Hi Mentors!

I can’t believe the year is almost over already! What a whirlwind it has been, too! With the many changes to the tutoring platform and the many changes to the mentoring tools, it seems there is always something new. We all appreciate your attention to all these changes and your energy and enthusiasm for your work. We wish you a safe and fun December!

Happy mentoring!

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**Consistency and Continuity: How can we avoid the moving target syndrome?**

**By Sarah Orlikowski, Senior Mentor**

Imagine you are a basketball player. After practice, your coach tells you that you really need to work on your dribbling skills before the big game otherwise the other team is going to have a lot of fun stealing the ball from you. You practice every day, and by the end of the week, you feel a lot more confident in your skills. During the big game, you don’t cause a single turnover! You feel pretty good about your performance, but afterward the coach’s only comment to you is that your jump shot needs some work. Even though your team won, you feel defeated. Didn’t your coach notice your mad dribbling skills? You find yourself with zero motivation to practice jump shots – or anything, really – next week. Who cares, anyway?

Tutoring isn’t a game, obviously, but Mentors have the same power as the coach does in this analogy: our words can either motivate or deflate the tutors on our teams. Jen Boller’s article on the ABC’s of Feedback in the October Mentor Newsletter focused on the way our word choices can affect the tutor’s impression of the Review. Here, let’s talk about continuity between Reviews as another strategy for helping our tutors feel appreciated, encouraged, and empowered.

**Continuity Between Reviews**

If we neglect to discuss progress on issues noted in the last Review and focus solely on other areas of concern, tutors may feel discouraged that we aren’t acknowledging the work they may have put into improving. Lack of continuity can also leave tutors with the impression that we look at sessions through a changing set of standards. We never want tutors to feel like the rules are changing or the bar is moving. Instead, we want to motivate tutors to continue evolving their tutoring skills to provide the best possible learning experiences for our students. When we acknowledge progress between Reviews, tutors feel seen and appreciated. In addition, referencing past Reviews can also help convey the severity of concern if issues aren’t improving.

Here are some steps we can take to ensure continuity between Reviews:

1.) **Look back:** Every time we complete a quality check for a tutor, we should be taking a look at the last Review or two to refresh our memories about what areas the tutor was working on as well as our level of concern and feedback provided about those areas.
2.) **Take note:** When we review the tutor’s current sessions, we should pay close attention to past areas of concern and ask ourselves the following questions: Is the issue resolved? If the issue is not resolved, do we see any progress at all? If the issue is not resolved, do we see the same level of severity?
3.) **Follow up:** When we write our feedback to the tutor, we should always reference the areas we asked him/her to work on in the last Review and discuss progress based on our observations.
   
   a.) If the issue has been resolved, praise the progress you see! Convey that we appreciate the effort s/he has put into aligning with best practices. If other areas of concern are present, you can use the momentum from the improved area to fuel other areas as well.
   
   b.) If you see effort toward improvement but more work needs to be done, be your tutor’s biggest cheerleader! Let your tutor know that you see the effort and continue providing actionable feedback to help him/her continue moving forward. Here is an example comment for a tutor who is working on interaction in live proofreading sessions:

   Last time, we talked about using leading questions in your proofreading sessions rather than telling the student exactly how to revise each error. I definitely see you using leading questions more often in these sessions, which is great! For example, you did a good job prompting the student to rewrite the thesis in the first linked session. Thank you for working on this. To continue refining your approach, keep working to use leading questions every step of the way. Even if the error seems minor (like a simple comma addition), we want to make sure the student understands why the revision needs to be made. Rather than telling the student where to add the comma, which misses a teachable moment, use a leading question that incorporates the grammar rule and prompts the student to come up with the revision. Last time, I asked you to look at the Stop and Talk article in the Tutor Resource Center. I encourage you to try using the Highlight Method described in that resource, as this method can help you avoid getting ahead of your students. I encourage you to also take a look at the resource titled Degrees of Student Engagement for some helpful discussion of what engagement looks like in various situations. There are some example sessions linked there as well.

   c.) If you don’t note any progress, take the opportunity to ask the tutor if s/he has had a chance to look at the resources and feedback mentioned last time. Make it clear that you’re open to any questions, and try providing your actionable feedback from another angle. While we still want to choose our words in a way that encourages the tutor (don’t forget to use the ABCs of feedback!), referencing past Reviews is a helpful way to convey the seriousness of your concern if issues aren’t improving.

Don’t be like the coach who asks the player to work on dribbling one week but only comments on the poor jump shot the next week! If we ask a tutor to work on an area, we should always follow up in the next Review to note progress. When we convey that we care about the work they put into meeting or exceeding our expectations, we can motivate them to continue evolving their skills.
Throughout the year, we often see tutors transferred from one team to another. At times, this can be difficult and confusing for the tutor, so it is important that we are doing all we can to ease the transition.

In some situations, you may look over past Reviews and then get ready to complete your first Review for that tutor only to find you do not agree completely with the previous Mentor’s perspective on the quality of the tutor’s sessions. It is important to take the time to make sure the two Reviews tie together even when you are seeing something new. Keep the human perspective in mind. Each tutor will react differently to the issues you are noting, so it is important to consider the human side of tutoring and mentoring. (More on this in the October 2017 newsletter!) Doing this will help minimize the tutor’s confusion and frustration.

As an example, let’s say we have a tutor who has been working with a Mentor for quite a long time. During this time, the Mentor has a lot of praise for the tutor and has noted no major concerns in the tutor’s work. When the tutor is reassigned, he/she receives a new Mentor who completes the first Review right away. The new Mentor notes a number of areas of concern and marks them all below expectations. Understandably, this could leave the tutor feeling shocked and frustrated!

There are some things the new Mentor could do to help avoid the above situation. First and foremost, when you sit down to do a Review or a Spot Check for a tutor who was transferred to your team, it is important to take some time to look through past Reviews as you would with your own tutors (check out the article on continuity earlier in this newsletter!). What did the previous Mentor cover with the tutor? Are there areas that you should pay special attention to when working on the Review? This will give you an idea of what has been covered with the tutor and how it has been addressed.

Next, you will want to take some time to complete your own review. If there are areas that you feel are below expectations, consider how much of an issue each one is. Could you focus on one or two of the most important issues and leave the rest until the next Review? If this is something that you choose do, it would be good to leave a note in the internal comments at the bottom. This will remind you at the time of the next Review about what still needs to be addressed, and it will help anyone who looks over the Review to see that you did note the issues but wanted to prioritize and not overwhelm the tutor with everything all at once.

When noting the issues in the Review, consider if there is something the previous Mentor has noted that you could tie your feedback to. “As your previous Mentor noted, it is important to...” or “In your last Review, I noticed that your mentor addressed...it looks like you are working on this area. As you continue working on it...” Statements like this will help connect the two Reviews and eliminate some of the surprise a tutor might feel.

It can also help to be sure you are including plenty of positive feedback and praise for strengths. What is your tutor doing well? Is there something the last Mentor noted that was going well that you could note? “Your last Mentor noted that you were doing well with...I noticed this in your latest batch of sessions as well. Great work!”

Before submitting the Review, take some time to read through it as if you were the tutor. Would you be surprised to receive this Review after receiving the most recent Review from your last Mentor? What areas would surprise you? Is there a way to change your approach to be more supportive and less surprising while still bringing this area to light?

Always give your tutor the benefit of the doubt. Ask open-ended questions to help you gain an understanding of your tutor’s thought processes. Keep in mind that you may not see a situation the same way the tutor does. Taking time to discuss the areas and get his/her thoughts can help the tutor feel more supported and less blindsided by a Review noting issues of concern following those that are primarily praise. When a tutor is feeling supported, he/she is more likely to feel like a valuable member of your team and take those steps needed to continue improving the quality of his/her tutoring. This will ultimately lead to greater learning experiences for our students.
One of the major challenges of mentoring is keeping track of everything! There is so much to remember—when a tutor came on the team, when a tutor has been sick and missed sessions, when an important resource was sent, and so on. We all have different ways of keeping track of this information, but the best way I have found of keeping track of it is often the most underused—the notes boxes in the Mentoring Tools.

Before we look at how to use them, let’s first look at their advantages over a post-it or notebook kept beside the computer, or even a document saved to your hard drive:

- Using the notes on the main mentoring tools page can help you stay organized. You always know if you wanted to check up on a situation at a certain point or if you wanted to send an email about an ongoing issue because you see the notes immediately every time you log in and look at that tutor.
- The entire mentoring team is able to see this information. This can answer so many questions before they are even asked because at any point the Senior Mentor or Mentor Manager has full access to everything you know.
- The information is quickly accessed, helping you to save time when doing Quality Checks. It is always right there on the individual tutor’s page. You don’t have to wonder where you put it, and you can’t forget to pull it out to look—it’s right in front of you.
- Over time, you’re able to easily spot trends that you might miss in notes on paper. You can see when tutors were inactive, missed shifts, and so on.

As I’m sure you’ve noticed, there are some different things you can include in these notes and also two different places to put your notes—the main notes page and the individual tutors’ pages. I use both of these places a little bit differently.

On the Mentoring Tools Page, I keep track of things that I need to be able to see immediately:

- A tutor who shows as due for a Review but doesn’t actually have any sessions (perhaps only a disconnect), so I want to keep an eye on things.
- Dates when I might want to do a Review, a quick check of sessions, or send an email.
- In short, anything that deals with frequency of Reviews or monitoring situations—things that I’ll want to see every time I log in without having to go to individual tutors’ pages to find.

On individual tutors’ pages, I keep up with anything that I feel might be helpful over time:

- Any important dates, such as status changes or when the tutor joined the team.
- Any time the tutor has emailed about sickness, a new baby, missing a shift due to an emergency, etc. I recently saw a situation where a low online % was explained because the mentor had kept a note of a power outage in the mentor tools, a small event that the tutor might have even forgotten over time.
- Any time an official email is sent—low online percentage, sporadic tutoring, connection failure rate, and so on.
- Any helpful resources that are sent to a tutor—this is invaluable in advisory situations to make sure that all possible help has been given to the tutor.
- In short, anything that might help you to spot trends or help with future situations.

So now that we know the “why” and “where,” what about the “how”? There are several things we want to keep in mind every time: initials, date, brevity, and newest first. The entire mentoring team has access to these tools, so leaving your initials helps everyone to know who left the note. Since we’re using it to spot trends, the date is also important in tracking when something happened. Brevity also helps to make all the notes easier to see and skim through. I try to summarize with entries “High connection failure rate” or “21 day inactivity email.” And finally, I recommend putting the most recent notes at the top. Since the more recent notes are likely to be the most relevant, having them more easily accessible will be more likely to save you time in the long run. Just be sure to always hit “save” before you navigate off the page so you don’t lose any notes!

It can feel awkward to use at first, but I’m sure that over time, my favorite tool will become your favorite tool as well!
When it comes to Probationary tutors, one of the most common issues we run into is tutors being held at the Probationary status for longer than necessary. And the most common reason is that the mentor is waiting to see something more—whatever that might be. The Mentor Manual outlines benchmarks for each status change (the December slow-down would be a great time to review those!). When considering them, remember that the quantitative benchmarks are guidelines, not concrete requirements.

Here are a couple examples of what we mean by guidelines:

**Example 1:** The tutor's overall rating is 4.1, but his October ratings are 3.5 and his November ratings are 4.5. This tutor’s ratings are trending in the right direction—as he has gained experience and implemented your feedback, the students are responding and he is moving in the right direction. If his quality so far is good, we do not need to wait for his overall ratings to catch up with his rough start before we can recommend Tutor 1 status.

**Example 2:** The tutor’s overall accepted percentage is 70%, but his October A% is 50% and his November A% is 95%. This tutor’s A% is trending in the right direction. As in the previous example, his increased experience and understanding of policies has resulted in a positive change in behavior. If his quality so far is good and those declines weren’t traded for excessive transfers, we do not need to wait for his overall A% to catch up with his rough start before we can recommend Tutor 1 status.

**Example 3:** The tutor’s quantitative stats all look good and he’s had 30 sessions. You’ve completed several Reviews and you have no recurring concerns—anything you have noted in a Review has been addressed and improvement is being made. Here as well, the tutor is moving in the right direction, is responsive to feedback, and is doing a good job. So if his quality so far is good, we do not need to wait for him to get 20 more sessions before we can recommend Tutor 1 status.

Let’s also look at some examples where quantitative stats are all meeting the guidelines (or trending in the right direction) but the tutor has been working on some qualitative things:

**Example 4:** You have completed a few Reviews and you have been working with the tutor on increasing the level of engagement in his sessions. You feel that he still has further to go, but you have noted significant growth over time and he is moving in the right direction. You have no reason to believe that this tutor is headed toward an advisory, and it appears through his responsiveness to your feedback that he is coachable. We are looking for potential, not perfection, when considering Tutor 1 status, so this tutor fits the bill. We do not need to wait for more sessions to review before we can recommend Tutor 1 status.

**Example 5:** You have completed a few Reviews and because the tutor has low usage subjects, his session count is pretty low, even though he is putting in the time to get sessions. When it comes right down to it, you’ve read through pretty much every one of this tutor’s sessions just because there were so few at each Review period. He has no recurring quality concerns (either quality looks good or issues noted are addressed in subsequent sessions). We are seeing potential and quality in the sessions that have been completed, so we can safely say he is capable of providing a quality experience to our students. We do not need to wait for more sessions to review before we can recommend Tutor 1 status.

Remember, while the Probationary period “can last up to 60 days” it really shouldn’t need to in the majority of cases. We should have enough information within a handful of Reviews (around 30 days’ worth of tutoring) to make a determination about whether this tutor has potential or has recurring quality concerns. If he shows potential, is moving in the right direction, and is responsive to feedback about issues noted, he has demonstrated what he needs to demonstrate to be a Tutor 1 and we should make the recommendation. If he does not show potential, is moving in the wrong direction, or is not responsive to feedback and we are seeing recurring issues, it is time to change tactics and start discussing an advisory.

And as always, if you have questions about whether a tutor is ready for a status change or is in need of an advisory, please start a discussion with your Senior Mentor. That’s what he/she is here for!
Async Resources

We want to remind everyone of the Async resources we have available for both tutors and mentors. The December slow-down is a great opportunity to read through these and refresh yourself on what Async sessions should look like, how to effectively review them, and how to provide actionable feedback to your tutors. Please let your Senior Mentor know if you have any questions. Thank you!

TUTOR RESOURCES

Career Help:
• Asynchronous Career Help
• Asynchronous Resume Sample

Essay Writing and College Essay Writing:
• Time Management Guidelines for Async Essay and College Essay Sessions
• Overview of Async Essay Writing
• Responding to Async Essays
• Overview of College-Level Async Essay Writing
• Responding to College-Level Async Essays
• 80-minute Async Sessions

Admissions:
• Guidelines for College Admissions Essay

MENTOR RESOURCES

In the Mentor Resource Area:
• Reviewing Async Sessions
• Quick Reference Guide for Async Reviews
• College Admissions Essay Guidelines

In the Mentor Newsletter:
• Async Sessions and Time Management (Nov. 2017)
• Trending Concerns in Career Help and Essay Writing (Oct. 2017)

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 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!

Holiday Traditions

What do you do during the holidays (Thanksgiving through New Years)? Do you earn your dinner with a Turkey Trot or Ugly Sweater 5k? Do you have a standing appointment with the Black Friday crowds? Do you recreate a childhood memory Christmas morning? Do you take turns each day lighting the menorah? Do you watch the ball drop every year?

We want to hear about it! Send your holiday traditions (photos welcomed!) to Sarah (Sarah.Snyder@tutor.com) by January 10, 2018, for inclusion in the January Mentor Newsletter. Happy and safe celebrating!
JUST FOR FUN

December Mentor Anniversaries

Happy anniversary to all our December-start mentors!

1 year
Brad A.
Beth G.

2 years
William R.

13 years
Kathleen C.