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## Teacher vs. Tutor

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Teacher vs. Tutor

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to explore the differences between the roles of a tutor in the writing center and a teacher grading their student's papers. I discuss ways in which tutor and teacher are similar as they both evaluate student's papers but the end goal is significantly different. A tutor does not nor should they assign a grade to any paper they read in a tutoring session. One of a teacher's primary intentions is to assign a grade to their student's papers that reflects the feedback given. There is also a barrier, whether purposely constructed or placed by assumed roles, between teacher and student. This barrier is not as firm between a tutor and student. Each of these issues helps to construct how I want to be viewed as a teacher now and in the future.

Keywords: Teacher, tutor, roles, evaluation, objective, improvement, barrier, selfishness.

### Teacher vs Tutor

Growing up, my parents valued hard work above almost everything else. Along with that they taught my siblings and me to do things for ourselves. This ranged from homework to being an adult and being on your own once you graduated high school. To this day I find it difficult to ask anyone for help. It was so ingrained in me it, at times, felt wrong to ask for help with anything. Interestingly, this can make me a selfish person. I've never thought of myself as a selfish person until I realized denying someone the opportunity to help me was in fact a selfish

act. This also made me realize I came into the writing center as a graduate instructor tutor with some pretty selfish thoughts. How is this benefiting me? This feels like a waste of my time, or at least I could be doing something more productive right now. I know working with the writing center is supposed to make up for only teaching one class but a lot of the work feels like busy work.

My thoughts began to change, slowly, once I graded my first round of papers for my class. I still held the belief that grading my students' papers was more important and made better use of my time. However, once I was reminded of the fact that the writing center does not give out grades my perception of my time in the writing center changed. I could help whoever came into the writing center without the pressure of assigning a grade at the end of a session. The two processes, evaluating a paper with the objective of assigning a grade versus working with a student without the goal of assigning a grade appear to be contrary. In the writing center you don't have to stress about giving a student a fair grade that will still encourage them to work hard on their next assignment. You can encourage the student to talk through the issues of their paper themselves and often they see mistakes on their own. As a tutor you don't take a student's paper and fix everything. This accomplishes nothing and will be a waste of the student's time.

Interestingly, some students who come in to the writing center might expect the tutor to mark everywhere they have made a mistake and give them a grade of sorts. Thankfully this is not how a tutoring session works. As a teacher it is your goal to assign your students' papers a grade.

The goal isn't simply to give a student an A or a C or an F, but to show them what they did well and what they could improve on. In that way the goal of the writing center and a teacher are aligned with each other. Both the writing center and teacher's hope to see student's papers

improve. My goal for this paper is to compare the similar yet distinct roles of writing center tutor and teacher.

Something else I have been thinking about is the different level of barrier between teacher and student and tutor and student. While it is clear I am the teacher I encourage my students to use their voice in class to express their opinions, and way of thinking about anything that comes up in class. A small number of students actually use these opportunities to express their belief about something, but it's there. I would hope this would encourage students to ask me for help when they want or need it.

Though a teacher knows their students on a more personal level and sees them far more often there is a barrier between teacher and student. It is rare for a student to go to their teacher as ask for help. Even though most teachers would be completely willing and in fact invite their students to come to them for help, that student-teacher barrier prevents this from happening. Students likely feel a high amount of anxiety when they turn in each of their papers, especially their first one. They have no idea how their teacher grades, and many teachers strive to put up their own barrier of sorts when grading. While grading a paper can never be truly objective, because writing is subjective, teachers will try to be as objective as possible when grading.

Just as I feel less pressure to help a student who comes into the writing center, so too will the student feel more relaxed. They are not meeting with a perceived authority figure but a peer. A majority of students will freely acknowledge the things they want or need to work on and feel comfortable talking about those issues. They can even rant about their teacher or the assignment their teacher has given them. While this may not improve their paper, it will make the student feel better and relax even more. There is something interesting that happens when you talk to a relative stranger about your paper. You don't feel the pressure to impress them. You will likely

not see them again so you interestingly might be more willing to apply their advice to your work. After I became more comfortable in the writing center I started asking students why they are writing the paper. This encourages students to think through what they already have written and what else they want to explore. One student came in struggling to get his paper written. Once I asked him why he was writing his response to reading paper he was able to talk through many ideas that he hadn't written about yet.

I didn't truly know what to expect when I began teaching or working as a tutor. I think for the most part that was a good thing. I vaguely remember my English 1010 class and the whole semester we dealt with grammar. We did worksheets for homework and in class and that was basically the whole class. Any paper we wrote was about the grammar rather than the content. I guess that is what I thought we were going to focus on in English 1010 and even in the writing center. I am so glad both English 1010 and the writing center have steered away from this and focused on the content. I witnessed a marked change in attitude toward writing in many of my students because of the focus on what they are writing rather than on whether they have used a period correctly or a word in the right context. I believe this has been one of the biggest benefits for me in working in the writing center while I teach my first semester. I am able to get double practice focusing on the content of a student's writing instead of nitpicking their grammar. I may be someone who values using correct grammar, but I also am far from perfect when it comes to grammar rules. I have also witnessed the shutting down students almost involuntarily do when grammar becomes the main focus of a class or discussion.

So here's where my selfish thoughts come back into play. I can apply the philosophies I learned and practiced in the writing center to my evaluations of my students' papers. Instead of simply telling my students' what they need to fix and give them a grade, I point out things they

have done well and what they could work on. Doing this should translate into the grade I have assigned each of their papers. While it is highly unlikely many students will come see me during my office hours seeking help on their paper, I'm hoping this way of evaluating their papers at least makes me a less intimidating authority figure. I'm hoping my students will, rather than view me as I'm the teacher and you're the student so listen to everything I say because you'll learn something, see me as someone who is facilitating their learning.