The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors

Third Edition

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CHAPTER 3

Inside the Tutoring Session

Getting Started

It is not by accident that many writing centers appear welcoming and friendly. To make writers feel more comfortable, centers are often furnished with plants, bright posters, comfortable chairs, and sometimes tables instead of desks. You too should try to put writers at ease. A casual but interested greeting and a smile can immediately make them less apprehensive about the prospect of sharing their writing with someone else. Be alert for those reluctant students who hover about the doorway, unsure about what to do. You might invite them in with a cheerful "Can I help you?" Then:

- **Introduce yourself.** Ask the writer his or her name. Then, once you have found a comfortable place for the two of you to work, ask about the assignment and how it is going. If you have worked with the writer before, ask how the last assignment went. The exchange of pleasantries at the beginning of a tutoring session helps to establish rapport and gets the session off to a good start.
- **Sit side by side.** Such a setup is the best arrangement for tutoring; it suggests that you are an ally, not an authoritarian figure who dispenses advice from behind a desk. Sitting side by side allows you and the writer to look at the work in progress together, but you can still position your chairs to look at one another as you converse. If you do use a desk, have the writer sit at the side of it rather than across from you.
- **Give the student control of the paper.** Keep the paper in front of the student as much as possible. If you are working at a computer, let the writer sit in front of the screen and let him or her control the keyboard. This placement reinforces the idea that the paper is the student's work, not yours.
- **Keep resources and tools nearby.** Keep scrap paper and pencils handy, as well as a handbook and dictionary. Though it is generally a good idea to let the writer do most of the writing, you may wish to occasionally demonstrate a point in writing, or it may be more expedient for you to occasionally make notes for the writer.

Setting the Agenda

During the first few minutes, you and the writer will be setting at least a tentative agenda for the tutoring session. To do this, you first need to know exactly what the assignment is, including constraints such as length or use of outside sources. The simplest way to get this information is to ask the writer to explain what the instructor expects and then request clarification of any aspects that seem unclear to you. If the writer has an assignment sheet, read through it quickly to make sure he or she has not forgotten or misunderstood details, but not so quickly that you miss important information. Rather than discussing the assignment first, some tutors prefer to read through the assignment sheet, but some writers might feel uncomfortable waiting in silence for the session to continue. In addition, asking writers to articulate the assignment often allows you to uncover any misunderstandings they may have, especially as you become more familiar with typical assignments.

Once you know what a writer is working on, ask what you can do to help. In some cases, the writer will tell you exactly what kind of help he or she needs — for example, "the introduction just doesn't seem to say what I want it to" or "the paper reads too much like a list." Or the writer might identify a grammatical point, like subject-verb agreement or semicolon usage, that frequently gives him or her problems.

As you and the writer talk during these first few minutes, look for information that will help you understand his or her concerns and determine what you can do to help. Be aware that some writers will simply ask for help with "editing" or "proofreading," using these terms to cover any aspect of revising, from major reorganization to eliminating wordiness or correcting comma splices. How you will spend your time depends on the following factors:

- where the writer is in the composing process,
- the constraints imposed by the assignment itself, with the limitations inherent in it, and those imposed by the teacher (length, number of resources, and so on),
- the time remaining before the paper is due, and
- the willingness of the writer to work with the tutor and improve the paper.

Sometimes a writer lacks sufficient time to really benefit from the tutor's suggestions. There may be problems with the content or organization, for example, but the writer has time to correct only sentence-level errors. When you encounter such a situation, explain to the writer that you cannot deal with all aspects of the paper that may need attention but will focus on the most expedient ones.

Another important factor is the length of time allotted for each tutoring session. Once you have assessed the writer's needs, determine what you can realistically hope to accomplish in the time you have. Some writing centers schedule appointments for twenty or thirty minutes; others

allow fifty minutes or an hour. Probably no tutoring session should last more than an hour. If it does, chances are that the writer will be overwhelmed by suggestions, or the tutor may end up doing too much work for the writer.

Three Effective, Powerful Tools

As a tutor, you have three powerful tools at your disposal:

- *active listening,*
- *facilitating* by responding as a reader, and
- *silence and wait time* to allow a writer time to think.

Used in combination, they can help you to learn and better understand what writers' concerns or problems with writing may be. You can use them to induce writers to think more clearly and specifically about their audience, their purpose, their writing plan, or what they have already written. These tools also provide an excellent means of getting feedback to determine how well writers understand the suggestions or advice you have given them.

ACTIVE LISTENING

After exchanging pleasantries and settling down at a table, Sam and his tutor, Donna, begin their tutoring session. As you follow their conversation, pay particular attention to Donna's responses to Sam's comments and concerns.

> *Donna:* So, tell me what you're working on. What's your assignment, and what can I do to help?
>
> *Sam:* I'm taking this speech course on gender and communication. For our final paper, we're supposed to take five rituals connected with courtship and marriage — like the engagement ring, bachelor and bachelorette parties, the father giving away the bride, the white wedding dress — and analyze them. We're supposed to relate them to some of the concepts we've been discussing all semester. And it's due next Tuesday.
>
> *Donna:* That sounds like a really interesting assignment, like it would be fun to do. I haven't heard of that assignment before, so I'm a little confused. Do you have to do research for it? Tell me more.
>
> *Sam:* No. No research. Not really. Just what we've been doing in class. I don't know. Five to seven pages! I think it's kind of hard. I can think of rituals, but there are so many. How do I choose five that are good? I don't want to do the same ones everyone else is doing. By the time Dr. Timmons looks at my paper, he might be tired of reading about engagement rings and white wedding dresses. And then I don't know how to put them into some kind of order. I could put the most significant one first, but then I'll end up probably trailing off into the least exciting one. Boring! And I have to have a coherent paper,

so I need an introduction that kind of ties these five rituals together. How do I do that?

Donna: What I'm hearing you say is that this assignment is really frustrating you, and you just can't get started. It sounds like you're worrying about all of it at once. Let's see if we can get some kind of handle on this. Okay. You have to select five rituals.

Sam: Yes, like the ones I mentioned. But they're the obvious ones.

Donna: Perhaps. But I also heard you say that you're concerned about the length of your paper. Let's start with the rituals. You have to discuss five, but earlier you mentioned four of them — engagement rings, bachelor and bachelorette parties, wedding gowns, and fathers' giving brides away.

Sam: Well, the *white* wedding gown. I know, but those are so obvious.

Donna: Are those rituals that you think you might have something to say about? Why did you choose those?

Sam: Yeah, you might be right. You don't think they're too common? Too obvious?

Donna: Maybe not. I can hear that you're very concerned that they're obvious, but if you have a lot to say about each, your paper could be really good. Probably better than if you picked something you might not know much about, like bridal shower games. Tell me more about the first one you mentioned. Let's see — the engagement ring.

When Sam talks about his assignment, he is clearly overwhelmed and frustrated. Rather than sorting the assignment out into workable tasks, he worries about content, length, engaging the reader, organization, and the due date simultaneously.

What Donna demonstrates in this scenario is *active listening,* a skill that takes energy and concentration. Instead of dismissing Sam's concerns, Donna grants them validity with statements like "What I'm hearing you say is . . . ," "It sounds like . . . ," "And I also heard you say that . . . ," and "I can hear that . . . ." She feeds back what she believes to be his message.

As the session continues, Donna *paraphrases* Sam's list of rituals, mirroring what she heard him say earlier. This paraphrasing accomplishes two purposes: It lets Sam know that she has heard and understood him, but it also serves as a way to check perceptions and correct any possible misunderstandings. For example, as Sam notes, it is not just the wedding gown that is important, but the fact that it is white.

Donna also uses *questions* to invite Sam to expand on or continue his thoughts. She asks, "Why did you choose those?" and urges him to elaborate by saying, "Tell me more about. . . ." Notice that these questions are open ones. Rather than requiring decisive yes or no responses, they give Sam room to continue his thoughts and to develop them.

Finally, Donna uses *"I" statements* when she says "I'm a little confused" and "I can hear . . . ." This approach places the burden of under-

standing on her rather than on Sam. If she had said, "You're not explaining things clearly," Sam might well have become defensive. Because Donna's questions and comments are not antagonistic, Sam is more likely to seek out and remedy the causes for her confusion rather than justify his apprehensions.

What we can't see in this scenario is Donna's physical engagement in the conversation — her *body language.* An active listener generally communicates interest and concern by posture and eye contact. Donna is probably leaning slightly forward, her feet on the floor, and looking directly at Sam. Her gestures of friendliness and approval, like nodding or smiling in agreement, also help to assure him that she is interested and following what he is saying.

FACILITATING

Shelly comes to the writing center with her first draft of a paper for an Introduction to Poetry class. Reproduced here are the first two paragraphs.

> Emily Dickinson, her poetry, and her style of writing all reflect her own feelings as well as her own ultimate dreams. Her withdrawal from the world and her impassioned art were also inspired in part I think by a tragic romance. A series of tormented and often frankly erotic letters were found to prove that this unsuccessful romance had a strong impact on her emotions — enough impact to seclude her from any outside life. This paper concerns two of Emily Dickinson's poems, number 288 and number 384, which are both prime examples that reflect the dejection she was experiencing.
>
> In poem number 288, Dickinson reveals her loneliness. In line number one, she introduces herself as "Nobody," as if it is her plural name. Nobody also refers to someone that people do not know much about. I think the word Nobody uses both meanings in this poem. She then asks the reader if they are Nobody too.

Shelly's paragraphs probably raise many questions in your mind. Looking only at the first sentence, for example, you might wonder, What feelings are reflected? What dreams? And how does Dickinson's style reflect these? But such questions only reflect the confusion Shelly is experiencing at this stage in her writing. Though it is clear she has thought about some ideas, she remains unfocused. She needs help with sorting through, clarifying, and articulating those ideas.

The best way to assist Shelly is to focus on her thoughts and ideas rather than on the paper itself. Instead of making judgments about her draft, describe your reactions as a reader and ask questions that invite her to further examine, explore, and clarify her own ideas and approaches. By reacting as a reader you are *facilitating* (that is, assisting and making the process easier).

The following paragraphs discuss the functions that facilitative questions and comments may serve. They offer examples as well as suggestions for applying them to Shelly's paper.

Reacting as a reader. Comments like "I'm confused," "I get lost here," "From your introduction, I expected to read . . . ," and "This is what this sentence or paragraph means to me. . . . Do I have the right idea? Is that

what you meant?" simply and honestly reflect your response to a paper as you read it. They invite writers to elaborate and, in so doing, to clarify ideas for you and for themselves.

■ *What you might say to Shelly:* An introduction should tell the reader what the paper will be about, but Shelly's introduction mentions several aspects of Dickinson's poetry, and it is unclear which one(s) her paper will focus on. Reacting as a reader, you might explain, "In your introduction, you say that Dickinson's poetry reflects her feelings and dreams and her dejection about the unhappy romance that inspired it. But when I finish that paragraph, I'm confused. I'm not sure exactly what your paper's going to be about." The "I" statements place the burden for the confusion on you, not Shelly, and invite her to resolve it. She will perhaps struggle to articulate her intended focus, but in doing so she will probably come to some new realizations about that focus.

Requesting information. Questions such as "Can you tell me more about . . . ?" can help students clarify their thinking, consider the whole paper or an aspect of it more critically, refocus their thoughts, or continue a line of thinking further.

■ *What you might say to Shelly:* Of the many poems Emily Dickinson wrote, Shelly chose two to discuss. Requests like "Why did you choose these two poems? Can you tell me more about them?" give her an opportunity to articulate and examine the reasons for her choice. Doing so should help her better understand what it is she wants to say about the poems.

Requesting clarification. When students' answers or writing are vague, encourage them to clarify points by asking, "What is your idea here?" "What are you thinking?" "What do you want to say?" "What do you want your reader to know in this paragraph?" "How does this idea connect with what you said before?" "What do you mean by . . . ?" or "Tell me more about. . . ."

To be sure you are following and understanding what a student intends, restate the content of the message: "What I'm hearing you say is. . . . Do I have it right?"

■ *What you might say to Shelly:* Shelly's reference to feelings is vague. Ask her to clarify the term: "You say Dickinson's poetry reflects her feelings. What do you mean by 'feelings'? Which feelings?" Such questions will lead Shelly to consider her intentions more carefully and come to a clearer understanding of what she means to say. As she responds, you could encourage her to relate her answers to the two poems, asking, "How are Dickinson's feelings reflected in the two poems you chose?"

Developing critical awareness. Writers sometimes plan or write whole papers without adequately considering audience or purpose, and one of the best questions you can pose is "So what?" That question, or versions of it — such as "Why does anyone [your audience] want or need to know about that?" — forces writers to think about their purpose in addressing their audience. "So what?" also makes them consider and justify other points in the paper, as do questions like "Why would that be so?" and "Can you give me an example . . . ?"

■ *What you might say to Shelly:* Shelly has singled out the word "Nobody" as significant, but she does not clearly explain why. To encourage her to justify its importance, you might say, "You indicate that the word 'Nobody' is important in this poem. Why would that be so?"

Refocusing. To get writers to refocus or rethink their writing, it is useful to get them to relate their approach to another idea or approach, using questions like "How would someone who disagrees respond to your argument?" "How is that related to . . . ?" or "If that's so, what would happen if . . . ?"

■ *What you might say to Shelly:* Shelly's draft is not far enough along to begin refocusing her material. Let's suppose, however, that you know something about Shelly's topic, an aspect that she should at least consider in her thinking. You might ask, "Didn't Dickinson also have a phobia, a fear of public places? How might that relate to her 'withdrawal from the world'?" Note that your request does not demand that Shelly consider this aspect in her paper; it merely asks her to examine whether she should consider it.

Prompting. To get writers to continue or follow their line of thinking further, encourage them with questions like "What happens after that?" or "If that is so, *then* what happens?"

■ *What you might say to Shelly:* As Shelly articulates her ideas about Dickinson's poetry reflecting "feelings," she will probably mention loneliness, because she includes that word in her draft. Encourage her to continue thinking along those lines with questions like "What words or phrases suggest to you that she was lonely?" "How do those words or phrases show loneliness?"

As a facilitator, you function as a sounding board or mirror, reflecting to students what you hear them trying to communicate. Your stance is an objective one, for your purpose is to evoke and promote students' ideas, not to contribute your own. As you become increasingly comfortable with tutoring and better able to size up the students you work with, you may feel more comfortable with occasionally offering opinions or suggestions for content, but beware. The paper must remain the responsibility of the student.

SILENCE AND WAIT TIME

Try this experiment. Get a watch or clock with a second hand. At the start of a minute, turn around or place the clock out of sight. When you think a minute has elapsed, look back. How close did you come? Thirty seconds? Forty-five? Chances are you stopped a little too soon, and that is what we tend to do when we try to make ourselves wait; we jump in a little too soon.

As a tutor, you should learn when and how to pause and be silent in a tutoring session. Occasionally, writers need time to digest what has been discussed or to formulate a question. They also need time to think about a response when you pose a question. Often tutors are tempted to quickly rephrase a question or even answer it themselves when a writer does not respond after a moment or two. If you feel this temptation, try waiting a little longer than you think you should and then wait some more. This deliberate use of wait time communicates to students that

A Note about Asking Questions

Questions can help you learn more about a writer's attitudes and specific problems with writing or with particular assignments. Questions fall into two broad categories — open and closed.

An open question like "What have you been working on in class?" or "What can I do to help?" is broad in scope and requires more than a few words in response. Usually an open question begins with "What," "Why," "When," or "How." Responses to such questions, especially at the beginning of a tutoring session, can help you determine the writer's attitude toward the task at hand. Asking "What can I help you with?" invites more response than "I see you're working on a definition paper." A question like "How is the class going?" may help you learn about the writer's performance as well as about his or her expectations.

A closed question is one like "Have you got a description of your assignment?" "When is your paper due?" or "Do you have some ideas for that section?" Such questions require a yes or no or a brief, limited response. Not only do such questions yield specific information, but the answer to a question like "Who is you teacher?" may tell you something about the class or assignment if you've dealt with other students who also have that instructor.

they are expected to think. You might even consider creating an excuse to get up and leave for a few minutes; go to the rest room or get a drink of water.

Thinking time is especially important when a new aspect of a topic arises, and writers may even need a few moments on their own to do some writing. Try initiating short breaks that allow students five or even ten minutes to freewrite, brainstorm, or draft a section of a paper. At other times, you might give them time to complete an activity that relates to what you have just been discussing. You might ask them to revise a portion of their draft or correct certain problems with grammar, mechanics, or punctuation. Or they might complete a short grammar exercise. When they finish, you can review their work with them.

The Many Hats Tutors Wear

A tutor's role varies from session to session. With one writer, you ask question after question to help him figure out what he has to say about a scene in *Beowulf*. With the next you explain the various ways of defining a term in a definition paper. In the midst of this session, the student vents some frustrations about being a returning student and balancing her time, so you direct her to a series of workshops for returning students. Then an ESL student appears. He just cannot get his subjects and verbs to agree, so you pull out a piece of paper and start explaining. In your tutoring, you function variously as an ally, a coach, a commentator, a collaborator, a writing "expert," and a counselor.

The Ally. You are a friend who offers support to a writer who is coping with a difficult task — writing a paper. You are sympathetic, empathetic, encouraging, and, best of all, you are supportive and helpful. You explain things in terms the writer can understand. You answer questions that may seem silly or stupid, but you take them seriously. You understand. After all, didn't you just explain that you have a history paper due tomorrow and you do not expect to get much sleep tonight?

The Coach. In sports, coaches instruct players and direct team strategy. They do not actually do the work for the team, but rather they stand on the sidelines observing how the team functions, looking at what is going well and what needs improvement. Likewise, you stand on the sidelines. The work that writers do needs to be their own, but by asking questions, making comments, and functioning as a reader, you encourage writers to think through problems and find their own answers. You suggest ways of accomplishing tasks. You explain how to organize a comparison-and-contrast paper, clarify the rules for using a semicolon, or explain strategies for invention and even help students implement them.

The Commentator. Sports commentators give play-by-play accounts, but they also give a picture of the whole game as it progresses. Likewise, you describe process and progress in a broader context than a student might otherwise see. As Purdue University professor and writing lab director Muriel Harris explains in "The Roles a Tutor Plays: Effective Tutoring Techniques," "The tutor-commentator provides perspective, makes connections to larger issues, gives students a sense of when and how they are moving forward" (64). You enable writers to see a paper as a whole by working with them to establish goals and by explaining what work lies ahead. You help them acquire strategies and skills that will work not just for this paper but for others as well. You point out that making a correction in spelling or punctuation is not simply a matter of following a convention but rather of making their writing more accessible for a reader.

The Collaborator. You know that students are supposed to do all the work themselves, but you are discussing ideas for a paper with a sharp student. She has read *The Awakening* and has focused on examining color imagery in it. You have just read the book, so you know what she is talking about. She mentions the dinner scene, and you have an idea about the color yellow in it. Do you keep it to yourself? Probably not. So

the two of you exchange ideas about the imagery; she profits from your input, and you from hers.

If you share your ideas with students, however, you need to be wary of two potential problems. Writers should always be responsible for and in control of their own papers. Lazy or unsure writers may try to rely on you to produce most or all of the ideas for papers, which should be their own — in effect, to write the paper for them. Conversely, the overzealous tutor may usurp papers, interjecting too many ideas and leaving writers no longer in control of the paper, confused, and perhaps less confident about their writing abilities.

The Writing "Expert." You may not be a writing teacher or a writing expert; nonetheless, students usually come to you assuming that you know more about writing than they do. The truth is, you probably do. Just by being a tutor you become more knowledgeable about writing. You are an example of the adage that we learn best when we explain something to someone else.

But what do you do at those times when you realize that you are in over your head, that you do not know how to explain a grammatical point or the options available when writing a résumé? The simple answer is to admit that you do not know, then seek help. Check a textbook or ask another tutor, who can often be an excellent resource. Occasionally, you may need to turn the writer over to a more knowledgeable tutor. In that case, you might sit in and learn something for the next time you encounter a similar situation.

The Counselor. A student's life includes much more than the writing assignment at hand, and often other issues and concerns interfere with getting the assignment done. Sometimes you may find yourself playing the role of counselor, listening to students' concerns and dealing with such issues as attitude and motivation. You may encounter a transfer student who is disgruntled because she has lost credits in changing schools, or a returning student who wonders if he can continue to juggle his job and school successfully, or a graduating senior who has lost interest in school and just can't seem to get motivated. In such cases, you offer support, sympathy, and suggestions as appropriate. You refer students to workshops or programs on campus: conversation groups for ESL students, time-management or study-skills seminars, résumé workshops, GRE reviews.

When Is a Tutor Not a Tutor?

Once your friends and neighbors — or even students you work with — realize that you are a writing tutor, they may seek your help with assignments outside the writing center. Except in special cases that only you can decide (helping a roommate or co-worker, for example), it is best to restrict your tutoring to the writing center. Otherwise you may find yourself coerced into spending your study or sleep time working on someone else's paper.

EXERCISE 3A

The roles described above are not the only roles tutors play. Sometimes you may find yourself functioning as a parent, therapist, actor, guru, or comedian. Exploring the many roles tutors might play can be interesting and informative. Make a list of all the roles you can imagine tutors playing, then list the strengths and weaknesses of each. How do these strengths and weaknesses affect tutoring? If you are working with other tutors, you might do this exercise in groups, with each group exploring the same or different roles.

EXERCISE 3B

Observe several experienced tutors in sessions as they work with students. (Be sure to get permission to sit in from both tutor and student first.) Notice how tutors greet students and establish rapport. Pay attention to the ways in which they learn what students want help with and decide what to work on. How does the tutor engage the student, phrase questions, and respond to the student's concerns? What does body language convey about tutors and students? How is a session ended?

When each sessions ends, talk with the tutor. Ask specific questions about how and why the tutor conducted the session as he or she did. You may want to complete a form like the one on page 26 for each session you observe.

EXERCISE 3C

In pairs, role-play a "tutor" and "student" starting a tutoring session. The tutor can simply play himself or herself and practice techniques for

- greeting a student and building rapport,
- getting information from the student,
- assessing the needs of the student,
- determining a plan of action,
- setting boundaries for the session, and
- using active listening.

"Students" should adopt one of the personas listed below, but without telling the tutor which one.

Follow up discussion should focus on the reactions and behavior of both tutor and "student." How did they feel during the session? What made them comfortable or uncomfortable? What seemed successful, frustrating, helpful, and not helpful? How was body language evident in the session? How might the tutor have handled things differently? Though not necessary, it can be helpful to videotape sessions for viewing and analysis later.

TUTOR OBSERVATION SHEET

Your name:_____

Tutor's Name: _____

Date:_____ Length of Session:_____

Class student's paper is for, or other reason for coming to the center:

_____

_____

Description of the assignment :_____

Areas covered in the session:

What helped the student or worked in the session?

What was tried but didn't help the student or didn't work?

Comments and reflections on the session:

Final thoughts:

The "Students":

1. You don't like the writing assignment you've been given — a comparison and contrast of two similar persuasive arguments for the same issue, that of revising the movie-rating system. It doesn't make sense to you. Wouldn't it be better to look at two opposing opinions? Couldn't you pick your own topic? You also don't like your teacher. You think she's mean and withholding. If only she would just tell you what she wants, you could just do it. You're asking a tutor for help with your assignment, but what you really want is empathy and sympathy. Isn't this a terrible assignment? Isn't she a terrible teacher?

2. You've got your paper drafted and are fairly comfortable with it. You know that it probably needs to be tweaked a bit here and there to improve it, but that's about all. The professor has said he expects a strong introduction, and you know yours could be a bit better. You also feel like your conclusion is too much of a rehash of what you just said. You're very open to suggestions and really expect that the tutor can give you some good advice.

3. You are a brand-new freshman, you don't really know anyone very well yet, and so far college has been a far more scary experience than you'd thought it would be. You've been required to come to the writing center; otherwise you would be in your dorm room, probably calling your parents or significant other back home — again. You suspect that your writing skills are pretty good because you did well in high school, but you wonder about how your writing compares to that of other freshmen. You hover near the door, unsure if you can muster the strength to enter the center. You barely speak above a whisper — if possible, not at all.

4. Fifteen years ago you went to college for a couple of years, but you were unsure about what you wanted to do and finally quit. Now you're back in school and serious about getting a degree in education. But oh, that hiatus! You're very worried about your writing skills. Can you hold your own? What's the competition like? You're afraid you will get a bad grade on this assignment. The paper is due in a week. You have brainstormed, outlined, and drafted. You suspect that there have been significant advances in approaches to writing over the past fifteen years, though you have no idea what those might be. You also have to pick up your children from school in an hour.

5. Swamped with several papers to write within the next two weeks, you have a ten-page history paper due today at noon! You got the research done for the history paper and finally sat down at 9:00 P.M. last night to write. At 5:00 A.M. you realized that you had good information, but you just weren't putting it together effectively. A couple of hours of sleep and now here you are, practically banging on the writing center's door and begging for help. In your

sleep-deprived delirium, this paper has taken on extra importance. If you don't do well on it, you won't do well in the class. If you don't do well in the class, you won't do well in school. If you don't do well in school, you won't be able to get a job. It's five to nine right now; if you can get some help by 9:30, you can get home by 10:00, revise and edit by 11:00, then a half hour for the bibliography . . . where IS everybody who works here?

6. Teachers (and tutors) represent authority to you. After all, they know so much more than you do! You've been brought up not to question authority. Even if you don't understand what a tutor says, you won't ask questions or seek clarification. If the tutor asks you something, you smile and try to quietly cover up your lack of understanding. You expect that the tutor will take your paper, read it, and use his or her expertise to edit it during the session.

7. You're actually a rather flaky person. If someone asks you about subject A, you find some obscure relation to subject B and discuss that. (For example, in your paper praising golfer Tiger Woods, you leap to discussing your love of sports, especially soccer. Mention of your experiences on the high-school team leads you into talk about extracurricular activity, like the club sponsored by your favorite English teacher, which leads you to discuss what your favorite book was senior year.) You want help with this paper for your psychology class but just can't seem to focus on Jung's theories. You're likely to end up talking about anything but Jung in this session!

8. You've been required to come to the writing center, and fulfilling this requirement is your main goal. You aren't much interested in the tutor's advice. The paper is due tomorrow and you have the sketchiest of rough drafts, but you envision completing it easily in an hour or two this evening. You suspect that if you hand something in on time, you will receive a passing grade on it, and in the class. Right now, however, more than anything else, you want to be home watching the basketball game on television. It's starting right about now. You have nothing against the tutor or the instructor, but you'll say anything to get the session over with.

9. You arrive at the writing center with a freshly printed copy of a paper for an English literature course. You are determined to get an A on this paper, and so it must be letter-perfect. In taking advantage of this service for students, you assume that the tutor will scrutinize every sentence, every word, and every punctuation mark. You expect nothing less and won't be satisfied until your paper is flawless.

10. You've always had difficulty with being organized and meeting deadlines. Your first paper in a freshman writing course is due this afternoon. As you sit with the tutor, you struggle to remember where in your bag you put your two-page, handwritten rough draft, and a search of your backpack yields only page two. When you talk to the tutor about the paper, you have difficulty remem-

bering your topic and the points you argued. As things become more confusing, you look to the tutor to save you from the mess you've created.

EXERCISE 3D

The following role-playing activities will help you practice active listening, facilitating, and using silence and wait time. If you are not using this book in conjunction with a class or training program, try to gather a group of tutors from your writing center who are willing to participate. Some of you will play a tutor or writer; others will observe the tutor's actions and words. (Role-players might want to take a few minutes to jot down notes before beginning.) Following are descriptions of the responsibilities for each role.

Writer. Assume that you need to write a letter on one of the topics on page 30 and that you are seeking a tutor's help to explore your ideas and begin arranging them effectively. You will need to anticipate readers' objections to the ideas you express in the letter. Use your imagination to come up with convincing arguments and objections. (Note that you do not have to *write* the letter. You are in the preliminary stages of writing.)

Tutor. The writer is seeking your help with writing a letter. Your task is to help the writer

- explore persuasive arguments,
- explore the audience's potential objections to those arguments and the writer's potential rebuttals to the objections, and
- begin planning an effective organization for the letter.

At the same time, you must

- keep all your ideas to yourself and make *no* contributions to the content or organization of the letter, and
- pass *no* judgment on any of the ideas the writer suggests. Instead, ask questions that help the writer focus and clarify ideas. (Remember to practice active listening, facilitating, and using silence and wait time.)

Observer(s). As the tutor works with the "writer," look for examples of active listening, facilitative language, and silence or wait time. Make brief notes as you observe examples. (Your notes need not include a sentence's content, only enough to indicate that the tutor is being facilitative: "I can hear . . . ," "What do you think?," and so on.

You might want to try different letter topics, trading roles as you move to a new topic. Each participant would thus get a chance to be a tutor, a writer, and an observer. After each session, group members should talk about how it felt to play the different roles. Observers should also share their impressions. What strategies did tutors use, and how effective were they? How could tutoring sessions have been improved?

Letter topics

1. Spring semester is nearly over, and your parents have been looking forward to having you at home for the summer. But you wish to live and work away from home, perhaps at the beach or near your school. Select the place where you want to live for the summer and write a letter to your parents explaining your reasons; try to convince them that your living away from home is a good idea.

2. A number of students who use the writing center have indicated a wish for additional writing center hours. Write a letter to the director either supporting or opposing extended hours.

3. As the parent of a young child, you find that attending classes poses some difficulties. Write a letter to the president of your school requesting that the school start a day-care facility for students' children. (If your school already has a day-care facility, ask that its hours be extended or assume that it is in danger of being closed and ask that it remain open.)

4. Write a letter to the president of your school asking for a change from giving grades for courses to using a pass-fail approach (or the opposite, if your school already offers pass-fail courses).

5. You are determined to participate in an exercise program while you are home for the summer, but you know you would be more apt to stick with it if you had company. Write a letter to a friend who will also be home then advocating a particular exercise program (such as swimming, weight training, or aerobics) and asking him or her to join you.

6. You have an opportunity to attend a three-day conference for writing tutors, but one of your professors frowns on students' missing class. Write a letter to that professor explaining and justifying your request.

7. You and some friends have decided to go somewhere for spring break. Write a letter to persuade your friends that all of you should spend your time swimming in Cancún rather than skiing in Colorado. (Substitute other places and activities if you wish.)

8. Write a letter to the president of your school suggesting that a specific campus program be started or continued. (Some suggestions: an orientation course for new students, a writing center, a math center, a study-abroad program, a particular internship.)

9. Your parents do not think it is a good idea for you to have a car on campus, but increasingly you wish to have one. Write a letter to your parents explaining your reasons.

10. Your younger brother or sister is considering buying a computer but is not sure how useful it would be. Write a letter explaining why a computer is (or is not) a good investment for him or her.