

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

Writing Center Analysis Paper

USU Writing Center

11-9-2017

Getting to Know You

Emily Withers

Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/wc_analysis



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Withers, Emily, "Getting to Know You" (2017). *Writing Center Analysis Paper*. Paper 2.

https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/wc_analysis/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the USU Writing Center at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Writing Center Analysis Paper by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



Emily Withers

Brock Dethier

English 6820

9 November 2017

Getting to Know You

Albert Einstein once said, "I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn." This may go against the grain for some teachers and tutors who enjoy imparting their knowledge to those they perceive as inferior. But those who truly care for their students know that learning will not happen unless a student feels comfortable in the classroom. Learning can happen when there are expectations and mutual respect between teacher and student. So, how can one instigate this idealistic situation? One of the greatest things you can do for your students either in the Writing Center or in class is to get to know them.

Students need writing advocates and individualized learning to better themselves. The students of Utah State University and other institutions of higher learning often have classes where they are little more than a number and a body in a seat. There is no way for the teacher to get to know each one of them on an individual basis, so they may go in feeling like a nonentity. When a student walks into the Writing Center, they need to know that when they are here, they are an individual with specific needs and a unique background. It wouldn't make much sense to put such an emphasis on avoiding plagiarism only to turn around and treat each student as if they are the same as the next. We can't just copy and paste responses if we really want the students to learn and succeed. Writing is personal for the student writing it, so the tutor helping them writing should know at least a little about the person with whom they are working. Every student coming in has a unique problem and needs a tailored response. This concept of getting to know students easily transfers to the classroom. Especially in the fall semester, many freshman students are entering a college classroom for the first time ever. Maybe they are away

from home and are not yet comfortable with all these new ideas and experiences. A teacher showing genuine interest and concern in their welfare can go a long way in settling their nerves.

Getting to know your students in the classroom is actually one of the number one ways to curtail behavior problems. At the base of this is whether or not the student is feeling mutual respect. In my past teaching experience as a middle school teacher, the biggest problems come from students who say things like, "You don't respect me, so why should I respect you?" Before that statement, I'd had no idea that the student was perceiving my words and actions as disrespectful. I'd been going forward on the assumption that just because I was the teacher, I should automatically get respect from my students. I was in charge, right? From this experience, I learned that I needed to lower the pride in my status a little and get to know my students better. Talking to them in a more personable manner helped immensely. We were able to restart on more even footing as we gained more respect for each other. Not all of the problems were fixed by this one thing, but it did make a difference. Granted, major behavior problems don't often happen at the college level. Instead, it translates into passive behavior. It's the student sitting in the back and playing on their phone if they show up to class at all. But if the teacher gets to know them and shows them the proper respect, they can feel more important in the classroom and will show more interest in the subject.

Bad behavior is not generally an issue in a half an hour tutoring session, but it does often appear in the form of the bad attitude of a student only at the writing center in order to fulfill a class requirement. Just as in the classroom, students do not learn from someone whom they do not respect. The tutors in the Writing Center may have an edge that teachers may not: students are going to tutor for help and automatically assume that they will get the help that they need. The respect is inherently there, though the tutor still needs to rise to the expectations in order to build respect and trust. Otherwise, the student will not accept the help offered and probably won't come back in the future. One way the tutors gain this trust is by explaining the Writing Center procedures and expectations at the beginning of the tutoring session. This way,

the student knows what will happen in the next 20-30 minutes, and so lessens the chance that they will leave feeling cheated out of their precious time.

Getting to know students at the Writing Center can be difficult given the short span of time, but it is absolutely doable. So, how do tutors deal with it? After greeting the student, they often follow-up with a question. "How are you?" is a nice, non-threatening ice breaker. Even if the student answers with the common answer "Fine," tone can go a long way in telling the tutor the client's state of mind. Then the tutor can respond accordingly: energetic, sympathetic, soothing, or whatever the student needs.

A teacher has an entire semester to get to know their students, but it can be more difficult for them than for a tutor. Since one-on-one opportunities are rare in a large class, teachers doing the small things from the very beginning can make all the difference. Making eye-contact and asking how everything is going is a small gesture, but it will help the student feel more comfortable and able to open up later on. I talk to my students before class to see how they fare and also to gauge the mood. If everyone seems a little out of it, I may need to step up my own teaching for that day. Low energy from the teacher won't help a class of sleepy freshmen. Teachers who get to know their students' personalities can respond in kind to aid in communication.

Ask questions, and then listen to the answer. A tutor can ask questions all day, but it won't do any good unless the answer is listened to and applied. I've noticed that tutors can take on the personalities of their clients. One student came in all gung-ho and raring to go. The tutor responded by giving a brief rundown of how the Writing Center was run and then jumping right in with them. The student was in charge of the session, and the tutor let them be. Another time, I saw this same thing with the opposite kind of personality. When the student came in, they were obviously not familiar or comfortable with the situation. The tutor subdued their own personality to match the student's and even took extra time covering the expectations of the Writing Center to put the student at ease. The tutor should also ask about the student's major to get an idea of

where they are coming from. This enables the tutor to tailor their responses to match the student's background. I saw one tutor go the extra mile with this one. He learned that the student liked the rodeo and was able to integrate that into his tutoring session. Using the rodeo as a metaphor, he described the need for strong transitions within a paper in such a way that was relevant and meaningful for the student with whom he was working.

At this point in their lives, students need to be taking control of their own education. Learning should be happening regardless of their personal feelings on the subject matter and instructor. Unfortunately, everyone is still human and fallible at this point. If we want our students to get the most out of their learning, we need to do what we can to make sure the conditions are met where the most meaningful learning can occur. This begins with the instructor getting more personal and asking questions and showing respect in such a way that the student feels valued. Learning will naturally follow.