

## Part II – Effective Tutoring

### A. Recommending Campus Resources

As a successful student, you're in a position to recommend resources on campus that other students may not realize are available to them. The following list (in no particular order) may be sources of additional help that you can suggest to the students you tutor.

**1. Writing Center.** The Writing Center is staffed by English department faculty members who can help with any paper that the student may write for an SMU class. Students must make an appointment in Canvas for Writing Center help. For any questions about the Writing Center, reach out to Lydia Allen (LRAllen@smu.edu).

**2. Academic advisers.** Many students are not aware that their academic advisers are available to assist them with more than just scheduling classes. Academic advisers can help students explore their interests to help them make decisions about courses and majors as well as help students with long, term planning and goal setting. Encourage students to contact their advisers if they're uncertain about their majors or the direction of their academic path.

**3. Disability Accommodations Counselors.** If the student mentions that he/she has, or suspects that he/she has, a learning difference, you might recommend a meeting with Alexa Taylor (alexat@smu.edu). Additionally, if you want more information on how to work effectively with students with learning differences, please contact Alexa.

**4. Learning Skills Specialists.** In addition to your own valuable experience as a good student, you will have some training in incorporating study skills information into tutoring sessions. However, you have the resources of the A-LEC in this area as well. If students express a need for an interest in developing skills such as managing time, improving concentration, or controlling test anxiety, suggest that they visit with Becca Umobong (rebecca@smu.edu).

**5. Professors.** First year students in particular are hesitant to contact their professors if they have questions or concerns about the class. For some, fear of being considered a poor student keeps them from going to office hours; others simply aren't aware that this is acceptable college practice. Use your own experience to help a student know how to approach a professor to get the most help possible.

**6. TAs.** Just as many students are not aware that their professors are available for out-of-class help, they often believe that the TAs only grade papers. In many cases, TAs are also available for out-of-class help on assignments. Encourage students to find out if this help is available.

**7. Health Center and CAPS.** Chances are, you'll be all too aware if students are ill when they come for tutoring. First, protect your own health by not shaking hands with or coming in unnecessarily close contact with a sick student. Then, inform the student about the Health Center (many really don't know what or where it is) and encourage him/her to go! (214.768.2141)

A more delicate referral is CAPS (Counseling and Psychiatric Services). However, if a student seems obviously distressed or indicates that he/she feels out-of-control, please tell them about the help that is available on campus. (214.768.2277)

**8. Libraries.** Students who indicate that they haven't found a quiet place to study could benefit from information about the university's libraries. You likely have already found the atmosphere that works for you; share this possibility with the student you're tutoring. Also, you might recommend to any student who is doing research for a class to consult with a librarian for help.

**9. ARAs and HDs.** Any residence hall which houses first-year students has an ARA (Academic Resident Assistant) who lives in the hall, provides academic programming, and serves as an academic mentor. Students can talk to the ARA about study skills or concerns about classes. Moreover, the HDs (Hall Directors) can be valuable resources for students who are having problems with roommates or with adjusting to college.

**10. Career Development Center.** Students who are uncertain about their majors or about what career possibilities their majors make available can benefit from a visit to the Hegi Career Center. Counselors can also provide information about the Center's job referral program. (214.768.2266)

## **B. Tutoring Session Basics**

Students who seek LEC tutoring help will come with varying abilities and problems. However, no matter the student or what subject is being tutored, each tutorial session will require a similar format.

### **A. Opening the Session**

1. Establish a comfortable working environment.
  - a. Introduce yourself to the student. Ask the student's name and repeat it back as you fill in contact sheet information.
  - b. Be open, encouraging, and supportive. Do not give the student any reason to perceive you as distracted or bothered.
  - c. Be aware of and try to minimize outside interference. For the most part, tutoring is individualized help, so give the student your undivided attention. Be sure that your cell phone is off.
  - d. Never allow yourself to become so engrossed in visiting with your friends that you ignore your clients. When students feel that you are not paying attention, they will not ask for needed help.
2. Actively listen to the student's needs and concerns.
3. Determine specific session goals by repeating back to the student what you understand to be his/her concern.

### **B. Meeting the Goals**

1. Be certain that the student is prepared for a tutoring session by checking the written work, notes, and homework of the student for clarity, accuracy, and completeness.
2. Give the student a chance to explain what he does know about the topic. Proceed on the basis of the ability of the student, not that of the tutor. The student will benefit most from the tutoring session if he/she actively participates in the learning process.
3. Encourage practice. If the student completes one problem or understands one concept, suggest another example to develop mastery.
4. Offer learning alternatives. Ask the student to talk through the problem as well as write it.
5. Review frequently during the session. Ask questions to ascertain if the student is retaining the information.
6. Involve as many of the five senses as possible.
7. Motivate the student by using appropriate reinforcement.

### **C. Closing the Session**

1. Review the session materials (or, even better, have the student do the reviewing).
2. Summarize what the student has learned (or have the student do the summarizing).

3. Identify what the student still needs to learn (or have the student do the identifying).
4. Leave on a positive, friendly note. Encourage students to return if they need additional help.

### **General Tutoring Techniques**

Each tutor will differ somewhat in his/her approach to tutoring. The following techniques, however, are applicable to all tutoring situations.

#### **A. Use Effective Communication Skills.**

Tutors learn a great deal about an individual's needs through listening and are often able to assist through effective use of questioning strategies.

#### **B. Encourage Good Study Techniques.**

The techniques for studying used by an individual may greatly influence his/her academic success.

#### **C. Reinforce the Student's Progress.**

Improvements should be reinforced. Be specific in your reinforcement ("You really used a good example from the text.").

#### **D. Identify Key Vocabulary Terms as Building Blocks to Key Concepts.**

Many courses have terms and definitions that are specific to that particular course. Make sure that a student understands and can use these terms as they apply to the course content.

#### **E. Draw Relationships Between Past and New Experiences and Knowledge.**

Sometimes students are not comfortable thinking or working in abstract terms. Bridge this gap by pointing out how an abstract idea relates to a concrete experience.

#### **F. Be Relaxed and Patient.**

Learning is often a slow process. Both the tutor and the student may feel frustrated because of this slowness. However, being in a relaxed state will facilitate learning.

#### **G. Remain Professional**

Do not question an instructor's teaching methods or assignments. It is the instructor who gives the students grades and determines what information the students will learn in order to pass the course. Do not gossip about an instructor. It is your

responsibility to encourage student/instructor interaction. If a student says something negative about an instructor, do not agree or disagree with him/her. Suggest that the student discuss the matter with the instructor.

- H. Work as Part of a Team.** Don't give out information unless you know it is correct. If you don't know, say, "I don't know." Get to know each staff member working with you during your scheduled hours. When you encounter difficult problems or questions, you should know each other well enough to ask for assistance or make a referral.

### C. Active Listening

The following are offered as steps to increasing your listening skills. Remember, listening is a high-level skill and is developed and improved only as the result of practice.

1. **STOP TALKING.** This is the easiest step in the listening process. You can't listen until you stop talking. Become aware of how comfortable you are with silence. Become aware of how much time you allow for your student to sit in silence and think about an answer before you volunteer the correct response. Wait for the student to think before you answer or move on to another topic. Become comfortable with some silence.
2. **LOOK AT THE STUDENT.** Looking at the student shows your intent to understand. It also communicates that you are interested in the student and what he has to say. Moreover, it is easier to pay attention and concentrate when you are looking at someone instead of looking away or at your notes or at the textbook.
3. **AVOID STEREOTYPING.** If you know just a little about another person (especially if that little bit is based on how the person looks, dresses, etc.), it is hard not to make assumptions about the person. The danger is that those assumptions—correct or incorrect—will lead to false or incorrect expectations about what that person can and will do.
4. **LISTENING DOES NOT MEAN PROBLEM-SOLVING.** You cannot solve every problem for every student. Listening means that the tutor cares and that he/she can help the student sort out options and clarify the decision-making process. Tutors can help identify the issues and spell out the alternatives.
5. **LISTEN TO WHAT IS BEING SAID.** Pay attention to more than just the words being said and listen also to the emotions and ideas being expressed. Pay attention to gestures and body language.

6. **THINK ABOUT WHAT IS BEING SAID.** Remember that listening includes thinking. It involves reasoning, weighing arguments, and analyzing the content of what is being said. A good listener must concentrate, think, and reason.
7. **LISTEN TO WHAT IS NOT SAID.** Listen to hear what is left out. Sometimes what is not said is more important than what is said. For example, if the student complains about being behind in class and about not being able to keep up with the professor, the student may not be attending class (possible attendance/motivation/persistence problems) or doing homework (time management/study strategy problem).
8. **LISTEN WITH THE INTENT TO REMEMBER.** Focus on key words and main points and use them throughout the session.
9. **BE CAREFUL WHEN EVALUATING THE STUDENT.** Seek to give the student useful feedback, but try not to judge. Be sure you get all the facts before you evaluate the student's problem or situation. Inaccurate or incomplete information can lead to a false conclusion and harmful advice or actions.
10. **LIMIT NEGATIVE EVALUATIONS.** Your thoughts are based on what you observe. You can never be completely accurate about the other person. Avoid risking or terminating the tutorial relationship simply to air your personal feelings/opinions.
11. **ACTIVE LISTENING** is the ability to repeat back in one's own words what someone else has said. This technique is often referred to as "mirroring." When you can say back to someone what she has just said to you, you—in effect—hold up a mirror to that person. The other person may say, "At last, someone understands what I'm saying," or "No, I didn't mean that." Active listening plays a crucial role in effective communication.

## D. Study Skills

“Study skills” typically refers to time management (setting priorities and scheduling one's time), taking lecture notes (and sometimes improving listening skills), textbook-study methods (usually SQ4R), preparing for and taking examinations, and improving both memory and concentration.

### 1. Time Management

It is very important that students learn to budget their time in order to allow a reasonable amount of time for each subject. In order to assist students in budgeting their time, the tutor might suggest the following strategies:

- a. Establish A Routine. Students should determine the most practical times for studying and set them aside. It is more efficient to establish regular study hours for each course.
- b. Use A Time Awareness Sheet. Having a written schedule of daily activities will help the student be more prompt in meeting responsibilities as a student
- c. Begin All Assignments. It is easier to "finish" an assignment if it has already been started and organized.
- d. Be Realistic About Time. Professors recommend 2 hours of work outside of class for every hour in class.

## 2. Note taking

Taking a good notes on a lecture is the surest single way to concentrate on the lecture and fix in the mind the ideas the lecturer covers. Good note taking principles include:

- a. Record the lecturer's Ideas in the your own words. Rephrasing the lecturer's words requires a high degree of mental activity and concentration, which helps the student learn and remember more of the lecture content.
- b. Be Brief. Record crucial nouns, verbs, and modifiers in notes. Unnecessary words should be eliminated, and the use of common symbols might also speed up the note-taking process. Students should be reminded not to try to get down everything the instructor says.
- c. Systematize and review the notes as soon as possible. It is best to have a loose-leaf notebook with a separate section for each course. This makes it simple to keep all notes on a subject together and to add pages at appropriate places if for some reason elaboration on a topic previously covered is needed.

Notes should be spread out somewhat as they are taken. The student should leave sufficient space so that when they review their notes, they can include additional ideas or clarifying words. It is most helpful, of course, to review notes immediately after the lecture.

Note taking, then, is essentially a form of recitation--a way of expressing the ideas of another person in one's own words, rather than merely listening to those ideas. The real value in good note taking lies in thinking about the significance of each group of words, recalling the elaborations that the instructor presented but which the student did not have time to write down, and, where appropriate, inserting those points necessary to create a full account of the lecture.

## 3. Textbook Reading

One of the most effective methods of learning written material is that known as SQ4R. What exactly is this method?

- S - SURVEY the chapter or assignment to get the main ideas. Note the title of the chapter. Read any introductory, summary, or concluding paragraphs, and scan all tables, inserts, and pictures.
- Q - QUESTIONS can be framed from the main headings. This will focus attention and give purpose to the reading.
- R - READ the chapter, section by section, in order to answer the questions. Write these answers on the back of the cards, paying attention to bold, italicized, or underlined words.
- R - RECITE the main points of the chapter by looking away from the book and restating the answers to the questions previously formulated. The student should do this verbally and in his own words. It is a good idea to write the main ideas down in outline form. Research clearly demonstrates that outlining is superior to both underlining and highlighting.
- R - REVIEW both notes and cards after reading the material in order to get a clearer focus on the main ideas and their relationships. The student should try covering his notes and recalling main points and subpoints.

For the anxious student, faced with a long, difficult text to read, the SQ4R method will provide a technique for getting started. It will make explicit the steps that a skilled learner automatically follows, and will help the student gain a better understanding from his reading.

#### **4. Test-Taking Techniques**

Multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and true-false tests are all considered objective examinations. Students often prefer these tests to essay examinations because they believe them to be easier. However, this is not necessarily true, as objective tests tend to emphasize minute details and may well be confusing and awkward. To do well on an objective examination, students need good reading ability and vocabulary skills so that they can interpret the questions and recognize information and concepts presented differently than in the textbooks and lectures.

All objective tests demand careful reading, as the answer to a question will often depend upon a qualifying term, such as "always," "totally," "never," "seldom," "usually," and "occasionally." (The first three qualifying terms are often false, while the last three are often true.) Following are several suggestions designed to help the student achieve better results on objective tests:

- a. Read an item through one, with high concentration, and answer on the basis of the first impression.
- b. Re-read the item, asking what it really means, expressing its thought in one's own words.
- c. Do not change the answer because of a mere doubt, but rather, change it only if there is a clear indication that it is wrong and another is right.



- d. Always keep in mind that the instructor is trying to measure knowledge of a subject, and not a student's ingenuity in solving verbal puzzles. Do not out-smart yourself by looking for the devious trick interpretations and ignoring the obvious, straightforward meaning.

Essay examinations, in contrast, require the student to recall information from readings and lectures, integrate, synthesize and organize it, and demonstrate the ability to express ideas well in writing. To write essay examinations effectively, the student should carefully read each question and look for the key word (or words), which states exactly how to frame the answer. Too often students ignore those directives indicating how to interpret questions and write answers not related to the question.

## 5. Memorization Techniques

A final study skill is memorization of the major points of the material. There are several principles of memorizing which lead to more efficient remembering.

- a. Memorizing should not replace understanding. Be sure to understand any material that needs to be remembered.
- b. Learn with the intention of remembering. If one does not intend to remember material, it will not be learned easily.
- c. Organize facts. Grouping ideas according to a key or common word increases memory effectiveness.
- d. Select (or create) key words to represent facts to be remembered. These key words may serve as guideposts to which the student can tie many ideas.
- e. Take advantage of the memory style. Become aware of the different modes of learning, visual and auditory, and capitalize upon them.
- f. Use Short Practice Periods. Pause for a moment after intensive memorizing so new information does not interfere with what was being memorized.
- g. Use a Flashcard System. This involves writing key ideas, terms, or questions on one side of a card, and related facts, definitions, or answers on the other. This method is particularly helpful for memorizing technical vocabulary, formulas, dates, or foreign languages.

## 6. Concentration

FACT: Average concentration span for textbook reading is 16 minutes.

Therefore, use 20-minute study-bites. Switch to another subject as soon as concentration wanes.

FACT: The purpose of goals is to focus attention.

Therefore, have a specified short-term goal for each study-bite. (Ex. read one history chapter, complete 7 math problems, brainstorm a dozen topics for an English paper.)

FACT: Emotional involvement and personal commitment help concentration.

Therefore, focus on the relevance and importance of the topic to be learned.

FACT: Negative emotions and stress detract from concentration.

Therefore, focus on positive thinking to increase your brainpower. Manage stress with visualization, humor, and relaxation exercises.

FACT: Other people affect your concentration.

Therefore, find better times (daytime hours and places (library) to study.

FACT: Active learning helps.

Therefore, get physically involved while studying. (Sit up straight, walk around, talk aloud, write a song about the topic.)

These five basic study skills, including time management, note-taking, textbook study methods, test preparation and taking, and improved memorization and concentration, are all important in the development of better study habits.

By promoting self-discipline and self-confidence, these study skills will reinforce in students the notion that hard work is indeed rewarded with good grades and a feeling of accomplishment.