Hi Mentors!

While springtime is traditionally the time to consider the growth of new things and cleaning out the old, there’s just something about the smells of pumpkin spice and cinnamon pinecones and the beauty of golden aspen leaves and red and orange maple leaves that energizes me like nothing else. I love the fall!

As we jump full swing back into this school year, we have a JAM PACKED newsletter for you! The theme of this newsletter is taking the time to rethink your approach to communication and feedback and rebuild strong mentoring skills. Please be sure you take the time to read through it. We have awesome technique articles, critical policy updates, and important announcements and reminders this month. Happy mentoring!

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Wouldn’t it be great if every tutor followed all of the rules, completed perfect sessions, and exceeded expectations in every area of their reviews? Imagine a world with no advisories, no QC sessions, and no content reviews. Sounds great, right? There are some downsides to such imagery, but one that hits me harder than all of the others – **WE WOULD ALL BE OUT OF A JOB!**

As mentors and senior mentors, we spend all of our time ensuring that quality sessions are being completed. Through spot checks and reviews, QC sessions, and advisories, we provide guidance and support to those whom we serve. Yet, there are times when our feedback does not appear to resonate with our respective mentees and/or leads to varied responses. If only, our mentees would grab hold of our feedback and apply it just as we imagined they would.

**News Flash** – the age of the tutor robot has ended as quickly as it began. In fact, it never existed. In the human experience, we all feel, think, and emote differently. Our reactions to setbacks vary as much as Colorado temperatures in Fall (shout out to Sarah Snyder). 😊 In these times, we have to take the time to consider the human experiences of tutoring and mentoring.

Here are a few ways that we can do that:

1. **Show empathy.** We often think of empathy as walking in another person’s shoes. I challenge you to go deeper and cultivate a relationship with your mentees that makes them feel understood and emotionally safe.
   
   “How would I feel if I were <insert mentee’s name> in this situation?” This question could help you connect emotionally to your mentee, which reduces defensiveness and/or frustration toward you, others, and the situation at hand.

2. **Suspend judgement.** Give your mentee the benefit of the doubt. In doing so, you increase flexibility in your thinking about the situation at hand. Make an effort to understand by initiating dialogue through open-ended questions.
   
   For example, if you know your mentee is having a tough time, reach out and ask if there is anything that you can do for him/her during this time. Such two-way communication can help increase self-awareness and responsibility.

3. **Validate experiences.** Specifically, in situations where a mentee is having recurring quality issues, we see his/her emotions on display. Keep in mind that two people involved in a situation will likely view it from two different perspectives. We may not feel or think the same way as our mentee.
   
   “I understand your frustrations and it’s okay for you to feel that way.” This is a quick way to dismantle any power struggle that may be brewing, resolve arguments, and build trusting relationships. Mentees who feel that their experiences have been invalidated will likely shut down, increasing tension between you and them.

4. **Maintain a collaborative spirit.** Share struggles that you may have faced. Offer encouraging words to help your mentee understand that you believe in their ability. Remind your mentees that you are there to support them through the tutoring process. We all have the same goal – providing educationally sound experiences for our students. Let’s work with our mentees to ensure their successes.

Now, I can’t promise you that if we follow these steps that every mentee will respond as we expect. After all, the Tutor Robot is an endangered species. However, I will guarantee that you will see less variation in the reactions to setbacks – more like Georgia temps in the Fall. 😊

It’s also very nice to see comments such as this one from our mentees:

*I appreciate your taking an interest as that helps to motivate me to get back to tutoring. 😊*

Happy Mentoring!
Wenona
Interaction vs. Engagement: What’s the difference and why does it matter?

BY MINDY WADE, SENIOR MENTOR

How are interaction and engagement related?
The words ‘interaction’ and ‘engagement’ are sometimes used interchangeably. Both are good to see in our tutoring sessions, but there is a difference. According to the “Degrees of Student Engagement” resource in the Tutor Resource Center, there are four levels of engagement, from minimal to conceptual engagement. There are situations in which each level of engagement may be appropriate, but in most sessions, we want full, conceptual engagement—the student is predicting, analyzing, asking questions, discussing the topic, and actively processing information.

Interaction means that there is a dialogue in the session; the student is participating in the conversation. Interaction is an indicator of engagement in general because without interaction there cannot be engagement. For simplicity though, let’s say that ‘interaction’ represents merely one of the first three levels of engagement, and ‘engagement’ specifically meets the threshold for conceptual engagement.

Interaction vs. Engagement in Sessions
Interaction is necessary for engagement, but not all interaction represents a sufficient level of engagement. For example, in a math or business session, if the tutor is listing steps and the student is doing the computations, this is interaction, but it does not quite reach the level of engagement we want to see. Perhaps the session begins like this, but as it continues, the student should be suggesting next steps, synthesizing the information to develop a formula, or summarizing the concepts discussed. The student’s level of engagement early in the session will depend on his or her level of understanding, but our tutors need to be asking leading questions and helping the student get to his or her own conclusions.

In writing or career help sessions, tutors should do as few edits as possible, particularly with regard to higher-level paragraph and sentence revisions. With basic grammar, a tutor may need to explain a rule to a student, but as much as possible, the student should be applying that rule to his or her own writing. The goal is to prompt the student to do most of the thinking and work in the session. This helps ensure he or she is getting the most out of the service. We might think of the difference like this: Interaction requires varying amounts of ‘doing’ while engagement requires ‘thinking and doing.’

Identifying Engagement in Sessions
Reading through a session in detail will reveal whether there is true conceptual engagement or merely some level of interaction. But even in scanning sessions, you can look for specific signs in the structure of the sessions that may point to a lack of engagement.

• Who is doing more of the talking?
  • If the tutor is talking more, he/she may be lecturing without giving the student a chance to think through the concepts.
  • The conversation should be split, or even better, the student should be doing more of the talking. This happens when the student is actively engaged, asking questions, synthesizing information, drawing conclusions, and attempting solutions.

• What are the student’s responses?
  • If the student is providing short responses such as ‘ok’ or ‘yes,’ he/she is probably not the one putting the logic together and coming to conclusions.
  • The student should be venturing guesses, asking his/her own questions, and problem-solving, all of which will require more than short answers.

• Is the tutor asking yes/no clarification questions?
  • Questions such as “does that make sense?” or “are you following?” typically mean that the tutor has just said or done something that did not allow for student engagement. The tutor may have just provided a formula, shown how to do something, or given a mini-lecture.
  • We want our students to understand how to do the critical thinking and draw their own conclusions, and that is generally inhibited when the tutor is doing too much of the decision-making during problem-solving.

Encouraging Engagement in Sessions
All tutors and mentors should be familiar with the resources in the Tutor Resource Center, particularly those surrounding engagement. As you are reviewing your tutors’ sessions, try to keep the levels of engagement in mind and encourage them to strive toward full conceptual engagement. It is the cornerstone of our service as a truly engaged student is the best indicator of sound educational outcomes.
**Mentoring with Purpose**

**TECHNIQUE**

**ABCs of Feedback: What happened to the sandwich?**

*BY JEN BOLLER, DIRECTOR OF MENTORING AND QUALITY CONTROL*

Mentoring is a position that has a dual role. We have an obligation to our students to ensure they are receiving a highly educational experience. We also have a responsibility to our tutors to support their development of the skills and strategies required to provide our students with exceptional sessions. While providing constructive feedback in a face to face environment is challenging in and of itself, working in a virtual environment adds another layer of complexity. We cannot leverage facial queues or vocal inflections, and we must rely solely on our words. The words we choose and the way we present them can be all the difference in the world between a tutor feeling appreciated, encouraged and empowered and a tutor feeling defeated and unwilling to put forth effort to improve.

We likely have all received feedback that left us feeling that we failed. Feedback of this nature can leave us feeling defensive and angry. As mentors, it is our job to ensure the feedback we provide is done in a way that gets under our tutors’ defenses and leaves them feeling hopeful and not discouraged. You likely have heard at some point in your mentoring careers about the sandwich technique for providing feedback: discuss something positive the tutor does, follow it with feedback about the areas in need of improvement, and end with an encouraging and hopeful summary of the tutor’s work. The problem with this technique is that it can feel disingenuous, leaving the tutor waiting for the shoe to drop… "You do a great job clarifying the student’s needs, but...” We want to suggest a different strategy for offering feedback.

The ABC strategy is one that focuses on the tutor’s areas of concern in a way that demonstrates encouragement and that this is a team effort with the clear goal of helping the tutor improve.

A : **APPRECIATE.** Show appreciation for something that the tutor does well. It is best if this feedback is relative to the concerns you are seeing. By doing this, you can emphasize that you know the tutor can do this well, you have seen it, but in this particular situation, it is something that the tutor needs to work on.

B : **BE REAL** and honest about the situation and the concerns that need to be addressed, and hold them accountable with feedback that uses facts and data.

C : **CURIOUSITY.** Using a team approach, ask the questions that will get the tutor thinking and eager to improve.

Let’s look at a few examples. Joe S on your team seems to have an issue with his tone in some sessions, often using short one-word responses. These could be perceived by the student as impatient or even rude. In his exchanges with you, his statements are always clear and respectful. So feedback to the tutor might look like this:

“I noted that when you and I are communicating, you are always very clear in your questions and comments to me. You are able to convey your thoughts concisely. In some of the sessions I looked over for this review though, I noticed that there are times when you are using very short statements or even one-word responses. A few students even made comments that they felt like you were being rude or impatient. So let’s take some time to think about this together. I can see in our communications that you are definitely able to convey your thoughts clearly, so I wanted to see what you thought about this situation. How could your approach to feedback change to address these students’ perception? I would love your thoughts on this so we can start coming up with some strategies that will result in no chance of misperceptions in your sessions. “

Another example might be Jane C who is having content issues in one of her math subjects, but not in the other subjects that she tutors. Feedback in this situation might look something like this:

“Most of the math sessions that I looked over for this review looked really good. You communicate very clearly with your students and your level of content knowledge is quite strong. I did notice, though, that a few of your Pre-Calculus sessions had some errors in them that weren’t caught or corrected before the session ended. I was intrigued by this given how solid your content knowledge was in the Algebra and Trigonometry sessions I have seen. What are your thoughts on this? Are there particular concepts in the Pre-Calculus sessions that you feel you are not as strong with that we may want to take a closer look at? The sessions I reviewed that I noted the errors in involved concepts “X” and “Y.” Let’s put our heads together to see if we can figure out how to approach this to ensure you are able to help students with these concepts going forward."

This ABC approach leaves a tutor wanting to grow and improve because his/her strengths in this area have been recognized and you are going to work on a solution together where the sandwich method can leave the tutor feeling shamed about the work he/she are doing. It is one that requires you to look at the big picture of the tutor’s quality, and it will take practice, but it is one that in the end will leave your tutors more receptive to the feedback you provide and your genuine offer to help.
**POLICY/PROCEDURE**

**Chain of Command**

It occurred to us recently that it may not be completely clear to everyone, especially our newest mentors, how the mentoring team as a whole is organized. So we wanted to provide a quick graphic of our chain of command. Just as a tutor with a concern about his/her mentor is welcome to contact the senior mentor, we want you to know your next point of contact if you have any concerns. Please let your manager know if this graphic is unclear or if you have any questions about the chain of command.

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**Disagreeing with a QC Reviewer**

We’ve all been there. We get a QC session in our queue and we feel like the reviewer is wrong about this session needing to be addressed with the tutor. What do we do with that?

That’s a great question! Here is a little background about the process and then the expectation for when you disagree. We have several QC “buckets.” A session might go through QC because the student’s comment leaves something to be desired, our filters picked up a word of concern in the chat, or a student requested a credit to his/her account for the time spent in a session. Our QC reviewers sift through these buckets on a daily basis, escalating anything that may need to be addressed.

But as I’m sure you can appreciate, it is impractical on many levels to have them reviewing these sessions in depth. Afterall, that is something mentors can do! So these sessions are escalated to the mentor to be reviewed and addressed as needed.

When you receive a QC session and you do see something in the session that needs to be addressed, please do so! But what if you disagree with the reviewer? In that case, please send that session to your Mentor Manager. Do NOT mark a session as not an issue without sending it to your Mentor Manager first. You can do that by taking the following steps:

1. Mark the session as being an issue (even though you disagree).
2. Choose the option to send the session to “Tutor.com” (this directs it to your manager when you send it).
3. Leave a comment for your Mentor Manager about why you disagree and feel that this session is not an issue.
4. Send the session on.

What happens from here is that your manager reviews the session and your comments. Sometimes we’re all in agreement and the session is returned to you with a note to go ahead and mark it as not an issue. But sometimes your Mentor Manager will see something differently and provide feedback when returning it to you. This will generally include input on what needs to be brought to the tutor’s attention and occasionally a suggestion for how to address it. By taking these steps, we can ensure solid quality control and prevent potential concerns a manager might see through a broader review of sessions from falling through the cracks.
**Status Change Evaluation Time!**

This will come as no surprise to those of you who have been with us through a fall semester before. It is status change evaluation time! What does this mean? Every fall we review new and existing employment laws in each state and determine whether some states should be converted from independent contractor status to part-time employee status in the new year. Once this decision is made we prepare for a massive employment status conversion for a batch of tutors from selected states.

To that end, we do a big push each fall to encourage status change review of every tutor. This is important for these tutors because we will be unable to process status changes for them for a period of a couple months. So we want to ensure any tutor who is on the way or likely to reach the next status in the coming weeks gets that status change before having his/her status “frozen” until after the new year. The deadline this year for those status changes is **October 31, 2017**. That is right around the corner!

Please review your team and recommend status changes for any tutors who are close, showing promise, and demonstrating good quality. Pay especially close attention to your Probationary tutors as being “frozen” at Probationary status is very discouraging! If you have any questions about a tutor’s qualification for a status change, please start that discussion with your senior mentor ASAP. We also ask that you not inform the tutor of your status change recommendation as a general policy but also in case the status change is not approved or processed in time during the conversion. Any status change recommendations made after **October 31, 2017** are not guaranteed to be processed until after the new year, depending on whether the tutor is going to be included in this conversion, and we want to reduce frustration for these tutors as much as we can. Thank you!

**Award Nominations**

This is a reminder that award nominations are a REQUIRED mentoring duty. Consider this: If no tutors on your team are deserving of an award, perhaps you are not doing the best job you could be with mentoring them toward greatness... just throwing that out there!

Each month we select:
- **One** Tutor of the Month winner
- **Four** Subject Tutor of the Month winners (nominate for ANY subject the tutor tutors in which he/she excels)
- **Three** Best Student Comment winners

Nominations can be made all month long. Consider nominating your tutors and their student comments when you complete reviews, when you complete spot checks, when you consider status changes, when it’s Tuesday... any time! Submit your recommendations via Support Ticket ([tutorsupport@tutor.com](mailto:tutorsupport@tutor.com)).

**Address Check!**

We are quickly approaching the end of the year! Please take a moment to ensure your address is current. You will need to update it in the classroom as well as on your W-4 through ADP. Thank you!

**Share Your Ideas and Get Published!**

The two technique articles at the start of this newsletter were written by your fellow mentors! They shared their ideas, and now they're published! Do you have a great tip you’d like to share with your fellow mentors? We’re looking for your input! Take ownership of your mentor newsletter by sharing those ideas with us. Think about the things you do that make your job as a mentor work for you (efficiency tools, communication tips, time management ideas, etc... the possibilities are endless!) and let us know about them. If your idea is selected, you will have the chance to write about it and get published!

Submit your ideas to [Sarah.Snyder@tutor.com](mailto:Sara.Snyder@tutor.com) with the subject line “Mentor Newsletter Ideas” and we'll let you know if we want you to turn them into articles to share with your fellow mentors. We can’t wait to hear what you come up with!
ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS

Trending Concerns in Career Help and Essay Writing

We’re seeing some concerning trends in a few subjects: Essay Writing, Essay Writing - College Level, and Career Help. I wanted to bring these to your attention to be sure that you’re looking out for these quality concerns in your tutors’ sessions.

As you know, it’s always tempting for tutors to simply answer a student’s question for them. After all, that’s often what students want us to do! Please encourage all your tutors to approach their sessions with a different philosophy. When a student leaves a session, they shouldn’t just have the right solution to today’s problem. They should be able to solve tomorrow’s problem on their own.

How does this philosophy look, when applied to Essay Writing? Any time that a tutor makes an edit for a student, they are giving out an answer, with no assurance that the student is learning how to write a better essay on their own. Instead, tutors should be pointing out where an essay needs editing, explaining why, giving suggestions, and asking the student to revise the essay themselves. The Tutor Resource Area has an excellent resource on how tutors can teach students to improve their own essays. I strongly suggest that you not only point tutors to this resource when you see “answer-giving” in Essay Writing sessions, but show them examples of “answer-giving” in their own sessions and suggest what a more appropriate approach would look like. Ideally, in Essay Writing sessions, tutors should not be making edits for students at all—except for perhaps correcting the first instance of a mistake, along with an explanation of how the student should deal with subsequent instances on their own.

In Career Help, we’re seeing sessions where tutors are unaware of what a high-quality resume looks like. For example, a resume should not be a laundry list of what the job candidate has done in the past! The resources we have for Career Help spell out clearly what tutors should be doing in Career Help sessions. Please be familiar with these. Remember that all mentors should be comfortable reviewing Career Help sessions and providing useful, actionable feedback. If you don’t feel completely comfortable with Career Help sessions, take some time to bring yourself up to speed so that you can support your tutors with them.

I would ask that you pay special attention to these concerns in your tutors’ Essay Writing and Career Help sessions. We would really like to see an improvement in the quality of these sessions. Thank you very much for your assistance in helping your tutors deliver top-rate education! If you have any questions, please contact your senior mentor. Thank you!

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 Currently Staffing (Not yet launched to students)
Business – Intermediate Economics – Macro (requires passing the Introductory Economics exam and the Intermediate Macroecon exam)
Math – Quantitative Methods (requires passing the Calculus exam and the Quantitative Methods exam)
Technology – Computer Science – Database Systems
Technology – Computer Science – Webdesign

New Subjects Currently Staffing (Recently launched to students)
Math – Quantitative Reasoning (limited hours: 6pm–12am 7 days/week)

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). Then submit a support ticket (tutorsupport@tutor.com) letting us know and we’ll take it from there!
JUST FOR FUN

October Mentor Anniversaries

Happy anniversary to all our October-start mentors!

2 years
Shawn K.
Jessica S.
Colleen T.

3 years
Zachary M.

5 years
Olga R.