Hi Mentors!

This month we’ve chosen to focus on summer travel and all of the preparation that comes along with that. In the next few pages, you will find information on helping your tutors complete SFFs, what it means to be a probationary tutor, thinking about the needs of our clients, mock sessions, and reminders related to summer travel. Thank you so much to all of the mentors and senior mentors who contributed this month. We had so many contributions, that we have enough for the June newsletter as well!

Enjoy the newsletter!

Joanna
Imagine this scenario. You’re finally on your big trip to Europe; when you land, you discover your suitcase was diverted. At least you have your overnight bag with your toothbrush, contact lens solution, medicine, and a clean t-shirt. It’s not perfect, but it’s also not a disaster. You have confidence the airline will reunite you with your luggage soon, and at least you can get going.

The Summary Feedback Form is a little bit like that overnight bag. Should it happen that for some reason the student’s original document does not get attached, is an incorrect version, or got corrupted, the student has something to go on in that SFF. It’s not perfect, but it’s better than standing in the middle of Heathrow Airport with only a passport and a pocket full of lint.

I use this analogy to help tutors realize that the SFF is not simply an exercise in redundancy. It helps them see why it is worthwhile to add another explanation or link about comma usage or specific links to the Purdue OWL website on citation formatting, as well as general, actionable steps about a problem they are trying to solve. It lets the student get started rather than standing there empty-handed.

Although it often feels like you are saying the same thing in the SFF that you already said in the paper, it helps the students to hear the same information more than once and often in different ways. Receiving feedback on a something you have worked very hard on can be difficult. Explaining it in the paper where you point out the error, is quite different than giving holistic feedback on the assignment/paper where they can see that all those little mistakes you pointed out actually have a larger significance.

One other thing about the SFF. No tutor would start a live help session with a student saying: Your paper still needs a lot of work in its structure and content. Instead, nearly every tutor starts a live session with Hello, how are you? Tell me about this assignment. Yet SFFs are the first thing a student sees, and that friendly greeting is often missing. Maybe it’s because tutors feel rushed and want to get straight to the point, but there should always be time for Hello, I enjoyed reading your paper on _(topic)_. You did a great job on _ (some aspect) _ before moving on to the corrections.

In short, let’s remind our tutors to fully complete those SFFs and do so using a positive and helpful tone. It really is the “overnight bag” of asynchronous sessions. Don’t leave the student’s stranded without it!
Summer is an exciting time for everyone, and it is coming up quickly for us! I remember the summer I first started learning to drive. It was exciting and daunting all at once. However, having an experienced driver in the seat next to me was a comfort as I pulled out into the road for the very first time while at the wheel. The probationary period is like being a student driver. The mentor, like a driving instructor, is at the side of the new tutor. The mentor is there to help and guide as the probationary tutor ventures out into the road of our online classroom for the first time. Like student drivers, our probationary tutors are excited and eager to tutor, and they come to us with strong content knowledge and previous tutoring experience.

Just as probationary tutors are excited to start tutoring with us, we should also be enthusiastic for them as well! We can ensure new tutors understand the probationary period is for their benefit by explaining the purposes and goals of this period. Before student drivers obtain driving licenses, they must be provided time to learn and get the lay of the land; our tutors need time to flex some teaching muscles, and learn safely with support while also determining if tutoring is the right fit for them. The probationary period is a learning space, not a punishment. To help new tutors understand this, here are some suggestions to help us guide them throughout their probationary periods:

⇒ We should explain the purpose of our reviews—to identify tutoring strengths as well as areas to build on—as soon as possible to our probationary tutors.
⇒ We can let them know our goal is the same! We want probationary tutors to progress to Tutor 1 status.
⇒ We should make sure probationary tutors know we are there to help with any questions or concerns and ensure they feel comfortable contacting us.
⇒ We should provide frequent positive feedback throughout our reviews, as well as give constructive and actionable feedback for areas to build on.
⇒ We should make sure tutors have an opportunity to tutor, figure out their “style” with tutoring, and make online tutoring fit their needs while being supported.
⇒ We can explain to tutors, as necessary, the purpose of marking Below Expectations; it is not condemnation of their work but instead helps us bring certain areas to their immediate attention. This helps tutors be motivated to improve instead of being discouraged.

As we help grow our probationary tutors, we ensure great experiences at Tutor.com for both our tutors and students. Strong, confident tutors provide excellent sessions to our students, which is our ultimate goal. Probationary tutors do not need to be perfect to achieve Tutor 1 status, but we should be confident in their ability to provide consistently strong sessions, and we can guide them to that point by having a positive attitude about the probationary period and their own progress in their reviews.
Once our probationary tutors are comfortable, we can and should happily recommend them for a status change. The only reason we should keep tutors in the probationary period longer is if we do not think they will be successful as a Tutor 1. By working hard to provide them actionable feedback and keeping them motivated to progress through this period, we can ensure they are ready for a Tutor 1 status change. With our help, our “student drivers” can have a productive probationary period that helps them succeed at Tutor.com!

Who is the Client? Helping our Tutors Meet our Clients’ Needs

I recently wrote an article for the tutor newsletter on this same topic, and was asked to consider how to help mentors with tutors who don’t quite get the concept that the student is not always the client. It’s true that except in a few cases, the student is not the one who hired us, who is paying us, and whose expectations we need to meet. Our client is the library, the school, the college/university, the department of defense, the parent, etc. Many times what the student wants and what the client expects matches. However this is not always the case. Let's look at a couple of examples of when what the student asks for differs from what the clients expects, and how we can help our tutors to reconcile these expectations

1. The student just wants the answer but the client wants us to keep the student engaged in his own learning.

Reassure your tutors that they will never be "called out" for a bad review from a student just looking for answers. We will support them when they are working with non-responsive students and provide suggestions of how to encourage the student to engage. Remind them that if every tutor on our site politely refuses to do work for the student, the student will realize that we are not just here for easy answers. This can be frustrating because it is not what the student wants. It is a good idea to help set students’ expectations quickly and adjust pacing for a student anxious to get the answer. This may involve adjustments to approach involving both directing and engaging the student.
2. The student wants to work on multiple problems instead of logging in for a new session, but the student is not unlimited.

How can we help our tutors establish reasonable expectations for what can get done in a session? Sometimes tutors do not want to end a session while the student still wants to work from fear of making the student angry. Sometimes it's because the tutor wants to make sure the student gets the help he needs. We want to remind the tutor that our clients are paying for us to reach many students' needs. The student is free to log back in, and another tutor will be available to help the student. By having the student leave the session, we are giving another student a chance to be helped. In addition, we can encourage the student to go and do some of the work on their own, and then log back in to check for understanding. That is a sound pedagogical approach.

We are in a competitive business. Online tutoring is growing. When a potential client is shopping around, they are looking for the best "bang for their buck." If they review our sessions and they see that the students are not always doing the work, will they hire us? What if they see that our wait times are so long, that students cannot get the help that they need? Will they renew our contract?

Probably not.

We can help our tutors understand that the clients are expecting the students to learn, even when the student thinks they just want the answer. In addition, the clients are expecting students to be helped efficiently, and in order to do so, sometimes that means encouraging the student to go and finish the rest of the paper, implement your feedback, or try to solve another problem outside of the classroom. In doing so, we can help scaffold the assistance we are offering so that the students log back in when they have a new problem or need additional help, rather than sitting in the classroom for hours, getting burned out and frustrated. Keeping the client happy is our goal. Let's not lose sight of that when we are helping their students.
Mock Sessions: Some Reminders

BY JUSTIN GEIGER, MENTOR

The mock session is a very important part of what we do because it affects the company’s staffing of highly qualified tutors. Providing an awesome mock session experience is a critical part to the tutoring journey since it can often predict how the Probationary Period might progress. Here are some helpful tips for conducting a well-rounded, effective mock session!

◊ **Follow the Mock Session Script:** This excellent script can be found in the Mentor Resource Area, and it is very helpful for the Mock Sessioner to follow to ensure a uniform and holistic experience for all applicants. In conjunction with the script, it is also important to post each slide (Agenda, Terminable Offenses, Async Tutoring) on separate whiteboards and to follow the example rubric when scoring the session.

◊ **Spend at least 20 minutes assessing Approach and Content:** Often, how an applicant tutors in a mock session will translate to how she will tutor during her Probationary period. For this reason, it is very helpful to allot at least twenty minutes of the Mock Session time to evaluating how well the applicant knows the content being tested, can assist a struggling student, and how well the applicant engages the student in the learning process.

◊ **Choose a moderate-to-difficult multi-step problem from the hardest subject you and the applicant both have:** Once the applicant becomes a tutor, he will likely receive some difficult questions from students, so depth of content knowledge must be tested within the Mock Session. As can be seen in the February Mentor Newsletter, the Mock Sessioner should test the applicant in the hardest subject they both have, such as Essay Writing-College Level instead of English or Calculus instead of Algebra. If the matching subjects are similar, it can help to choose the subject with higher student demand.

◊ **It is okay for the student to ‘not know’ or to be silent:** As can also be seen in the February Mentor Newsletter, when playing the student, the Mock Sessioner does not need to prompt the applicant during dead periods, and the student does not have to know the answers. The applicant should take the lead during the tutoring portion by using open-ended questions, example-giving, resource-sharing, and mixed approach. The Mock Sessioner should structure the student experience so that the applicant must change between these four basic approach techniques.

I hope you find these tips to be helpful! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to your Senior Mentor and/or Manager. Happy Mentoring!
Remember that nervous applicants may not fully show their skills. Someone might be an awesome tutor, but feels a mock session is similar to giving a speech in front of a hundred people. They get stage fright. Insert a few comforting phrases. Try to insert a bit of humor in there. Think about what skills a good tutor might need, and can't be checked on the subject exams. Can they tutor to someone who doesn't know the special topic words? How do they handle a brain-fried student? Can they shift gears in approach? Handle faulty logic? -Lisa Jackson, Mentor

Practice the spoken scripted parts a little so that you don't trip over wording or sound robotic. Be personable and inject a little levity. We want to help get the candidate past some initial nerves in order to see what they're really made of. Find a graceful way to cut off the mock portion of the session when the time has been reached and you have a good feel for the candidate's style. Sometimes I have my "student" say she just got called to dinner.

Keep in mind how you felt as a student when something confused you, and bring in some of the situations you have seen when tutoring. Sometimes the concept made sense when the teacher explained it in class, but now the student is lost: "I'm frustrated... I'm clueless about where to begin... I thought I understood this..." This approach will give you a feel for the candidate’s empathy, clarification skills, ability to explain, as well as content knowledge. Think through your question for the candidate. If they have a good approach, they will ask a lot of questions, so you need to have a bit of a backstory in mind. -Kathleen Beplay, Mentor

Use the script! I like to print the script because for me it's easier to flip through and follow if you have to troubleshoot or review the flowchart during the mock session. Also, I use the same problem because as you figure out typical responses, you can improve in your role as the student. In other words, with the same problem, you can learn to better gauge the applicant's abilities.

Periodically review the mock session resources, rubric, and instructions (not just when they change). It keeps the processes fresh in your mind so you don't get complacent in your sessions. Comments are not necessary on the rubric form unless there is something specifically mentioned in the script, e.g. explaining a 1 rating or Voice issues. If they're not necessary, do not leave them, as it would save time. –Mindy Wade, Senior Mentor

Run a Voice test. Since many applicants have difficulty with voice, it's good to know the issue is on their end and not ours. Running the voice test assures us our microphones and speakers are working properly before the session begins.

Don't be afraid to ask a difficult question. Students’ questions may vary from elementary level to college level. Since tutors need to be able to handle that range, it’s good to make sure they can answer some of the more involved questions. For instance, ask a College Essay Writing tutor to help develop a thesis, rather than just where a comma belongs. –Tammie Niewedde, Mentor

I keep all my scoring notes in a Notepad and take notes as we move through the session. This helps me remember everything, plus I can save all the scores in case there's ever an issue with the post-session survey. –Ashley Little, Mentor
Summer is approaching! It’s a time for family fun, travel, and recharging for next school year. If you’re heading out, let’s review steps to ensure your team is taken care of.

First, for planned vacations of more than 3 days, notify your Senior Mentor and Mentor Manager at least one week ahead. Include:

♦ Dates away
♦ How much you can be in touch (if at all)
♦ A calendar of tutors who need reviews, tutors under Advisory, and tutors being closely monitored. This will let them see who needs attention while you’re gone. Make sure to complete any reviews before you leave, for tutors who fall in the window for Spot Checks or Reviews (see Mentor Manual, page 10).
♦ Finally, update your Team Space Survey with your dates away so new tutors are not assigned.

For vacations over a month, a temporary Leave of Absence is needed. Your tutors may be reassigned to other mentors and your return may be delayed until additional mentors in your subjects are needed. Also, try to request the LOA at least 2 weeks prior to leaving. This gives us time to come up with a plan to manage your team in your absence. Provider Management makes every effort to accommodate requests for time off. Finally, have fun!

Mock Session Template and Availability

BY JOANNA SIMPSON, MENTOR MANAGER HUMANITIES

Please use the exact mock session template and do not vary from it. When you vary from the template, it messes with the reporting that is necessary for our Quality Control system.

Although sessions typically slow down over the summer, we are in full swing to onboard tutors for the upcoming fall semester. It is critical that you make sure your mock session availability is current, and that you are conducting mock sessions when you can in order to onboard new tutors. Thanks!

Share Your Ideas and Get Published!

Take ownership of your mentor newsletter by sharing your ideas with us! Think about the things you do that make your job as a mentor work for you and let us know about them. If your idea is selected, you will have the chance to write about it and be published! You can add your publication as a line item on your resume or vita, to show that you’ve published in an internal peer-reviewed journal!

Submit your ideas to Joanna.Simpson@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!
May Mentor Anniversaries

Happy anniversary to our only May-start mentor!

2 years
Linda O.

HAPPY WORK ANNIVERSARY