LET'S START FRESH!

Hi Mentors!

I can't believe how fast the last year went! We implemented so many new tools and resources last year! I know new year resolutions are cliché and the average resolution has already been broken by the time you're reading this, but taking a fresh look at mentoring in the new year can be a great kick start for upping our game and doing great things this year. I am so excited to see what our mentors are capable of this year! Here's to you.

Happy mentoring!

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Recently, there's been a push to emphasize voice more in tutoring sessions. For both tutors and mentors, this new emphasis brings new skills that we have to master and requires developing an understanding of what makes voice tutoring effective. Although the general principles of helping the student understand what they are studying through engagement, clear explanations, and patient encouragement still apply, they manifest differently for voice sessions compared to the chat sessions with which most of us are more familiar. What are the indicators that a voice session is in need of improvement, and what suggestions can we make to effectively develop voice tutoring abilities?

Many problems will become evident in the transcripts, and that is always a good place to start the review of a voice session. If a transcript appears nonsensical or has many unclear words, listening to the audio can help you narrow down what is causing the problem. Here are some common issues associated with using the voice tool, and some suggestions to give tutors when they arise:

- **Talking over the student**: Ask the tutor to be mindful about not speaking over the student and always pause to hear what the student is saying. If a student starts talking, the tutor should make an effort to stop and listen carefully to what the student is saying, and wait until he/she is done to respond.

- **Volume irregularities**: Ask the tutor to make sure his/her headset is on securely and that the mic is staying in the same orientation throughout the session. It can also be a good idea to encourage the tutor to review his/her own past sessions in order to monitor the sound quality.

- **Strong accents or unusual word choices**: Since the Internet is worldwide, the tutor and student can be vary quite a bit in their English pronunciation and usage. It can help to suggest to the tutor that he may want to practice professional English, such as by watching instructional YouTube videos or taking online courses, and try to find opportunities to practice speaking outside of Tutor.com. That can help close the gap between regional variations.

- **Long delays or hesitation**: Although a tutor shouldn’t be afraid of natural pauses, if the pauses are long or impacting the student's experience, they could be a sign of content deficiency; in this case, it would be good for the tutor to brush up on his/her content knowledge to help speed up the time spent thinking through steps. Just like when tutoring in chat, quality leading questions such as “Have you done similar problems before?” and “What have you been studying lately?” can help the tutor buy a little time while clarifying student needs at the same time.

- **Students have trouble understanding the tutor or ask the tutor to repeat**: If this isn’t a case of strong accents or volume irregularities, some other causes might be pacing (maybe the tutor is speaking too quickly) or use of less clear informal words (such as “yeah” or “nah” instead of “yes” or “no”). In general, if students are having trouble understanding tutors, then it will help if they speak more slowly, more formally, and with crisper enunciation.

- **Finally, if you have doubts about whether a tutor should be tutoring voice sessions given recurring quality issues that make it difficult to understand the tutor clearly, please discuss those with your Senior Mentor. And as we’ve noted before, if a tutor indicates that he/she has extenuating circumstances, please refer the tutor to Tutor Support (tutorsupport@tutor.com) if he/she is interested in requesting an exemption.

Have you noticed any other frequent or interesting problems with voice sessions? Be sure to let your Senior Mentor or Mentor Manager know. We are all doing our best to adjust to and master the voice sessions.
In the December Mentor Newsletter, we addressed how to provide continuity between reviews by looking back at the last couple quality checks to remember what issues the tutor was working on, taking note of whether we’re seeing that past issues have resolved, improved, or stayed the same, and following up with tutors in the current review to note progress or encourage continued focus on the areas of concern. Continuity between reviews is another tool in our mentoring toolkit that can help us appreciate, encourage, and empower tutors.

But how should we handle situations when new issues crop up? If every review centers on a new concern, tutors can feel like we’re just looking for ways to criticize their work or like they’ll never be good enough. Similarly, if new areas of concern are piled on top of concerns that haven’t yet resolved, tutors can feel overwhelmed or discouraged by what can be perceived as mounting levels of criticism.

Let’s look at a few scenarios where new issues crop up in a tutor’s work and consider how we can present our feedback in a way that encourages and empowers the tutor while keeping the quality of the student’s learning experience at the forefront of our minds.

**Scenario 1: A tutor’s sessions display issues in more than one area, but one area has a greater negative impact on the student’s experience than the other.**

Some issues we see in our tutors’ sessions have a greater negative impact on the student’s learning experience than others. If a tutor is still working on a bigger-impact issue and a lower-impact issue crops up, we should consider whether it’s necessary to address the new issue or if it can wait until a later review after the bigger-impact issue has been resolved. Giving a tutor too much to work on in one review can be discouraging and overwhelming. We can always make a note in the Internal Comments section of the review as a reminder that we noticed an issue but decided to wait and mention in a later review after the current issues are resolved.

For example, a tutor might be showing issues with doing too much work for the student. Whenever the student needs information or doesn’t understand the topic, the tutor gives the full explanation of the issue without using leading questions to engage the student’s critical thinking skills. The tutor’s limited length sessions are also averaging around 45 minutes rather than sticking closer to the session length guidelines. Engagement is critical to providing a sound learning experience, so in this case the mentor may choose to address how to involve the student in his/her learning and hold off on addressing the session length concern in more depth until the issue with doing too much work for the student improves.

**Scenario 2: A bigger-impact issue has resolved and it’s either now time to address the lower-impact issue, or a lower-impact issue has newly cropped up.**

When the bigger-impact issue resolves and it becomes the right time to address the new issue, we should make sure to consider whether the new issue is linked to the previous issue in any way. If so, we can choose wording that reflects progress with the initial issue and appreciates the work already done as a way to encourage the tutor.

Whether or not the issues are linked, we should also remember that we’re now presenting an issue that has lower negative impact on the student’s experience, and we should choose our words accordingly. We can use language that conveys our suggestions as refinements rather than major overhauls to the tutor’s approach. In this way, we can recognize the positive big-picture skills the tutor is displaying while providing suggestions for improvement in a way that is encouraging and empowering.

Let’s look at an example comment that acknowledges progress and presents the suggestions as refinements. In this example scenario, the tutor was working to add more detail to the in-line comments in Asynchronous Essay Writing sessions. That issue improved, but the Mentor then noticed that the Async sessions were extending beyond the hard-stop time limits.

*I can tell you’ve been working to add more detail to your Async comments as we have been discussing in past reviews! Your comments are now more consistently including grammar rules, explanations, and outside examples to ensure student understanding. We appreciate your attention to this area! Some sessions since your last review did extend past the time limits, though, such as the ones linked here. Adding more detail like this does take extra time, but we still need to make sure we’re ending these Async sessions by the hard-stop time limits because of the way these sessions are contracted to our clients. Working on balancing extra detail with efficiency is a way to continue refining these sessions going forward. There are some excellent tips in the Async Time Management Guidelines, so make sure to check that out.*

(Cont’d on page 4)
Scenario 3: A bigger-impact issue has not yet resolved, but a new concern crops up that is either equally or more concerning than the initial issue. If a new area of concern crops up that is equally or more concerning than the original issue, we do need to address the new issue rather than put it off until a later review; however, we should still consider the way we present the issue to ensure the tutor feels supported rather than attacked.

Again, we can consider whether the new issue is linked to the original issue. Sometimes issues may not seem linked at first glance, but we can think about ways that working on one issue might contribute to the improvement of the other issue. If our feedback asks the tutor to apply effort in one general direction, the tutor is less likely to feel like she or he is playing “Whack-a-Mole” with new issues popping up in each review. A tutor who has clear direction and is empowered rather than overwhelmed is much more likely to make forward progress.

For example, suppose a tutor is showing issues with engaging students when working on essay revisions. The tutor simply tells the student the revisions every step of the way rather than asking leading questions to prompt the student to engage in the proofreading process. In the review, the Mentor provides feedback on stopping to talk through each error and using leading questions to engage the student. In the next group of sessions, the issue with engagement is still present, but it becomes apparent that the tutor is not proofreading thoroughly enough in these sessions to catch the majority of the student’s errors. The Mentor is now concerned about not only engagement but also content. Rather than treat the issues as completely separate weights being piled onto the tutor’s plate, the Mentor can explain that talking through the student’s errors in a more engaging way can slow the pace of the tutor’s review of the essay, which may keep him/her from overlooking errors.

Let’s look at an example comment that conveys concern about both areas but empowers rather than overwhelms the tutor.

There’s a lot of helpful feedback shared with the students in your sessions, and in particular we appreciate the expertise you bring to your literature sessions! It was great to see how effectively you were able to help the student answer the Macbeth questions, for example. Great job there! In proofreading sessions, though, some student essays are returned with a number of agreement and sentence structure errors still present, such as the essays in the sessions linked here. It’s important that we review essays thoroughly, as students can lose faith in our service if they are docked points for errors in an essay they thought was ready to turn in. In your last review, we talked about ways to engage the student in the proofreading process by using leading questions that include the grammar rule and prompt the student to come up with the revision, and I think applying this approach will help with catching more errors as well. Stopping to talk through each error using leading questions effectively slows down the pace of the session, and a slower pace can help tutors catch more errors as they’re reviewing. As you log more sessions, try using the Stop and Talk approach we talked about last time to not only engage the student more fully but also slow down to catch more errors. I’ll go over some more specific examples below, and I’ll also share some helpful online grammar resources to review as well.

Even when new issues crop up, we have choices about when and how we present our feedback. Every session we review is part of someone’s tutoring journey, and when we keep that journey in mind as we write reviews of our tutors’ work, we can help our mentees move forward rather than contribute to discouragement or stalling out!
Ah, January – the month of New Year’s resolutions! The month when we promise ourselves (and sometimes others) to do better and be better. The month when gyms’ parking lots are full and the lines to use their equipment are long. The month when you cannot watch 15 minutes of TV or go online without discovering that yet another celebrity has lost a ton of weight by [Insert your favorite weight loss trick here].

Most of us are familiar with some kind of annual “New Year’s resolution” routine. And probably most of us are just as familiar with the disappointment on December 31st, when we look back and realize that we actually have very little resolve!

But what about mentoring resolutions? Do you find yourself setting some job goals at the beginning of the year? Are there things you’d like to improve? January is a great month to reflect on the past year. We all have a list of things we could work on or wish we did better, and that list might vary in size depending on where you are in your mentoring.

Here are a few tips on how to make your mentoring resolutions a success:

- **As with any resolutions, set small, attainable goals**, such as:
  - Check your email and QC sessions at least once every 48 hours.
  - Make sure a Welcome email gets sent to new tutors on your team within 48 hours of being moved to your team.
  - Never let a brand new tutor go more than 7 days before his/her first review.
  - Be proactive – touching base with your Senior Mentor about trends you are seeing and discussing Probationary tutors on your team around the 30-day mark are great ways to accomplish that! (The December 2017 Mentor Newsletter had a very helpful article about the timing for Tutor 1 recommendations.)
  - Ask for help. Are you struggling with something? Do you have questions? If so, don’t be afraid to reach out to your Senior Mentor or Manager. We are all here to help, work as a team, and support one another.

- **Focus on the things you can control**. While setting a goal to have a termination-free year might not be realistic, we could focus on all the things we can do to ensure we provide our tutors with the support they need (and if we are successful, this should help reduce terminations):
  - Do you have Probationary tutors on your team? Let’s provide them with a status change progress update in the 3rd review. How are they doing? Are they on track for a status change? Are there things that need to be improved first? This is not only a good way to keep tutors in the loop, but also a great reminder for us to keep an eye on things and start thinking about the next steps (status change, advisory, sporadic tutoring email, etc.) in a timely manner.
  - What about Tutor 1 and Tutor 2 tutors? It’s a good idea to include periodic status change updates in their reviews as well. Let them know where they are and what they need to be focused on.
  - Are you noting concerns in reviews? Making sure we vary our feedback and providing more details with every occurrence will make our reviews more effective.
  - Let’s also ensure our feedback is actionable (there was a great article on that in July 2017 Mentor Newsletter).

And so now that we’ve made your work yet another place where you are reminded of your New Year’s resolutions… Happy New Year! Just kidding! But on a more serious note, you can see that these are not some far, out of reach goals. These are simple and attainable, and I would hope we all do these already. But if not, I hope the above tips help you make at least your mentoring resolutions a reality. Happy New Year and here’s to a disappointment-free 12/31/18!
When Was That Review Due?: A tool to help your timeliness resolution

By Scott Rizzo, Mentor

If you’re anything like me, then you like to plan out things in advance. While the information featured in the mentoring tools provides all the information needed to do so, it doesn’t account for things such as vacations and summers off. I don’t like being late with reviews and spot checks, and when I take a vacation for a week or more, I like to make sure all of my reviews are done before I leave. Furthermore, I don’t have the bandwidth to conduct multiple reviews during a weekday, so I need to plan out which is the most priority review for a given day to avoid falling behind. From that was born my tracking spreadsheet (available in the Miscellaneous section of the Mentor Resource Area: http://filedepot.tutor.com/mentors/Review_Timeliness_Tool.xlsx). Here’s how it works:

Based on the level entered into column C, and the last review/spot check dates in columns D & E, Column F calculates the very last day before the review/spot check is due. There are actually 5 levels; 0 represents a probationary tutor. 0.5 represents a Tutor 1 who I need to review/spot check more often (that will make the due date 28 days rather than 42), and levels 1, 2, and 3 represent Tutor 1, 2, and 3, respectively. An overdue review/spot check does not result in a negative number of days—it will still show as being due in 0 days. The spreadsheet will tell you whether it’s a review or a spot check due by which one has been conducted more recently.

When you update “End of next pay period” to the end date of the current pay period, column G will show you all of the reviews/spot checks that will be due this period and cell G54 will tally all of the reviews/spot checks due by the end of the period. Now you can plan out exactly who gets reviewed when in this review period, well in advance.

If you go on vacation, enter the vacation start/end dates into cells J1 & K1, respectively, and column H will turn to “YES” any review that falls in that period. This will help you determine reviews which needs to be done before you leave for vacation to avoid having them be late upon your return.

If a tutor is taking the summer off, you can turn off the tutor’s “Due this period?” indicator by putting anything in column I for that tutor. Anything you put there will change a “YES” for “Due this period?” for that tutor to “NO.” Make sure you are intentional here and continue to check the tutor’s activity level in the mentoring tools periodically to ensure you don’t lose track of his/her return to active tutoring.

That’s really the nuts and bolts of it. Here are some things to be aware of.

As you know, probationary tutors do not receive spot checks. So if a probationary tutor is in row 24, for example, then put “=D24” (without the quotes) in cell E24 and every time you update the last review, the spot check date will change to match, indicating the next assessment to be done is a review. When the tutor moves to Tutor 1, be sure to remove that formula as the tutor now gets spot checks as well.

You are probably going to want to sort this spreadsheet to show what is due the soonest. Be very careful when you sort! Do not sort beyond column I or below your last tutor. You do not want to change the location of Vacation start/end, today’s date, or end of next pay period, or they will become sorted into the spreadsheet. You also want to avoid sorting below your last tutor because you don’t want to change the location of “reviews due by the end of pay period.” So if you wish to sort by the review due soonest, and you have 40 tutors, then your last tutor is in row 41. Highlight from A1 to I41 and under the “data” tab, click “sort.” Make sure the “My data has headers” box is checked so you don’t sort the column titles into the spreadsheet. Sort by “Next Review/Spot Check,” sort on “Values” and order “A to Z.” Click “OK” and then voila! Your tutors are sorted by reviews due first, and then by spot checks.

There are some limitations of the current version of the spreadsheet. For instance, you are currently unable to sort by next due without regard to whether it is a review or a spot check. Another limitation is if a tutor has not tutored in 48 days, but his/her review is due soon or overdue, there is no way to indicate a review is not due unless you put something in “Inactive for summer” column even if it isn’t summer. Furthermore, if a tutor comes off a summer break, s/he usually has a certain number of days to resume tutoring before a review is due. These enhancements are in the works, but for now you will want to keep an eye on situations like those.

I hope you will find this useful! As with any tracking tool, it’s important to be sure you are checking it against the original data (in this case, the information available in the mentoring tools) on a regular basis to ensure nothing is overlooked, but it can be very helpful for planning out your week or your pay period. If you have any feedback about this sheet, please let your Manager know. Happy mentoring!
To Enable Or Not To Enable: Enforcing the Voice Policy

As you should recall, we have been working hard to encourage the use of voice by our tutors as this is an important feature to so many of our students and institutional clients. To that end, we will begin enforcing our voice-enabled policy in the coming months. This policy lines up with our online percentage policy by requiring voice-approved tutors to be have the voice tool enabled for at least 70% of the time they spend available or in session with a student.

As with online percentage, this is a policy being enforced by the Mentor Managers, but if you see that you have a voice-approved tutor who is disabling voice frequently, you should mention it in your reviews and provide a reminder of the policy to be sure your tutor is aware of it. If you hear from a tutor that he/she would like to be exempt from conducting voice sessions, please direct him/her to contact Tutor Support (tutorsupport@tutor.com) with details about the request and those will be reviewed on an individual basis.

Please also keep in mind that as with all other tutoring policies, mentors are also held to the same standards. You can check your own voice enabled/disabled percentage on the connection details page in the Tutor.com classroom. If you have any questions about this policy of the coming enforcement, please let your Manager know.

Async Shift Declines

To those of you who mentor Essay Writing and/or College Essay Writing, we recently sent out information about where you can find the max session length for declined Async sessions in order to have a little more insight into shift-related Async declines. Please make sure you read that information ASAP and let your Manager know if you have any questions about it. Thank you!

AP Crash Course Launched

Our new AP Crash Course product launched 1/16/18! As we noted in an email sent to mentors, this is new territory for us. If you are asked any questions you are unable to answer, please share those with your Manager. And if you have any questions yourself, please also share those with your Manager. Please keep a close eye on these sessions and let your Senior Mentor and Manager know if you see any content concerns. 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!
Thank you to all of you who shared your holiday traditions in response to the December newsletter!

There are 7 people in my immediate family. Still, no one likes the stress of hosting for the holidays, so we started a system where we take turns with hosting duties on Thanksgiving. For Christmas, we do small Secret Santa gift-giving. With the money we would have used for gifts for everyone else, we go to a nice restaurant for dinner. The kicker - everyone has to wear an Ugly Christmas Sweater and Christmas lights. The lights really work. They're battery operated and we wear them around our shoulders. The running joke is if you forget your lights, dinner's on you. It was a funny feeling walking into the restaurant the first year. People are always dressed very nicely and we sort of make a scene with our appearance. After a few years though, we now walk in with confidence like we own the restaurant – and we always get lots of compliments for our silly tradition! Senior Mentor Mindy W.

My family has a fun (and maybe weird...) Christmas tradition. I take things around the house that belong to people or things that people hate and wrap them up from “Repo Clause.” For example, Repo has given a giant empty box and an entire drawer of socks wrapped up for my brother who can’t stand socks. My family loves joke gifts, and these make Christmas morning even more fun. Also, my younger brother and I would always put out a sandwich for Repo Clause alongside the cookies for Santa. The things in the sandwich would be disgusting, like soggy cereal covered with dish soap and chili powder. :) Mentor Maddie H.

My holiday tradition began when I was a little kid, and I've now passed it on to my stepdaughter. Though we opened our gifts on Christmas morning, we always got to open one gift on Christmas Eve. The catch was that Mom got to pick the present, and it was always pajamas! We were, of course, expected to wear them to bed so we'd be in our new Christmas jammies for pictures in the morning. :) As I got a little older, Mom decided she didn't want to mess with “traditional” meals on Christmas Eve and we started a new tradition where my brother and I made dinner and it was never the typical meat and potatoes that I grew up with. Tacos, Chinese, or my favorite, the lasagna bake-off, where my brother and I both made a pan of lasagna and Mom and Dad crowned a winner! (Me, of course! LOL!) Mentor Maya B.

My holiday tradition is working our family Christmas Tree Farm in Ohio. I am the third generation of the farm that has been in business since 1964 (Our first generation is still involved at 87 and 84 years old!). Since I was a baby, I have spent the majority of my holiday season spending time at the farm. It is a crazy busy time for my family but a unique experience for sure. I've attached a picture of our 1st (my grandparents) and 4th generation (my niece and nephew learning some decorating skills), and one of our farm shop. Mentor Rebecca S.
JUST FOR FUN

January Mentor Anniversaries

Happy anniversary to all our January-start mentors!

2 years
Robert M.
Meagan T.
Madhu T.

6 years
Bob D.

7 years
Christina R.

12 years
Sharon F.