

The Oxford Guide
for
Writing Tutors
Practice and Research



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CHAPTER 3



Tutoring Practices

For Discussion

1. What specifically about the activity of tutoring excites you the most? What activity or activities related to tutoring do you find the most challenging?
2. Think about your favorite teacher or teachers. These can be teachers in the traditional sense of the classroom, or you can explore this term more broadly, thinking about the teachers you've had in other parts of your life—employers, for example, or coaches. What are the qualities or the actions that, in your estimation, made them great? What, if any, is the relationship between the way they taught and how you learn?

INTRODUCTION

New tutors are often eager to learn right away what they should actually *do* when they help other people with their writing. As a result, you might be starting this book here, with Section II, “A Tutor’s Handbook,” and this chapter on tutoring practices. Admittedly, we do not—and could not—cover all of the activities tutors engage in to help writers. This limitation in large part is due to the fact that tutors constantly adapt, revise, and invent in order to respond to the particular needs of the writers they’re working with and in the contexts in which they’re working. However, to give you a sense of some of what you need to consider and what’s possible in your important work of helping other people with their writing, our discussion in this chapter presents fifteen of the most frequently used strategies that have been developed by generations of tutors and well-known writing center scholars and researchers from across the country and around the world.

If, however, you've already read one or more of the other sections in this book, you might be wondering what the focus on research there has to do with the emphasis on practical strategies here. In fact, practice and research are deeply connected in this book, just as they are in the writing center field and in many writing tutoring programs, for several reasons: first, research can support and improve practice by providing evidence of the effectiveness of tutoring choices, and as a result, the majority of the strategies we offer are supported by current research. Second, much of this research began with the questions that emerged for tutors and directors when they reflected on their practice, noticing, for example, that some ways of helping writers worked better than others. Third, tutors who are both practitioners and researchers have potentially the most to gain from and to contribute to their work because they can create new knowledge and use this knowledge to improve their programs and add to the field of writing center studies. You are starting this practice-research process now by reading this book, discussing it with others, and testing it against your experience as a tutor, writer, student, and person. Perhaps in contrast to other textbooks you've used, you might notice that throughout this section we connect writing tutoring practice with available research. We chose this approach to show the ways that research and practice can inform one another. The *For Inquiry* assignments that appear at the end of each chapter in this section will support your research process even more directly.

We explore this research-grounded approach to tutoring writing in Section II through five chapters that move from general to specific. In this chapter, we aim to provide you with an overview of the work you'll be doing, starting with general advice about tutoring and moving to discussions of strategies that are likely to work in many tutoring situations. In the following chapters, we continue to offer strategies but in the context of more detailed discussions of

- Different ways writers write, how tutors can help them with their processes, and the history of authorship that informs both (Chapter 4)
- How tutors' and writers' individual identities influence their working relationships (Chapter 5)
- Kinds of writing you'll work with and the contexts in which you'll work with them (Chapter 6)
- The impact of new media and online communication on writing and tutoring (Chapter 7)

To further emphasize the practice-research connection, each chapter is organized around a key concept aimed adding to your knowledge about tutoring and writing and therefore to give you helpful ways to think about your work. Here, in Chapter 3, for example, we focus on **reflection**. In the chapters that follow, we address the key concepts of writing processes and authorship, identity, genre, and rhetoric. In addition to noticing these concepts, you'll also observe

that we've bolded and defined keywords that are central to the ideas explored in these chapters.

FOUNDATIONAL ADVICE FOR WRITING TUTORS

Below, we offer basic advice about tutoring, both to provide information that you can put to use immediately and to begin to sketch out the local and international communities of writing tutoring that you'll be joining.

Be Specific

Perhaps the most important piece of general advice we can offer is that *tutoring writing is always specific*. That is, tutors always work with unique individuals at certain times and in particular places. There are no "general" sessions that play out according to a set script. Although this chapter, for example, offers strategies you can use in many different sessions, the transcripts from actual sessions below show just how individuated each session can be. Even when tutors work with multiple students who are all writing the same paper for the same course, each writer, each piece of writing, and, therefore, each session is distinct from the others. Each one of these writers has an individual combination of strengths and weaknesses, not to mention an individual personality and set of preferences, and the work that she will have done (or not done) when she meets with the tutor will be different from what other writers will have completed.

Be Flexible

Although tutors are able to use similar strategies for many different writers, as a result of this specificity, the way they do so is probably at least slightly different each time. What might work for one person or one piece of writing will not necessarily work for another—likewise, a strategy that might be highly effective for one tutor might fall flat for another. Because there is no "one-size-fits-all" tutoring, then, tutors must be flexible, continuously adapting their tutoring strategies to the situation at hand.

Be Ethical

If you are a student at the college or university where you tutor, you likely already work within a set of context-specific ethical obligations, a large portion of which probably have to do with your institution's definition of academic integrity. Undoubtedly the most important ethical question that writing tutors face has to do with how much—and what kind—of help they can give writers. In particular, there is a concern that tutors might help so much that the writing is no longer really the writer's—because tutors have given writers ideas for what to write or, in the worst-case scenarios, coauthored with or ghostwritten for them. These concerns are very serious, and tutors shouldn't do anything that would

call into question the writer's, program's, or tutor's own reputation as academically honest.

Because the line between enough and too much help is not always clear, we will provide more detailed attention to these issues later on. But we can offer these two guidelines now:

- Be sure to operate within your institution's and program's policies in terms of how much help is "too much."
- Keep in mind the writer's learning as your ultimate goal, and work to find what will best support it so that the next time he faces a similar writing situation, he'll be able to tackle more of it on his own.

Tutors encounter other ethical concerns as well. Some have to do with not taking advantage of the authority, access to information, and interpersonal relationships you will have as a tutor. Writers and faculty need to be able to trust that tutors will not undermine writers' relationships with their instructors, for example, by questioning an assignment, comment, or grade or in some other way speaking inappropriately about the course or the instructor. Writers need to be able to trust that tutors will not discuss their personal information outside of the tutoring program—and that even in this context this discussion will be handled sensitively. Tutors should be clear about their program's policies concerning when, if, and how it is appropriate to "blow off steam" after a particularly challenging tutoring session or to otherwise portray a writer or her work in a light that could be considered less than positive.

And, of course, writers need to be able to trust that tutors will not take advantage of the interpersonal nature of the tutoring relationship, even inadvertently. The tutoring relationship can be an almost intimate connection, and sometimes interpersonal communication can be misconstrued; gratitude for a particularly productive tutorial can be taken for more personal feelings, for example. Know the policies of your program and your school that govern such relationships, including policies concerning workplace and sexual harassment.

Be Safe

Tutors should be able to trust that writers will not take advantage of the tutoring relationship either. Very occasionally, a writer, stressed out by academic work and the social and cultural difficulties inherent to college life, might act in a way that is inappropriate or even threatening to a tutor. Such incidents are rare. However, it is important to find out whether your program has a safety plan and how to reach the security office if need be. And each tutor should spend some time reflecting on strategies and program policies she might draw on to guide her response to a distraught writer or an irate faculty member.

Be Professional

Another aspect of tutoring ethics is the consistent practice of professionalism. The definition of professionalism for your institution or program will be expressed

in its policies and expectations, but it's probable that, like many others, your program will expect tutors to be respectful of everyone they work with—writers, other tutors, program administrators, faculty, and staff. Your program will likely also expect that you will demonstrate such respect by arriving on time, making arrangements in advance if you need to miss a session, not going over the allotted time for your sessions, and completing paperwork by the due dates. Failing to do any of these can have a negative impact on your community, ranging from creating additional work for others to damaging the reputation of your program.

Learn

Tutors do not need to know everything about writing (or anything else) before they start. This statement might be surprising because it might seem that tutoring is about having all or most of the answers for writers. New tutors come to the job with a wealth of experience to draw on, which we try to help you make use of. But one of the great benefits of being a writing tutor is that you'll learn too. Writing center scholars and researchers as well as tutors themselves have known this for a long time. Kenneth A. Bruffee famously wrote in 1984 that "Peer tutoring made learning a two-way street, since students' work tended to improve when they got help from peer tutors and tutors learned from the students they helped and from the activity of tutoring itself" (325–26, this book). More recently, Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth H. Boquet maintain that all members of a writing tutoring program—writers, tutors, and administrators alike—are co-learners, teaching and learning from each other to create "a learning culture" (49, 60–61, 68).

What tutors learn on the job, including professionalism and awareness of ethical complexities, not only helps them tutor but can have potentially long-term benefits. Several studies show that tutors not only develop as writers, mentors, and teachers but also enhance their interpersonal skills and abilities to work with others, their analytical and critical thinking skills, and their confidence (Dinitz and Kiedaisch; Hughes et al.). Although some of the tutor alumni surveyed for these studies did go on to pursue graduate degrees and careers in education and in writing, many went into a broad range of other fields, including economics, history, law, medicine, music, microbiology, political science, psychology, and social work. In their subsequent careers they have become administrators, analysts, business people, nurses, lawyers, physicians, psychologists, and researchers, among others (Hughes et al. 21–22; Dinitz and Kiedaisch 4–5). According to Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch, "Many tutors commented on how tutoring helped them in the hiring process, explaining that their writing expertise came in handy in writing resumes, cover letters, and application essays, while their tutoring experience prepared them for interviews" (4). In other words, because it can add a particular expertise to students' specific aspirations across fields and careers, serving as a writing tutor can be a rare professional and personal opportunity.

Reflect

Essential to such learning as well as to tutoring and positioning yourself as a tutor-researcher is the key concept of this chapter, **reflection**. According to Efrayim Clair, a former graduate student tutor in Yeshiva University's Wilf Campus Writing Center, tutors need to actively engage in such learning to receive the benefits of their jobs. Based on his years of tutoring, his wide reading in writing center studies, and his work in YU's graduate education program, Clair argued that reflection is essential to this active learning process. Donald Schön, an influential social scientist who studied how professionals solve problems, defines reflection in the workplace as a process of thinking about what we are doing, of "turn[ing] thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action . . . sometimes even while doing it" (50). Similarly, for Clair, reflection is an active process of looking back. After a tutoring session, for instance, he asks himself, "What did I do right and wrong?" Indeed, post-sessions reflections are common in many programs, with tutors required to write reports on what happened (a practice we return to below). However, Clair emphasizes that it is important to engage in reflection *while* tutoring—what Schön calls "reflection-in-action"—perhaps by thinking to yourself, "This is what I'm doing and why it works." He also urges tutors to actively reflect on connections *among* sessions, which he sees not as independent but as building on each other.

Clair's advice that tutors proactively reflect on their work applies to how you might use this book and produce research yourself. As you put into action the strategies below, you might well find that not all of them will work in the way we suggest or even at all. Geller et al. argue that this is part of the job and quote Schön on this point: because with reflection-in-action, "practitioners sometimes make new sense of uncertain, unique or conflicted situations of practice," we should not "assume that . . . existing professional knowledge fits every case" or "that every problem has a right answer" (qtd. in Geller et al. 22). In other words, the process of testing out strategies might raise questions for you and point up gaps between extant research and experience. Why didn't it work? Why did this happen this way? Many of the tutor-researchers whose articles we anthologize in Section IV take such gaps as their starting points. We hope you will too.

AN OVERVIEW OF WRITING TUTORING SESSIONS

Keeping in mind our caveat above about all sessions being specific, Figure 3.1 (next page) is an overview of a writing tutoring session. We chose to represent this general tutoring session with a word cloud rather than a linear list of strategies because we wanted to give you a sense, from the onset, of how dynamic sessions can be, with most of the elements taking place at nearly any point, sometimes repeatedly. As this word cloud shows, there is a lot that happens in writing



Figure 3.1 Overview of a Writing Tutoring Session.

tutoring sessions, and if you're a new tutor, you might be nervous about all you'll need to learn how to do. But the good news is that this book and the co-learners in your program (including the writers you work with) will help you develop and refine your knowledge of tutoring and writing. And the even better news is that you probably already know a great deal about and have many of the skills you'll need to tutor:

- **Being a student and writer:** You already know what it's like to be a student and writer—about managing your time, figuring out assignments and course readings, getting started on papers, and staying on track until they're finished. Even if you haven't always been completely successful at these tasks, you've probably gained insights from your experiences that can help writers who are figuring what they need to do to succeed in college or graduate school.
- **Interpersonal skills:** You probably already know how to interact with others, to help put people at ease if they seem to be feeling unsure (which can happen when people share their writing with strangers and even people they know), to give them space or time if they need it, to listen. All the qualities that go into making you a friendly, helpful person will be an important skill set for this job.
- **The benefits of feedback:** If you've received feedback on your writing—perhaps from a teacher, another student, or a friend—that helped in some way, you probably already know that it can be useful to get another person's perspective on your work. One of the most beneficial services you'll provide is giving the writer a new way of seeing her writing.

You're probably already familiar with some of the other skills we discuss in this chapter because they are part of ordinary conversation. As a result, we've put these under the heading of "Tutoring Is Conversation" below. Some tutoring strategies, however, are specifically and directly about helping with writing and, as a result, you might have never (consciously) used them before. So we're putting them under the heading of "Tutoring Isn't Just Any Conversation." In addition, to specify these categories a bit more, we introduce the more technical terms **motivation** and **scaffolding** because they have proven to be useful ways to think about and define the individual practices of writing tutoring. Each writer is unique and each session is specific. As a result, each of these strategies won't work in every case, and we often point out the important exceptions. You'll want to test them out, reflect on them, and be flexible about trying something else when you or the writer sense they aren't working.

For Writing

1. Reflect in writing on a successful conversation you had that was purpose-driven and high-stakes, such as interviewing for a job, convincing an authority figure to allow you to do something, or asking someone out on a first date. After selecting a situation that you remember well, write a description of the conversation, paying particular attention to the ways in which you prepared for it and what strategies you used that enabled your success.
 2. Make a list of ways you have motivated yourself to accomplish tasks that seem unappealing or challenging. Compare your list with those created by other members of your class or program and make note of any common categories of motivation.
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TUTORING IS CONVERSATION

By saying that tutoring is conversation, first and foremost, we want to describe what tutors and writers actually *do* in tutoring sessions. Whether they're meeting face-to-face or online (especially in synchronous instant-message or video-chat tutoring), what they do, to borrow from Bruffee, is "converse" (331, this book). This means that, rather than one person talking or asking questions while the other person quietly listens or answers, tutors and writers often engage in a dynamic back-and-forth in which both of them talk, listen, ask, and answer. In fact, studies suggest that the more dynamic these conversations are, the more the writer is apt to learn (Thompson 419; Babcock et al. 99, 107–08; Babcock and Thonus 112). In addition, like many ordinary conversations from everyday life, tutoring sessions can include laughter, play, and fun. Tutoring is serious work, but personal connections can help us enjoy the process of completing it.

Tutoring Is Interpersonal

In addition, we use "conversation" to suggest the interpersonal aspects of tutoring, the ways in which tutoring involves relationship building. As Efrayim Clair, the tutor we quote above, puts it, we are "shifting . . . focus from 'tutoring writing' to 'tutoring people.'" In a talk he gave at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, Brian Fallon, a former undergraduate tutor and now the director of the Writing Studio at the Fashion Institute of Technology, of the State University of New York, describes how much tutors in his writing studio value tutor-writer relationships:

[T]hey see a correlation between successful tutoring sessions and the type of relationship they foster with a writer. For instance, Louisa . . . explained to me that "When I take the time to get to know how each tutee uniquely learns and reacts to what happens during a session, the session is far more valuable than ones where the tutee is treated just as the paper they bring with them." ("Why" 362, this book)

In particular, Fallon focuses on empathy, "seeing the world from other people's perspectives and doing your best to meet them where they are" (361, this book). Such empathy is especially important for writing tutors because writers sometimes share deeply personal matters (in their writing and conversations with tutors) and because writing is often seen as an expression of who a person is, his or her "self." This means that writers can feel vulnerable and even uncomfortable about sharing their work.

Tutoring Is Motivational

But as risky as it might be, getting personal can be essential in a writing center session. Fallon, for example, sees empathy as necessary for learning to occur. Helping a writer to see his personal stake in the expression of his words and ideas can help him care more about his writing and learn more from it. This brings us to the first of our technical terms in this chapter, **motivation**, which comes from the field of educational psychology.

You probably already know that it's more fun to write something you care about and easier to learn something new if you are invested in it. Writing tutors and writing center researchers and scholars recognize too how important it is for writers to be engaged and interested in their writing, to have a sense of ownership of and even pride in their work. Three of the articles that appear in Section IV of this book and that we discuss in this chapter address writer motivation in depth: undergraduate writing tutor-researcher Natalie DeCheck points out that "motivation is one of the greatest tools for acquiring new skills and knowledge" (337, this book); researchers Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson describe it as "the drive to actively invest in sustained effort toward a goal" and essential for improving writing (422, this book); and these researchers, along with undergraduate tutor-researcher Molly

Wilder, suggest how particular tutoring strategies can help to encourage and enhance writer motivation (which Wilder calls “engagement”).

Tutoring Is Time-Bound

The idea that tutors and writers use writing tutoring sessions to build deeply conversational, interpersonal, and motivational relationships might seem to run counter to another powerful motivator for many writers (although not always a positive one): deadlines and other limits on time. Tutors, too, experience these constraints, as with the expectations for professionalism that are time related, including arriving promptly and not going over the allotted time for sessions. As a result, Geller et al. find that tutors often feel a tension between “fungible time”—measured by the clock and the tutoring schedule, for example—and “epochal time”—measured by events such as writing or relationship building that “take as long as they take” (33–34, 39). No doubt tutors are especially prone to this tension because they are responsible for ensuring that they don’t run out of time in their sessions and for setting aside time at the end so that writers can plan what they’ll do next.

You might find that as you gain experience as a tutor, your sense of time in the session will shift. If you’ve never tutored before, the time allotted for individual sessions in your program (whether 30, 45, or 60 minutes) might seem lengthy, and, at this point, you might be wondering how you will fill it up. But when you have your first sessions, you might find that with some writers, at least, the allotted time won’t be enough. Geller et al. report, however, that once tutors have gained experience, they are often able to “expand and contract a session with the skill and ease of an accordion-player in a zydeco band—15 minutes here, 40 minutes there” (41). Moreover, even though a program’s schedule can imply a standard length for all sessions and promotional materials often encourage writers to make appointments well before their work is due, Geller et al. encourage us to be open to the possibility that quality sessions can occur in shorter lengths of time and very close to the deadline (35–37). For Geller et al., the question we need to ask ourselves is, “How do we savor whatever time we have?” (38). In other words, how do we remain flexible in the midst of such limits?

Interpersonal Strategies for Motivating Writers

We begin by offering eight strategies (seen in Table 3.1, next page) that are conversational (practices you are likely to have used already in ordinary talk with others), interpersonal (aimed at relationship building), and motivational (ways to engage writers).

Get Acquainted

Related to the tensions around time that we discuss above, because time in tutoring sessions is limited and because the writer has come to work on her writing (and not necessarily to build a relationship with a tutor), you might feel that you

Table 3.1 Interpersonal Strategies for Motivating Writers.

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- Get acquainted
 - Ask (and answer) questions
 - Make statements
 - Offer your perspective as a reader
 - Take an interest
 - Praise
 - Listen
 - Consider nonverbal cues
-

need to get down to business from the very beginning of the session and start working on the writing immediately. But keep in mind how Louisa, quoted above, says she adds value to her work with writers: “I take the time to get to know how each tutee uniquely learns and reacts to what happens during a session.” Indeed, according to several studies, engaging in small talk can lead to greater satisfaction for tutors and writers, and not doing so can lead to unfulfilled expectations for both (Babcock and Thonus 81; Babcock et al. 51). Taking several minutes at the beginning as well as throughout the session to get to know the writer and for the writer to get to know you is essential to building a working relationship and getting the most out of your limited time together.

Ask (and Answer) Questions

A great way for you and the writer to get acquainted is to ask questions and to answer some yourself. As writing center researchers Isabelle Thompson and Jo Mackiewicz report, questions are “a major tutoring strategy” (62). Based on an empirical study they conducted of eleven tutoring sessions, they found that questions serve a number of functions, including allowing “tutors and students to fill in their knowledge deficits and check each other’s understanding,” helping “tutors (and occasionally students) to facilitate . . . dialogue and attend to students’ active participation and engagement,” and enabling tutors to help “students to clarify what they want to say, identify problems with what they have written, and brainstorm” (61). The tutors they studied used questions very frequently and much more often than writers. Interestingly, however, when writers worked with same tutors repeatedly, the writers tended to ask more questions than the tutors (61, 63).

Table 3.2 lists sample questions you might ask at the beginning and throughout your sessions. To give you a sense of the overall range of questions you might ask, these are very general. However, we offer more specific sample questions as we address particular tutoring situations later on. For now keep in mind that, as Thompson and Mackiewicz say, it’s important “to tailor questions individually for each student” (62). As with all of the strategies we offer, you’ll want to be flexible about how and when you use them.

Table 3.2 Questions to Build Your Working Relationship with the Writer.**Questions to get acquainted:**

- How's it going?
- What program/school/class/year are you in?
- Where are you from?
- What's your major?
- How do you like your classes?
- Have you worked with a writing tutor before?

You might answer one or more of these questions yourself!

Questions about what the writer is working on:

- What do you want to work on?
- Was it assigned for a class? Or are you writing for some other context?
- What did you/do you want to write about?
- [If the writer has writing] How did you write this?
- What is the assignment?
- When is it due?

Questions about what the writer wants help with:

- How do you feel about the writing/ideas you have?
- Which parts/ideas seem to work well/do you like the best?
- What questions do you have about what you're working on?
- What do you mean by ["grammar," "flow," "following the assignment"]?
- Have I answered all of your questions? Do you have any others?

To show your interest and engage the writer, you might ask follow-up questions about any of the writer's answers that show her expertise.

Note that the majority of these questions are “open”—that is, aiming to “facilitate extensive and constructive responses” from the writer (Thompson and Mackiewicz 53)—and thus can be the most helpful as a motivational strategy. “Closed” questions, which require only short responses, include those concerned with the writer’s background (program, major, hometown), when the writing is due, and whether the writing was assigned for a class. You might notice too that several of these questions acknowledge the possibility that writers might not yet have completed any writing for an assignment or will want to work on writing from contexts other than courses (such as an application for graduate school or an article for the school newspaper). Questions can help tutors and writers generate ideas and understand these contexts.

Make Statements

No tutoring strategy works for every tutoring situation, and questions are no exception. Indeed, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of tutor questions. In an article we include in Section IV, Alicia Brazeau reports that many

writers she interviewed felt “anxiety over questions and answers” in one-to-one tutoring sessions and seemed to prefer working in groups partly as a result (289; see also Wilder 535, this book). For one thing, overdoing questions might make the writer feel interrogated or frustrated, especially if the tutor responds to the writer’s questions with more questions. In addition, through her presentation and analysis of a transcript of tutoring sessions, Molly Wilder demonstrates that questions aren’t the only means by which to learn about the writer’s work or to help her engage in the session. In one of Wilder’s transcripts, the tutor, Derek, is unsure about a key term the writer, Heidi, has used in her paper, but he makes a statement about it rather than asks questions. As you read the short excerpt below, note that real tutor–writer dialogue, like any conversation, can be full of colloquialisms and fillers such as “um” and “like”:

DEREK: Um, so the first thing: terminology. I really like it when people like define their terms. Um, it struck me, though, that you didn’t define gender.

HEIDI: Oh, right. Good point. (537, this book)

Wilder argues that in this case a statement is more effective—and “more inviting”—than a question, speculating that had Derek asked Heidi why she hadn’t defined “gender,” Heidi might have felt that Derek was judging her negatively. This in turn might have hindered Heidi’s ability to consider Derek’s suggestion, or, probably more important, to benefit from “working out for herself why she didn’t define gender and what she should change.” Instead, in response to Derek’s statements, Wilder explains, “Heidi offers a proposition for what her definition might be, and then herself decides to revise that definition” (538, this book). For Wilder, such involvement on Heidi’s part is a sign of her engagement in the session and her motivation to work on her writing.

Offer Your Perspective as a Reader

In addition, the brief excerpt above reveals that tutors use different conversational strategies nearly simultaneously. While making his statement, Derek offered an implicit suggestion and employed a third strategy, that of articulating the details of his own perspective on the writing, complete with his own preferences (“I really like it when”) and what this preference leads him to notice (“it struck me, though”). This personal response might well have reminded Heidi that her audience consisted of real, live readers, such as Derek (even though he wasn’t the target audience for her paper). For some writers, especially successful ones, this isn’t news. But for people new to college or who struggle with writing for whatever reason (as most of us do at one point or another), writing might feel like only words on the page or screen, not an act of communicating with someone else.

As a living, breathing audience, tutors can show writers that their writing does indeed matter. Writing center researcher Robert Brown holds that one

reason writing can be alienating is that the writer is usually separated from the reader “by time and space.” That is, as is typically the case for writing completed for school, the writer often composes his writing at one place and time and, somewhere else and later (sometimes much, much later), a reader responds to this work, without the writer nearby to guide this response, answer questions, or provide explanations. Tutors, holds Brown, can “compensate for [this] alienation” and restore “immediacy to written communication” (72). Even though a tutor like Derek is not the target audience and is, in Brown’s words, “a reader, not *the* reader” (73), he can nonetheless do what early writing researcher Nancy Sommers identified as a crucial strategy for writing teachers to employ, to “dramatize the role of the reader” (“Responding” 148).

Sue Mendelsohn, another writing researcher, builds on Sommers’ insight, applying it to writing center tutors. In fact, Mendelsohn sees “the job of dramatizing the presence of a reader” as the tutor’s primary role, “performing for writers what a reader knows, does not know, expects, and wants to learn” through such strategies as **metacommentary** (82–83). In this context, “meta” means “after,” “beyond,” or “about,” so one way to define “metacommentary” is as commentary about commentary, not only responding to a piece of writing but saying out loud how and why you are responding as you do. In this way, “metacommentary” is closely related to a keyword we say more about in the next chapter, **metacognition**, which, similarly, means “thinking about thinking.” Both metacommentary and metacognition are acts of reflection, of considering what you are doing after or even as you are doing it. Moreover, metacommentary depends on metacognition; we need to think about our thinking in order to understand how we are reading the writer’s text as well as to share this response with the writer. Mendelsohn explains it this way:

When a consultant offers metacommentary on a writer’s draft, she may, for example, read the piece aloud, pausing to describe the experiences and thoughts that arise. The consultant might say things like “I feel excited to keep reading in order to see how you’re going to solve the problem you set up” or “I’m slowing down because I’m looking for cues about how this point connects to the previous paragraph.” If the prose is muddled, she might explain “I’m not sure I understand that sentence, so I’m going to read it again.” (82–83)

Sharing metacommentary can in turn motivate a writer because it can bring home for her the fact that a real reader is trying to understand what she wants to communicate with her writing. Even if, in the process of working with a tutor and the tutor’s metacommentary, a writer discovers that her writing has not effectively communicated what she wants to say, this discovery can motivate her to keep trying, just as we often do in regular conversation.

Elsewhere in her study, Wilder examines another moment when a tutor shares her own perspective on a writer’s work, offering the kind of metacommentary that Mendelsohn describes. Lidia, a tutor working with students in a

psychology course, summarizes Marsha’s paper and, rather than pointing out a specific problem, instead provides what Wilder calls “her personal reaction to the structure”:

LIDIA: . . . so I’m reading this and I’m like, oh wait a minute like, now you’re not just talking about like general principles, all of a sudden you’re talking about like your study. (543, this book)

Just as Derek did, Lidia not only presents Marsha with the perspective of a real, live reader; Lidia also enables Marsha to “see the problem for herself,” in this case by helping “Marsha to see her writing through the eyes of her audience (the specific audience of Lidia)” (543, this book). Through her reflection and metacommentary on her reading, Lidia is able to demonstrate for Marsha how her writing appears to a reader.

Take an Interest

In “The Power of Common Interest for Motivating Writers: A Case Study,” included in Section IV, undergraduate tutor-researcher Natalie DeCheck discusses a related aid in motivating writers: showing interest in them and their work. Based on her analysis of interviews of a writer and her tutor, DeCheck concludes that a tutor’s “interest is a powerful learning tool that plays a large role in motivating a writer. It drives the writer to want to explore a subject and strive for a better understanding through research and writing” (341, this book). In the case that DeCheck analyzes, the tutor Charisse’s genuine interest and curiosity in the writer Andrea’s project in turn helped “to move Andrea from a focus on external pressures”—writing and researching because she had to—“to a place of intrinsic motivation”—writing and researching because she herself “was interested in the material and wanted to learn more” (336, 339, this book). Although DeCheck offers suggestions that are applicable across many writing tutoring sessions, she emphasizes the specific circumstances of this tutor–writer relationship that helped to enhance both Charisse’s interest and Andrea’s motivation. Both Charisse and Andrea were women of color “at a large, public research university whose students are predominantly Caucasian” and both “reported in interviews identifying with” and “liking each other from the start” (338, this book). Charisse and Andrea used these unique and uniquely productive circumstances to build their working relationship.

Praise

Related to interest but even more positive is the strategy of expressing praise about a particular part of the writing. Below is a longer excerpt of Wilder’s transcript of Lidia’s session with Marsha, which takes place slightly earlier than the part discussed above when Lidia offers her metacommentary on the structure of Marsha’s paper. Again, this is far from a scripted, idealized tutoring session. Furthermore, both Lidia and Marsha use some of the specialized language of the

field in which Marsh is working (psychology), including “studies”/“study,” “Darly,” and “social psych.”

LIDIA: Um, so, just as like an overview, like basically like, um, I thought like you obviously like had a lot of really good studies that you'd found, and like I think you talk about those really well.

MARSHA: Okay.

LIDIA (NODDING): So like that's like, that's really great, yeah.

MARSHA: I wasn't sure, because I just, I had the model . . .

LIDIA NODS.

MARSHA: . . . I wanted to work off relying on Darly . . .

LIDIA (NODDING): Mhmm.

MARSHA: . . . and I'm like, okay, like they talk about this in my social psych textbook . . .

LIDIA: Yeah.

MARSHA: . . . and I don't just want to be like, you know . . .

LIDIA NODS.

MARSHA: . . . it is the studies that are supporting the concepts . . .

LIDIA (NODDING): Yeah.

MARSHA: . . . but I don't want to just like reiterate what they say.

LIDIA (NODDING): Yeah.

MARSHA: I want to like, you know, so, I . . .

LIDIA: Yeah, definitely.

MARSHA: I had to rewrite that a couple times..

LIDIA (NODDING): Uh huh, yeah, so I think like, maybe like the direction you could go in then is like moving from the studies towards explaining your study . . .

MARSHA (NODDING): Okay.

LIDIA: . . . which is something that you like, you sort of like, you do like talk about in the introduction. (541–42, this book)

As Wilder observes, in this excerpt Lidia starts by pointing out where Marsha was successful. The advantage of doing so, says Wilder, is that Lidia is likely able to increase Marsha's “self-confidence, morale, and general goodwill towards the tutor and the conference” and “give a concrete example of what she is talking about, one that the student understands” (542, this book).

Lidia's praise is especially noteworthy because she doesn't go overboard. Rather than claiming that the entire paper is “really good,” she focuses on one aspect—the studies that Marsha presents. As a result, Lidia's praise follows Mackiewicz and Thompson's recommendation that it be specific and focus on a writer's performance rather than a characteristic of the student herself (428, this book). Because Lidia's praise is so specific and concrete, it seems to be what Lidia genuinely feels about the writing rather than something she says to make Marsha feel good. As writing center scholars Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner

hold, “We all want praise, and the writers with whom you'll work make themselves quite vulnerable by sharing their writing with you. However, don't push it. Writers will know if you're being phony and will feel patronized” (35). Moreover, empty praise can mislead writers about how much work they have ahead of them. A crucial part of the tutor's job is to reflect the writer's work back to her accurately, which requires being specific and including both the positive and the negative.

Finally, note that at the end of this excerpt, Lidia uses her praise as an opportunity to make a suggestion. By doing so, holds Wilder, Lidia indicates that Marsha “already can and has done to some extent the suggested task, that it isn't a radical change or completely new idea, but rather builds on what [she] already knew to do” (542, this book). This move is an example of what Mackiewicz and Thompson call “statements of encouragement or optimism about [the writer's] possibilities for success” (428, this book), and is another means by which to motivate writers to continue their work.

Listen

Perhaps the most important of all the tutoring strategies on our list is listening. Surveying studies that emphasize its importance, writing center researchers Rebecca Day Babcock and Terese Thonus conclude that “It cannot be stressed enough that tutors must listen to tutees” (120). Just as probably everyone likes praise, it's likely that most people want to be heard. And by listening, a tutor creates another opportunity for the writer to engage in the session because it can demonstrate to the writer that she can literally have a say in the direction of the conversation. Even though Lidia clearly has her own ideas about what Marsha should work on, she is careful to listen to Marsha's particular concerns and to let her take center stage. By doing so Lidia can gain valuable insight into the particular issues in the paper that Marsha feels she needs to work on.

In addition, through verbal confirmations (“Yeah”) and by nodding, Lidia uses the strategy of *active* listening to convey to Marsha that she has heard these concerns and to encourage her to continue explaining them. Elsewhere in her study, Wilder shows Lidia engaging in other active listening strategies, by paraphrasing and mirroring back to Marsha what both she and her paper say. Writing center scholars Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli point out that such “paraphrasing accomplishes two purposes: It lets [the writer] know that [the tutor] has heard and understood [her], but it also serves as a way to check perceptions and correct any possible misunderstandings” (23). Mackiewicz and Thompson call such moves “giving the gift of understanding” (439, this book).

Wilder notes that at the end of the session, Marsha “volunteered a significant amount of positive feedback” about Lidia's tutoring (544, this book). While admitting that such feedback might be more the result of “Marsha's personality”

than anything Lidia did, Wilder speculates that “the conference was genuinely successful from [Marsha’s] point of view” (544, this book). The motivational strategies that Lidia employed seem to have paid off.

Consider Nonverbal Cues

Although Wilder’s transcripts reveal a number of apparently successful tutoring strategies, what they don’t show us are the tutors’ and writers’ nonverbal communication (besides Lidia’s nodding). We don’t know, for instance, how long the tutors or writers paused after they spoke or if there were any periods of silence during their conversations. Nor do we know if they used hand gestures to emphasize certain points or express uncertainty. Babcock and Thonus survey the research on nonverbal communication and report that when tutors and writers don’t have the same expectations about such behaviors “as eye gaze, silence, and laughter,” they can end up feeling uncomfortable (140). They recommend paying “attention to nonverbal cues and possible differences in interaction styles” (142). Another suggestion they offer is addressing these activities directly, for instance by saying to the writer something like, “I have a thing about being sure I’m getting across to you. So when you understand what I’m talking about, just say ‘Umhmm’ or look at me and nod your head. Otherwise, I’ll think I’m not being clear, and I’ll go on and on and bore us both to death” (Boudreaux qtd. in Babcock and Thonus 141). For a detailed analysis of how a tutor’s hand gestures support his attempts to relate to and motivate the writer, see Thompson’s award-winning article, “Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor’s Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies.”

For Writing

1. Compare the list of motivational strategies you came up with earlier with those described in this section and in DeCheck’s article in Section IV. Describe any similarities between the two lists and ways that you see to adapt motivational strategies, either from your life to your tutoring or vice versa.
 2. Think or freewrite about the ways in which you and your friends motivate yourselves to tackle particularly unappealing or difficult tasks. When sharing this information with your peers, see if you can generalize motivational strategies from similar items in your lists.
 3. How many possible specific meanings you can attribute to the following two statements?
 “My paper doesn’t flow.”
 “I need you to check the grammar and make sure everything sounds right.”
 4. Share your list with your peers and see how many potential meanings you can compile.
-

TUTORING IS NOT JUST ANY CONVERSATION

Although tutoring shares much with ordinary conversation, we would misrepresent this work if we did not discuss ways that tutoring writing requires strategies and skills in addition to those used in everyday talk. Undergraduate writing tutor Claire Elizabeth O’Leary points out in her article in Section IV that although “conferencing and conversation are intimately linked” (483, this book), they are not identical.

Tutoring Is Task Oriented

Summarizing research on the kinds of conversations that occur in writing tutoring sessions, O’Leary concludes that unlike most ordinary conversations, those between writers and tutors are “task oriented”—that is, “focused on one issue (the student’s paper) and . . . one goal (improving the paper)” (485, this book). We saw this in the excerpts from Derek’s and Lidia’s sessions, with both clearly focused on helping Heidi and Marsha improve their writing.

Tutoring Is Asymmetrical

In addition, O’Leary holds, the “institutional aspect” of the tutor–writer relationship affects tutor–writer conversations as well (485, this book). The tutor, for instance, is usually specially selected, perhaps in a competitive process, is often trained and experienced in tutoring writing, and is compensated by her college or university with money or course credit. As a result and in the context of the tutoring session, the tutor is granted more authority and status than the writer, making the relationship unequal or asymmetrical. As Thompson argues, “Unlike peers, tutors and students are not equals because tutors bring knowledge and skills that students often lack to conferences” (419). To their credit, Derek and Lidia don’t emphasize their institutionalized status as tutors in Wilder’s transcripts, but they very likely didn’t need to since Heidi and Marsha were no doubt well aware of their positions.

Tutoring Is Scaffolding

Such asymmetry can, in fact, be beneficial. As Thompson writes, “In this asymmetrical relationship, the more expert tutor is expected to support and challenge the less expert student to perform at levels higher than the student could have achieved without assistance” (419). In other words, tutors can use their authority and the asymmetry of their relationships with writers to make sessions more productive than they would have been had the tutors been on an equal footing with the writers and certainly if the writers had worked on their own. This brings us to our other key technical term in this chapter, **scaffolding**.

In teaching, scaffolding refers to a learning situation in which an older or more experienced person (a parent or writing tutor, for instance) guides another person (a child or a writer) through a particular task, by interesting her in it, breaking it down into doable but still challenging parts, supporting her through any frustrations, and “fading” near or at the completion of the task (Mackiewicz

and Thompson 427, this book), just as scaffolding on a building is removed once the work has been completed. You might be familiar with other different but comparable uses of this term in writing classes, where teachers talk about the ways in which papers are scaffolded or structured. While these are two distinct uses of the term, they can be usefully compared. Just as teachers might be seen as authority figures in the classroom, so too do writers have (or should have) authority in their writing. And just as teachers use scaffolding to facilitate students' learning experiences, so too do writers structure—scaffold—their papers to guide the reader through their argument and evidence.

A crucial first step in scaffolding a writing tutoring session is figuring out where the writer is in terms of a particular skill set or knowledge base. For example, if a tutor notices that a writer's paper neglects to include the kind of scaffolding language that we mention above—such as topic sentences (opening sentences in paragraphs that announce what the paragraph is about) and transitions (which link a paragraph to the one that came before)—the tutor would probably want to first establish whether the writer can see the need for such language on his own and, if not, to explain why it would be helpful to readers and to suggest ways to rewrite the opening of one paragraph. Then, the tutor would likely want to find out if the writer can see where such sentences would be useful in other paragraphs, offering help, as needed, on one or two more, but then providing less and less help as the writer is able to spot when he needs such sentences and produce them on his own.

In their article on scaffolding (included in Section IV), Mackiewicz and Thompson offer specific examples from actual session transcripts. One such example involves a tutor's scaffolding of the writer's work in generating transitions in her writing. The tutor does this in part by laying out what the writer has already accomplished and then focusing the writer's attention on an abrupt shift from one part of the writing to the next. Notice that in the transcript below the tutor does not point to the lack of a transition but rather asks for more connection. (In this transcript, "T" stands for "Tutor" and "S" stands for "Student," and the gaps in individual lines show when their talk overlaps.)

- T: . . . let's see here, [reading from draft] "This is the first year at school and I cannot fit in. I felt fat and at this point in
- S: uh-huh
- T: my life and I felt like I could not take anything to heart. My second year," Okay. Then you transition. Then you say, "My second year at private school I was considered a slut by other girls." So here you talk about not taking everything to heart, and here you're talking about another terrible story. So what's the connection between that? (1–2 seconds) Did you start to take it to heart here?
- S: Yeah.

- T: Okay. So what's a transition sentence that you could use?
- S: Hum, that towards my second year of school I started taking things to
- T: yeah
- S: heart.
- T: Perfect! Yeah, write that here. That's the kind of thing to transition between those two ideas. (441, this book)

Scaffolding Is Motivational

Motivation is essential not only to the tutoring session generally but also to effective scaffolding in particular. Indeed, Mackiewicz and Thompson's article is titled "Motivational Scaffolding." As a result, all of the strategies we discuss earlier in this chapter can be helpful in scaffolding a writer's learning. For instance, note how enthusiastically the tutor praises the writer when she is able to generate a transition, praise that is appropriate, as Mackiewicz and Thompson point out, because "it responds to an identifiable accomplishment" (441, this book). In addition to praise, Mackiewicz and Thompson maintain that tutors need to know how "to recruit students' interest in writing tasks, to encourage students' persistence and effort in completing the tasks, to attend to students' motivation and active participation, and to minimize students' frustration and anxiety during the conference" (427, this book).

Scaffolding Is Ethical

Scaffolding can in turn provide a way to negotiate the ethical complications we mention above concerning "too much help." Scaffolding in tutoring writing is a powerful means by which to help writers build their writing themselves and to comply with your institution's and program's policies regarding academic integrity. To follow up on the metaphor that this term draws on, just as literal scaffolding is not the building itself, so too scaffolding in tutoring is not a substitute for the writer's thinking and writing but a support meant to be dismantled and removed. Moreover, scaffolding is a way of keeping in mind the goal of the writer's long-term learning. Too much help can be just as much of an impediment to learning as not helping enough (Johnson qtd. in Babcock et al. 112).

Scaffolding Strategies

In Table 3.3 (next page) we describe strategies that will help you scaffold your sessions, focusing in particular on what Mackiewicz and Thompson see as the crucial activities of making "the writing task manageable for each individual student without simplifying the outcome" and mutually defining the goals and agenda for the session (427, this book).

We present these strategies in the context of a tutoring setting in which the tutor would not have seen the writer's work or the assignment beforehand. However, if you tutor in a program where you read and respond to the text before you

Table 3.3 Scaffolding the Tutoring Session.

• Ask the writer what the agenda should be
• Analyze the assignment and context
• Read the writing
• Negotiate the priorities for the session
• If the writer has no writing, help him get started
• Wrap up
• Reflect

meet with the writer (such as a writing fellows or asynchronous online tutoring program), you should arrange these strategies in an order that's more appropriate for your tutoring process.

Ask the Writer What the Agenda Should Be

Scaffolding starts from the beginning of the session, when you ask the writer about what she'd like to work on. Such questions are crucial in recruiting the writer's interest in both continuing the writing process and in making best use of the session itself. Such a framing demonstrates to the writer, as Lidia did with Marsha, that she can take center stage and can literally have a say in the direction of the conversation. In addition, the writer's answers to such questions are valuable for you as a tutor, because they can show you what she might expect from the session and even how and whether she understands the assignment and what she's trying to accomplish with her writing.

However, figuring out this agenda with the writer might not be as straightforward as simply asking what he wants to work on. A good example of such complications can be found at the beginning of Wilder's transcript for Conference 2, with Lily and Wally. When Lily asks if there is "anything in particular you wanted to start off with talking about, about this paper?" Wilder reports that "Wally explains vaguely that he is confused, ending with a general question for Lily."

WALLY: I guess a lot of it is just kind of like, does it sort of make sense?

LILY NODS.

WALLY: And flow? And like . . . I don't know. (539, this book)

In this exchange, Wally does not give Lily much to go on. Gillespie and Lerner describe a similar scenario, in which the writer asks the tutor to "check my grammar." They offer advice about how to understand this request as well as about how to scaffold the discussion going forward:

First, the request . . . doesn't necessarily mean [the writer] wants line-by-line editing or for you to proofread the work. It's often a matter of vocabulary that results in such requests. In our experience, "check my grammar" can mean a whole range of requests, from "give me feedback on structure and organization," to "react as a reader to my argument," to "help me interpret this

assignment." Many students . . . simply aren't well versed in the vocabulary of writing tutoring. However, for many, the association between correcting grammar and tutoring writing is pervasive. But as a tutor, you'll have the opportunity to teach . . . writers that language of tutoring, and what once was a grammar check can next time be a request to "tell me if my evidence supports my thesis." (119–20)

We should note that some writers really do want and need to go over their grammar, and we discuss how to do that below. Here, we focus on how to proceed when the writer describes an agenda that doesn't provide enough information about what she wants to work on or might possibly (as with "grammar check") stand in for quite different writing concerns.

One strategy is to ask follow-up questions that emphasize your curiosity and need to know, in the way that Mendelsohn's metacommentary does, such as, "Can you say more about what you mean by 'flow' or 'grammar'? Because sometimes these mean different things to different people, and I just want to make sure I'm clear." Along these lines, Lily might have asked Wally what he meant by "confused" and by "if the writing makes sense": What was he confused about? What does he think might not make sense to readers? Wally might have in turn been able to provide descriptions of his concerns so that Lily could meet him halfway and provide the "vocabulary of writing tutoring" that Gillespie and Lerner describe, thus scaffolding Wally's knowledge of writing.

But it might be that this more focused sense of what to work on won't emerge until later in the session, as you and the writer learn more about the writing and what he wants or needs to accomplish with it. For instance, after you and the writer go over the assignment for the writing as well as the writing itself, you might see that the paper needs to be five pages when the writer has written only two. In this case, producing more writing will likely move ahead of anything else on the agenda. We should say too that writing is something that the writer can do *in* the session, with your help, for instance in response to your questions. (We offer more strategies for such work in the next chapter.)

Related to what we say above about the tensions connected to time, you might find that the writing is due very soon or that the writer has brought in a piece of writing that is longer than you have time to address in your session. In such cases, you and the writer can work together to determine where to put your collective energies. For example, you might

- Ask the writer to pick out the one or two or three (depending on how much time there is) places that are giving him the most trouble and concentrate on those.
- Read the first few paragraphs or pages and comment on how the opening has set the rest up.
- Ask the writer to walk you through the organization, while you make notes in the margin or on a separate page to show the writer how you, as a reader, understand the overall structure.

In such cases, you might scaffold the writer's understanding of how to make optimal use of writing tutoring by suggesting that, for future writing, he might want to make an appointment earlier on or make multiple appointments for longer papers. (Of course, he might know this already and/or have good reasons for coming when he did. And either way, you won't want to make him feel ashamed.)

Analyze the Assignment and Context

Analyzing the assignment (if the writer is completing writing for a course) as well as the larger context for what she is working on is another opportunity for scaffolding. First of all, you need to figure out if the writer understands what it is she needs to write. A good way to determine this is to ask her to explain the assignment or context and to walk you through the instructor's written instructions (if there are any). Doing so will have the advantage of encouraging the writer's participation and giving both of you a sense of key requirements and areas where either or both of you might be unsure about what it is the writer is being asked to do—thus potentially minimizing future frustration and anxiety.

If the writer has a copy of the written instructions, either of you might read it aloud and both you and the writer can engage in metacommentary, discussing questions and ideas that come up for you as you work your way through. Geller et al. point out that this is an opportunity to share your own knowledge as a writer by reflecting on how you make your way through an assignment (80). Many writers draw on the strategies outlined in Table 3.4 (on the next page).

Sometimes writers don't have written instructions, perhaps because the instructor didn't provide them, because the writer forgot to bring them to the session, or because the writing is in response to a situation outside of a classroom, such as an application for a job, an article for the school newspaper, or work that the writer is pursuing for her own satisfaction. Again, in such cases you might draw on your own knowledge as a writer. Some writers find questions like those in Table 3.5 helpful (also on the next page), even when they have written instructions.

A final caveat: analyzing the assignment or the context will give you and the writer information about what the instructor or the audience wants the writer to do, but it won't necessarily tell you what the *writer* wants to communicate. This is where additionally scaffolding the writer's motivation, through extra encouragement and efforts to help her to make a personal connection to her work, as well as breaking the task down into manageable pieces can be especially important. Below, we discuss how to break down the task when the writer has brought in writing as well as when she has no writing yet: in both cases, starting with the assignment or context is a critical first step.

Read the Writing

As we suggest earlier in this chapter when we discussed sharing your perspective as a reader by engaging in the reflective practice of metacommentary, reading

Table 3.4 Strategies for Understanding the Assignment.

-
- Look for important words and phrases, especially verbs, that tell the writer what she should do with the writing, such as “analyze,” “explain,” “define,” or “compare.”
 - Look for places in the assignment that specify the kinds of information or evidence the writer needs to draw on, such as personal experience, readings, field or lab work, or research.
 - Look for special directions about the format of the writing and what the final product should look like: Should there be a thesis or argument? A specified structure? Headings? Citations? A particular length?
 - Ask the writer about and look for information external to the assignment itself:
 - Is there a grading rubric or a list of evaluation criteria?
 - Did the instructor talk about the assignment in class, perhaps emphasizing key requirements?
 - Sometimes the syllabus offers clues: What are the goals of this course? How might writing this assignment at this point in the semester or quarter help students reach a particular goal? How might their writing help them show that they're doing so?
 - If there are important terms that you and the writer aren't clear on, you might look them up in a writing handbook or online, by searching for both “writing center” (in quotation marks to ensure that you'll get a writing center site) and the term you and the writer need help with, e.g.:
 - “writing center” analyze
 Such search terms will help you locate a user-friendly yet academically focused handout.
 - Once you've gone through the assignment, the writer might summarize it in her own words. This can solidify her understanding of it and is also a good way to check that she understands what she needs to do for this piece of writing.
 - Remember that written instructions are writing too, sometimes composed quickly by faculty who are just as rushed as students, so some parts might be unclear, in which case the writer might need to go back to the instructor. Geller et al. suggest that tutors can help writers brainstorm the kinds of questions they might ask (80).
-

Table 3.5 Questions to Ask When There Is No Assignment.

-
- What should the writer accomplish with this writing? What should happen as a result?
 - Who is the writing being written for? What is this audience's relationship with the writer and what he's writing about (e.g., sympathetic, antagonistic)?
 - What kind of expectations does this audience have for what the writing is supposed to look like?
 - Are there any materials online (including on your institution's website) that will give you and the writer clues about what to write? For instance, career services offices often have model application letters and résumés, and pre-med and pre-law offices usually have useful advice about personal statements.
-

is a surprisingly complex process, even more so if you're trying to work through the writing of someone who is sitting next to you and expects a relatively quick response. Here, we focus on how to scaffold this process so that you can proceed in a manner that will be most helpful to the writer.

There is a long tradition in writing centers of asking writers to read their papers out loud. This strategy has become a tradition for several good reasons: it requires the writer's active participation, and, if she has a strong grasp of Edited Academic English and a sense of what she's trying to accomplish with her writing, reading the work aloud can be a great way for her to see and correct any grammar mistakes, spot and reword sentences that don't yet convey what she means, or become aware of larger issues and start to think about how to address them. In addition, this technique has the advantage of being a useful takeaway for writers since it is something they can do on their own.

On the other hand, some writers don't have an intuitive understanding of English or they have learning differences or other specific challenges that make it difficult for them to spot and correct their errors. For these writers, reading their own writing aloud might lead to frustration rather than insight. Instead, for these individuals, it might be more helpful for tutors to be the ones to read the writing aloud. Such a process could encourage the writer's participation (she can listen and read along) and give her a sense of when the writing makes the reader stumble or proceed smoothly and easily. Tutors can also use such reading as an opportunity for metacommentary that narrates their journeys as a readers. However, you should be open to the possibility that the writer might need the tutor to read the writing to himself silently, perhaps while the writer reads along or writes down questions or thoughts she might have.

There's another tradition of recommending that tutors read the writer's entire piece of writing before figuring out what to focus on. This strategy can be useful because sometimes writers don't articulate their main focus or argument until they write the final paragraphs (since at this point they probably know the most about what they're writing), and, unless tutors read to the end, they might not perceive this main focus or argument. However, research also shows that it can be useful for tutors and writers to stop at points along the way to offer or to ask for feedback. Babcock and Thonus report on a reading method called **point-predict**, in which tutors stopped during the reading "to describe what the paper had accomplished thus far, and what he or she predicted would come next" (117). Mendelsohn links point-predict to Sommers' insight about dramatizing the presence of a reader, since this strategy can similarly help the writer "develop a sense of how to anticipate the reader's response" (82).

It's usually not possible to know in advance which method of reading will work best for a writer. Even if you've tutored the writer before, what works for one piece of writing might not work for another. We suggest explaining the different options and asking the writer what she thinks will work best for her. You can even try changing reading strategies during the session, perhaps starting out with reading the writing aloud or to yourself and, then, as you and the writer talk in depth about a particular part, asking the writer to read it on her own and perhaps aloud. This too can scaffold the writer's learning, supporting her as she tries a new way of looking at her work. Again, flexibility is key.

Finally, writing center scholar Toni-Lee Caposella reminds us that there is sometimes additional writing to make your way through as you read the writer's work: comments by the instructor. Here again, you can draw on your own experiences with working through such comments, and Caposella suggests asking the writer herself how she thinks the comments should be used. In addition, Caposella recommends helping the writer to understand any specialized vocabulary (such as "thesis statement"), connecting individual instructor comments to particular parts of the writing to provide the writer with specific examples, and distinguishing the major issues that will require substantial revision from the smaller matters that will require editing sentences (74–75). It's worth noting that Babcock and Thonus report on a study in which concentrating on teacher comments led tutors to lose "their focus on the students and their writing" and led the writers to become "more concerned with grammatical features than with the ideas in their own texts—even if their instructors had commented on content as well" (89). Depending on what the writer wants to focus on, you might want to make sure that addressing the instructor's comments doesn't crowd out her other priorities for the session.

Negotiate Priorities for the Session

Negotiating priorities for the session is not a separate step from the previous scaffolding strategies but one that begins when the writer tells you what she needs help with, the two of you analyze the assignment and/or context for the writing, and one or both of you read the writing. However, what we haven't discussed so far that is crucial to this ongoing negotiation process is how to decide on what exactly to work on in the writing. Because there are limits on both the amount of time you have with a writer and the number of issues you can discuss without overwhelming her with too many suggestions, it's essential to decide together on which one or two or three of the many issues you might address are the most important.

For instance, in Wilder's transcript of Lidia's conference with Marsha, Lidia chooses to focus on Marsha's introduction and her transition from her literature review rather than, say, punctuation or grammar or the wording of individual sentences. But what we don't know from the transcript is how Lidia and Marsha came to make these decisions. Why did they choose to focus on what they did? Since Wilder doesn't report on this aspect of Lidia's and Marsha's work together, we can't know for certain. But Lidia might have had in mind another longstanding tutoring tradition, that of starting with "global" over "sentence-level" issues in a piece of writing. Below, we outline this way of looking at writing as offering options that you can present to the writer and that, together, you can choose from. Again we want to encourage you to stay flexible and honor the writer's requests, even if her priorities do not align with those discussed here.

Start with Global Issues. **Global issues** have to do with the writing as a whole, its ability to communicate with the reader, and its overall effect. They are also known

in the writing center field as higher-order concerns (HOCs), a term coined by Donald A. McAndrew and Thomas J. Reigstad, who define it as “central to the meaning and communication of the piece, . . . matters of thesis and focus, development, structure and organization, and voice” (42). These terms are contrasted with **sentence-level** or lower-order concerns (LOCs), which “are matters related to surface appearance, correctness, and standard rules of written English” (McAndrew and Reigstad 56). Gillespie and Lerner helpfully call these “*later-order concerns*,” because while important, they are ideally addressed after the writer has sorted out the “big issues” (17).

There are good reasons why distinguishing global issues from sentence-level issues is a tradition in writing tutoring. Most significant, and as you might have already experienced when reading your friends’, your classmates’, or your own drafts, it’s sometimes very hard to see beyond the surface appearance of a piece of writing to issues such as organization or argument, perhaps because error can be one of the first impressions that writing can make and therefore hard to ignore. Perhaps, too, we respond this way because this is how our own writing has been responded to (with spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes circled); as we describe in Chapter 2, there’s a long history of teachers focusing primarily on errors in student writing. Consequently, getting in the habit of looking for global issues in writing can be a major benefit of tutoring, helping both you and the writer see important aspects of her work—and even your own writing—that you might not have otherwise. And this perspective can help you scaffold the writer’s learning, helping her to isolate specific issues to work on and, therefore, as Mackiewicz and Thompson say, potentially “minimize [her] frustration and anxiety during the conference.”

The problem with this tradition, however, is that it risks inflexibility, leading tutors to believe that they can’t work on individual sentences or words or punctuation marks even though this is what the writer wants and, in some cases, is what can provide the highest potential benefit for the writing. Moreover, sometimes global and sentence-level issues are so deeply interrelated that it is difficult to separate them. For instance, you might come across a sentence in which a writer has difficulty clearly articulating an idea but that, if revised, could help readers understand the entire argument of the piece. In this case, working on sentence-level issues would benefit global ones.

Questions to Help You See Global Issues. With this important caveat in mind, we offer these questions to help you and the writer see global issues:

- What does the writer see as the main point or central idea of the writing? Does the writing match this summary?
- Based on your reading of the writing, do you understand what the main focus is, what the writing is “about”? Are you able to paraphrase it for the writer?

- Does the writing seem to address all the required aspects of the assignment and context?
- Do you understand how the piece is organized, how it moves from idea to idea? Are you able to walk the writer through the different steps through which the piece progresses? Can she do that for you?
- If the piece is supposed to have an argument or thesis, are the claims sufficiently supported by evidence, examples, details, and explanation?

If you or the writer answers any of these questions with “no,” you likely have a global issue to work on. However, we suggest double-checking with the writer to make sure that you aren’t missing something significant, for instance a convention from her discipline that you might not be familiar with. One way to do this is to share your perspective and offer metacommentary on the writing, to show exactly what you are understand and where you get stuck. You might also ask why the writer wrote the way she did; her explanation might help you. And if you simply misread a sentence or passage, don’t worry; this happens to all of us occasionally.

You might combine these questions with other strategies for seeing global issues such as waiting until you’ve read all of the writing before offering feedback or using the point-predict method by stopping at different places in the reading to tell the writer what you anticipate will happen next. Indeed, Babcock and Thonus report that the point-predict method can lead to “a focus on global issues like content and organization” and seems less useful for locating sentence-level issues (117).

Strategies for Working Through Sentence-Level Issues. As we point out above, sometimes working at the sentence level is exactly what the writer and the writing need. We consider below a few strategies that will help you and the writer to do just that. You’ll notice that these techniques use the same basic strategies as looking for the global issues described above.

- *Reading aloud:* For writers with a strong, intuitive grasp of English, reading aloud, specifically to make sentence-level changes, can be a very effective strategy. But you’ll need to scaffold this work, beginning with finding out what the writer is able to do. For example, if you notice that the writer skips over problems as he reads aloud, you might say, “I’m seeing a couple of things that you’re not, so why don’t we try something else?” At that point, you might try the following suggestions.
- *More scaffolding:* As represented in Figure 3.2, Gillespie and Lerner describe a process of helping you get a better understanding of what the writer can do by helping the writer zero in on his errors.
- *Prioritize the errors:* If you have read the entire piece and notice that there are many errors throughout the writing, you’ll need to figure out which

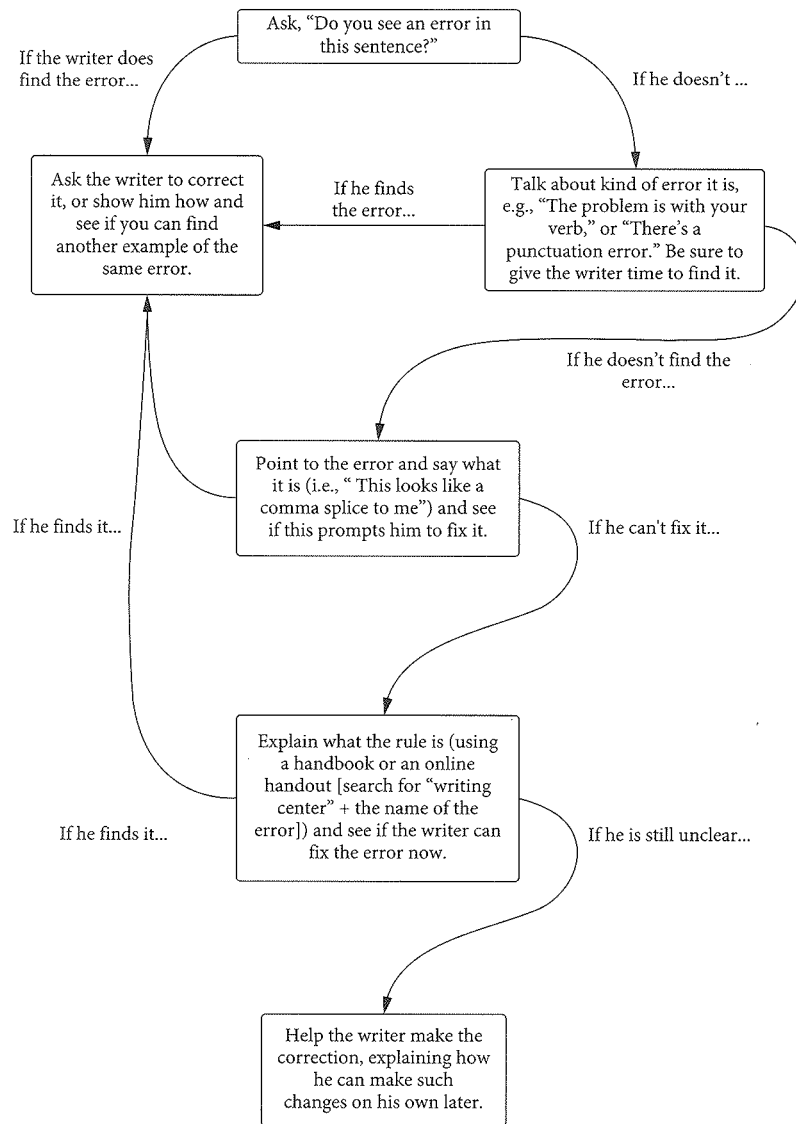


Figure 3.2 Flowchart for Scaffolding Error Correction. (Based on Gillespie and Lerner 41–42.)

ones to work on first since you might not have time to cover them all and, even if you do, covering too much ground won't scaffold the writer's learning. Here are suggestions for prioritizing errors:

1. Address errors that interfere with meaning and that prevent you from understanding what the writer is trying to say. We find that sometimes when writers talk about what they had in mind, they can clear up any problems. (And it's a good idea at these moments to have a pen in hand to write down the writer's clarification.) Sometimes, this will be a long process involving much back-and-forth between you and the writer. It is nevertheless time well spent. Clarifying ideas and sorting out appropriate vocabulary at the sentence level is a crucial part of writing.
2. Look for errors that would bother the writer's audience; find out what these might be by asking about the kinds of errors this reader (perhaps an instructor) has commented on before. Such errors include word choice, word order, and verb tenses.
3. Use Gillespie and Lerner's scaffolding strategy from the flowchart in Figure 3.2 to find patterns of error that you can comfortably address and the writer can learn to correct. You'll need to assess your own understanding of grammar and punctuation as well as work with the writer to find out what he knows. It's unlikely that you will be able to work profitably on articles or prepositions, since they are difficult even for experts to explain.

If the Writer Has No Writing, Help Him Get Started

Although working with a writer who has no draft can initially seem daunting, many tutors report that these are their favorite sessions because they get to see writers in action and help them build writing from the ground up. Generally speaking, you can draw on many of the conversational, motivational, and scaffolding skills already described in this chapter. In many cases, you'll have the assignment and in all cases you'll have a context—a reason the writer is writing. Talking about the assignment or context, while at the same time listening carefully for what the writer might be motivated to pursue, can provide useful starting points. Also helpful will be expressing your own interest, praising ideas with potential, asking "open" questions aimed at prompting the writer to flesh out these ideas (and perhaps to link them directly to the assignment or context), and paraphrasing what the writer says to confirm that you understand her (and so she herself can hear it, in a new way).

Writing can be a powerful tool during any session, whether the writer already has writing or not and whether the writer, tutor, or both write. Writing can generate new thinking, clarify ideas, raise questions, provide opportunities for experimentation, and slow the process down if the conversation is moving too quickly. And writing is all the more useful when a writer needs help getting started. You might take notes on what the writer says, or she might try freewriting

or listing—writing down whatever comes to mind about the topic or about a more specific question. Perhaps under the pretense of getting a drink of water, you might leave during the session to give the writer privacy and space to do her writing. Next, you and the writer might try outlining or—because outlines don't work for everyone—in some other way representing a possible order for presenting or developing her ideas. You can find suggestions for generating ideas and writing in handbooks, online (search for “writing center” brainstorming), and in our next chapter.

Wrap Up

The end of the session is just as significant as the beginning, and is, as a result, another part of the session that you will need to be conscientious about. Just as you'll want to help the writer feel comfortable during the first few minutes about getting help from you, as the end of your time approaches, you'll want to help the writer feel good about tackling the rest of his work outside of the session. As we mention above when we address some of the tensions involved with time in tutoring writing, you will need to watch the clock to ensure that you and the writer have time to answer any final questions and map out his next steps.

Gillespie and Lerner suggest letting the writer know when there are about ten minutes left to give him a chance to raise final questions or concerns. They also recommend prompting the writer to discuss what he plans to do next with his writing (42–43). Such discussion is important because, as we address in the next chapter, some writers don't know yet how to see their writing processes in terms of doable, discrete steps, and it might not be obvious to them once they leave the session how they should get back to work. But even writers who know how to do this work will likely find it helpful to have a reminder of what they need to accomplish when they return to their project. Here too is another point when writing during the tutoring session can be extremely helpful: you might take notes on the writer's plans or you might encourage him to do so—or both.

Finally, you'll want to end the session on a friendly note, maybe with encouraging words or something else that shows you are still interested in the writer and his work, such as inviting the writer to meet with a tutor again.

Reflect

The end of the session and immediately after offer excellent opportunities for reflection that can benefit both you and the writer, as well as future writers you'll work with. As you wrap up the session, you and the writer might reflect on what you accomplished. Such reflection can help the writer feel good about his work with you and serve as a basis for his plans. In addition, it can help you formulate the knowledge that you gained from your work with this writer to apply to future sessions. As tutor Efrayim Clair points out above, it's important to reflect on what worked and didn't throughout each session and in connection with other sessions. Such reflection can greatly enhance your development as a tutor.

Table 3.6 Post-Session Reflection Questions.

-
- How did the appointment begin? How did you and the writer get acquainted?
 - What kinds of questions did you and the writer ask? What kinds of statements did the two of you make?
 - How did the two of you figure out the agenda and priorities for the session?
 - How did you work through the assignment and the writing (if there was any)?
 - Did you express your interest in the writer and his/her work? Did you offer your perspective on the writing? Did you listen? Did you offer praise? How? Why? Or why not?
 - What did you notice about the nonverbal cues and body language of the writer? What do you think the writer might have noticed about your nonverbal cues and body language?
 - Were there other ways you tried to motivate the writer or scaffold his/her learning?
 - How did you and the writer wrap up the session?
 - As you reflect on this session now, what stands out as interesting or surprising or noteworthy? What did you learn? What would you want to try again? What would you do differently?
-

To help you reflect on your sessions, we reframe the fifteen strategies we discuss in this chapter as questions for you to consider. The questions found in Table 3.6 might also offer a helpful summary of the ground we've covered so far.

In many peer writing tutoring programs, such reflection is a required part of the tutoring session, taking the form of a report that a tutor writes immediately after meeting with a writer. While session reports encourage tutors to take lessons from their work with writers, they have additional functions that are worth keeping in mind. In many programs, these reports are written not only for the tutor's benefit but to provide information for the writer's next tutor. In others, the writer and/or his instructor receive copies of the report. In still others, this year's writer might become next year's tutor, able to read the reports that tutors wrote about him in the past. In other words, because the audience for these reports isn't just the tutor herself, there is an ethical component to them. A good rule of thumb is not to write anything that you wouldn't want the writer to see. If you have serious concerns about the writer or the session, you should probably talk to your program director or administrator rather than only describing them in a report that might not be read for a while. Lastly, and touching again on the issue of timeliness, it's important to write up these reports as soon as you can after the session so that you don't forget important details. If you are as busy as the tutors we work with, it will be all too easy for other parts of your life to crowd out your memories of particular writers and assignments.

FINAL REFLECTIONS ON THIS CHAPTER

Even with all of the ground we've covered, we expect this chapter hasn't mapped out as many aspects of the tutoring session as you might like, answered all of your questions, or put all of your concerns to rest. We hope that the following chapters

in this section will go a long way toward doing so. However, we would be misrepresenting tutoring if we did not acknowledge that even years of preparation won't prevent some sessions from not going very well. Experienced tutors tell us that they continue to face challenges throughout their careers and to have sessions that genuinely surprise them—perhaps because the writer or the tutor is tired or having a bad day; because neither can figure out what exactly the assignment is asking for; because the writing upsets the writer, tutor, or both, maybe due to its personal, political, or religious content; or because of a host of other reasons that are out of the writer's or tutor's control. There are so many such complications that it would be difficult to cover them all here.

But we can say that it's crucial to remember in such situations that you are not alone, either in your program or in the larger writing center community. Your colleagues who have been tutoring for a while can serve as excellent resources for learning about particular challenges that they have faced and that might come up for you, and even if they did not think of effective solutions at the moment, they might be willing to share reflections on what they could have done differently. Another excellent resource from the international community is *The Writing Lab Newsletter's Tutor's Column*, available for free in *WLN's* online archives. Tutors, many of them undergraduates, reflect on what are sometimes very difficult tutoring situations. It's worth looking through back issues to get a sense of the range of complications that your colleagues elsewhere have dealt with, and the archives make it fairly easy to locate any relevant articles on a particular question or concern you might have. (In the search box, type in "Tutor's Column" and your topic.) Moreover, such discussions might in turn give you ways to formulate questions that you can pursue for your own writing and research.

Reflecting on the learning process of several of the tutors in his writer's studio, Brian Fallon offers remarks that make a fitting end to this chapter:

[C]onfidence does not develop overnight, and . . . there is a process to learning how to become a confident tutor. Stephanie, a new tutor, mentioned "how important making mistakes and being in uncomfortable situations" can be for learning, and that she values "learning through experience." Being open to making a mistake is a difficult thing to do, especially when we feel there is so much at stake. Yet, this is when we have to consider the tutor as a learner. ("Why" 361, this book)

For Writing

1. If you completed the first *For Writing* prompt in this chapter, reflect on and analyze what you wrote about your successful conversation. Next, compare the qualities you attributed to your success to the tutoring strategies described in this chapter, noting any similarities or differences you see between the two experiences. Alternatively, compare your earlier description and

analysis of conversation to Kenneth A. Bruffee's description of conversation in "Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind," included in Section IV of this book. (Note: you might wish to review some of the strategies for reading theory, described on pages 211–12 of Chapter 9, before diving into Bruffee's article.)

2. Meet with someone in your program to talk about writing you've completed or writing you need to work on for any context (maybe even the writing you completed for the prompt above). Take turns trying out several of the strategies outlined in this chapter and discuss your experiences with them, both as tutor and writer. What strategies did you use that weren't described in the chapter? How did these work out? Why did you use them? If you or your partner already has experience as a tutor, discuss how (and if) these strategies work in practice. Write up your observations to share with each other and others in your program.

For Inquiry

1. With the permission of both the tutor and the writer, record a tutoring session conducted by a tutor in your writing tutoring program. Depending on the requirements of your instructor or program, you may want to review Chapter 8 for a description of the considerations related to conducting research, and you will want to consult Chapter 11, particularly pages 257–60. First transcribe the recording. Then use this data to respond to one of the questions below:
 - a. Review the recording, working to identify the strategies and elements described in this chapter. What insight do these strategies give you into this tutorial element? (Hint: in reviewing the transcript, you will want to pick the element that is the most illuminating for your own practice.) You may wish to refer to Molly Wilder's "A Quest for Student Engagement: A Linguistic Analysis of Writing Conference Discourse" in Section IV for one model of how to approach such an analysis. Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson offer another model to refer to (also in Section IV).
 - b. In "It's Not What You Say, But How You Say It (And To Whom)," tutor-researcher Claire Elizabeth O'Leary concludes that "The results of my qualitative analysis suggest that gender performance by students significantly affects a writing fellow's conferencing style" (494, this book). First read O'Leary's article (included in Section IV) and then review your tutorial transcript. Finally, write an essay in which you explain the ways in which the tutorial you recorded confirms or refutes O'Leary's assertion.
2. We've covered a lot of ground very quickly in this chapter. You will find, as you progress through your tutoring career, that this is information that tutors continuously relearn and/or learn more deeply. To facilitate this process for

yourself and your community, select one portion of this chapter and read further on the topic. You might start with the relevant resources cited in this chapter, and/or you may wish to review the research strategies discussed in Chapter 1, specifically pages 6–12. Once you have deepened your knowledge through your reading, create for your community an artifact whose purpose is to increase the viewer's/reader's understanding of the concept. Depending on your context, interests, and expertise, this artifact might be an article for a tutors' newsletter, a poster for a tutor lounge, a presentation for a tutor meeting, or a web page whose link is shared with your community.

CHAPTER 4



Authoring Processes

For Discussion

1. Has anyone ever told you that you are a good writer? If so, freewrite about the situation in which you received this praise, focusing on how the term “good writer” was either implicitly or explicitly defined.
2. Create a visual depiction of your process of completing academic writing. Share your depiction with your classmates or other tutors in your program and look for ways in which your writing processes are similar or different.
3. Without consulting any sources, discuss or write about how you define (a) originality in thought, (b) originality in academic writing, and (c) plagiarism. Are there any parts of these definitions in which you and your classmates or fellow tutors disagree? Quickly review your institution's plagiarism or academic integrity policy. Does it resolve any conflicts or confusions that occur among these definitions?

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we focus on what tutors do and different strategies they can use to help writers. Here, we shift to what writers do, the activities they engage in to produce their work as well as how these activities are understood within U.S. academic culture—what are known as **writing processes** and **authorship**, the two key concepts of this chapter. But since tutors are writers too, much of what we say here might well apply to you and your writing. Indeed, you likely have firsthand knowledge of and experience with the following that you can draw on to help writers with their authoring processes:

- **Getting started on a piece of writing—and keeping going:** You might have tricks or rituals or habits that help you. You might know what it's like to struggle with this process, maybe especially when you're working on

The Oxford Guide
for
Writing Tutors
Practice and Research



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