

Obstacles to Tutoring

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Each time you enter the booth and begin to tutor someone, you must evaluate and assess each individual separately. Just as each of us has our favorite music or food, we all have a preferred way to write, read, and learn. Just as each of us has a routine by which we get ready in the morning, we all have certain "routines" or "processes" by which we write, read, or learn. Just because each of us prefers different music, it does NOT mean one piece of musical composition is "BETTER" than another. We as tutors must not only recognize the differences in our learners, we must also understand and adapt to different writing, reading, and learning styles. We must recognize the differences in how one learner gets from one point to another within reading, writing, and learning. We must acknowledge there is no "correct" or "better" way to travel on the journey of reading, writing, and learning. There are only different, unique, creative ways of getting to the same spot. There are three obstacles that a tutor has to beware of when helping a learner:

- Not recognizing differences in preference.
- Not recognizing differences in learning process.
- Not accepting that there is no "correct" way to get to the end result.

It does not matter how much knowledge the tutor holds if these essential components cannot be recognized and the obstacles cleared. Success of the tutoring session will depend on overcoming your own instincts to make the learner write, read, and learn in your style. Almost all tutors would agree that with the power of these three obstacles it becomes hard to focus on the learner. These obstacles make it even more difficult to be successful with a learner. Each of these obstacles can be hurdled if only we can see them as obstacles ahead of time so we have enough time to get a running start.

Obstacle One: We as tutors try to inflict our "practiced" type of writing, reading, or learning on our learners.

We must be able to set our own likes and dislikes aside and sincerely accept the student's way of writing, reading, or learning. Our favorite way or subject for writing, reading, or learning may NOT be the learner's favorite way or subject. We must realize that our tastes or styles should not alter the learner's style or subject. For example, I like to write papers on the environment. I have certain opinions about how a paper on the environment should be written. However, I must not sway my learners to my writing style or opinions on the subject. Furthermore, I should not demand that my learner arrange his or her paper in a certain way because that would be how "I would do it."

Research indicates that the only way one learns to write is by writing. Choice is important in this process because it emphasizes the selection process, which is crucial to writing, and because it enables us to say that copying is not writing. Ian Cassiman gives a good example when he writes about his British novel course: "The professor assigns the books from what she has read and from what she thinks is suitable for our fancy. She assigns the books with defiant consideration of the students. So therefore our discussion and activities revolve around her theoretical disposition which at times is again, not MY interest. But having a doctoral degree and many years of experience of life in general, I am at the command, the direction of the professor" (Cassiman, 3/25/98). We must allow our learners to have flexibility in what and how they read, write, and learn.

Obstacle Two: We as tutors try to use our routines instead of conforming to our learners.

As a tutor it is so easy to conform to our own comfortable ways of writing, reading, and learning. This can be very frustrating to our learners, who are individuals, with unique backgrounds, styles, techniques, and needs. We must be able to step outside our ways and into theirs. We must realize that our ways are not their ways in order to assist them in their writing, reading, and learning.

Our learners' writing, reading, and learning cannot turn into our personal agendas. Most of us have preferred ways to perceive and process new information. Today those preferences are often called learning styles. Writing and reading also take on different styles (Ellis, 1994). Each writer and reader goes about the task differently in his or her own unique style making the process very versatile. How our learners compose is a product of many different aspects of their lives. As Brock Wojtalewicz remarks, "I believe that not only our friends and family, but also geography has much to do with our way of speaking, and consequently our way of writing" (Wojtalewicz, 3/11/98). In order to preserve our learners' style of writing we, as tutors, must conform to their process/style of writing. We must assess our learners and either adapted to the way they have already established or we must help them develop a routine of writing, reading, and learning that meets their needs.

Each learner will have specific and unique needs from you as a tutor. It is important that we set aside some time to establish those needs. We must get to know our learner as a person in order to understand perspectives, styles, and needs. Discovering a learner's needs is sometimes hard, but once you both know what each of you expects it will be much easier to have a successful tutoring session. No matter what setting provides for a tutorial, however, its basic purpose is unvarying: it is to help writers gain the confidence and skill necessary for them to write well **independently**. The process through which tutors help writers learn to do so differs in complexity and duration depending on each writer's ability, level of achievement, previous experience, attitudes, values, and availability (Meyer & Smith, 1987).

Obstacle Three: We must realize that there is no "best" or "right" ways to write, read, and learn.

We must realize that the process we as tutors go through to get something accomplished is NOT the "RIGHT" way. It is just a way of getting results for us, and this does not mean this is how the learners get to their end product. What is best for us as tutors will not necessarily be the best for our learners. For example, I'm a verbal learner; however, there are others who just don't learn this way, and sometimes verbal learning can hinder the learners if they cannot concentrate well enough when someone is talking about the subject. It is imperative the tutor adapt to the learner's way of getting results and not to pressure the learner into "our" ways.

Works Cited

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