

LEARNING TO PEER TUTOR

ANSWERS TO 25 QUESTIONS
NOVICE TUTORS ASK

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Dedicated to E.B.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is designed as a handbook for all students who have been chosen to tutor their peers. Although designed with novice tutors in mind, it can also be used by experienced tutors to help them effectively respond to the daily challenges they encounter while peer tutoring. The questions are ones that novice tutors commonly ask. The answers provided stem from informal observations conducted of peer tutors, from previous research conducted on peer tutoring strategies, from the thoughts of experienced peer tutors, from a review of relevant scholarly literature and from the author's own experience individually assisting students with their academic success.

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on deciding to become a peer tutor! Try gradually incorporating some of the following concepts and strategies into your tutoring repertoire over time. While your tutees may seem determined in their passive approach to learning, remember the Chinese proverb suggesting that if you tell someone something, they will likely forget, and if you show them, they might remember, BUT if you involve them, they will understand. The strategies included here are all designed to put your tutee and their improvement at the centre of your peer tutoring. It is essential to understand that getting good grades does not automatically mean you will be effective tutors. There is so much more to peer tutoring than having a solid understanding of course material.

#1

GETTING STARTED

Is there anything I should know or can do to prepare before I actually start tutoring?

- Many new tutors are concerned about not knowing an answer to a tutee's question. Remember, you are a college student, just like your tutee, and you are **not expected to have all of the answers** to their questions. In fact, when a tutee asks you a question and you don't know the answer, this can be a great **learning opportunity**. First, it indicates to your tutee that they are not the only ones who can find the material challenging. Second, it provides an opportunity for you to work with your tutee to help show them the **processes and concepts** involved in finding the answer; this can be much more valuable for their learning than if you simply provide an answer to their question. So, don't be afraid to say "I really don't know, but let's try to figure it out".

Second, before you begin tutoring, it is important to **observe an experienced tutor** in action; while observing, consider the following:

- a. How did the tutor greet the tutee?
- b. How did the tutor try to make the tutee feel comfortable?
- c. What questions, or types of questions, did the tutor ask?
- d. Was the tutor patient (or not) in letting the tutee think and then answer?
- e. Who did most of the talking in the tutoring session?
- f. How did the tutor encourage the tutee to create their own knowledge?

- g. Did the tutor give the tutee time and space to work/struggle on their own?
- h. Did the tutor confirm the tutee's capability to learn? If so, how?
- i. How did the session end? Did they review what was accomplished and what still needs to be done?

* This list is modified from a list developed by Gillespie & Lerner (2008)

- After observing the session, you may find it useful to consult with the tutor and/or your supervisor to ask questions about what you observed.

NOTES

#2

THE FIRST SESSION

What should happen during my initial meeting with my tutee?

a. **Break the Ice** - when meeting your tutee for the first time, greet them with a smile and try to break the ice; you should try to get to know your tutee a little before addressing their academic concerns. Try asking them questions about themselves, for example about their program, their plans for after graduation, their career interests, their year of study, or their impression of their individual courses or their overall program. Being warm and welcoming with your tutee will help you both develop a level of comfort.

b. **Preliminary Diagnostics** - try to determine what kinds of help the tutee is requesting and what some of their more broad as well as specific academic issues are. Then prioritize, with your tutee, which issues should be addressed first, second, etc. You may want to have a pad and paper handy for this and continually refer to your notes. This will allow you to stay focused on the tutee's needs.

c. **Goals** - discuss the broad and specific goals of your tutoring sessions and how you will know if those goals are met. Ask your tutee why they thought that you might be able to help them succeed.

d. **Roles & Expectations** - talk to your tutee about your role and your expectations and about their role and their expectations; be candid and specific about how you can and cannot help them throughout the semester; assure your tutee you are committed to helping them; this book will offer guidance in helping you better understand your role as a peer tutor.

NOTES

#3

TUTOR-TUTEE RELATIONSHIP

What kind of relationship is appropriate to have with my tutee?

- Your relationship should be **professional more than personal**; this means that your conversations ought to revolve around the academic concerns of your tutee; at the same time, be yourself and be friendly and show your sincere commitment to helping your tutee succeed.

Being professional requires that you...

Avoid speaking negatively about teachers

Communicate with the tutee through Mio only

Avoid releasing your personal contact information

Respect the times or shifts for your tutoring and politely decline when a tutee asks for your assistance outside of your scheduled meeting hours

- If you develop a friendship with your tutee, that is fine, of course; however, you are still expected to retain a professional tutor-tutee relationship during tutoring hours.
- Remember that you are not meant to be a counselling or academic advising service. If you ever feel uneasy about the personal nature of the questions your tutee is asking, contact your supervisor to determine if another resource, such as peer or professional counselling, could provide the help that your tutee might need. If

your tutee asks you detailed questions about their specific academic program, which courses to take or course sequencing, refer them to Academic Advising.

- If you refer your tutee to another person or resource, assure your tutee that you are not brushing-off their concern, but that you do not have the knowledge or experience required to guide them effectively; become knowledgeable about these referral services and remember to **follow-up** with your tutee (Newton & Ender, 2010).
- Peer tutoring is not meant to replace class attendance. If your tutee is missing class to see you, you must remind them that there is information discussed **in class by their teacher** that cannot be replaced by meeting with you.
- Do not let peer tutoring conflict with your own studies, even though you really want to help your tutees and be available for them. **Your studies** must always be your first priority.

NOTES

#4

BOUNDARIES

What can I do if my tutee expects me to do part(s) of their school work for them?

- Setting boundaries at the outset for what you can and cannot do is important and ever-challenging. As deadlines or exams loom, ensure you maintain your boundaries.
- Tell the tutee clearly that you cannot and **will not do work for them**, but you certainly can and will help them.
- As a peer tutor, you are not expected to have all the answers your tutee seeks. Rather, you are expected to **converse** with your tutee and **collaborate** with the intent of helping your tutee create their own knowledge.
- Your conversations must be structured around the demands and requirements of your tutee's course content. You are not expected, or even allowed, to do your tutee's course work.
- Tutees might ask you specific questions related to the expectations of their teacher (how long should an answer be; what needs to be included in a response). Those questions need to be re-directed to the teacher of the course.
- If your tutee seems uncomfortable approaching their teacher, remind them that teachers are not 'scary' and that there are real benefits to asking teachers questions when something is unclear. Offer specific personal anecdotes about how you may have benefited from this type of interaction.

NOTES

#5

KNOWLEDGE

How can I help my tutee develop a new understanding?

- Peer tutors should have a general idea of what knowledge is and how it is created. Knowledge is not **static** - It does not always stay the same. Rather, knowledge is the product of **continual research and renegotiation** - this distinction has important implications for how peer tutors view their tutees (Driscoll, 2000).

View 1: My tutee is an empty container needing to be filled (Not Ideal)

It is unwise to view your tutee as an empty receptacle **needing to be filled** with information (even if they come to you and say 'I don't know anything'). You may be tempted to tell your tutee everything you think they ought to know. This approach will encourage your tutee to rely on you for all their answers. Tutoring needs to encourage and support your tutee to arrive at the tutoring session prepared, having attempted the difficult work that has been assigned.

View 2: My tutee is an individual full of prior knowledge and experience (Ideal)

View your tutee as having the **potential ability to create** their own understanding and help them participate in the **construction of their own knowledge**. This means that when a tutee asks you a question, rather than immediately giving them the answer, you should explain the processes and concepts involved in finding the answer.

NOTES

#6

COMMUNICATION

How can I communicate effectively with my tutee?

- Active listening is a desired skill that can be developed and improved as your tutoring experiences increase.
- Novice tutors often feel that **if they are not talking, the tutee is not learning**, but active listening is actually at the core of peer tutoring.
- It is useful to explain the general goal of a mini-lesson before delving into the specifics. Tutees generally appreciate having a certain amount of context before getting into the details. For example, put the “*why* a course concept is important” before the “*how* we go about learning it”.
- Try **not to assume the level of understanding** that your tutee has when you first work with them. Ask your tutee to explain or elaborate on concepts that they should solidly understand (previous courses or high school prerequisites). This approach is generally helpful as a review. Sometimes, you may be able to shed new light on concepts that relate to current course material.
- Encourage tutee’s to explain themselves even when it seems like they know the answer or understand what’s required of them; often, students will get the right answer but for the wrong reasons. Asking students to **explain themselves, even for something simple**, often exposes underlying misconceptions or incomplete understanding that need to be addressed.

For a peer tutor, Active Listening:

- is the core of helping your tutees
- takes concentration, effort and energy
- involves giving signals, such as uttering short encouragements like “ok, uh huh” or nodding your head, to indicate to your tutee that you understand them so far. Your signals should fit into the flow of your tutee’s talk without taking it over (MacDonald, 2000)
- requires **not interrupting**. Often, your tutee’s misunderstandings might not be where you initially think they are. Allowing your tutee to finish their explanation will permit you to more fully grasp where your tutee might be getting confused.
- involves silence. It is often ideal to wait a few seconds before responding to your tutee; this time allows both you and your tutee to consider and reflect on what was said.
- includes silent pauses which give you and your tutee time to think, process information, and come up with more information, questions, and responses.

For a peer tutor, Speaking:

- includes trying to develop your **linguistic abilities and vocabulary**
- involves thinking constructively about what you say and how you say it
- involves developing alternative ways of expressing ideas, and incorporating a tutee’s ideas, words/phrases, and understandings and misunderstandings into your own speech.

- involves paraphrasing what you hear to check for understanding (e.g. so if I understand you correctly, you're telling me _____" or "I understand that you are having difficulty with _____or it seems that you are frustrated by_____".

For a peer tutor, Non-Verbal Communication:

- requires that you display openness with your facial expressions
- involves making eye contact with your tutee. This will illustrate your attentiveness and help you keep your mind from wandering
- involves using positive body language (e.g. nodding head; leaning forward to show interest; uncrossing your arms and legs)
- requires removing any physical barriers between you and the tutee (e.g. a pile of books)
- includes smiling

NOTES

#7

EXPERTISE

Do I have to be an expert in a subject to be an effective peer tutor?

- There is a difference between being successful at a certain skill or subject - *content knowledge* and being able to tutor that skill or subject area successfully - *pedagogical knowledge* (Berliner, 2001 & 2004).

To be an effective tutor:

Required: solid grasp of the subject or skill fundamentals

Not required: mastery of the subject or skill (the teacher's role)

Characteristics of an effective tutor include the following:

- a. Caring/wanting to help
 - b. Being an effective communicator
 - c. Admitting what and when you don't know something
 - d. Being dependable and punctual
 - e. Acting professionally
 - f. Displaying enthusiasm about tutoring & learning
 - g. Being patient
 - h. Being respectful
 - i. Showing empathy
- You do NOT need to be an expert in the subject matter you are tutoring because students learn best when they can **collaborate with peers** who are in a similar situation. Peers are well situated to target specific skills, help increase tutee motivation and address various academic issues (Falchikov, 2001).

- As a tutor, you should work on developing expertise in **tutoring pedagogy** so that you can best help your tutees improve by:
 - a. Making your tutee feel comfortable to discuss their concerns and willing to share their failures. With this, you can gain their confidence and help them improve and be ready to try again.
 - b. Listening actively and patiently (see Question 6 on Communication)
 - c. Asking questions and letting answers emerge (e.g. give your tutee time and encouragement to answer)
 - d. Helping your tutee tap into their existing knowledge
 - e. Helping your tutee learn to monitor their own progress

NOTES

#8

HELICOPTER TUTORING

How can I encourage my tutee to become autonomous?

- A helicopter tutor constantly hovers over their tutee without providing space and puts them self at the centre of the tutoring. This is NOT an optimal tutoring technique.
- Helicopter tutoring does not promote tutee autonomy. The goal of educators is to help learners build their **own identity**. This occurs when the learner stops depending on someone else, but formulates their own understandings (Baxter Magolda, 1994).
- Many novice tutors think that if they are not directly doing something with their tutee, their tutee is not learning. However, actual learning usually does not take place as you are explaining something to your tutee or even as you are giving feedback. Learning takes place as tutees try to verbalize understanding and takes place in the **individual quiet time** where the tutee consistently works through challenging material, makes mistakes, and then tries to use your feedback and suggestions to improve.
- Tutees not only need **time** to work through material, they also need **space**. If you hover (like a helicopter) over your tutee while they work through challenging material, they will be inclined to let you take over or feel pressured to answer quickly. However, when you physically remove yourself by moving your chair back a few feet, you are signalling to your tutee that it is now time for them to work on their own. This

approach also gives the tutee **confidence** in their ability to work on their own.

- If you feel your tutee is working through material too quickly just to get your feedback, insist that they take more time and show their work to you only after they have reviewed it and are more confident in the accuracy of what they are now showing you.
- By resisting the urge to helicopter tutor, you will help your tutee realize that the **onus for their learning** is not on you and it is not on their teacher, but it is on them. You and their teacher are their partners in supporting their learning, but the responsibility to learn rests with the tutee.

NOTES

#9

PROCESS VS. PRODUCT

My tutee is concerned with their end results, but I am concerned with helping my tutee improve. How do we resolve this?

- Your tutee will be primarily concerned with their **final product** (and they should be); however, your primary concern should be the **processes** involved in obtaining or creating the product.
- Assure your tutee that focusing on processes will indeed help them achieve the end product.
- To help your tutee with understanding the problem-solving processes, **focus on the WHY**. Rather than just helping them understand the series of steps needed to achieve a certain outcome, focus on helping them appreciate *WHY* certain steps or methods should be taken; the *WHY* will help the tutee tackle **future problems** and scenarios and build their **autonomy**.

For example, if you are helping your tutee learn how to calculate demand elasticity, it would be useful to first review **why** demand elasticity is important in economics, **how** it relates to other related concepts, and **why** each particular step is needed to solve the problem. That way, the tutee may feel more invested in learning the calculation.

- The tutee should be able to **transfer** their learning experience in the tutoring situation to other course material and to other learning situations.

NOTES

#10

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE

What can I do to help my tutee develop effective study skills & strategies?

- Tutees will generally appreciate help with study skills and learning strategies, even if they don't specifically ask for it.
- It is useful to explain study skills in relation to their **actual classes**. Study skills are best learned in conjunction with learning course content.
- The most effective students are able to **adapt or modify their approach** to studying depending on the particular class, assignment or learning context.

Share your own study skills and strategies and explain what works best for you, but remember to insist that tutees figure out **what works best for them**. It is important to understand that what works for you could be completely counterproductive for someone else, and that while you should suggest study tips, you should also try to help your tutee figure out what is best for them by getting them to address their studying weaknesses and build upon their strengths.

For example, you can talk about yourself and what you do concerning the following:

- a. Visiting teachers during office hours
- b. Determining ideal times to do course readings
- c. Finding useful study spaces on and off campus
- d. Looking for connections between classes and ways to make course content meaningful
- e. Preparing for exams
- f. Taking exams
- g. Note-taking and reviewing notes
- h. Reading and analyzing difficult texts
- i. Developing good in-class habits
- j. Strategies for working in groups
- k. Improving information retention (memory)
- l. Keeping a worry pad (a list of questions/concerns)
- m. Keeping course/study materials organized
- n. Staying up-to-date with assignments

NOTES

#11

TIME MANAGEMENT

How can I help my tutee with time management?

- Time management is arguably the most important academic skill of all because you need to plan enough time to use all other study skills.
- Try to help increase your tutee's awareness of time and how they use it.
- Have your tutee explain what **procrastination** is and why people procrastinate. Ask your tutee how and when they tend to procrastinate and feel free to share your personal challenges with procrastination. From there you can have a discussion of ways to avoid letting procrastination interfere with your studies.
- Help your tutee create an assignment planner (break down assignments into specific tasks and try to determine how much time each will take). Remember to make adjustments as additional assignments are required.
- Help your tutee make a realistic To-Do List in which larger items are broken down to give a sense of progress.
- Help your tutee create a semester schedule to get a **global view** of their semester; this can help them divide the semester into more manageable chunks.
- Help your tutee create a **weekly schedule** to create a visual of when they are free and when busy. Remember to include outside work, social, relaxation, eating, and sleep time.

- Recommend online time managing tools and share how you manage your time.
- You may suggest your tutees **reward themselves** for sustained studying: for example, 30 minutes studying/10 minute break, 45 minutes studying/15 minute break, or 60 minutes studying/20 minute break. Encourage them to avoid electronic devices during their short breaks and to exercise instead (e.g. walk, calisthenics or workout).
- Try to promote a **balanced lifestyle** - encourage your tutee to prioritize time for regular exercise, scheduled leisure or social time as well as time for enough sleep.

NOTES

#12

METACOGNITION

How do I get my tutee to think about their own thinking and understanding?

- Metacognition is knowledge about thinking in general as well as thinking about one's own thinking (Pintrich, 2002).
- Encourage your tutee to become more knowledgeable about and more **responsible for their thinking**. Provide ample opportunities for them to reflect upon their own thinking and understanding.
- Recommend your tutee to try different approaches to learning and then recognize and reflect upon what worked, what didn't work, and why.
- For example, when helping a tutee read a challenging text, try to work with them to create ways to **monitor their comprehension** as they read. This could involve asking them to summarise a text briefly to see if they understand it.
- TASC has tools to help you and your tutees develop metacognitive skills.

- Encourage your tutees to question themselves about the following:

1. What do I already know about_____?
2. What new material must I learn about_____?
3. What skills, knowledge, and abilities do I need to learn _____?
4. What will I be able to do once I know about_____?
5. How will I get to learn about _____ in an efficient way?
6. What strategies can I use to learn about_____?

NOTES

#13

SELF-REGULATION

How can I help my tutee figure out if they understand something?

- Being self-aware and able to self-regulate are essential skills for your tutees to develop (Weimer, 2003).
- Encourage your tutee to develop an understanding of when they understand new information/concepts and when they do not. Weinstein et al (2006) suggest that “checking on understanding and looking for gaps in knowledge integration should be an ongoing activity present in every studying and learning context” (pg. 310).

To help your tutee self-regulate,

- stress the importance of increasing and/or improving their reflection about their thinking and learning
- discuss the **strategies you use** to monitor your own thinking and learning
- encourage them to **paraphrase** what they learned (paraphrasing helps build meaning and helps identify misunderstanding)
- encourage them to **apply** what they learned to a given task (homework problems or project assignments are often designed to identify gaps in knowledge)
- suggest that when learning new information, they can **create sub-goals** and then practice trying to determine if each goal has been met (when a goal

- has not been met, ask them what they can do to address the issue)
- ask them to **'teach'** you challenging concepts (while processing the content needed to teach you, the tutee will have to consolidate the learned concept and, as a result, this can help them determine if they actually do understand)
- Helping your tutee self-regulate puts the tutee at the centre of the tutoring-learning exchange.

NOTES

#14

FEEDBACK

How can I give useful feedback to my tutee and offer effective praise?

- Your feedback should be honest, specific and constructive; provide opportunities for your tutee to **act upon your feedback** by trying to create a **feedback loop** where you offer feedback on what is working and what is not and have them practise, try again, and continue the loop. This works best when you create a non-judgmental environment where your tutee is unafraid to try and fail. Making mistakes and failing provides learners with so much value.



- Try to relate your feedback to identified learning objectives.
- Structure your feedback such that it **promotes dialogue**.
- **Reciprocal feedback** - continually ask your tutee to give you feedback on your tutoring

approaches and what you could do differently to support their learning.

- When complimenting your tutee, consider the type of **praise** you give:

While tutoring, try to praise your tutee's **efforts** and **persistence** rather than their intelligence or skill. As Dweck (2008) argues, praising your tutee's mind and natural talent can actually decrease their confidence because, if challenges get harder (and they always do), they will start to doubt themselves (pg. 176). So, as a tutor, you should encourage your tutee to **embrace challenges** and be **fascinated by mistakes** (pg. 177).

You may choose to use the sandwich method:

1. Start by telling them something that they are doing well
2. Then comment on an area that needs improvement
3. Finish with a positive comment

* Remember to accompany your critique with specific suggestions that your tutee can use to improve their learning.

NOTES

#15

DYNAMIC TUTORING

How can I use a dynamic approach in my tutoring?

- There is **not just one pathway to learning** - you will find that your tutees will all learn in different ways and have many different strengths and weaknesses
- Share your learning styles with your tutee and share specific studying and learning strategies that work best for you.
- Encourage your tutees not to limit themselves by trying to learn in only one way, but rather to combine multiple ways of learning (Throop & Castellucci, 2011).

To promote learning, try to keep your tutees on their toes and in a slight discomfort zone. Use a dynamic approach while tutoring by incorporating the following approaches:

- a. Visual Learning (seeing): use drawings, visuals, charts, concept maps, and review notes
- b. Auditory Learning (listening): encourage tutee to tell you about class lectures and discussions
- c. Kinesthetic Learning (using whole body): design and build things with tutee, do role play, talk about tutee's real life experiences as they relate to course concepts
- d. Tactile Learning (using hands): encourage tutee to take notes, highlight, underline, sketch, create diagrams (Throop & Castellucci, 2011)

- e. Naturalistic Learning (using nature):
engage in an outdoor experience and
use principles in nature to help tutee
discover new ways of learning
- f. Musical Learning (using music): have
tutee listen to an audio link or have
them compose a song or piece of music
to help them learn

NOTES

#16

TUTEE MOTIVATION

What can I do to improve my tutee's motivation?

- Help your tutee see relevance and value in course material by thinking about what aspects of the course might interest them or help them.
- Encourage your tutee to adopt a **flexible learning approach**, rather than a **fixed one**, as this often helps to increase motivation (see Question 22).
- Share your motivational approaches of being a college student with your tutee and about strategies you used when you were not initially motivated.

Keep in mind a few **theories of motivation**:

<p>a. SELF-EFFICACY THEORY</p>	<p>If you reassure your tutee they are indeed capable, and you resist comparing them to other students <u>and yourself</u>, they may become more motivated (Bandura, 1997).</p>
<p>b. ATTRIBUTION THEORY</p>	<p>If you help your tutee see that the work they put into studying can and will influence their results, their motivation may increase (Weiner, 1985). Try scaffolding by first working on a task you believe they can accomplish successfully before building on developing additional skills.</p>
<p>c. GOAL-SETTING THEORY</p>	<p>Helping your tutee set realistic goals can help your tutee change their behaviour and possibly energize their learning. Help your tutee create goals that are Specific, Attainable, Timely, Measurable, Realistic, and Shared and encourage your tutee to break up larger tasks into smaller, more manageable sub-goals. Then you can give them feedback on each goal (Locke & Latham, 2002).</p>
<p>d. SELF-WORTH THEORY</p>	<p>Tutees may go to great lengths to avoid failure and to protect their self-worth by not trying, by procrastinating, or by maintaining a perpetual state of disorganization (Seifert, 2004). To help increase your tutee's motivation, encourage your tutee to complete a learning plan and help them manage and prioritize their time.</p>

Note: If you cannot seem to help motivate your tutee, encourage them to visit Vanier's Academic Success Advisor in the Tutoring & Academic Success Centre (E-308)

NOTES

#17

TUTEE FRUSTRATION

I may feel very uneasy watching my tutee struggle; what can I do about this?

- Learning is difficult and often requires us to **change**, and change is often uncomfortable at first. It is often hard to watch someone struggle and try to navigate a situation outside of their **comfort zone**; however learning to work through that struggle is something tutees need to learn and will appreciate, especially during final exams or future assignments, when they will not have you around.
- Students learn best from having the time and space to work through difficult material in a supportive and encouraging environment; they should not fear failure, but rather **embrace making mistakes by seeing it as a way to learn**.
- As a tutor, providing this support comes from **acknowledging that college-level work is difficult** and encouraging your tutee that they do have the capacity to learn and improve.
- If you give your tutee an answer to a question, or do work for them as soon as you notice them struggling, they will be delighted, but they will not learn and they will not discover ways to get to the answer on their own.

NOTES

#18

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

How can I resolve potential conflict with my tutee?

- Conflict can occur when people have different opinions and expectations. As a tutor, you need to practice diplomacy, speak calmly with your tutee, and find ways around impasses. Remember, should a conflict emerge, try not to take personally any difference of opinion (Ellis et al, 2016).
- Try to focus on what you do agree upon and try your best to take your time to **understand the opinion or concern of your tutee**; it is important to respond sooner rather than later to a tutee's concerns, distress, or inappropriate requests.
- Focus on solutions to the conflict and try to **affirm your commitment** to helping your tutee. Avoiding the conflict may give your tutee the impression that you are inattentive or don't care about them – and that is not the message you want them to receive.
- In times of escalating conflict, individuals tend to talk at the same time and not listen to each other. Try to **slow down the communication** as much as possible and focus on either speaking or listening. Remember the active listening tips in Question 6.
- If you cannot seem to resolve the conflict, bring in your tutoring supervisor as a more objective mediator – this can help relieve some tension.

NOTES

#19

DEEP VS. SURFACE LEARNING

How can I help my tutee take a deeper approach to learning?

Simply put, deep learning involves actively trying to understand, apply and/or create while surface learning involves passively trying to reproduce.

According to Bain (2004 & 2012), tutees are more likely to learn deeply when they:

- a. believe they can learn
- b. believe other people have faith in their ability to learn
- c. can get support (emotional and intellectual assistance) when they need it
- d. can speculate even before they have formally learned anything about the topic
- e. can try, fail, receive feedback, and try again before anyone judges (grades) their work
- f. believe that intelligence and abilities are expandable, and that if they work hard, they will get better at it
- g. are trying to answer questions or solve problems they find intriguing, important, beautiful, or beneficial
- h. can collaborate with others working with the same sort of problems

The following strategies can help to foster deep learning:

- a. Urge your tutee to think about some big, broad questions related to the course or topic that might actually matter to them.
- b. Help your tutee create some questions related to the course or topic that are

important, intriguing, or fascinating to which they actually want to find the answer.

- c. Converse and engage with your tutee to help revive their natural child-like curiosity about the course content.
- d. Create a non-threatening atmosphere where your tutee is not afraid of failure.
- e. Emphasize to your tutee that they can learn and that you are there to help. Many tutees may not have a supportive group of friends or family that believes in them or that can provide academic help.

NOTES

#20

ACTIVE TUTORING

How can I encourage my tutee to be active in our sessions?

- Learning is work. Ask your tutee to **demonstrate** (by completing a certain task) that they understand a difficult concept. For example, you might suggest your tutee to read a paragraph and then summarize its key message or paraphrase a challenging concept in their own words. When assisting your tutee with their homework, help the tutee understand the important concepts needed to do the work and then get them to work on other questions on their own to demonstrate they can **apply** the learned concepts.

Active Reading

College students often need help with learning how to read for understanding and how to link current reading to earlier learning (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). Helping your tutee to learn to read actively is one of your roles as a tutor. When reading a challenging academic text, encourage your tutee to try the following 3-step approach:

- a. **Contextualize** the text by discussing the following:
 - When was the text written?
 - Why might it have been assigned by the teacher?
 - How does text compare to other texts in the class?

- How does the text contribute to the main theme(s) in the class?

b. **Deconstruct** the text by discussing the following:

- What main point or argument is the author trying to make?
- What are the specific claims the author makes to support the main argument?
- What reasons, arguments, and details does the author use to support each specific claim?

c. Ask the following **questions** about the text:

- How does the text fit into the overall theme(s) in the course?
- How convincing is the support and evidence that the author uses?
- How does the text support or refute your own ideas about the topic?

Reynolds (1996) suggests that college students often need help learning how to critically read scientific texts and Wong (2015) adds that college students must learn to break poor reading habits that are inadequate to deal with college-level reading and comprehension. When assisting your tutee to read texts more technical in nature, consider asking them to try to answer the questions below. If they struggle to answer a question, this can open up dialogue.

1. What specific results are mentioned in the **abstract**?
2. Do you agree with the logic of the authors' **conclusions**?

3. Do you understand the **background** or **motivation** of the text?
4. What does other scholarly research **reviewed** suggest about the topic?
5. What **methodology** was used by the author? How did the author collect and analyze data?
6. What are the **main findings** of the text?
7. How do the findings **relate** (refute, support, add to) to other research conducted on the topic?
8. What does this text tell you that is **important** in relation to the class?
9. Are there any **technical terms** that you did not understand?
10. Is **further research** is suggested? If so, why is it suggested?

NOTES

#21

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Should my approach change when tutoring in my tutees' 2nd (or 3rd or 4th) language?

- Your approach to helping your tutee improve should not change; however, there are a number of extra considerations when you are assisting your tutee in the language that is not their native tongue:
 1. You may often not finish what you expected to in the allotted time; so, plan accordingly and urge tutees to see you more often when there are language barriers (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008).
 2. It will require even more patience when assisting a tutee in their non-native language.
 3. It is extremely useful for non-native speaking tutees to see the same tutor each time that they require assistance, as you will gradually develop your level of comfort with each other.
 4. To avoid miscommunication and to ensure you are on the same page, there is an even greater importance of being an active listener and paraphrasing what you hear to check for understanding (i.e. "so if I understand you correctly, you're telling me _____")
 5. Consider using multiple means of expressions; for example, talk and write on a white board to reduce miscommunication.
*refer to Question 6 for more suggestions on communicating clearly with tutees

NOTES

#22

TUTEE MINDSET

Can my tutee's mindset influence their academic potential?

- Tutees with a fixed mindset will often get **discouraged** when initially struggling because they convinced themselves that the material is too difficult for them and that they are not smart enough to get it (Dweck, 2006). So, remind them that college level material is supposed to be challenging and that they will be able to understand it if they work at it.
- Tutees with a fixed mindset will often think in **dualistic terms**: 1) if they have the necessary ability to succeed in _____, they will succeed, or 2) if they think they do not have the necessary ability, they won't succeed. Such tutees will usually see a poor result on an assignment or failure to get a correct answer as proof that they cannot succeed. So, let your tutee know that there were many instances when you (or your friends) struggled academically and that working hard can lead to positive results.

How can you help your tutee adopt a more flexible mindset?

- The feedback and praise you offer your tutee can help them develop a mindset geared for growth (see Question 14 on feedback).
- Feedback that prioritizes **perseverance rather than intelligence** will help your tutee see that growth takes time, commitment and determination.

- Help your tutee see that making mistakes and experiencing failure are often necessary steps before success in college and beyond.

NOTES

#23

SAFE SPACE

How can I ensure I provide a safe space for all tutees and myself?

- Tutoring your peers is a terrific way to become an **engaged and active** college student.
- You will likely be tutoring a very diverse group of students, and it is essential that you provide an **inclusive space** that is conducive for *all* students to learn and grow.
- **Don't make assumptions** about your tutee's race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, gender, or cultural background.
- If you ever feel that a tutee is harassing or bullying you or makes tutoring unsafe for you in any way, **let your supervisor know immediately**.
- For more information on the necessity of students treating fellow students with respect, fairness and integrity, consult Vanier College's *Code of Conduct Policy*.

NOTES

#24

SELF-ASSESSMENT

How will I know if I am an effective tutor?

- To become an effective tutor, it is useful to continually **reflect** upon your tutoring sessions - think about what worked and what you can improve upon for next time.
- Develop a practise of asking your tutees how the tutoring session went and what you can possibly do differently to help facilitate their learning.
- Ask your **supervisor for feedback** on your tutoring.
- Consider participating in the TASC peer tutoring blog (www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/tasc). This on-line collective is a space for peer tutors of all subjects to share ideas about peer tutoring.
- To practice reflecting on your developing skills as a tutor, see Appendix A.

NOTES

#25

YOUR OWN DEVELOPMENT

How can tutoring my peers help me develop?

Tutoring your peers can be advantageous to you. The potential benefits for tutors can be put into six categories:

- a. **Academic** - your grades can improve; Topping (2005) argues that students might never truly grasp a concept until having to explain it to someone else. 'To teach is to learn' so tutors may actually learn as much (or more) than their tutees
- b. **Communication** - your active listening skills and your speaking skills can develop
- c. **Emotional Intelligence** - your self-awareness, empathy, social/relationship skills, respect for diversity can develop
- d. **Leadership** - you can build confidence in your leadership skills (Skalicky & Caney, 2010)
- e. **Employability** - you can increase your future employability by developing work autonomy, leadership skills, a strong work ethic, and a sense of professionalism
- f. **Future Career** - if you are contemplating a career in education, tutoring your peers will provide you with some useful insight into what this career might look like

Read about what recent peer tutors have said about their own development:

Recent Peer Tutor Testimonials:

"I learned how to write and read better in English due to my four English classes, but I learned how to speak more fluently due to the tutoring sessions I gave" - **Fall 2015 TASC Tutor**

"I believe that I gained 'soft' skills from this experience, such as the ability to encourage people and to tactfully pinpoint mistakes in a manner that encourages learning. Moreover, seeing so many students determined to improve triggered empathy within me" - **Winter 2016 TASC Tutor**

"Tutoring really helped me with my communication skills. Being in Nursing, we have to practice active listening and the use of silence. This experience helped me in my clinical part of Nursing" - **Winter 2016 TASC Tutor**

"If I were to compare the person I was in my first-year of college to the person I have become today, after having had a full academic year of tutoring, I can definitely come to a conclusion that I'm so much more comfortable around people now" - **Fall 2016 TASC Tutor**

"I believe I have improved my communication skills because tutoring forced me to learn how to reword and re-explain myself in different ways so that the tutee would understand. I had to learn how to adapt to the needs of the tutee, which improved my speaking skills" - **Fall 2016 TASC Tutor**

“Peer tutoring is always helpful to review material. By explaining the material to others, not only is the information ingrained into my memory, but I also understand the material much more if I am able to explain it to another” - Winter 2017 TASC Tutor

“I have learned how to be positive. A lot of tutees that I see were in a state of panic because of their failed assignments. I learned how to be calm and show my tutees the positive side of things and help them find a solution” - Winter 2017 TASC Tutor

NOTES

CONCLUSION

Peer tutors have tremendous potential to help students experience academic growth. However, it is not necessarily students with the highest grades in Mathematics or French or Nursing (or whichever discipline you tutor) that make the best tutors. This book has outlined which skills and characteristics are important for peer tutors and what strategies you can use to put your tutee at the centre of your tutoring. By relating to the challenges that your tutees face, you will be able to help them grow and improve. Tutors will thrive when they see tutees as their peers and as their equals. Tutors who understand that peer tutoring is an opportunity for like-minded college students to work in a learning partnership will have the greatest impact.

APPENDIX A

Practice reflecting on your developing skills as a tutor.

1. In what ways do I establish a positive rapport with my tutee?
2. Am I patient with my tutee? How can I be more patient?
3. Do I listen attentively to my tutee? If not, how can I improve my listening skills?
4. Do I avoid interrupting my tutee?
5. Do I acknowledge that the work my tutee is doing can be challenging?
6. If my tutee tries to get me to do some of their work, how do I handle this?
7. Do we summarize what was accomplished in the tutoring session, and do we discuss what still needs to be done?
8. How do I give feedback to my tutee and create a feedback loop?
9. How do I praise my tutee's persistence rather than intelligence?
10. In what ways do I encourage my tutee to take a deep approach to learning?
11. In what ways do I create a safe, non-threatening space?
12. What could I have done differently to help my tutee experience improved learning and skill development?
13. How can I use my supervisor to help me become a better tutor?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information or additional resources on any of the information in this book or to offer comments about any of the content, please contact Joshua Berman by e-mail at bermanj@vaniercollege.qc.ca or in person in the Tutoring & Academic Success Centre, E-306.

For more information on peer tutoring instructional strategies, please consult the author's M.Ed. research results, *Cross Disciplinary Peer Tutoring Instructional Strategies: The Impact of Experience* at <http://savoirs.usherbrooke.ca/handle/11143/7640/>. To continue the discussion on various different topics related to peer tutoring and education in general, feel free to consult the TASC peer tutoring blog: www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/tasc where you can collaborate with peer tutors from every discipline at Vanier College.

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Congratulations

**ON DECIDING TO
BECOME A PEER TUTOR!**

Tutors often describe peer tutoring as one of the most enriching and fulfilling parts of college life. Tutoring your peers may take you outside of your comfort zone, but this book is designed to help you address challenges so that you and your tutees can get the most out of the tutoring experience.

"Learning To Peer Tutor gets straight to the point and provides useful information for students in any discipline looking to become a great tutor. A must-read for peer tutors of all skill levels."

- Dylan Patel, Health Science Student & TASC Tutor

"Following the tips and tricks given in this book will help ensure that you grow as a tutor and your tutees improve as students."

- Shealeigh Sangollo, Social Science Student & TASC Tutor

"This book is GREAT!

I learned a lot just reading through it."

- Marie Gribbon, veteran teacher of 30 years & Explorations Coordinator