

## IS IT POSSIBLE? A TWO-DAY TUTOR TRAINING CLASS

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Tutoring can be effective for students who are performing poorly or even failing in school (MacDonald, 2000). Furthermore, Boylan and Saxon (1999) found that “the effectiveness of tutoring is strongly influenced by the quality and the amount of training received by tutors.” Colleges train their tutors in many different formats, frequently with a ten- or fifteen-week course. Red Rocks Community College’s two-day tutor training class has proved to be an effective way to improve the quality of tutoring in the Learning And Resource Center (LARC). Based on the college’s identified needs, a for-credit, fifteen (contact) hour, two consecutive day training class for each CRLA level was created, using active learning methods to teach a variety of tutoring skills. The result is more effective tutoring at the college.

### Training Model

The two-day tutor training meets the needs of several areas of the Learning And Resource Center. The course creators began by assessing the tutor training needs of the many areas of the LARC: Writing Center, Math Lab, Social Science Center, Learning Development Center, and Tutor Services for vocational students. In addition, the needs of the Office of Special Services, which serves individuals with physical, cognitive, psychological, or other types of disabilities, were taken into account. These areas use a combination of professional tutors (who have a bachelor’s degree and receive a semester contract), peer tutors (Work Study and student hourly employees), and volunteer tutors. When developing the training schedule, it was important to be considerate of the time

limitations of these students and working adults and plan training sessions that minimally impacted work, study, and/or family time. It was also important to teach the essential information about tutoring practices as early as possible so tutors could begin to use it immediately with their tutees. These multiple needs were met by structuring two consecutive days of training.

Long-range organizational planning for the tutor training resulted in three effective training courses. Tempting as it was to include all available tutoring information in the Level 1 class, creating all three CRLA levels simultaneously allowed determination of which information was significant for the first level versus what could be briefly highlighted at the first level and then covered in more depth in the two subsequent levels. CRLA certification requirements combined with what the LARC tutors needed to know finally determined the breadth and depth of topics at each level. The information from the first level is referenced and reviewed at the subsequent levels. The trainers constantly refine the classes based on experience and tutors' suggestions, including new topics or re-prioritizing concepts. The CRLA requirement of twenty-five hours of tutoring experience to progress from one level to another determined the amount of time that should elapse between each of the three levels. A year of tracking registration helped us to predict the number of tutors expected to go on to the upper two levels. Red Rocks has trained forty-five tutors at Level 1 (New/Regular), nineteen at Level 2 (Advanced), and twelve Level 3 (Master) tutors. These tutors assist students in basic skills, math, social sciences, computer sciences, writing, humanities, biology, physics, and chemistry. As a result of long-range planning, the two-day tutor training has been quite successful.

The methods used at all three levels convey the essential information and increase the likelihood that it is absorbed and applied in tutoring situations. The keys to accomplishing this are multiple teaching methods, active learning, and modeling.

Multiple teaching methods are used regularly. The classes are team taught, so students are exposed to different teaching styles and tutoring experiences. The facilitators use mini-lectures: brief overviews of crucial information, often incorporating visual aids. Commercial videos (accompanied by popcorn!) are divided into ten to fifteen minute segments with ample opportunities for clarifying and/or processing ideas. Also, guest speakers share information and insights from their areas of expertise. Facilitators respect the varied learning modalities and styles of the tutors by incorporating multiple teaching methods.

Tutors are expected actively to learn from the instructors, the materials, and other tutors. Tutors interact with the materials (textbook and other resources) both independently and in class. They actively participate in class discussions and presentations. Small group experiences include collaborative learning and role-playing. Facilitators are always open to questions and use the experiences of the tutors as a source of knowledge for the entire group. To keep interest levels high, activities are interchanged regularly. The classes have scripts, which define the types of exercises and indicate when a change is needed. Scripts also modularize the activities, allowing for adaptation of instruction for different audiences. Journal articles, conferences, and Internet sites are ongoing sources of ideas for new activities. Amidst the active learning, there is also time for personal reflection.

The facilitators model multi-modality learning, varied approaches to tutoring, and active involvement of students in the tutoring process. In addition, they model the six goals

of tutoring and the twelve steps of the tutor cycle. If tutees are expected to be independent learners, then tutors are also expected to be independent learners, e.g., reading assignments and handouts on their own, creating reflective journals, and pursuing independent research on topics of personal interest.

### Benefits

Using multiple teaching methods, active learning, and modeling insures that the tutors understand and are ready to apply the lessons to tutoring situations. Participants — tutors and trainers — have fun! There is frequently laughter in the classroom.

There are additional benefits to the two-day training. The compressed format immerses trainees in the tutoring processes. Tutors from different disciplines interact, creating personal support systems, a sense of community, and synergy among tutoring areas. The training creates self-reported positive behavior changes in the tutors. Experienced tutors are reassured that some of their methods are effective. Both new and experienced tutors are glad to find a structure that allows them to improve the quality of their tutoring. When surveyed about the benefits of the format, the tutors indicated a preference for two consecutive days: “[It] provides a clearer understanding [of] material that all relates and works off each other;” “The desired material is covered in two days, I think this helps the learning process;” “There is an evening of reflection between the 2 chunks of time;” and “Short training time so that the information can be applied sooner.”

By creating a two-day, comprehensive, high-quality training program, Red Rocks Community College has improved the effectiveness of the tutors in the Learning And Resource Center. As evidence of this success, Red Rocks is now trainings tutors from five other private and public colleges in Colorado.

## References

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