What does a typical tutoring session look like at the University of Tromsø’s Writing Center?

What are some of the key philosophies/best practices that guide your approach to tutoring?

Tenets of Peer Tutoring

- Tutors aren’t teachers (you aren’t expected to have all the answers--just to know how to find them!)
- Tutoring should create better writers, not just better papers; the ultimate goal is to make the tutor obsolete.
- Tutoring is a collaboration between peers; hierarchies of learning are leveled.
- Tutors sit next to writers rather than across from them; tutors never write on student papers.
- Tutoring is conversational; tutors ask questions, and writers supply answers.
- Tutoring focuses on higher-order concerns first (issues of revision: structure, content, argumentation, rhetorical effectiveness) and lower-order concerns second (issues of editing: grammar, mechanics, syntax, style).
- Tutoring requires both control (setting a plan based on the writer’s goals, concluding with a plan of action) and flexibility (adjusting course to allow the session to develop organically).
- Tutoring is about trust: trust of the writers in the tutors, trust of the tutors in the writers.
- Tutoring is non-directive: the tutor doesn’t tell the writer what to do; the tutor helps the writer maintain ownership of and agency over their text.

*Note: the issue of non-directive tutoring has been one of the key debates in Writing Center theory and scholarship… Do tutors have an ethical responsibility to help students by sharing what they know? Or, do tutors have an ethical responsibility to help students help themselves? It can manifest in a tension between social justice and academic honesty.*

Directive and Non-Directive Tutoring

*Jeff Brooks: “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Students Do All the Work” WLN 1991.*

Brooks advocates for non-directive tutoring, following many of the tenets of peer tutoring listed above.

What are the central takeaways for Brooks? What do you think of his argument?

Do you find his perspective idealistic?

Carino advocates for a combination of directive and non-directive tutoring, compromising some of the tenets above to distinguish between theory and practice: what Writing Centers say they do versus what they actually accomplish.

How does Carino disagree with Brooks?

What does it mean to “use authority without becoming authoritarian”?

What is potentially “foolish” and “unethical” about divesting the tutor of authority?

What are the risks of relying exclusively on directive or non-directive tutoring methods?

How might the “tutoring style decision tree” help us to balance directive and non-directive methods?

![Tutoring Style Decision Tree](image)

Tutoring English Language Learners

Brooks and Carino don’t talk directly about ELLs, but how does this debate shift in the context of tutoring English Language Learners?

What are the practical considerations to examine?
What are the ethical considerations to examine?

Other tips for working with ELLs:
● Get a sense of how strong their English skills are, noting that their speaking and writing skills may not “match”
● Work on patterns of error in three steps: identify/correct the error for them, identify the error and let them correct it, then help them to identify/correct errors on their own
● Note when “writing problems” may be rooted in “thinking problems,” especially with issues of clarity
● Focus on issues that the writer is most motivated to address
● Avoid asking yes/no questions such as “do you get it?”
● Present information in small, manageable steps to avoid overwhelming the student

How can you work on developing your directive and non-directive tutoring strategies?

While we often assume that good writers make good tutors, a tutor writes very little in the Writing Center. Instead, a tutor is primarily a reader and a listener. The most important way to grow as a tutor is to cultivate your reading and listening skills! Next, we’ll discuss listening and reading in the Writing Center as essential ways to help determine when to be directive or non-directive in your approach.

Listening in the Writing Center

What is the difference between hearing and listening?
Hearing: the physiological process of processing sounds (ears)
Listening: the psychological process of making sense of sounds (brain)

Types of Listening
➢ Informative Listening: listening to understand
➢ Relational Listening: listening to support/empathize
➢ Appreciative Listening: listening to determine quality
➢ Critical Listening: listening to analyze/evaluate
➢ Discriminative Listening: listening for meaning

What types of listening do you engage in as a writing tutor?

Misconceptions about Listening
➢ listening is a talent rather than something you learn
➢ practice eliminates the need for formal training (less than 2% of Americans learn listening skills in school!)
➢ listening is just like reading
➢ the speaker is responsible for effective communication
➢ careless listening isn’t a big deal
Exercises to practice listening

Listen to the following list and remember as many words as you can.
Now, write down the words you remember.
What words did you remember? What words did you forget? What words did you imagine?

Listening Self-Assessment

How often do you find yourself doing the following in the Writing Center:

1. Making direct eye contact with the writer          Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
2. Finishing the writer’s sentences for them         Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
3. Nodding your head to signal agreement             Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
4. Preparing a response before they finish talking   Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
5. Using an “open” posture (uncrossed arms/legs)     Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
6. Multitasking while listening (moving papers, etc) Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
7. Feeling awake and engaged in the session         Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
8. Allowing distractions to disrupt your focus       Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
9. Giving the student time to think in silence       Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
10. Making judgments before hearing all their ideas  Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
11. Paraphrasing what the writer has said            Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
12. Talking to avoid awkward silences                Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
13. Making descriptive comments that use “I”        Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
14. Making evaluative comments that use “you”        Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
15. Asking open-ended, encouraging questions         Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
16. Asking closed-ended, leading questions           Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
17. Asking their ideas before offering your advice   Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
18. Fidgeting while you are listening                Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
19. Noticing their emotions behind their words       Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
20. Interrupting the writer to make a point          Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
21. Noticing the nonverbal cues they are sending     Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
22. Daydreaming or pseudolistening                    Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
23. Becoming interested in the writer’s topic        Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
24. Listening for details/facts instead of holistically Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never
25. Being in the moment and losing track of time     Often       Sometimes    Rarely    Never

To tally your score, first calculate the odd answers (4 points for often, 3 points for sometimes, 2 points for rarely, 1 point for never). Then, calculate the even answers (1 point for often, 2 points for sometimes, 3 points for rarely, 4 points for never). The higher your score (out of 100), the stronger your listening skills.

What do you notice after taking this self-assessment?

What are your strengths and weaknesses as a listener?

What listening skills do you want to work on in the future?

How can effective listening strategies help you determine when to be directive vs. non-directive?
Reading in the Writing Center

The Writing Center… because every writer needs a reader.

What is the difference between reading and editing?
   Editor: directs the writer to make corrections; seeks to improve the text
   Reader: approaches the text with an open mind/thoughtful questions; seeks to improve the writer

Reading Strategies in the Writing Center
   ➢ ask the writer questions about their goals/concerns before you read
   ➢ read out loud (you or the writer)
   ➢ read the prompt before the paper
   ➢ read the whole paper at once to get a bird’s eye view
   ➢ re-read shorter passages to address smaller details
   ➢ take notes as you read
   ➢ read for potential, not for problems
   ➢ react like a reader: what interests you? what confuses you? does the paper match expectations?
      ○ “As a reader, I notice…”
      ○ “As a reader, I feel…”

Writers as Readers

Sometimes the student you tutor will be writing about a text: a novel, a poem, an article, an essay.

   How can you help a student make sense of what they are reading? analyze or evaluate what they are reading? incorporate sources into their own research?

   If you are familiar with the text, how can you avoid letting your own interpretation shape your tutoring approach?

   If you are unfamiliar with the text, how can you help the writer to understand and analyze it?

   What are some active reading strategies you can share with or model for the writer?
   
   reread  look up words/ideas  take notes
   read out loud  discuss with a peer  ask questions
   identify the argument  identify the main points  identify rhetorical strategies

Reading the Text, the Writer, Yourself

As a tutor, you read not only the paper, but also yourself and the writer. Remember that every session will vary based on those three factors:

   The Tutor: What are your strengths? What is your tutoring personality?
   The Writer: How confident are they? How skilled of a writer are they? What is their personality?
   The Text: What is the genre, topic, due date? How long until it is due?

   How can effective reading strategies help you determine when to be directive vs. non-directive?