

INGREDIENTS FOR A GOOD TUTORING SESSION

Tom Gier
University Of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

Naturally, there are many ingredients for a good tutoring session. Briefly, some skills that a tutor must possess or display in order for a session to be successful are:

- giving the tutee his/her undivided attention;
- having empathy for the tutee's problems;
- being honest if he/she does not know an answer;
- trying to lighten up the session and make the tutee feel good about him/herself and what was accomplished in the session.

Of course, there are many more actions required of a tutor in order for the session to be successful. For instance, a tutor must have good interaction with the tutee during the session. In other words, the tutor must encourage the tutee to talk and do the work. The tutor wants the tutee to learn from him/her; this requires that the tutee listen to the tutor and watch the tutor work some of the exercises. However, it also requires that the tutee do his/her own work. A good give-and-take relationship is required during the session with the tutor acting as a guide, a partner, and an observer. The ultimate goal of tutoring is to make the tutee academically independent. In other words, a successful tutor will wean his/her tutees away from him/her so that they can work and be successful on their own.

In order to help a tutee succeed, a tutor must learn the tutee's strengths and weaknesses. There are many ways to accomplish this. Actually, time itself will help a tutor learn this; the more a tutor works with a tutee, the more familiar the tutor will become with that tutee's abilities. A way to speed up this process is for the tutor to ask the tutee questions

concerning certain abilities needed for the tutee's class. Another method is to have the tutee bring his/her work, both graded and ungraded, with him/her so that the tutor can not only offer suggestions for improvement but also get a better idea of where improvement is needed.

The tutor should not, repeat, NOT concentrate solely on the tutee's weaknesses. In fact, a very successful method of tutoring is to work through a tutee's area of strength in order to improve weak areas. If this is not possible, the tutor should at least spend some time at the beginning and end of the session emphasizing the tutee's area(s) of good about him/herself and his/her work. A tutor should always give the tutee credit for what the tutee knows before concentrating on what the tutee does not know.

A good session always ends on a positive note. This requires knowing when to stop. There is the old adage of "quitting while you are ahead." Well, this certainly pertains to a tutoring session. Of course, the tutor always wants to accomplish as much as possible in the time allotted, but some times it is better to stop a few minutes early rather than get into something that the tutor does not have adequate time for, or for which the tutee is not totally prepared. Solution? Simple--the tutor should discuss the situation with the tutee. This is done by telling the tutee what a fantastic job he/she has done so far and how much time is left. The tutee is given some alternatives such as: a new skill/area in which to work, quitting early, reviewing some material, or suggesting a related activity. The tutee should be involved as much as possible in the planning and decision making of the sessions. The more involvement a tutee has, the more sense of accomplishment he/she will feel during the sessions.

Ending a tutoring session on a positive note is very important. Tutors want tutees to feel good about themselves and their accomplishments so that this positive feeling will carry

over to the tutee's classes and assignments. This positive feeling will also encourage tutees to continue to seek tutorial assistance. This continued assistance will lead to improved knowledge and grades, and eventually, the ultimate tutoring goal, the tutee's academic independence.