

**OCAD Writing & Learning Centre
Tutor Self-Evaluation Form (Spring 2006)**

1. How would you describe your general approach to tutoring?

My general approach to tutoring is one of facilitation and accommodation. Because I believe that an individual has specific questions about the writing process, I treat students according to their identifiable needs. Depending on what these are, I advise them on how they may approach the issue; if needed, I provide them with handouts that augment our discussion.

Discussion is the foundation of accommodating students, the absence of which results in a teacher-centered dynamic in which the tutor simply lectures and the student passively heeds the tutor's advice. Because I believe in the importance of identifying student needs, I establish a dialogue in which I, as the tutor, also listen to the student outline his or her strengths, weaknesses, concerns, and questions. Through the solicitation of questions, I encourage students to share how they learn best. In so doing, I can recommend tools that students may use in self-study and self-editing.

2. Give one example of a challenging situation you have dealt with in a tutoring session, talk about how you handled the situation, and outline any questions you may have about what you could have done differently or better.

Recently, a student who had self-identified as learning disabled, returned for another tutoring session. He, once again, broached the subject of wanting his entire paper edited for grammar and mechanical errors. As we had discussed this topic in a previous session I, again, provided him with a rationale for why we don't focus solely on editing at the Centre. I outlined, for instance, how 'correcting' another's work independent of that person compromises the learning opportunity because there is no pedagogical value in editing itself; it should be accompanied with input and advice. Although the student understood the rationale on not solely editing he still felt that his needs weren't being met by our Centre: something he'd been told by staff at the Centre for Students with Learning Disabilities would be. A complete editing of his papers was what he felt he needed. Wanting to accommodate the student's needs, I took the advice of the Centre's Program Co-ordinator, by providing the student with a list of what I could do for him, which focused on addressing specific issues within the context of his paper. For instance, to address his questions about grammar, we examined the first few paragraphs of his paper, and looked for grammatical or mechanical error patterns that, on being provided with ways to address, he could later apply to other written work. The student claimed to appreciate this approach but was still disappointed that his expectations of the Centre couldn't be met.

My questions about this circumstance underscore my lack of knowledge about learning disabilities. I know that the rationale I provided this student is one I would provide to all students so I am uncertain if there are other, more effective approaches appropriate for students with learning disabilities. Perhaps consulting with the Centre for Students with Learning Disabilities staff would shed more light on the issue helping Writing and Learning Centre tutors become better prepared to care for the increasing number of students we meet with learning disabilities.

3. How has your work as a tutor changed over time? (e.g., you could think about the kinds of skills, methods, or insights have you acquired or developed as a tutor. You might also consider strengths/weaknesses in your approach to tutoring that you have become aware of through practice and experience.)

My work as a tutor focuses on working with students who are at various stages of the writing process. Regardless of whether they are engaged in writing a research paper, a comparative analysis, a résumé, or response essay, I believe my work with students has become more proficient at identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and potential of their work. This proficiency is the result of a system, gradually developed in which these factors are expediently identified and addressed. Subsequently, students are offered a variety of tools and rationales that may be effective. Such a system is predicated on cultivating trust between the student and me through dialogue. I have incorporated much into my work from the PD sessions and literature on various methodologies to effect a collaborative ethos. These methodologies include being an active listener, and an interactive facilitator that tries to elicit ideas that can be clearly, succinctly, and comprehensibly conveyed by the student. For the most part, this system has been reliable and effective; however, there are still instances when student questions can test my skills and knowledge about a particularly topic leaving me stumped. It is the unexpected nature of these instances that challenge one to think quickly in order to find a solution. At times these circumstances result, to a degree, in self-doubt as I question my ability to help a student; however, I try to reflect on the value such challenges present because they regularly result in new-found insights leading to further inquiry about a topic. It has been a humbling experience to realize that I'm not an expert in everything, but an even greater revelation to know that I don't have to be. The acceptance of this fact actually leads to building a greater empathy for students as often, they are plagued by the same doubts. Consistent with my goal to building trust between students and me, relinquishing all notions of being 'the expert' facilitates this goal!

4. How does your work as a tutor at the WLC relate to your professional objectives/aspirations? What skills and insights will you carry forward from this position into your next one? (employment, school, art/design practice, etc.)

My work as a tutor relates to my professional objectives by providing me with a context in which to explore and implement the theories and approaches I'm learning about in the Master's in Adult Education I'm currently engaged in. I am fortunate that these studies have a symbiotic relationship with the work I do at the Writing and Learning Centre in the way they inform the work I do with students. I am particularly interested in the concept known as Self-Directed Learning and how it can expand on traditional teacher-centered approaches. I am interested in this approach because it places teachers as facilitators on an equal footing with their students as learners. In essence, self-directed learning encourages students to become autonomous and self-initiating learners, ones who acknowledge their individuality and their responsibility in creating a caring, collaborative learning environment, regardless of whether the learning takes place within a formal or informal context.