

THE TUTOR RECIPE BOOK: INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL AND HEALTHY TUTORING FOR THE TUTOR AND THE TUTEE

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To many students the first few semesters at college may be like being a guest at a huge “all-you-can-eat buffet.” Many simply do not know when to say “when” and later find themselves in an academic fix not unlike the gastronomical fix that often accompanies the \$6.95 buffet. Well, what can tutors do to help the tutees get and maintain a healthy academic diet? The following academic/tutoring tidbits may help the tutee avoid academic indigestion.

RECIPE BOOK

Just as a master chef has a personal recipe book containing favorite recipes, techniques, ideas, and short-cuts — tutors can write their own individual tutoring “recipe books.” These individual “recipe books” may contain all sorts of information, techniques, shortcuts, and yes, even favorite tutoring recipes (in the form of handouts, notes regarding particular assignments, diagnostic tips).

Chapter 1: Questions To Ask The Tutee

Chapter One in the tutoring “recipe book” may be a list of specific questions to ask the tutee to help ascertain exactly what kinds of academic/tutorial help the tutee needs. The tutee should be able to state as specifically as possible what his/her difficulty is with a particular course or assignment. However, many times the tutee cannot; therefore, how can the tutor possibly help? The tutor could have a prepared list of questions to ask regarding particular classes, professors, and assignments.

- “What exactly is the assignment?” This would include information regarding content, mechanics, format, etc. If the tutor has worked with other students and

this professor's assignments (or perhaps the tutor has had courses with the professor) the tutor may already have his/her own notes regarding the assignment.

- “What can you do right now with the assignment?” or “What do you understand the assignment to be right now?” This gives the tutee an opportunity to begin initial critical thinking about the assignment and her/his role with it. If the student cannot answer — the tutor should appropriately suggest that the tutee first visit with the professor or re-read the assignment or syllabus to ascertain exactly what is assigned and what is expected in regards to the assignment. This gives the tutee an opportunity to take charge of the assignment and her/his commitment to it and make her/himself known to the professor as a serious and conscientious student. Many students find that this step is all that was needed — they did not understand an assignment, thought the professor was unapproachable, felt anxiety, fear, and stress as a result and, therefore, did nothing about any of these difficulties. With the help of a tutor, the tutee can get the support and encouragement to work to overcome these difficulties and take charge of her/his academic progress.
- “What specific help do you need with the assignment?” Answering this question enables the tutee again to analyze critically where help is needed and what kind of help is specifically needed. This information is helpful for the tutor so that valuable tutoring time is not spent on wayward areas. Corollary questions for a writing assignment may include: “Do you need help with mechanics, grammar, documentation, narrowing the topic, or getting started with the research?” Perhaps if the tutee is involved with a math assignment, the tutor might ask, “What skills do you already have that can help you solve or address this

assignment?” or “What skills do you need to review or sharpen?” If the tutee is involved with an assignment from another discipline, the tutor turning to his/her prepared list might ask: “What experience do you already have that can help you with this assignment?” or “What could you teach me about this topic, assignment, or project?”

This type of questioning helps the tutee and the tutor identify particular ingredients in a recipe that are missing and helps the tutee to recognize his/her academic responsibilities and commitments.

Chapter 2: Simulations

Perhaps the tutee has more general academic difficulties: the student is underprepared, has poor time/self/life management skills, and/or ineffective or poor study skills. Now what can the tutor do? Well, Chapter Two in that “recipe book” could include methods, techniques, suggestions, and simulations that the tutor could engage the tutee (or group of tutees) in to help address or identify these difficulties.

For example, a psychology (or other discipline) tutor might have a very brief five - ten minute “lecture” on an introductory and very basic topic — this could be written with the help of one of the specific content area professors. The tutor could give the “lecture” as a simulation to help ascertain if the student/tutee is having difficulty with note-taking, effective listening, concentration, and/or language comprehension.

This type of simulation is a very effective diagnostic tool that could be used one-on-one or in an introductory group tutoring situation. The tutor could see immediately if the tutee was trying to take notes “by taking dictation” and, thus, trying to write too much. This could result in the tutee missing the main points. Or if the tutee is not writing any

information or enough information, the tutor could see that the result is having insufficient material to review/study.

The tutor would also ascertain and provide immediate feedback if the tutee was having listening problems or concentration difficulties. The tutor would also be able to notice if the tutee simply does not have the language comprehension abilities or knowledge of the specific vocabulary needed to “get” the lecture material. With information from a simulation, the tutor is better able to prescribe and begin effective and specific work with the tutee, to begin to adjust the menu, and to help meet the particular academic needs of the tutee.

The tutee may come to the tutor with anxiety or stress-related difficulties: the all-too-common test anxiety, math anxiety, writing anxiety, speech anxiety. Turning to his/her “recipe book” again, the tutor can help the tutee address and take charge of the anxiety-producing agent. The tutor can go thorough relaxation techniques with the tutee and vary the recipe accordingly — an audiotape for one, a videotape for another, a “do-along” demonstration for another.

Working with the tutee and practice tests: having the tutee write his/her own practice tests; having a group write a test and then taking the test they have written; and reviewing old tests from a particular course (sometimes these can be obtained from specific departments on campus) can be effective simulation activities in helping tutee learn how to take positive charge of this anxiety producing situation.

The tutor may want to try taking the test simulation activity a step further by making test review games for midterms and finals. Group reviews or tutorials in the form of a *Jeopardy*-like or *Trivial Pursuit*-like game can be very effective as can reviewing for

“prizes” in a take-off of *Wheel of Fortune* or *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*? These are different approaches to review that can be very effective and fun — and just another variation on the recipe of studying.

Sometimes just having someone to listen to their concerns about a particular class, test, or assignment and receiving constructive and appropriate validation is all that is needed for some tutees to begin to take charge. Knowing that their concerns are not isolated, understanding that their concerns may be justified, and then learning that there are constructive things that can be done about the concerns may be all the tutees need to begin to take charge of their own academic recipes. As a master chef learns when to add another dash of something to the pot or when to leave the pot alone to simmer, the effective tutor learns when to adjust the tutoring session by adding another method, idea, or technique or when to just listen quietly and let the tutee explore on her/his own.

Chapter 3: Varying the Menu

Just as the master chef must sometimes adjust a recipe or meal to take into consideration the special dietary needs or requirements of a diner, a master tutor will likewise be aware that at times he/she must adjust the tutoring situation and techniques to meet the particular academic needs or requirements of a tutee. Tutors may want a chapter in their “recipe book” for ideas about how to vary their strategies to meet the special needs of the hearing-impaired, the sight-impaired, the underprepared, and/or the non-traditional tutee.

The tutor working with a hearing-impaired tutee will want to be aware of how to appropriately and effectively work with the student and his/her signer. The tutor needs to realize and remember that he/she is working with the tutee and to look at the direct questions, answers, directions, and discussion to the tutee and not the signer. The tutor will want to

utilize more visuals, diagrams, and/or pictures and have these already available in the “recipe book.” When using handouts, written materials, or visuals the tutor will want to provide a copy for the signer. When speaking, the tutor will remember to speak and listen to the tutee not the signer, and to remember many hearing-impaired students read lips — so keep your hands away from your mouth, be aware of your head position and back lighting. Gentlemen tutors with beards and mustaches, be aware of your built in “word-filters” and that they may interfere if the tutee cannot see your mouth! Another note in the Recipe Book would be a cautionary note to the tutor: tutors should remember that American Sign Language is a language, not just a system of symbols, and that some concepts do not easily translate. So for some difficult concepts and theories, the tutor will want to have several variations and methods of explaining readily at hand.

Sight-impaired tutees may benefit from audiotaped exercises and simulations, or enlarged print materials. Specificity and detailed descriptions and explanations are also beneficial. The master tutor will keep in mind that more time may be needed and adjust the sessions as needed.

The underprepared tutee may need smaller portions of the tutored material while at the same time needing more tutoring sessions. The tutor can vary the menu by using: group tutorials; providing a succinct, step-by-step approach to the tutoring topic; having the tutee direct the session; and using study groups or study guides.

The non-traditional tutee may need the most variety in the tutoring menu. The older non-traditional student may need help in adjusting to the role of being a student again. As we get older, “Some things just don’t taste the way they used to.” Well, just reword that to: as we get older, “Some people just don’t think that way they used to.” Older students may need

extra time and extra practice to acquire new, much needed skills like computer knowledge, or they may need to polish an old skill like typing. They may need time to remember, re-learn, dust off and practice long-ago learned concepts and methods.

Chapter 4: When To Shop At The Specialty Store

Master tutors, like master chefs, realize when they cannot simply replace a missing ingredient with another one that is close at hand. Master tutors realize that sometimes they must go to or refer the tutee to a “specialty store.” If the anxiety- or stress-prone tutee cannot be helped by the tutor, has not, or cannot take charge of his/her anxiety or stress-producing agent — the tutor must know where and to whom the tutee can go for appropriate help. Tutors should add to their “recipe book” a section that includes specialists on campus and in the immediate community who provide specific, supplemental, or adjunct services, and the tutor should be aware of the correct and proper procedure for making referrals. Campus services may include: Disabled Student Services, Counseling and Advising Centers, Psychological Counseling Services, Health Services, Emergency Care facilities, Crisis Centers, Legal Counsel/Aid, Emergency Financial Aid, Clergy, Foreign/Native/Minority Student Services, etc.

Chapter 5: Presentation

A master chef realizes that the presentation of the meal is almost as important as the preparation — the presentation is what is seen before the meal is tasted. It is the effective master tutor who keeps this in mind while tutoring. The master tutor presents her/himself and the material with aplomb and enthusiasm, letting the tutee know that she/he is happy and eager to share time, knowledge, and experience with the tutee. Let the tutee know that as a tutor, he or she will also gladly be learning from the tutee. The master tutor presents the

material honestly — not opaquely or starkly but with just the right amount of spice and panache for the particular tutee. The master tutor lets the tutee experiment with the recipes as the sessions progress and the expertise of the tutee deepens.

Master tutors really are like master chefs. They both take the unprepared or underprepared and with a little help from a dash of that, a bit of this, a dollop of spice, or a twist of something else, they help prepare and create something wonderful: the gourmet meal or the successful student who can now take charge of his/her own academic recipes.

Bon Appétit and successful tutoring!