



T U T O R S ' T I P S

Getting Started with Your Student

The First Meeting

Although the tutor may feel nervous about the first tutoring session, it is very likely that the student will be even more on edge. It is possible that both participants will be uncertain about how the tutoring will take place, and this will be what you negotiate. It is very important to spend some time exploring the student's background and needs. Remember that every student is different, and that your job is to help design a program that is focussed on the interests and goals of the individual. Balance these needs against your own knowledge and experience, and together decide how the student will learn best. Help your student leave the first session knowing he/she can learn. Do this by helping the student learn one new thing. You will determine what this after you have talked for a little while.





The Tutor/Student Relationship

Getting to know your student is critical. This often means the student is asked to talk about their educational and family backgrounds, so always remember that anything said should remain confidential. Some students may be reluctant to discuss personal matters. Respect this. Others are crying out for help when they feel their circumstances are not good. You are not a social worker. You are there to help your student learn. If necessary, refer your student to your co-ordinator who will know the most appropriate person to assist. Your student may be curious about your reasons for becoming a tutor, and may ask you about yourself. While it is important to develop a trusting relationship with your student, it is often better to proceed cautiously when revealing personal information. Some tutors become good friends with their student, but others prefer to have a more "professional" relationship.

Activities for the First Meeting

The first meeting should not be too long - between one and two hours should be plenty. Make sure you have a private place to chat, in case the student feels embarrassed about talking about problems where others may overhear. Having a cup of tea or coffee may help break the ice. If you ask your student to write something, you might walk away to get a drink to take away the pressure of writing in front of an audience.

Your student may have already had an initial assessment completed by a teacher in your program, and you may have been given the information collected at this stage. If so, this will be a great help in giving you some background knowledge. Even if you already have an idea of your student's level of reading and writing ability, it will help your understanding greatly if you ask him/her to read something aloud and do a short piece of writing. Go prepared with a range of texts for reading and some ideas for the writing.

After spending some time getting to know one another, the first meeting should include some or all of the following:

- ▶ Enrolment procedures (if necessary)
- ▶ Establishment of a regular time and place for meeting
- ▶ Discussion of methods for contact if necessary between meetings
- ▶ Goal setting (long and short term)
- ▶ Discussion of the skills needed
- ▶ Prioritisation of needs
- ▶ List of interests or hobbies
- ▶ Discussion of reading and writing genres of interest (newspapers, magazines, letters, forms, lists etc)
- ▶ Negotiation of who will bring material
- ▶ How much homework will be set
- ▶ Discussion of the responsibilities of both student and tutor
- ▶ A short reading and writing activity





Responsibilities

Your aim is for the student to leave the first meeting feeling that you are an empathetic person who is prepared to listen to and respond to their problems. Even though you are a volunteer, they need to have confidence in your ability to plan appropriate lessons. Make it clear that the tutoring is a partnership, where you will both contribute to the decision making process. Your responsibilities as a tutor include providing regular help with the literacy or numeracy the student needs, evaluating progress and keeping records of work. The student has responsibility for articulating their needs, attending regularly, doing homework as agreed, and for some, bringing along texts for assistance.

What Next?

For many tutors, this is where the true challenge lies. You go home after the first meeting and sit down to plan your first "real" lesson. Where do you start? The first job is to look at all the information you have discovered about your student. Think what it is they want to learn most urgently, and plan a lesson around this. Be sure it is not too difficult - you want your student to have success and gain confidence.

Most interesting lessons have variety; for example there may be a passage to read, followed by some comprehension, spelling, grammar and writing exercises. It is a good idea to have a theme for the lesson, so that most of the exercises are inter-related. However, not every student will need to work in all areas, so fit your planning around what your student has identified as relevant.

There are three common starting points in lesson planning: a particular topic, a certain skill that is needed, or a genre with which the student wants to become more competent. No matter where you start, in the end your lesson will usually combine all these elements.



For example:

Your student wants to improve their writing (skill).

You know they are interested in sport (topic).

A suitable text may be a short newspaper article (genre) about football.

This leads to reading practice and comprehension (skills).

Difficult spelling (skill) in the text may be studied.

For a writing activity you decide to focus on a letter to the editor (genre) about a recent sporting issue.

You examine a range of letters to the editor and discuss the features of this genre.

The student writes a letter in a similar style.

Together you check it and discuss incorrect grammar or sentence structure or spelling (skills).



Some students may be at a beginning level, where they can only read and write a few words. In this case the strategies chosen should be quite different.

For example:

Your student enjoys cooking, but cannot read recipes. A language experience approach would be ideal. You discuss with your student what they can cook. They select a favourite well-known dish. As they describe how it is cooked, you write down the recipe. After this, you read it back to the student, then the student tries reading it to you. A text has been created using the student's own language. The words can then be studied, rhyming words listed, spelling learnt and phonics explored.

Golden Rules for Tutors



Be on time.



Be prepared.



Make sure the learning environment is quiet, without many distractions.



Respect the student's lifestyle and privacy.



Give lots of praise and encouragement.



Respond to your student's individual needs.



See mistakes as a way of learning.



Show that you make mistakes too.



Ensure a high level of success can occur.



Read body language and react to it.



Have variety in your lessons.



Involve your student in decisions about what to learn.



Don't be afraid to try something new.



Smile and have fun.