

## ROLE-PLAYING FOR TUTOR TRAINING

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Newly hired content area tutors at the postsecondary level are usually recommended by faculty in specific departments, and, therefore, those responsible for managing the tutor program can assume that these tutors are capable helpers in the academic subjects which they will be tutoring. However, most new tutors need assistance in study skills and communication management techniques, and role-playing can quickly and effectively provide instruction in many important areas.

Role-playing has two important advantages over other types of training. First, tutors can see an example of the type of communication being demonstrated by watching while two “actors” role-play a specific situation. This modeling is followed by discussion of the dynamics of the interaction. Second, the tutors can practice (in pairs or in small groups) the communication skills for themselves, receiving feedback from supervisors or other tutors. This enables them not only to see and hear the desired message but to also participate and practice the skills for themselves and receive feedback on their progress.

Role-playing is most effective if tutors are instructed to read about the instructional topic prior to the training sessions so they are familiar with the strategy; however, role-playing can be used in nearly every area of tutor training. Beginning skills in demonstrating note-taking techniques (Cornell and Barusch methods) and textbook reading strategies (SQ3R, visual mapping, summarization, and outlining) can be rapidly learned through role-playing by letting tutors explain the process to each other. Methods of establishing rapport and building confidence can be quickly learned, as well as techniques for handling more

difficult tutoring situations. The following are specific examples of tutor training through the use of role-playing.

### Effective Communication Techniques

The tutor coordinator should first distribute information about the topic. This information should include establishing rapport, communicating at the student's level, and the difference between teaching and tutoring. Two knowledgeable actors can role-play a constructive communication situation and then role-play a non-constructive one. Following a group discussion, tutors should break into pairs and role-play prepared situations. It is often a good idea to have experienced tutors play the part of the tutees. They will be able to ask realistic questions or make relevant statements that will encourage new tutors to practice the desired skills.

### Attending Behaviors

After information about attending behaviors (body language, eye contact, silent communication) is distributed and read, actors should provide an example of the skills. Pairs can then practice using two or three prepared situations. It is very important to have some situations ready in advance for the tutors to role-play, as it is very difficult for even experienced tutors to pull more than one or two specific examples from their memories, and the ones they select may not be good examples of what you are trying to demonstrate. Prepared situations also help the pairs stay on task and aid later group discussion since everyone has been role-playing the same situation.

### Questioning Techniques

Allow tutors to read and discuss information about questioning skills and then have two actors role-play both effective and ineffective questioning techniques. Divide your

tutors into pairs according to academic areas if possible. Let the one acting as tutor define the problem area and then role-play questioning techniques designed to find out how much the tutee knows about that specific body of information. Have the pairs change roles so that each can obtain experience in asking questions and giving feedback on the questioning techniques after each role-playing sequence is completed.

### Assertiveness Training

After receiving information about assertiveness, tutors can be placed in small groups. Going around the circle, each person must role-play the part of the tutee and, turning to the person on the right who is role-playing the part of the tutor, must draw a statement out of an envelope and read the statement out loud. The tutor must then make an appropriate, assertive response to the statement. After each response, other members in the group should give feedback and may suggest other responses to the statement. The statements should be realistic and may be formulated from actual tutoring situations that experienced tutors have reported. Try to have enough statements in the envelope so that each person gets to role-play as the tutor at least twice. Some sample statements are as follows:

1. Tutee: "I hope you'll forgive me for dropping in on you at 11:00 at night, but I didn't dream I wouldn't be able to do tomorrow's assignment."
2. Tutee: "I know you helped me get ideas for my English theme last Tuesday and told me to write a rough draft and bring it with me today, but I just didn't get to it. Wouldn't it be better if you just helped me write it now?"
3. Tutee: "Here's a list of questions we're supposed to finish by tomorrow. Now, what's the answer to the first one?"

4. Tutee: "I can't help it if you have a meeting tonight. I have to have help, and I need it now!"

### Empathy Training

After reading about empathy, receiving instruction and participating in a discussion, the same circle technique can be utilized as in the previous example of assertiveness training. Many statements from tutees require both empathetic and assertive responses. The circle technique allows participants to receive feedback from everyone in the circle about their responses and to give feedback to others as they complete their turns at role-playing. Sample role-playing statements include:

1. Tutee: "The instructor in this class talks way above my head. I don't understand what he's talking about most of the time."
2. Tutee: "What do you mean you don't know how to solve this problem? You're a tutor in this subject, aren't you? What am I supposed to do?"
3. Tutee: "I can't even concentrate on this stuff. Everything is coming down on me at once — my classes, my girl, my job and my parents."
4. Tutee: "Look at this page you helped me with last week. Red marks all over it and a big, fat 'D'!"
5. Tutee: "I just don't understand this stuff. I must be really stupid."
6. Tutee: "I wanted you to see this paper you helped me with and to thank you. That's the first 'A' I've gotten in this subject."

### Taxonomy Of Difficult Styles

Tutors need to become familiar with behavior and/or communication styles that may characterize difficult tutees. These styles include blocking, confusion, miracle-seeking, over-

enthusiasm, resisting, passivity, and evasion. A demonstration of each style should be enacted, followed by a discussion and suggestions for working with tutees displaying that particular style.

Again utilizing the circle technique, participants will formulate questions and statements based on one of the identified styles and will role-play an individual with that style to the tutor on their right without identifying what style is being depicted. The person in the tutor role should use appropriate approaches and responses for that specific style while still remaining empathetic and assertive.

### Common Irrational Beliefs

Many students express negative self-perceptions or anxieties. Tutors should learn to refute irrational beliefs that are a detriment to learning. Albert Ellis' common irrational beliefs and their application to tutoring can be discussed and a few examples of them can be modeled.

Tutors should be given a few minutes to plan how they would present one of the irrational beliefs and then seek out another person and role-play the situation, eliciting appropriate responses from their partners. After both individuals have role-played the part of a tutee with an irrational belief, the tutors can repeat the process any number of times, each time choosing a new irrational belief to depict and new partners for role-playing.

### Summary

Role-playing is a useful tool in clarifying both simple and complex tutoring situations. Rather than just reading about efficient tutoring techniques or having someone lecture about them, add modeling followed by role-playing to combine the best of the strategies while adding the important aspect of actual experience. Tutors will be more

confident and more proficient because of the practice they received in role-playing situations. By extensive use of role-playing, more training can be effectively accomplished in less time, creating a better-informed group of tutors and a stronger tutoring program.