Hi Mentors! Welcome to your very own newsletter! You've let us know that you need more consistent communication and feedback, and we've heard you! The monthly mentor newsletter will keep you apprised of policy changes, let you know about new products and subjects rolling out, provide reminders about new features or ongoing projects, and provide you with tips to improve your mentoring in different areas each month.

These newsletters will be archived and indexed in the Mentor Resource Area (http://filedepot.tutor.com/mentors/), but you'll want to be sure you read them thoroughly when you receive them to ensure you have the most up-to-date information available. And with that, let's jump right in!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

TECHNIQUE

Identifying Content Concerns
How can you tackle content in a minimal amount of time? 2

Conceptual Error vs. Careless Mistake
What is the difference and do you know how to address it? 2

Providing Actionable Feedback
How do we do it and why do we need to? 3

POLICY/PROCEDURE

Peak Onboarding Season
What does this mean for you? 4

Probationary Periods over the Summer
How much is enough? 4

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS

New Advisory Template Wording 5
The Tutor Newsletter 5
New Subjects 5

JUST FOR FUN

Mentor Anniversaries 6
**TECHNIQUE**

**Identifying Content Concerns: How can you tackle content in a minimal amount of time?**

**BY TRACY STANT, SENIOR MENTOR**

An important step in the review process is checking for content. We understand that not all sessions can be checked for content, but there are a few tricks you might find useful for identifying content issues in the sessions you review.

1. As you are reading through the session, do not just check for pedagogy, but also actively look for things out of the norm. For example, long pauses at the beginning of a session might mean that the tutor is not familiar with the material and as a result is doing some lengthy research. This can be an indication that you need to be extra aware of potential content issues.

2. Look for text that looks like it is straight out of a textbook. Tutors that are unfamiliar with material may be more likely to copy and paste text directly from Web sites or e-books as they are unable to have an informed discussion without external support. If a tutor seems to be just pasting information, you can check it by copying a portion of the text and pasting it into Google with quotation marks around it to see if it may have been plagiarized. If you find that it appears to have been taken directly from an external resource, kindly communicate that tutors must be able to clearly explain concepts themselves. As a tutor works to change this behavior, root content issues will often come to light.

3. When picking sessions to review, check the content for topics that tutors regularly struggle with. Have at the ready an arsenal of strong external resources for when content errors are found in those topics. For example, double-declining-depreciation was a big content error topic for a while because one of the top search results for this concept was an about.com article that had a content error. So those might be sessions you would want to be sure you included in your review.

In the next article, read about what to do when you find those content errors.

**Conceptual Error vs. Careless Mistake: What is the difference, and do you know how to address it?**

**BY WENOYA YOUNG, MENTOR MANAGER**

As mentors, we want to ensure that the information our tutors provide to students is accurate. As such, I’m sure we have all encountered those sessions where we question the accuracy of the content. In our attempts to determine whether the inaccuracy is knowledge-based or careless, we may struggle with how this should be addressed with the tutor. So, let’s first take a look at the review form description for content knowledge:

*Did the tutor provide accurate content and demonstrate strong content knowledge in the sessions completed? While an occasional calculation or careless mistake may have occurred, or a correction was made during the course of the session, did the tutor demonstrate proficiency in the concepts associated with the approved tutoring subjects?*

As we can see, this description focuses on the accuracy of the content as well as proficiency with the concepts. This description also acknowledges the presence of careless mistakes, but challenges us to focus on the tutor’s overall conceptual understanding. So, what’s the difference and how can we help tutors improve?

**Conceptual errors** occur because there is some misunderstanding of the foundational concepts needed to address the student’s question. These may also appear in the form of incorrect logic. In either case, the tutor may lead the student down an incorrect path to address the question at hand.

Without the ability to provide accurate information to students, our service suffers. Thus, when we recognize conceptual errors in a tutor’s work, we encourage mentors to provide the tutor with the correct information, along with a resource to help the tutor review the concept in question. There is little we can do beyond this level of feedback, as we place the responsibility of content knowledge on the shoulders of each tutor.

**Careless mistakes,** including computational errors in the maths/sciences, generally occur when a tutor is not paying attention or is working too fast.

In this case, we should bring the error to the tutor’s attention and encourage him/her to:

1. **Slow down** – Some tutors become concerned about limited-length sessions and rush to finish before the suggested time has expired. We want to encourage tutors to balance efficiency with accuracy.

2. **Consider the solution prior to offering assistance to the student** – Whether working out a problem on paper or searching for the answer/solution via the Internet, we want tutors to think through the answer to the student’s question. During the initial “information gathering” phase of the session, begin to create a roadmap of how to approach the question – even on paper or on the computer.

3. **Double-check comments before pressing ‘enter’** – There are times when our fingers move faster than our minds. Encourage tutors...
to take time to review their comments before they appear in chat.

When it comes to rating the quality of a session, we encourage mentors to consider the totality of the session.

- Certainly, if there are conceptual errors present in the session, Below Expectations, is the appropriate rating.
- However, if there is a careless mistake that has not affected the overall quality of the session, we need to consider whether that mistake demonstrates a content deficiency on the part of the tutor before rating the content knowledge category as Below Expectations. This may be a situation where we simply acknowledge the careless mistake with feedback to the tutor as noted above.
- If a pattern of careless mistakes begins to emerge, then we encourage mentors to take a step back and consider the root cause, which could be content knowledge or approach. Once the root cause is determined, we can move forward with appropriate and actionable feedback.

Keep in mind that the ultimate goal of the service is to provide each student with an educationally sound experience. Our ability to distinguish between conceptual errors and careless mistakes, and address them appropriately, is the key to improving each tutor’s ability to deliver the accurate content that is central to the student experience.

Happy Mentoring!

---

**Providing Actionable Feedback: How do we do it, and why do we need to?**

BY TRACY STANT, SENIOR MENTOR AND SARAH SNYDER, MENTOR MANAGER

Actionable feedback takes standard feedback to a new and more useful level. Instead of simply identifying an issue that needs attention, actionable feedback provides the recipient with tools that can be useful in taking the necessary steps toward improvement. Providing actionable feedback should be our goal in every review we write.

In areas such as student engagement, we may find that providing actionable feedback is fairly straightforward. We have a tutor who tends to lecture rather than engage, so we provide the tutor with specific verbiage he/she can use to ask engaging questions and draw the student into the discussion.

But what about areas like a low accepted percentage? Suppose “Demonstrates familiarity with basic concepts” is marked as below expectations and the comment encourages the tutor to work on achieving an 85% accepted percentage. We have identified a concern (a low accepted percentage), but how can the tutor use that feedback to improve? He/she might even already be aware of the low accepted percentage, so we haven’t even provided new information! Perhaps it hasn’t improved because he/she isn’t certain of what to do differently. The important next step is identifying the cause so we can provide appropriate suggestions.

For example, suppose there were in-scope expertise declines. Those can move the focus from the low quantitative metric to the actual cause of the low quantitative metric. We’re no longer simply trying to treat the symptom because we’ve identified the source. So even in areas like these, we can provide more thorough, actionable feedback.

But how do we do that? We can make the feedback more actionable by linking to external resources. For example, if a tutor’s declines demonstrate that there are some unfamiliarity issues with basic game theory, we can provide a link or two to some resources that the tutor can review. This way, we are doing as much as we can to help the tutor be successful. We have provided some tools we found useful.

This is just one example of where actionable feedback can take things to a new level. Be on the lookout for a new resource that delves more deeply into actionable feedback, and strive for actionable feedback in each review you complete. Ask your senior mentor if you have any questions about how you can implement more actionable feedback in your reviews so your tutors can be as successful as possible.
MENTORING WITH PURPOSE

POLICY/PROCEDURE

Peak Onboarding Season: What does this mean to you?

Every summer we ramp up our onboarding in preparation for the fall semester. We have staffing goals we are trying to reach to ensure we have full coverage when school is back in session. This means that we have more Probationary tutors during the summer than we do during most of the school year, and to make it to Probationary status, every applicant must go through a mock session.

We count on all of you to help us with both of those things – conducting mock sessions in your respective areas of expertise, and mentoring the new Probationary tutors as they get started so that can have a solid foundation come September.

Please take a moment to look over your team, think about the time you are currently putting into mentoring (remember, we do ask that you have at least 8 hours per week available), and consider increasing your Probationary tutor limit and/or your mock session availability (remember, we ask you to have at least two 1-hour slots of availability set each week to ensure adequate coverage in all of our subjects).

If you would like to update your mock session availability, you can do so here: https://prv.tutor.com/apply/login.aspx. If you would like to update your team space availability, you can do so here: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/QQ7M86B. Thank you!

Probationary Periods over the Summer: How much is enough?

While we do not require tutors to reach Tutor 1 status within 60 days if they are Probationary during the summer, we also do not require them to spend 60 days at the Probationary period. There is a balance between moving a tutor to Tutor 1 too quickly and delaying a definitive decision. Neither one is of benefit to the tutor, so where is that balance?

Most tutors, regardless of the time of year, will receive at least 3 tutor reviews before moving to Tutor 1. This is because it generally takes that much time to get a solid sense of even a strong tutor's quality. If the tutor is not strong right out of the gate, it may take a little longer. But at what point have we seen enough?

The status change guidelines in the Tutor Resource Manual are just that – guidelines. Not requirements. They are there to help give the tutors a goal to work toward and an understanding of what our mentors are looking for. But it is important for each of us to remember that the quantitative half of the equation is not set in stone. If a tutor has demonstrated high quality in 3 reviews of 10 sessions each, we don't need to hold out for another 20 sessions.

Suppose a tutor had a rough start and declined a whole bunch of sessions during his/her first week. But since then, great strides have been made and the accepted percentage has trended upward each week because the root cause (nervousness and inexperience) has been addressed. We don't need to hold out until the overall accepted percentage reaches 85%.

It is important to look at the whole picture, beyond the individual numbers. What does this tutor's quality look like? Is this tutor moving in the right direction? Are the quantitative metrics trending upward, even if they haven't hit their mark yet? Is putting off a status change because an overall average hasn't overtaken the effect of a poor first week or two really buying anyone anything? These are some questions to ask yourself when considering whether a tutor with good quality but possibly less than stellar quantitative metrics is ready for Tutor 1.

And also remember that this tutor is not being sent off into oblivion. He/she will still receive regular reviews and feedback from you, so we should be looking for potential rather than perfection.
ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS

New Advisory Template Wording

**NOTE:** The advisory template has been changed! Please be sure you are using the most recent version of the template. The primary change is in the wording toward the end that outlines how much time we are providing. Previously we had said we would provide 2 weeks. We have changed the wording to read "up to 2 weeks" to account for the rare occasion where based on the severity of the concerns allowing a tutor to continue through the second week of an advisory is clearly not in anyone's best interest. If you believe you have a case like this, please discuss it with your Senior Mentor and Mentor Manager.

The Tutor Newsletter

Hopefully all of you read the latest tutor newsletter so this is nothing new. If you didn't, please take the time to read the newsletter each month. It helps to keep you on the same page with your tutors. In last month’s newsletter, we asked for help from our tutors brainstorming discipline-specific newsletter topics. The response has been great! However, we would still like more ideas.

If you are looking for more to do this summer, and you would like to engage with our tutors through the tutor newsletter, please take a moment to share your ideas with us through this survey: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SummerNewsletterIdeas](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SummerNewsletterIdeas). If we like your ideas and you want to write them, we will pay you to do so. And if you don’t want to write them, that's okay, too! We still want your ideas! Think about what your tutors struggle with the most and let us know!

New Subjects

This is a quick update on subjects that are currently in development or that have upcoming launch dates to help keep you up to speed with the changes we are always making to our subject offerings.

New Subjects in Development
Math – Quantitative Methods

New Subjects Currently Staffing
Math – Linear Algebra
Math – Quantitative Reasoning (currently requires passing Algebra II, Geometry, Trig or Pre-Calc, and Statistics)
Technology – Computer Science – Database Systems
Technology – Computer Science – Webdesign

Upcoming Launch to Students
Technology – Computer Science – Python
Business – Intermediate Economics – Micro

If you are interested in tutoring or mentoring any of these subjects, please head over and take the exam ([https://prv.tutor.com/apply/login.aspx](https://prv.tutor.com/apply/login.aspx)). Then submit a support ticket (tutorsupport@tutor.com) letting us know and we’ll take it from there!
J U L Y  2 0 1 7

JUST FOR FUN

July Mentor Anniversaries

Happy anniversary to all our July-start mentors!

1 year
Joe D.

2 years
Naimah A.
Carlos M.

3 years
Helen D.

5 years
Christine R.

6 years
Matt P.