

4-18-2019

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Recommended Citation

Thimmes, Sophia, "Making Sandcastles with the Sands of Time" (2019). *Tutor's Column*. Paper 34.
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/wc_tutor/34

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Making Sandcastles with the Sands of Time

Sophia Thimmes

April 18 2019

Abstract:

Rushing through a tutoring session can seem alluringly efficient, but this theorized efficiency is a faulty conception. In a tutoring session, moving through content too quickly can lead to discussion based only on surface level observations. By being fully present and taking the time to explore ideas in depth, a tutor is able to supply a Writing Center visitor with much more helpful and in-depth insights.

Key Words: time management, mindfulness, tutoring

My father asks me how I am in the morning, and I give him short, sharp replies as I pour my coffee into my to-go cup and head out the door. I burn the roof of my mouth because I don't wait for it to cool and trace the budding blisters with the tip of my tongue. I speed along the February slush and have to spend my birthday money on a speeding ticket. I hurriedly walk across campus without pausing to tie the shoelaces that lash around my ankle bones. When I run into a friend from a history course I took two semesters ago, I calculate how I can move the conversation along as swiftly as possible. I chirp out automatic pleasantries. *How are you?? Good, good! And that thing? Great! Oh, I'm doing fine. Well, I've really got to go...it was nice seeing you! Good luck with the thing! Have a good day!*

I rush along to the Writing Center and settle into my position behind the desk. When a student comes into my tutoring session and begins to explain his paper to me, I interrupt him with questions before he has the chance to fully illustrate his ideas. His halted syllables fall from his mouth and drop emptily to the floor. I anxiously watch the clock. I try to arrive at some astute point before really getting into the meaty part of the writing. I make surface level comments and try to find a way to resolve an issue as quickly as possible. I wonder if he will have time to take the survey. The supervisor observing me makes note of the minutes I did not use in my session. *Make full use of time* is printed on my observation sheet in neat handwriting.

It makes sense. Sinking into time and not rushing a session along requires a tutor to be fully there with a student. If a tutor is fully present in a session, they give their student the gift of someone who is fully invested, fully listening, and--because this tutor has been paying full attention to the session--the gift of someone who is able to respond to concerns in depth or to

pick up on things that the student hadn't considered. The tutor is now capable of asking questions and offering guidance that is more meaningful because they've allowed themselves to be fully present in a session.

I try to change the way I've been framing time--like it's something to arrive at the end of.

In cultures outside of the west, time is conceptualized differently. It exists in a different physical space. When referring to the past, people in the West gesture behind them, while people in other cultures may gesture above or beside them (Cooperrider, Kensy, and Rafael Núñez 2016). By gesturing behind them, those living in the West indicate that they see time as something to distance themselves from. They look constantly towards the future. This may not always be bad thing, but it can produce restlessness and an inability to settle into the present moment. Those who gesture beside them when referencing time invoke another way of looking at time—as something that walks alongside them.

If the way we experience time is something that depends on our or our culture's subjective way of conceptualizing it, why not frame it as something to relish and to play with? This makes us more present and allows us the space to actually enjoy and to savor whatever the task at hand is. If the sands of time are slowly passing through the hourglass, one might as well make sandcastles with the pooling sand. In a tutoring session, this mentality can manifest itself in a myriad of ways. It can mean taking the time to fully pick apart one specific idea in a paper, asking the student more open-ended questions, or taking time to pull up resources. Even if you touch on less issues in a session as a result, the interaction will be more meaningful because it has been more in depth.

In my tutoring sessions, I start to allow myself to take up time. I focus on grounding myself in the session by truly listening to what the student is saying and opening myself to the writing that is in front of me. I breathe deeply and make sure to make frequent eye contact with the student. I remind myself to more talk more slowly. I allow both the student and myself time to consider ideas and to articulate our thoughts. I invite time to walk alongside me. Suddenly, using the time in a tutoring session becomes easier, and I forget to look at the clock. Instead of feeling panicked to arrive at some conclusion, issues are resolved as I let the session unfold organically.

The strange thing about giving time to someone else, is that it expands one's sense of time. Hoarding time or rushing through it only makes it feel more scarce. Bringing meaning to time by using it to work with others increases the feeling of time affluence (Mogilner et al 2012). By pausing to focus on the needs of a writing center visitor, you are actually making yourself richer with time.

Reducing speed in a tutoring session will not only make the tutor feel more capable and calm, but it will set the visitor at ease as well. If a tutor relaxes into time instead of frantically trying to arrive at the end of a session, this will set a more calming tone and give the writing center visitor the space to open up about their concerns and ideas.

In a tutoring session, a minute will pass at exactly the pace that a minute will, whether or not you're anticipating the arrival of the next and trying to hurry it along. The time in a tutoring session is brief and rushing along can seem tempting. However, by allowing yourself to take the time to unwrap each minute, you give both yourself and the writing center visitor the gift of a

mind that is fully listening, fully there. Why not give yourself the gift of allowing yourself to be exactly where you are and to relax into time instead of pushing against it?

I really didn't have to speed on that day in February. I still got to class in plenty of time.

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