statements:

1)  
   a. You know that the least common denominator of 5/12 and 2/15 is 60 right?  
   b. How do you find the least common denominator of 5/12 and 2/15?

2)  
   a. Do you understand?  
   b. Does anyone have any questions?  
   c. What did we just do?  
   d. Can anyone summarize how we arrived at that answer?

3)  
   a. A method to convert a measurement from one kind of unit to another is called the factor-label method.  
   b. Does anyone know the method we can use to convert a measurement from one kind of unit to another?

4)  
   a. Did you know that you have a run-on sentence in the paragraph?  
   b. Can you explain to me what a run-on sentence is? Can you point out an example of a run-on sentence in this paragraph?

**Tutoring Strategies using the M.I.F.F. Techniques**

The MIFF techniques, when used effectively, will help the tutor in four critical areas: **Management, Involvement, Feedback, and Focus**. The goal for the tutor is to become proficient in using these techniques as problem-solving tools to help with session management, to increase student involvement, to elicit feedback, or to provide focus.

All math and science tutors will be introduced to the MIFF techniques during tutor training sessions. You will be expected to implement these strategies in your tutoring sessions as you learn them.

A handout describing the MIFF techniques will be provided to each tutor during the orientation process.

**6. Practice, Practice Practice**

A) At the beginning of each new session – Material that was covered at a previous tutoring session should be briefly reinforced during the new session.

B) After each major concept – allowing students to summarize major concepts will aid the student in remembering important steps in solving similar problems.

C) At the end of each session – briefly encourage students to summarize the subject material covered in the session.
7. **How great can I make you feel?**

There are multiple opportunities during tutoring for tutors to make students feel great about their work. Always look for an opportunity to reinforce the accomplishments of the student’s understanding of the subject material by offering positive feedback. Overall, positive reinforcement can aid in increasing student confidence. Even though a student may not have fully grasped all of the concepts that were covered, it is important to provide words of encouragement at some point in the tutoring session.

8. **Don’t forget.**

During tutoring you might be able to see things that students are not doing to maximize learning opportunities. You can use this information to remind students about successful strategies that can help increase student success.

- Always bring your books and notes to tutoring.
- Read the book.
- Practice problems.
- See your TA during office hours

9. **Thank you.**

Always remember to thank your students for attending and attempt to leave on a positive note with all of your students.

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**MATH/SCIENCE DROP-IN TUTORING STRATEGIES**

**Create Drop-in Groups:**

- Drop-in tutoring allows you to work with multiple students throughout your scheduled tutoring time. In an effort to help as many students as possible, you should work around the room and not with one individual student. This can be accomplished by providing students with short bursts of information, hints, clues, and questions that allow the student to continue to work on the problem solving process on their own.

- You may find that several students are working on the same problem, which allows you to create small work groups. As students enter the room, try to seat students together based on the problems, professor, and class section.

  When you arrive for drop-in hours, you should check the current set up of the students in the room to continue the groups already established. As new students enter the room, you can continue to group students from the same class.

- Encourage students to work in groups on the board. Tutors can write practice problems on the board or use the student’s homework problems to have small groups work together. The tutor can walk around the room and provide problem information, clues, and hints.
DO:

- Create a comfortable learning environment to encourage discussion.
- Allow the students to guide the content of the session.
- Teach by asking questions. Use a lot of positive reinforcement. Use paper problems to determine student understanding.
- Avoid lecturing and giving answers. Provide “short bursts of information” that supplements the student’s knowledge.
- Allow and encourage your student to ask questions and provide comments to involve students in the learning process.
- Seek assistance from another tutor or specialists when you need additional subject information.
- Encourage your students to do the work.
- Suggest study techniques that support student success.
- Let your students know briefly what you can do for them as a tutor.
- When checking a student’s work, always look for something right to use for a positive reinforcement opportunity.
- Work with students in the subjects you were hired to tutor.

DON’T

- Do not write on the student’s paper. This practice is prohibited in the Student Academic Success Center and is subject to disciplinary process. Always allow the students to have control of the pencil during tutoring. This is considered a part of the learning process for students and eliminates “cheating” issues with instructors.

  You can circle part of the problem or provide suggestions in the margins. If you need to show another example of the process used to solve a problem, use a separate piece of paper or the margin of the student’s paper. You can also use a chalkboard and have the student write the problem on paper.

- Do not discuss grades or instructor problems with a student. This can create a conflict of interest for the tutor and the SASC.
- Don’t continue trying to figure out how to solve a problem if you don’t have enough subject knowledge. Let the student know they can come back to see another tutor or the specialist. Create your personal subject bank and learn the answer for the next student.
- Don’t work with students in subjects you are not hired to tutor. This may spread your time to thin for the students in your subject area.
Learning Styles

Learning styles are based on the student’s preferences as to how information is taken in and processed; by seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analyzing and visualizing, steadily and in bits and pieces.

At the most simplistic level of categorizing learning styles, three learning preferences exist: Visual, auditory, and tactile or kinesthetic.

Students that are visual or tactile learners may not perform as well in a lecture class than a student who is an auditory learner. And the opposite is true for a student that is a preferred auditory learner who finds himself in a class where much of the material presented is in the written form.

In a learning support environment, you can provide students with alternatives to learning the material that corresponds to their learning strengths. For example:

1) Visual Learners – a visual learner can use charts, maps, notes, videos, flash cards, and can use the practice of visualizing or picturing words and concepts. Everything discussed during a tutoring session should be written out so that the students can use the information for frequent and quick visual review.

2) Auditory learners – The auditory learner should use tapes during lectures (if allowed) and tutoring sessions as much as possible. The tapes will fill in the gaps in notes and after reading information. The student should summarize and recite information aloud to hear their own voice as much as possible.

3) Tactile learners - The tactile or kinesthetic learner should write and trace words as they are said. Facts that are to be learned should be written several times. Use lots of scratch paper during tutoring and prewritten study sheets for the student to practice with.

During tutoring you may not be able to determine a student’s learning style preference. If this is the case, your tutoring should include a variety of methods from all three learning styles.

If you are interested in learning more about learning styles and preferences, please visit http://www.metamath.com/lsweb.dvclearn.htm.

Additional Academic Resources

As a tutor for the Student Academic Success Center, you should be familiar with the many academic resources available for your students. With some students, you may find that the scheduled tutoring appointments are not enough and students may require more academic assistance than you are able to provide.

The SASC offers students a variety of additional resources that can be used throughout the quarter. An updated list of specific workshops and hours are available each quarter. Students can visit 2205 Dutton or go to the SASC’s website at http://sasc.ucdavis.edu.