

1. Introduction

Genevieve, a chemistry tutor, truly enjoys tutoring, saying that she learns as much as her students do. “As a tutor, I try to instill confidence in my tutees. Students will come in extremely frustrated over their homework problems because they cannot figure out how to start or where they went wrong. Together we restart the problem and look at similar examples in their notes and textbooks. A few questions about why they did that step and what are they trying to figure out, and the light bulb comes on as they gain the confidence to take on any problem in the world.

“But tutoring doesn’t just help them—I gain as much as the students do. Tutoring keeps me fresh on basic subjects like chemistry and math, and it helps me become a better leader and a better person. Tutoring introduced me to a diverse group of students, and I get the opportunity to learn how best to work with each one of them. I also get to learn from my peer tutors as we all try to help our students become independent and confident. Sometimes I pass a former tutee on campus and they tell me how well they are doing in an upper level course because they still make study guides like we did together during tutoring. The best part is that I didn’t teach them the material or simply tricks to scrape by on a test. I demonstrated *how* to learn it on their own, instilling confidence so that they can succeed in any subject.”

Being a peer tutor can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of your academic career. This book is designed to help you develop your skills as a tutor. The first step is to define the role of a tutor.

1.1. What is the Role of a Tutor?

Tutor as a Helper

A tutor’s primary role is that of a “helper.” A tutor does not do the work for the student, but instead helps students learn how to help themselves. The majority of this book, especially Chapters 5–8, focus on strategies tutors can use to help students become independent learners.

Tutor as a Peer Learner

Peer tutors are successful students, not experts. They are not responsible for knowing all the answers. Good tutors model the arsenal of successful student skills by acknowledging when they are unsure and by encouraging students to use one of the many other resources available, such as instructors, other peers, and other resources.

Tutor as a Teacher

Sometimes it is appropriate for the tutor to act as a teacher by directly explaining things to the student. Chapter 9 explores effective ways to explain material to students.

Tutor as an Employee

Finally, tutors are employees who represent both the tutorial center and the institution in which they work. Activities later in this chapter help you learn about your own center.

1.2. Why Tutor?

There are many benefits to being a tutor. Some are obvious: You may be receiving course or service learning credit, or you may want an on-campus job that fits into your schedule.

I like tutoring because I get to learn as well as help others.

There are more than just tangible benefits to being a tutor, though. By tutoring a course you have already taken, the material stays fresh in your mind; you will probably develop a deeper understanding of the content. Tutors often find this constant review useful not just in future classes but also in high-stakes tests like the GRE or MCAT.

-Jia

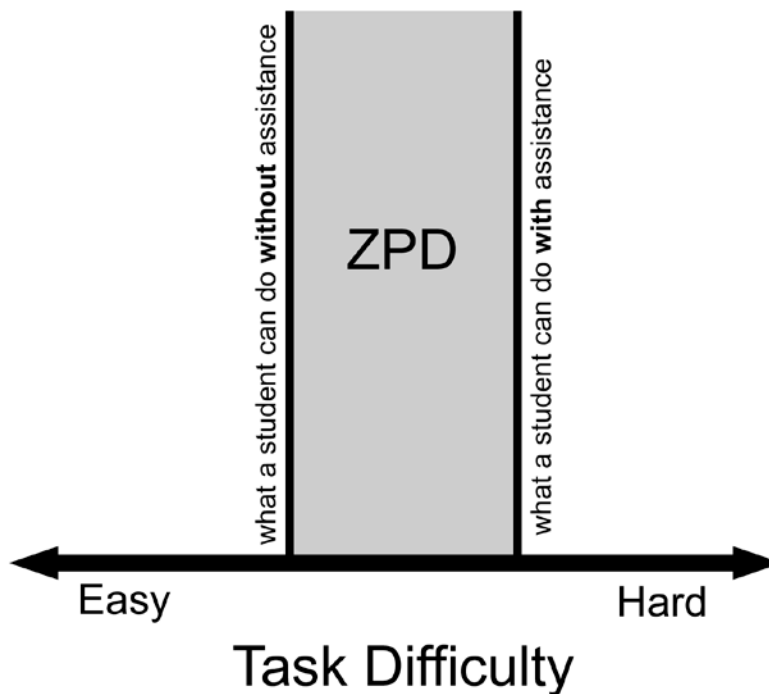
Being a tutor may also help you become more hireable for future employment. You will improve your communication skills, your ability to think quickly on your feet, and your problem-solving skills (for both discipline-specific and interpersonal issues).

Finally, because a tutor's primary role is as a helper, many tutors feel the primary benefit is the satisfaction of helping others. Being a *peer* puts you in a unique place to do just that.

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1978) theorized that learning is an inherently social activity. In fact, although we may be able to do “x” amount of a task by ourselves, we are often able to do more with a little guidance from someone more capable. That extra amount we are able to do is what Vygotsky called the “zone of proximal development” (see Figure 1.1. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development).

Helping students within that zone is very effective. At times, classes may move too fast or too slow for students. Students do not need help below the zone because they can already accomplish those tasks, and they are often not ready for tasks above the zone until they have mastered easier tasks. As a tutor, you can work closely with students at their specific levels of need.

Figure 1.1. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development



1.3. Why Tutor Development?

I like to tutor so I can not only help the student, but also so they can help other students. I want not only to help a student learn physics, but also to learn how to be a student.

-J. P.

Often at the beginning of a tutor development program, tutors wonder why they must participate. “I got an A in the class, I know the material backward and forward, and I’ve helped friends in this class. Why can’t I just start tutoring?”

That is a valid question. Have you ever been in a situation where you had difficulty understanding a concept, even though you could tell the person speaking was incredibly knowledgeable about the topic at hand?

The tutor development program in this book does not focus on the content of the course; instead, it focuses on strategies you can use to help students learn how to master content themselves.

1.4. Should You Tutor?

Before you decide whether to be a tutor, it is important to consider if tutoring is right for you. Most centers hire tutors by the semester or quarter; leaving midway through a term not only disrupts the center but also puts your students at an unfair disadvantage.

Therefore, it is best to fully consider the responsibilities now. Exercise 1.1 will help you determine if a tutoring job is a good fit for you. Use this list of questions to assess your interest.

Exercise 1.1: Do You Want to Tutor Here?

1. What is the center like?
2. What is the mission of the center? Do you believe in its mission?
3. Whom does the center serve? (First-year students? Developmental students? Undergraduates? Graduate students? Community members?)
4. How does the center serve those users? (Drop in? Appointments? Online?)
5. What are the responsibilities of tutors?
6. How many hours per week is a tutor expected to work? Are those hours guaranteed?
7. When are you expected to work? (Mornings? Afternoons? Evenings? Weekends?)
8. When does the work term start and end? Do you tutor during exams?
9. What training and development must you complete?
10. What compensation do you receive? Is that sufficient for you?
11. What paperwork must you complete?
12. What is the culture of the center?
13. Will you be working with other tutors? Alone?
14. Where will you be working? (Center? Library? Residence hall?)
15. How accessible are your supervisors?

These are some examples of questions you should answer before you commit to being a tutor. Your supervisor will let you know if there are other important issues related to the tutoring center.

Another important question to ask is: “Do I have enough time to tutor?” Complete Exercise 1.2 to help you answer that question.

Exercise 1.2: Do You Have Enough Time to Tutor?

Below block out the times when you are . . .

- In class (include commute times if appropriate)
- Have other scheduled commitments (another job, religious commitments, extracurricular activities, family responsibilities)
- Studying (Think about how difficult you expect your classes to be)
- Taking care of yourself physically (Sleeping, Eating, Bathing, Exercising)
- Taking care of yourself mentally (Relaxing, hanging out with friends)

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8 a.m.							
9 a.m.							
10 a.m.							
11 a.m.							
12 p.m.							
1 p.m.							
2 p.m.							
3 p.m.							
4 p.m.							
5 p.m.							
6 p.m.							
7 p.m.							
8 p.m.							
9 p.m.							
10 p.m.							

Now look back at Exercise 1.1, questions 4-7. Does the schedule above realistically allow you to meet the responsibilities of tutoring?

1.5. Making the Commitment

If, after considering Sections 1.1–1.4 and completing the exercises, you decide that you want to tutor, congratulations on making the tutoring commitment! I look forward to sharing your development. This book is designed to help you on that journey.

In the same way that you will tutor students by guiding them, this book is only a guide. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences and complete the exercises to develop your skills. Tutoring, like playing basketball or completing calculus problems, is a skill learned by doing, not simply by watching others.

Each chapter starts with a narrative about an actual tutor's experience. Then, content is presented. Throughout the chapters, exercises allow you to practice what you have learned and reflect on your growth.

Take a moment to reflect on the upcoming journey by completing Exercise 1.3.

Exercise 1.3: Hopes and Fears

1. List at least two hopes you have about tutoring.
2. List at least two fears you have about tutoring.

Discuss your responses with a partner. Are your hopes and fears similar?

1.6. Tutoring Ethics

No matter what kind of tutoring situation you work in, there are certain principles that you need to adhere to for the benefit of the student, the center, and you.

Protected Classes

In the United States, harassing anyone based on any of the following classifications is considered unlawful harassment: race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability status, and veteran status. Individual states and institutions may also protect other classes, such as those based on creed and sexual orientation.

Discriminating against someone for any of the foregoing reasons is not just unprofessional, it is *illegal*. Part of your job is to create and maintain a supportive, harassment-free working and learning environment for all people on your campus. You can do that by:

- Keeping compliments casual and impersonal.
- Avoiding jokes, words, phrases, and gestures with racial, sexual, or other inappropriate connotations.
- Remembering that each person has a personal space. Watch for body language that indicates you might be infringing on that space.

- Conducting all meetings with students in public areas.
- Remembering that your students may perceive a power differential between you. Casual comments may be taken more seriously than intended, and suggestions may be taken as directives.

Of course, as a tutor, you should avoid all harassment, not just the unlawful kind. A form of “legal” harassment would be making fun of a student for supporting a rival baseball team. What might be tolerated between friends comes across very differently when you are in a position of power. Although you might see yourself as just another peer, students often perceive tutors as those in control of their access to services.

Exercise 1.4: Harassment Prevention on Your Campus

It is important to know the policies and procedures on your campus.

1. What classes are protected at your institution?
2. What should you do if you feel harassed?
3. What should you do if you are accused of harassment?

Code of Ethics

Tutors should be ethical in all dealings with students.¹ The ethics required by all tutors falls into six major categories:

- **Tutoring Philosophy:** I will act in the best interest of my students, following the mission of the institution for which I work.
- **Responsibility:** I will take responsibility for my own behavior and work to resolve conflicts that may arise.
- **Integrity:** I will follow the academic honor code of my institution, and I will always promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness.
- **Respect for individual differences:** I will not use tutoring situations to impose my beliefs. I will respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.
- **Excellence:** I will strive for excellence by continuing to improve my tutoring skills. I will be open to comments regarding my performance. I will admit my own weaknesses in content or instructional ability and will seek assistance when I need it.

¹ The Association for the Tutoring Profession <<http://www.myatp.org/>> has an ethics statement from which this is modified.

- Professionalism: I will always remember that I am a role model and will conduct myself in an appropriate manner. I will not take on a role for which I am not qualified. I will be punctual, maintain records, and keep confidential any information that my student decides to share with me or that I have access to in the helping process. I will not pursue inappropriate relationships with my student.

Exercise 1.5: Tutorial Center Ethics

1. What is the code of ethics at your institution?
2. What surprises you on this list?
3. Do any items confuse you?

1.7. Conclusion

Before committing to being a tutor, be sure that you have the desire and time to do so. It may be that there is another tutoring situation that would fit you better, or that it would be best to start tutoring in a later term. Although tutoring can be a very rewarding job, it also has multiple responsibilities that come with it. Be sure you understand and can follow tutoring ethics.