

# Tutoring Students

Using Communication and Interpersonal Skills



## Introduction

- Tutoring is a helping activity that represents a sincere desire to help another student learn.
- Tutoring is not successful by accident or intuition. The skills must be learned and practiced.
- Listening, tutoring skills, and communication are key to being an effective tutor.



## Active listening

- Tutees often are not explicit about the help they need.
- Actively listening to a tutee means that you pay special attention to what the tutee is saying and respond back in a way that encourages him or her to say more.
- Active listening encourages further conversation when you repeat back the general meaning of what you heard the person say.



## Active listening-examples

The tutee explains that a particular problem or concept is difficult and he or she is confused as to the meaning of the operation or information.

"It seems to me you are having problems understanding what to do when \_\_\_\_\_ happens."

"It sounds like \_\_\_\_."

"What I heard you saying is \_\_\_\_."



## Highlights of active listening

- It demonstrates that you are taking the tutee's perspective.
- It does not mean that you necessarily agree with the tutee's issues.
- It signals your willingness to explore the problem with them in more detail.



## Learning styles

- Notice and ask how your tutees how they learn best.
- Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (Physical) learning



## Visual learning

These are tutees that need to see how a problem is worked.

When asked about studying, they make lists, underline text, high-light notes, and use pictures and illustrations.



## Auditory learning

These are tutees who prefer to listen to tapes, lectures, and talk over problems with other people.

Auditory learners need to formulate answers mentally.



## Kinesthetic learning

These are tutees who like to put things together and take them apart.

They want to see inner workings and manipulate data as much as possible.



## Tutoring to different learning styles

- For visual learners, give them pictures and diagrams to observe and study. Have them draw their own pictures/diagrams of the concepts with which they are struggling.
- For auditory learners, have them think aloud and discuss the problematic issues with you or others before they write out any problems.
- For kinesthetic learners, make models or equipment available to them to explore the problems on which they are working.



## Tutoring to different learning styles

- Notice their "body language" that might indicate stress, confusion, nervousness, frustration, or satisfaction.
- Ask about different ways they might study.
- You can help tutees enhance their learning by telling them about learning styles and helping them see when each style is most productive for each tutee.



## Getting the most out of a tutoring session

- Tutoring is much more than working problems or explaining concepts.
- Tutors need to explain very clearly what the intent of the tutoring session is at the very beginning of the session.
  - This will help the tutor and tutee make the most of the session and avoid miscommunications.



## Homework sessions



- **Tutors can**
  - explain how to work a problem or the meaning of a concept.
  - Help the tutee's understanding about the larger framework of the course or the academic area in general.
- **Tutors should not** do the tutees' homework for them!
- Tutors need to set the ground rules for homework sessions ahead of time and honestly confront tutees' efforts to the contrary.

## Project design/feedback



- A tutor can
  - Provide critique of a tutee's project design or drafts
  - Provide advice on how to work with team members
- A tutor should not
  - Provide insights into other teams' projects
  - Become a de facto team member

## Study and survival skills



- **Tutors can**
  - Help tutees discover how to study for a specific course or professor
  - Offer a critical review of the tutee's thinking processes related to the course
  - Relate positive experiences that enabled the tutor to be successful in the course and at the university

## What can't be accomplished in tutoring sessions



- Solving student's personal problems
  - Do not become involved in a student's personal college adjustment or emotional problems (friends, housing, etc.)
  - Refer the student to the Counseling Center
    - Keep the phone number handy, just in case!
  - If an issue is in immediate danger of escalating, call a fellow tutor, a supervisor, or administrator into the session at once.

## What can't be accomplished in tutoring sessions



- Repeating a lecture
  - It is always the student's responsibility to obtain all class information.
  - Suggest that the student get the notes from a friend and then come back to see you with questions.

## The importance of communication



- Communication means paying attention to what you, the tutor, are thinking and feeling.
- Test your own emotional "barometer" before you get started on another person's problems.
- Communicate what you know to tutees.
  - Don't try to bluff
  - Admit to errors or not knowing
  - Volunteer to find out the right answer, and follow up
- Be their advocate and coach.



## Successful tutoring

- You need to actively listen to your tutees.
- You need to evaluate how to best help them.
- You need to be firm about how and in what ways you can help them.
- You need to communicate with them effectively.



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