THE FOUR KNOWS OF CONTENT AREA TUTORING:
A HANDBOOK FOR TUTORS

Shawn M. Ford
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Honolulu, Hawaii

The Four Knows of Content Area Tutoring: A Handbook for Tutors is designed to provide students with valuable tips that will help them become more successful as tutors in the college environment. It is meant to be utilized in conjunction with existing tutor-training materials, as a supplement that provides additional training assistance. The intended audience is the novice tutor, although both intermediate and advanced tutors may gain insight into their developing practices from this material.

The handbook is the result of a yearlong study, combining course work in *ED 101: Peer Tutoring*, continued course work in *ED 299: Independent Research*, and content area tutoring in the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) at Kapiolani Community College. Through these experiences, four primary, sequential issues relevant to the professional development of content area tutors were identified, which the author calls the *knows* of content area tutoring. These *knows* are: 1) *know* your content area; 2) *know* about content area tutoring; 3) *know* your content area instructors; and 4) *know* your clients. Each *know* is divided into major considerations for the given issue that contribute to tutor development and success.

Following the four knows, a section is included that discusses continuing as a tutor. The concluding section provides useful references for tutor training and development. It is hoped that by reading and applying the information provided by *The Four Knows of Content Area Tutoring: A Handbook for Tutors*, tutors will become more successful in their future academic endeavors both as students and as professionals.

132

KNOW 1: KNOW YOUR CONTENT AREA

To become a content area tutor in learning assistance centers on most college campuses, the very first and most important thing to know well is a particular content area. Therefore, the first *know* of *The Four Knows of Content Area Tutoring* is simply "Know Your Content Area."

A student exhibits knowledge of a content area by excelling in college courses within that area. Excelling in the content area not only means receiving high marks in the area courses, but it also includes going beyond course requirements, delving deeper into course topics, contributing positively to class discussions, working well with peers, and building relationships with instructors. In addition, a high overall G.P.A. shows that a potential tutor has good study skills and is a serious academic.

<u>Teacher Referral</u>

Students are commonly introduced to the idea of becoming a content area tutor by their teachers. These teachers usually have observed the students in class, have seen their academic work, and have deemed the students to be of potential tutor quality. This level of familiarity makes teacher referral a crucial aspect of recruiting future content area tutors for college and university tutorial programs.

For the student who aspires to become a tutor or future teacher, it is advisable to become acquainted with the college professors in the content area of interest. Students are advised to get to know these professors by taking their courses, observing their classes, and/or discussing with future academic goals with them. Most teachers are open and willing to provide advice and assistance to interested students.

Characteristics: Passion, Motivation, and Excitement

Among the most important personal characteristics for a student tutor to possess are passion, motivation, and excitement for a particular content area. These qualities are a part of the foundation of a successful content area tutor. They provide the student with the original stimulus to become a tutor, the desire to continue to help others acquire knowledge, and the drive to develop as academic professionals.

Continual Maintenance

Another important factor relevant to the first *know* of content area tutoring is the necessity of continual maintenance in the particular content area. Student tutors can further develop expertise in their content areas by continually studying the subject and keeping abreast of current research and literature in the discipline.

KNOW 2: KNOW ABOUT CONTENT AREA TUTORING

Once knowledge of a particular content area has been established, the student must be thoroughly trained as a tutor. Therefore, the second *know* of *The Four Knows of Content Area Tutoring* is "Know about Content Area Tutoring."

Tutor Training

Most college learning assistance centers offer thorough training programs for content area tutors. These programs typically train tutors in different methods for conducting tutoring sessions, presenting material, working with a variety of students, and developing professionally. In addition, these programs usually require tutors to undergo periods of supervised tutoring and maintain journals of tutoring sessions.

CRLA Tutor Certification

Many learning assistance centers offer tutor certifications upon completion of college

tutor training programs. Certificates are offered for completion of beginning, intermediate, and advanced tutor training. These tutor training programs must follow guidelines established by College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) regarding the subjects covered during training and the minimum numbers of hours required for training and supervised tutoring.

Keeping a Journal

A reflective journal is a major element of many thorough tutor training programs and is continuously maintained by serious content area tutors. Reflective journals contain the tutor's questions and thoughts about topics covered during the training process. These reflections are followed up with answers to any questions and action plans for implementing tutor training material into actual tutoring sessions. Reflective journals are maintained to record successes and difficulties encountered during tutoring sessions. These reflections are then be reviewed with the tutor trainer to develop strategies for future tutoring sessions.

One-On-One Vs. Group Tutoring

One-on-one and group tutoring are additional aspects of content area tutoring that should be covered early in the tutor training process. Each type of tutoring presents distinct challenges and requires different strategies for success. In many situations, group tutoring sessions can be the most effective due to time constraints and the large amount of material covered. However, group tutoring requires the tutor to work closely with individual content area teachers and their students in order to provide the most effective tutoring sessions.

KNOW 3: KNOW YOUR CONTENT AREA TEACHERS

An additional aspect of complete tutor training that should not be overlooked is the role that content area teachers play in the tutoring process. Teachers will refer more of their

students to the campus learning assistance center if they are familiar with the respective content area tutors. Additionally, content area tutors will be more effective in their tutoring sessions if they are familiar with the syllabi, lessons, activities, and teaching styles of the respective content area teachers. Therefore, the third *know* of *The Four Knows of Content Area Tutoring* is, "Know Your Content Area Teachers."

Meet Teachers

The most direct way to get to know content area teachers is to arrange face-to-face meetings with each of them. Most, if not all, college content area teachers should be willing and pleased to meet with learning assistance center tutors from their institutions.

Teacher/ Student Referrals

When meeting with content area teachers, the tutor should ask them not only to encourage students to seek tutoring assistance but also to refer needy students directly to the learning assistance center for content area tutoring. With the combination of walk-in and teacher-referred students, the tutor's time and effectiveness will be maximized.

Collect Syllabi/ Materials

In order to become more familiar with course materials, tutors should also ask their respective content area teachers for copies of syllabi, lessons, and activities. These course materials will help content area tutors prepare for future tutoring sessions and student questions and problem areas.

Observe Classes

If not already familiar with the teaching style of a particular content area teacher, the tutor should ask the teacher for permission to observe one or more class sessions. By doing so, the tutor not only will become familiar with the teacher but also will become familiar

136

with the personalities of the students in the class and the dynamics of the class as a whole. This level of familiarity could be very beneficial during future tutoring sessions.

Hold Coordinated W/Ss Or Special Sessions

The tutor can become further connected to specific content area classes by offering workshops and special tutoring sessions that correspond to topics covered in the classes. In order to provide the most effective service to their students, tutors should work with willing teachers to develop schedules for these types of sessions throughout each semester.

KNOW 4: KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

As a part of a thorough tutor-training program, students should also receive specific training about working with a diverse student population. Therefore, the fourth *know* of *The Four Knows of Content Area Tutoring* is "Know Your Clients."

Establish Rapport

If rapport has not already been established with a student client in the classroom or in another setting, the tutor should make an attempt to do so before entering into any tutoring session. This can be done by a brief exchange of pleasantries or by a more in-depth exchange aimed at learning something about the student's academic background.

Student Background

Types of academic background information that may be helpful and even necessary for a successful tutoring session include: college and high school courses taken in the specific content area, courses taken in other subject areas that may affect the academic standing of the student, additional experiences applicable to the content area, the number of semesters in college, and the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the student. However, this type of

discussion should not become too personal so as to interfere with the primary task of tutoring.

Student Expectations/Needs

The tutor should be aware that students approach the tutoring situation with differing expectations and needs. Some students have never sought tutoring assistance before and do not know what to expect, while others have expectations established through previous tutoring sessions. Some students are not aware of the specific assistance that they need, while others come to the tutoring session with lists of problems and questions. Therefore, at the beginning of each tutoring session, the tutor should attempt to determine the specific expectations and needs of the student. Tutors should also explain to students what tutoring assistance can be provided and how the tutoring session will be conducted.

Cultural Differences

An additional aspect relevant to knowledge of individual students is knowledge of cultural differences with regards to tutoring. Not all cultures approach tutoring in the same manner. Some cultures have histories of tutoring assistance, while others do not. Some cultures view providing and seeking tutoring assistance with more respect than others. In light of this, perhaps the most important consideration is to approach content area tutoring with patience, awareness, and an open mind to cultural differences.

WHAT'S NEXT

After receiving tutor training and an assignment in a college learning assistance center, the content area tutor will finally be able to apply accumulated and acquired skills to the task of helping other students. However, the tutor's training process does not cease at

138

this point. Content area tutoring is a profession that requires constant maintenance in order to develop professionally in the specific content area and to improve as a tutor.

Professional Development

The content area tutor should continue to develop knowledge in the specific content area as an aspect of constant skills maintenance. During down time, the tutor should review material and learn new information from the content area. By doing this, the tutor will remain skilled and interested in the subject and better able to assist other students who come for help.

Continual Improvement

Likewise, the content area tutor should continue to improve as a tutor by reviewing tutor training materials during down time, particularly before returning to the learning assistance center following school breaks. In addition, the tutor can continue to develop as a tutor by seeking the next certificate level offered through CRLA certification.

Tutoring Journal

One important way to develop professionally and improve as a content area tutor is to constantly maintain a tutoring journal. The tutoring journal should contain reflections logged by the tutor after each tutor training session and after each tutoring session. Tutor training reflections should consist of important aspects covered during the training sessions and ways in which those aspects will be integrated into tutoring sessions.

Tutoring reflections should cover aspects such as the numbers of students tutored, the lengths of the tutoring session, topics covered, progress made, and difficulties encountered. Afterwards, tutoring session reflections should be reviewed, focusing on the progress made

and difficulties encountered. Plans of action should be developed for future tutoring sessions based on these reflections.

<u>Future Opportunities</u>

For content area tutors who thoroughly enjoy their profession and wish to pursue careers in academia, future opportunities exist as teachers in their associated content areas and as administrators of learning assistance centers. Interested students should consult their teachers, administrators, and counselors for advice and guidance.