

# I. General Guidelines for Tutors

## 1. Getting Started

Your role as tutor is to help students learn the process for problem solving and build their confidence and content knowledge. You may feel pressure because you have the ability to influence a group of students, and you want to do well. Take it easy! If you are doing your best to tutor students, they will see that and respect you for your effort. Know that you have a support system with the staff at the school, fellow tutors, and in the Leonard Gelfand Center at Carnegie Mellon.

Here are some basic principles for working with students:

### ❖ **Communicate**

Communication is one of the keys to success. Nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal, so be aware of your posture and body language. Avoid crossing your arms, leaning back in your chair, tapping pens, doodling, fidgeting, zoning out, or ongoing looks of frustration. Nod and smile appropriately to let your student understand that you support him/her. Be sure to make appropriate eye contact. Your behavior is a model for your student, and this is a great way to show you are listening and engaged.

### ❖ **Be sincere**

More than how much you remember about geometry, students care if you are real with them. If you feel relaxed, open, confident, and comfortable, students will feel this way, too. Chit-chatting before and occasionally during the tutoring session allows you to relate to the student and to better understand the most effective ways to teach them.

### ❖ **Share your experiences**

We all have stories about having difficulty with particular subjects/topics. Sharing these anecdotes helps students to know they are not alone. If your students know that they are not alone, they will feel like the trouble they are having in school is a part of the learning process. Trust us, it is!

### ❖ **Make the process transparent**

Teamwork and communication are really important parts of tutoring. In order to maintain a successful program, we need all the tutors to act as transparently as possible. Set clear boundaries and make a plan that meets both your expectations and the student's. Communicate openly and often.

### ❖ **Talk to your fellow tutors and the school faculty**

They may be able to provide helpful information about the students' lives and can give you tips that you may have not considered. Tell the teacher what's going on with students' behavior and progress (ex: what issues they are having); they may have strategies/ideas to improve your next session with that student.

## 2. Student Learning & Ownership

Helping students take ownership of their learning is a critical step in the process of education, and as a tutor you will have the ability and the responsibility to guide these students to be empowered learners.

- ❖ **Make students do the work. Never give them the answer.** In the long-run, you're doing them a huge favor by teaching them how to learn the materials at hand.
- ❖ **Have students prioritize their work.** Students can then make choices about what they want to work on during their tutoring sessions. For example, ask: "Which work should you do first? Why? What should we do now?"
- ❖ **Ask questions!** You may begin by saying something like: "How would you begin solving this homework problem?" Be sure to ask questions your student is able to answer, as well as harder ones.
- ❖ **Do the hard homework first.** The student can do the easy work at home. The truth is that parents may not understand some of the more difficult homework. Try to direct students towards finishing their harder work while they are around trained individuals who can support them.
- ❖ **Acknowledge students who are waiting for help.** A good way to have them understand is by saying something like "I see you; I'll come to you next." Students will then tend to move on by themselves to another problem.
- ❖ **Try to get the students to do the work on their own.** Sometimes students ask for help even though, when you ask them, they know how to find the correct answer. Many students want to be validated and acknowledged for their work. Try giving them an instruction on their assignment: "Do number 3 now on your own and I'll come back and check on you."
- ❖ **Acknowledge your student's hard work and accomplishments.** You can do this throughout the session, but make sure to reiterate this at the end of each session.

### 3. Structure & Routines

The goal of tutoring is to teach students an efficient routine to complete homework on their own and to learn how to effectively seek answers. Thus, be sure to structure your time effectively and establish these routines. A few ways to show students that you are committed to being their tutor is by showing up on time and being available and present for all tutoring sessions.

- ❖ **Set goals and establish specific, measurable objectives.** This will allow you to set a diagnostic to the progress of your students and program. Speak with other members at your program to see what is already in place.
- ❖ **State objectives before you start the one-on-one or group activity.** Let students know what to expect from the tutoring session. Always keep in mind that you want to have direction when working with your students. Before you begin any activity, state the objective and what it would mean for them to grasp the concepts.
- ❖ **Have a time-based outline of a plan for each session.** It is important to have a plan of what you are going to be doing throughout the session, whether it is with a group or one-on-one. While it is not necessary to have a written timeline, learn how much time routine activities take so you can more effectively plan lessons.
- ❖ **Be consistent.** Make it a point to **be patient, encouraging, and flexible each session.**

Students' lives may be filled with many inconsistencies. You want to be a consistent and positive role model in their lives. This will help you gain their respect and trust. Show up on time and ready to work!

### 4. Process

- ❖ **Never be afraid to ask for help or direction.** Tutors benefit from ongoing support. It is understandable that newer tutors will require more structure and closer supervision. Tutors can learn from each other's experiences, as well as from teacher and supervisor suggestions for handling problems.
- ❖ **Implement "logs" for both tutor and student.** This will help you to see what was accomplished and what still is needed among both students and tutors.

## 5. Working towards Independence

As a tutor, you should help facilitate a path that would allow students to seek knowledge for themselves. These tips will help you find out new ways to help students learn how to do work on their own.

- ❖ **Reinforce progress and aim for student independence.** Move from experiences where the student is fully supported to experiences where student is fully independent.
- ❖ **I do, we do, you do.** At first, you will be the one aiding with problems. The session will then get to a point where you and the student do problems together. In the end, you want the student to be able to do it successfully themselves.
- ❖ **Adjust the plan if the student is frustrated.** There are many ways to teach a student the same concepts or lessons. Try not to get too focused on teaching the student a concept only one way. Be prepared to adapt to the way the student learns by teaching the material in a way that best helps your student grasp the concept.

Be aware of your student's shifting workload. Constantly check to make sure the student is properly prioritizing their work and taking a more independent role in designing what this system looks like.

## 6. Behavior Management and Bullying

If you witness a student being bullied during a tutoring session, let the bully know that you don't appreciate what they're saying and encourage the bully to apologize. If the bullying behavior continues, contact a faculty member or site director to intervene. If there is a physical altercation between students and you are the first adult to notice, use a stern but polite voice to call for the altercation to stop. If that does not work, notify the nearest adult employee at the school or site location.

## II. Tutoring as Mentoring

Even though it may not be obvious, the daily interactions you are having with your student are incredibly important to his/her development. **You have the opportunity to be a positive role model and a mentor for these students.** Mentors assure students that they have someone who cares about them and the work that they do. Mentors provide encouragement and help students with the challenges they may face. Below we have included some tips and strategies on how to be an effective mentor.

### 1. Tutor-Student Relationship

It is important to acknowledge that there is a specific relationship that you should have with your students. Think about the impression you want to make and understand that there are multiple aspects of this relationship that you must maintain. This tutor-student relationship takes time to grow, and relies on **consistency, trust, and proper boundaries.**

#### Setting boundaries with social interactions:

- ❖ **Lay the ground rules for how you will interact with your students.** Gently remind your student whenever they cross that line. Be comfortable asking for help in determining appropriate behavior or if you are unsure how to breach the subject with a student.
- ❖ **Physical contact should be kept to a minimum.** Hand to hand contact such as handshakes, first bumps or high fives are all acceptable and can be a simple way to positively encourage your student.
- ❖ **Maintain firm boundaries in terms of email, social media, and other forms of communication such as exchanging cell phone numbers.** Our world is full of newer, better forms of technology and social media. It's easy to accept friend requests on social media or answer a friendly email from a mentee. Your role is that of a tutor, not friend, and following students or accepting students on social media platforms is strongly discouraged. Additionally, **check your own social media privacy settings to ensure that you are presenting yourself as a positive role model to your students.** CMU Child Protection Operations has more information on healthy boundaries with minor student populations.

#### Strategies for dealing with difficult situations:

If there is a difficult situation that you cannot handle, do not be afraid to talk to another tutor or a faculty member. **If something makes you uncomfortable, trust your instincts and tell your instructor or project leader.**

## 2. Make it Fun and Make it Friendly

Helping your students to learn is the primary goal. This does not mean that you cannot have fun. You should build positive and friendly tutor/tutee relationships with your students. This will keep them interested in returning, learning, and succeeding.

- ❖ **Be positive and encourage students to give it their best efforts.**
- ❖ **Build a good rapport with your students.** Initiate a bit of small talk at the beginning of your tutoring session. Ask students how their day went, what they learned that was interesting that week, what school activities are happening at the moment, etc.

Don't be discouraged if there is not an immediate connection with your students as that dynamic can sometimes take some time to establish.

## 3. Communication & Active Listening

In our daily lives, we are constantly listening and reacting to the world around us. **Active Listening allows us to better understand students and their tutoring needs, concerns, and questions.** Below are some tips to become good active listeners.

- ❖ **Repeat a student's question back to them in the form of a statement.** For example, you may say something like: "It sounds like you're asking... Is that correct?" Not only does this clarify the question, but it shows your student that you are listening.
- ❖ **Body language is essential to active listening.** Be aware of your posture, your facial expressions, and your eye contact. Proper eye contact shows your student that you're listening to him/her.
- ❖ **Ask Probing questions.** Ask questions that expand conversations and learning. For example, ask questions that could help your student to gain a deeper understanding. You might ask questions like: "What do you think would happen if..." or "Could you imagine another way..."
- ❖ **Allow for silence.** Sometimes not talking can feel a little uncomfortable but giving your student an extra ten seconds of silence can prompt him/her to speak up, voice concerns, opinions, or ideas.
- ❖ **Empathize.** If a student is having a bad day, acknowledge that sometimes situations can be frustrating. Say something like "That sounds very frustrating..," or "It's understandable that you're upset about..."
- ❖ **When times get tough, redirect.** This is a good tactic to use if your student is expressing a lot of frustration about a particular problem or subject. Move on to a different

problem, or take a short break. A change of pace helps students to regroup and finish their other work.

## 4. Trouble with Homework

Remind students that what they're feeling is important; don't shut them down.

- ❖ **Identify with your student's frustrations, but direct your student to think about why it is important to complete homework, and how they can work through the frustration.** Sometimes, a student may simply need a break from the assignment, and may need to work on another assignment before returning to the first. Sometimes, a two-minute stretch break or a walk to the water fountain may help. Use your best judgment.
- ❖ **Validate your student's frustrations.** For example: "I understand that this is important to you..." Try to understand where your student is coming from. This will help you to find the best approach for moving forward. If you can relate to the student's frustrations with a certain topic, share your own story about how you were able to accomplish the task or finish the related homework.
- ❖ **Ask students what strategies they've found helpful in the past.** Come up with homework solutions with them.

Remember to use active listening skills. Listen, ask any clarifying questions, and repeat back what you think the student is asking to be sure you understand. After you have a discussion, you may even want to ask, "Does that make sense?" in order to gauge if you have effectively answered your student's question.

## 5. Trust-building

At the end of the day, you want to provide a place where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and their struggles. **Be fair, honest, and consistent with your students.** With time, they will return the favor with their trust.

# III. One-on-One Tutoring

## 1. Evaluation of Needs

Each student has different needs and ways to learn. As you get to know students, you will be able to develop new ways to help them learn more efficiently. Below are some strategies to help you facilitate this process.

- ❖ **Ask what they DO know**, not what they DON'T know, in order to evaluate where to begin the tutoring session. Have them talk about what they're working on in school and/or topics they're most interested in.
- ❖ **Develop a personalized program.** Set minor and major goals and establish the way in which these goals will be met. Let students help to determine what these goals will be.
- ❖ **Learn to understand the communication style and learning style of the student.** Some students tend to have an internal locus of control, or believe they are in control of their learning. While other students have an external locus of control and believe that external forces control the outcome of their learning. Being able to understand what type of learner the student is allows you to effectively teach them.
- ❖ **Ask the students where they are having trouble. Some students fear a subject because of past failure.** Some students are taking the class because it is a requirement; therefore they may have no interest in the subject. The students could also be lacking confidence in their ability to master the material, or they might be overwhelmed by the time requirements imposed on them for this particular class. The reason for the tutoring request is important because it will give you a starting point from which to plan your future tutoring sessions.
- ❖ **Track the progress of all work.** Grading and recording results will allow you to determine when your student has a total command of the material and is ready to move on.
- ❖ **Establish and share the needs and expectations.** Both you and the student should share needs and expectations you have for each other from the beginning of tutoring.
- ❖ **Engage the student by asking their interests.** By learning about what your student likes and dislikes you may be able to incorporate this information into real-world examples or build your relationship through similar interests.

Set rules and guidelines at the beginning of the first session and be consistent.



## 2. Opportunities for Success

Students want to achieve and have successes. Facilitating this process will help to keep them motivated in order to continue to the next problem.

- ❖ **Always begin an activity at a point where the student can succeed and provide support when moving to more difficult tasks.** Providing support isn't simply giving the student answers but guiding them towards the answer. You'll want to be able to determine whether the student doesn't understand the material, is struggling to concentrate, or is maybe lacking the appropriate background knowledge for any given assignment.
- ❖ **Ask probing questions related to the content.** The way that the students answer these questions can also help determine if they learn best by hearing, seeing, talking through a problem, using manipulatives (Ex: counting blocks), or using real life examples.
- ❖ **Repeat tasks as often as needed.**
- ❖ **Make sure the student fully understands one concept before moving on to another.**

## 3. Right and Wrong Responses

Knowing how to respond to questions is important. This can make the difference between students feeling down on themselves or motivated to work harder to attain the right answer.

- ❖ **Acknowledge but do not over-exaggerate success during a tutoring session.** Praise effort over intelligence. "I really appreciate how much effort you put into that homework assignment. It may have taken some time, but in the end you were able to complete it by talking through each problem and breaking it down. Nicely done."
- ❖ **Encourage students constantly and praise positive behavior and attitude.** Respond to wrong answers supportively. "No, that's not right, but good try."
- ❖ **Do not correct a student's grammar.** Instead, provide them with an example by using correct grammar. Do not correct the student on everything.
- ❖ **Note mistakes for later, but stay focused on session goals.** Create a non-judgmental environment for students where they learn that they can make mistakes. When appropriate and applicable, relate to mistakes by providing personal anecdotes. Point out to the student where they may have made a mistake initially, but then self-corrected and got the right answer. Applaud persistence.

You want students to be comfortable making mistakes around you so that you can provide correct examples.

## 4. Communication with Parents & Teachers

Sometimes you may need to talk to your student's parents or teachers in order to provide the best tutoring situation for your student. We think about reaching out to parents and teachers when times are tough, if the student often forgets assignments, has behavioral issues, or simply isn't certain what to work on during tutoring sessions—but the truth is, **touching base with parents and teachers about your student's successes can be just as helpful.** Working together with parents and teachers can help you to create tutoring goals to meet the student's needs.

**Always speak with your leader, faculty member, or supervisor before reaching out to parents or teachers.** They may be able to provide some helpful tips, and may have insight into how to address certain issues.

### Once you have the go-ahead, here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

- ❖ Speaking to teachers ensures that you share the same educational objectives and can work as a team to be sure the student is receiving the best help possible.
- ❖ Ask a lot of questions about the teacher's expectations and insight, and work towards meeting the goals of the teacher. Email is a great way to reach out to teachers, since they can respond quickly during times that work for them. (They may also want to send supplemental materials, like worksheets or reading materials.)
- ❖ When speaking with parents, **be sure to highlight the positives.** Ensure parents of your dedication to their child's success, but do not shy away from discussing any issues your student is facing. Talk about what problems you've noticed and ask parents for feedback. Sometimes, they may be able to share helpful information about your student that will allow you to better teach them.

We tend to associate parent-tutor communications as necessary only when there are problems, but it is a good idea to reach out to give positive updates, too. That way, parents will see that during tutoring, their child is working hard, has a good attitude, excels at reading, or other positive traits. It also helps parents to know that you see all the great qualities about their child, while working to correct a specific problem.

## IV. Cultural Sensitivity & Awareness

Our world is vast. **While tutoring, you will probably be working with students who have different backgrounds than your own.** Our differences help to create the dynamic, exciting, diverse world that we live in. However, it is important that as tutors, we are sensitive to the differences that each of us has, and do not let this get in the way of our tutoring.

**Here are some guidelines that can help us, as tutors, to be more culturally sensitive and aware:**

- ❖ **Be aware of your own biases and prejudices.** We all hold cultural misinformation based on our education, history, access to information, and exposure to other types of people. **It's our job as tutors to be aware of these so that we can value diversity.** Read books, watch documentaries, ask questions!
- ❖ **Take the time to listen to your students.** Ask questions that might help you to better understand where your student is coming from.
- ❖ **Don't make assumptions.** Your student's race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status are in no way a predeterminate of their abilities or perspective. Many different belief systems can exist within one specific culture.
- ❖ **Find common ground.** Often there are many parts of our lives that we have in common outside of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc. Talking with students about their interests and academics is a great way to make connections and build healthy tutor/student relationships.
- ❖ **It's okay to have differences!** We don't all have to believe the same things in order to have great peer and student/tutor relationships. **Remember that no matter what the differences, we all share the common goal of helping students, which is why we signed up to be tutors.** Be aware and interested in learning about your student's background if the topic comes up.

Developing cultural sensitivities is an ongoing process. We are constantly learning and changing and growing, and it's okay to have questions or concerns. If you have worries about your belief system or someone else's, talk to your group's leader or a faculty member. They will be able to help.

## V. Tutor Self-Care

Tutoring is often fun and rewarding; however, there may be times when you feel frustrated or upset about events during a session, or about a behavioral problem you must address. As a college student, you have many courses and responsibilities, so time management can also become difficult. In these situations, it is normal to feel worry or stress. Here are some tips for what to do when this happens.

- ❖ **Talk to your program leader, another tutor, or faculty about any tutoring issues you are facing.** You are not the only one to face challenges in tutoring, and you may be able to gain some great feedback on how to solve the problem.
- ❖ Reserve at least 30 minutes each day to exercise, stretch, meditate, or reflect. You'll feel more refreshed and recharged.
- ❖ Spend time with friends, even if this involves study groups, the gym, a coffee break, or a meal.

Ultimately, you must feel good in order to be able to tutor and mentor someone else. In tutoring, you'll have good days and bad days. If the bad days begin to outnumber the good, talk to someone about it. Most problems have solutions, but sometimes it takes teamwork to solve them. We're here to help you to be a great tutor and to enjoy what you do.

## VI. Dos and Don'ts

### Dos

- DO show up on time, & be consistent
- DO work as a team & share experiences with other tutors
- DO use body language to produce a positive, encouraging environment
- DO use active listening skills
- DO acknowledge student's hard work & accomplishments
- DO set goals & establish specific, measurable objectives
- DO reinforce progress & aim for student independence
- DO set boundaries with social interactions
- DO be positive & encourage students to give it their best efforts
- DO validate your student's frustrations
- DO understand the communication style of the student
- DO create a safe, non-judgmental environment for students
- DO reach out to parents & teachers when necessary
- DO be culturally sensitive & aware of your own biases and prejudices
- DO engage in tutor self-care. You deserve it!
- DO ask questions

### Don'ts

- DON'T give students the answers. Work with them to solve problems.
- DON'T be inconsistent
- DON'T lie or exaggerate to students
- DON'T talk just to fill the silence. Silence can be a good thing!
- DON'T correct your student's grammar
- DON'T ridicule, tease, or yell at your student
- DON'T make assumptions about your student's belief system or culture
- DON'T stick with a problem that is causing a lot of frustration. Move on & come back to it.
- DON'T be afraid to ask for help or tips from group leaders, faculty, or staff.