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## One-on-One in a World of Twenty-Four

by Brittney Allen

**Keywords:** Individual appointments, face-time, tutor neutrality, teacher power dynamic, one-on-one.

**Abstract:** As a long-time tutor, I was startled by the lack of individual time I got with my students as I took on the more powerful role of Graduate Instructor. I fear that I lose a lot of my effectiveness due to no longer being a peer to English 1010 students. I explore why that is and potential ways to fight back against lost facetime in what ways I can.

Getting a job at the Writing Center was easily one of the smartest moves of my undergraduate career. It happened almost offhandedly—I was between jobs as a warehouse worker and kennel assistant at the shelter when I saw the posting for “Writing Center Tutor” on the school’s job search site. I knew the center’s director from community open mic nights and simply from time around the English building. I applied for the job and sent an email, and almost immediately received an enthusiastic reply coupled with “Why haven’t you already been working here?!”

Within six months I was promoted to supervisor, and Utah State University’s Writing Center became a second home. Being promoted meant spending my summers in the Writing Center as well, tutoring while tackling large projects such as the annual rewrite of the Policies & Procedures manual (as well as the Supervisor Handbook). I witnessed and helped lead the Writing Center through big periods of expansion with the addition of the Library Writing Center and Science Writing Center. Upon graduating with my Bachelor’s degree, I was unexpectedly lucky enough to continue working at the Writing Center during my gap year when my original plans for international teaching fell through (I married a valley boy instead—oops!). This semester (my first as a Master’s student and Graduate Instructor) marks my ninth semester as a tutor and supervisor, including the summers. My directors, fellow supervisors, and each wave of new tutors became deep and valued friends.

The shift to Graduate Instructor has been rather large in several ways. Whereas I spent years getting cozy with students in one-on-one settings and maximizing my effectiveness to fit the 25-minute appointment span, I now spend 150 minutes per week trying to reach an audience of 23 students. Where I was comfortable and grateful to leave student papers completely in the hands of their authors, cheerfully answering when questioned that I have no authority on a

student's potential grade, I am now the red-pen-bearer. I grade and comment directly on the paper, since I'm often grading from my laptop at home instead of holding face-to-face appointments with students and going over their papers in front of them. While I can't even fathom how much bigger teaching English 1010 would feel without a background in the curricula and extensive experience with the papers and students at large, there are gaps between tutoring and teaching that I didn't know to be prepared for. Namely, despite my standing in front of my students three times a week, I feel like I'm losing effectiveness by not focusing concentrated bursts of face time with each student for each paper.

I recognize to do so would be possible, but incredibly exhausting and more demanding of me than my emotional budget for teaching allots. When I meet with students during my office hours for paper revisions or get emails with questions or advance drafts, they fall into the category of "Checklist Items." Especially with email, these student interactions are so pointed that they rarely take up much time. Most of my freshman students are just as busy as I am, between schoolwork and jobs and the big adjustment to adulthood. Just like me, they're trying to get questions answered to complete an item on their to-do list and want to move through that list as quickly as possible. The physical limitation of time demands I treat them with the same efficiency.

Meetings in the Writing Center are isolated 20- to 25-minute sessions wherein you get to know the student, the assignment, and identify their issues while offering individualized advice in one fell swoop. Having similar intense sessions with 23 students for all four papers comes down to between 1,840 and 2,300 minutes of my time per class per semester—hours and hours of time I can't afford. Yet as I grade and leave comments on my student's papers, I'm often frustrated by how much more articulate I could be with my feedback in speech. I entreat students

to visit with me or the Writing Center for help with specific things, lamenting how much easier it would be to give them my feedback if only I were their tutor and had them next to me.

However, even if I made the time in my schedule, there is no guarantee that I could reach the same level of effectiveness in a session that I could as a tutor. When discussing my paper in the Writing Center, my tutor pointed out that there is a huge perceived difference between asking a peer for help and asking your professor. To incoming freshmen, the idea of meeting with your professor outside of the classroom is a new and intimidating concept. The students I will be teaching as an English 1010 and 2010 instructor are primarily first-year college students. As a tutor, I am able to sit side-by-side with them as a peer figure, opening more channels of dialogue that I lose as an authority figure.

The value of a low-pressure peer mentor session is undeniable, but also incompatible by definition with my status as an instructor. As a tutor, it is easier to be neutral on the quality of a paper as well as its topic, as my time with the paper ends at the half-hour mark. The power dynamic in the classroom renders impossible that neutrality as I wield the power of assigning each paper a grade. In my role as Graduate Instructor, I can't serve as an objective peer.

Nonetheless, individual face-time with each student and their papers is something I know to be more effective than not. I plan to make more room for its potential benefits as I move into my second semester of teaching. A few ways to do this include making room to hold one-on-one mini-conferences during class time, or possibly increasing the number of times my students visit the Writing Center from twice each semester to once per each paper (doubling their requirement to four visits). What I've learned during my first semester as a Graduate Instructor is the incredible value of individual appointments, and with the help of the Writing Center, it is something I can ensure my students are able to take advantage of no matter the extra cost to me.

Master Tutor

Brittney Allen

Draft 1

Getting a job at the Writing Center was easily one of the smartest moves of my undergraduate career. It happened almost offhandedly—I was between jobs as a warehouse worker and kennel assistant at the shelter when I saw the posting for “Writing Center Tutor” on the school’s job search site. I knew the center’s director from community open mic nights and simply from time around the English building. I applied for the job and sent an email, and almost immediately received an enthusiastic reply coupled with “Why haven’t you already been working here?!”

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- I am at 750 words and need help arriving at some sort of proposal or solution.

What I've learned is the incredible value of individual appointments, but how do I fit that into my busy grad student life when I've crunched the numbers and can't afford the time?

- ~~Edw~~ Time intensive of note-leaving on papers  
- is an audio function  
• Video?

- \* Focus on value of meeting face-to-face  
- 1010 & 2010 students wouldn't meet prof.  
new intimidating concept
- Convincing/requiring them to meet w/ me  
- Cancel class to meet w/ me?

*gentle  
cuts*

Master Tutor

Brittney Allen

Draft 2

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\* More explicitly what I lose  
• Power dynamic w/ grades,  
easier to be neutral on quality & topic as tutor



Writing Center New Tutor Observation

Tutor: Megan Ririe  
Semester/Year: Fall 2018 Start Time: 1:30 End Time: 1:53  
Observed by: Brittney Allen

Tutor Checklist for Session

- How did the Tutor begin the session (i.e. greeting the student/explaining the Writing Center procedure)?

✓ Pulled out the chair for student  
Asked if had ever been before.  
✓ "Help with any & all stages of writing"  
Explained what notes she will be taking & encouraged them to give input & take their own notes

- What techniques did the tutor use to give effective feedback to the student?

Reading out loud "ears catch what the eyes don't"  
✓ Good at repeating what she heard back to the student  
Good at responding to the writer as a reader  
✓ Gave explanations for her suggestions & questions

- What Questions and strategies did the tutor use to discover the student's concerns with the paper?

Asked right away what his specific concerns were  
Asked if student was comfortable reading his work out loud

- What effective open-ended questions did the tutor ask?

"What specifically ... ?"  
Rephrased what she understood from the introduction/thesis  
✓ "What's your idea behind \_\_\_\_\_ so I can understand?"



Writing Center New Tutor Observation

Tutor: Camilla Sanabria  
Semester/Year: Fall 2016 Start Time: 12:00 End Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Observed by: Brittney Allen

Tutor Checklist for Session

- How did the Tutor begin the session (i.e. greeting the student/explaining the Writing Center procedure)?  
*Sympathized & made student feel comfortable  
Gave student a refresher of WC goals  
Greeted the student by name*
- What techniques did the tutor use to give effective feedback to the student?  
*Reverse outlining - explained & taught it to the student & then they did it together  
Prompted student along without overwhelming them with questions  
Repeated back to the student what they understood  
Asked about the student's career plans*
- What Questions and strategies did the tutor use to discover the student's concerns with the paper?  
*Clarified the class's goals  
"What were you hoping to work on today?"  
"What are the expectations & requirements of this assignment?"*
- What effective open-ended questions did the tutor ask?  
*Lots on the paper assignment & its purpose  
"Let's go over those."  
- Good questions w/c questioning*



Writing Center New Tutor Observation

Tutor: Jessie Hahn  
Semester/Year: Fall 2016 Start Time: 11:30 End Time: 11:55  
Observed by: Brittney Allen

Tutor Checklist for Session

- How did the Tutor begin the session (i.e. greeting the student/explaining the Writing Center procedure)?

Greeted the student by name  
Joked about the day of the week  
Asked if they had ever been in  
\* Looked at & asked questions about the pre-appointment form  
Gave speech, referenced the triangle on the wall ✓

- What Questions and strategies did the tutor use to discover the student's concerns with the paper?

✓ Asked clarifying questions from the pre-appointment ticket  
Prioritized what the student wanted to work on, kept him aware of time  
Wrote them at the top of the notes

- What techniques did the tutor use to give effective feedback to the student?

Notes took at the beginning of the session, wrote down what the student wanted to talk about  
Let the student then look at the list & determine priorities  
Read out loud at student's preference  
✓ Read & walked student through the notes she took at the end

- What effective open-ended questions did the tutor ask?

"Tell me about \_\_\_\_"  
Very warm & welcoming.  
"What would you say your \_\_\_\_?"  
Typed student's answer ✓  
in notes  
"What do you like about \_\_\_\_?"  
"How do you feel about \_\_\_\_?"