## LETTERS TO NEW EMPLOYEES

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Dear Incoming STARS WRITE Mentor,

This is my advice to you...

Take your job seriously, and seriously have fun with it. As a mentor you get to see your mentee as a whole person. Remember, in the same way you are working toward a better writer and overall process—not a better grade on one paper—you are also in a position to encourage better thinking and more successful student strategies in general.

Do the best you can, and realize that you, like all papers and people, are a work in progress. Have patience with yourself, and especially your student; incremental progress is a beautiful thing. Keep a student mind—you will learn as much or more from mentoring as your mentee will learn from you. Even remind your student during the sessions that you are both learning from one another. We all have valuable approaches to writing and research, whether they are useful as lessons of what not to do or best practices. Learn from your student; if you are in this position you are likely interested in your own writing process—allow yourself to change and experiment with their strategies. Mentorship is a collaborative learning process that takes time, and true learning and academic development is not always linear, so know that every lesson is worth learning every time.

As a mentor you can befriend your mentees, but in a quasi-friend professional sort of way with boundaries. The long-term relationship is where the real work can be done, but it also takes trust and getting to know one another. I always take time to check in with the student and humanize them by asking how their week is going and how things are going in general. This is incredibly helpful for building a relationship and identifying challenges and strengths in a student’s academic situation. Constantly contextualize yourself and your student. This could sound like you saying, “This has worked for me in these classes,” or really listening to your student if they say, “It’s my first time writing an analytical paper,” and catering your suggestions to their existing competencies. Asking questions and identifying where your students are and where they need the most support will make your efforts far more effective.

Setting clear boundaries is crucial. For example, rescheduling one meeting time is okay, but if the student is trying to shift the schedule too much and it’s interfering with your own health and success, draw the line. Also, you are not a counselor, so get to know the resources on campus for Counseling And Psychological Service (CAPS), sexual assault and domestic violence, etc. to serve your mentee effectively if they are in need. Also, be a good employee and follow LSS’s rules—they have plenty of helpful boundaries to adhere to.

Enjoy your position and the mentorship process! Please be sure to thank yourself and your student regularly for such commitment and investment.

Sincerely,

Carson Watts

Former STARS WRITE Mentor and LSS MSI Learning Assistant

B.A. Sociology major, Politics minor, Class of 2013
Dear STARS Writing Mentor/Tutor,

Congratulations on recently becoming a STARS Writing Mentor/Tutor. It is important to have tutors that work exclusively with transfer students, given that transfer students’ needs are different from other students. As a recent/continuing transfer student, you have the opportunity to help a transfer student who will be thankful for you to share your writing strategies and advice. Maybe you know what it feels like to doubt your writing, or your own struggles with becoming a better writer. Whatever your experiences with writing, always consider drawing from your own strategies and tips for effective writing practices.

My own first mentorship was a positive experience, but it took patience, trust, and honesty. It is, I think, important to deploy patience and honesty when working with students, you must be ready to adapt to students’ diverse needs. However, you must be meticulous in spelling out the terms of the mentorship from the outset. You need to set expectations between you and the student, as to prevent miscommunication(s). Therefore, I will suggest three things: set boundaries from the get go, draw from various writing strategies to help your student, and be ready to challenge yourself and your student.

First and foremost, I think you need to set some boundaries.

Here are a few questions to consider:

What are the student’s/mentor’s goals for the quarter? Will the student be working on a specific writing strategy (Creating Thesis, Outlines, and Topic/Transition Sentences)? Or will you be collaborating on a specific writing project? What is the student’s writing strengths/weaknesses? How will you communicate effectively? (E-mail? Texts?)

In addition, take care to include the student in all of the decisions, even those you would make alone, like choosing writing strategies or specific goals. This is especially important in the beginning of your sessions because it will help set the mentorship between you and the student. Feeling comfortable with arrangements, I think your next task will be to help develop effective writing strategies or techniques. For instance, I have found that students respond positively to “free writes.” Free writes are chances for students to write freely about any given topic without worrying about content or grammatical structure and this is an opportunity for students to think through their ideas. Often times students know what they want to write about, but they need help to draw out their ideas. Given this, you may find that some students are visual learners, and for them, that means you must have diagrams, such as “Venn diagrams.” Venn diagrams are reminiscent of high school; remember those circles that would overlap? Well, some students still need visual aides to understand their frameworks and writing capabilities. I would suggest paying close attention to the EDUC 194F course that you may have to take. In the course, we read about different strategies that can help some students to learn effectively.

This position also requires you to draw from your own writing experiences. What techniques worked best for you? How do you approach writing? How have you become a better writer? How do you conduct research? These are the questions that you should ask yourself. From these ideas, you should be able to formulate effective writing strategies. Recent transfer students have diverse needs and
knowing your strengths and weaknesses as a writer will be valuable in helping new/continuing students develop their own. Often times, students are good writers, but they need to work on “problem areas” like excessive quoting, not enough quoting, floating quotes, run-ons, and other similar small writing mistakes. While other students might require more help in organizing their thoughts and ideas, theses, outlines, etc. Sometimes, students don’t require much writing help and instead lack the training in research and research paper crafting. This is when you can draw from any and all of your own previous proficiencies!

It has been my practice, that the best mentorships have involved students whose abilities as writers has also shaped my own. What I mean is that as a person who has taken writing classes and workshops to write effectively and strategically, I know I’m not the best writer. However, I do work on my writing every single day and thus I am taking the steps to become a better writer. Being a STARS writing mentor also has allowed me to strengthen my own skills, because I have to employ the techniques that I develop to make sure they work! Imagine that! This position will help you see how the strategies and techniques we learn in EDUC 194F can be put to use, if they work or if they don’t.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to check out some of my favorite writing tools:

The Craft of Research (Third Edition) by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. This book is a great tool for students interested in writing academic research papers.

Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace (Tenth Edition) by Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Colomb. This book is an amazing read and has great writing exercises.

If all else fails, always trust yourself and communicate with your student. If you meet any challenges or barriers, know that the best tool is communication, patience, and honesty. Be truthful about your own limitations and don’t be afraid to try new things!

Best,

- A previous STARS Write Mentor/Tutor
Dear Future LSS Employee,

Coming into a job as a MSI Learning Assistant for Statistics as a second year psychology student was very intimidating to say the least. Not only was I one of the youngest of my colleagues but I was very aware that I would be younger than the students I was tutoring so the age gap was intimidating. However I had to constantly remind myself that I got my job as a tutor because I had the skill sets to tutor the given class due to my prior success in it, and my interpersonal skills. Prior to becoming a tutor I had received an A+ in Statistics. I was very surprised because in high school I barely passed with a C. However knowing that I did poorly in this class in high school I was destined to do well in college which ultimately led me to my job I am so grateful for.

I believe my background as a Psychology student and working with people while I babysat and volunteered served as one of the best tools I had coming into this job. I state this because there are plenty of people who do well in classes but not all of them have the personal qualities that will make them a tutor. I believe my past in not succeeding but still preserving made me more relatable to the students and ultimately made them feel more comfortable with me and helped make a more productive learning environment.

As I previously mentioned I am a Psychology student tutoring Statistics, so the fact that I was not an Engineering major or science major made me feel subpar almost because almost all my tutees asked me if I was. Upon finding out I wasn’t ended up surprised because they did not expect me to “be smart” enough to tutor a math course. Despite being offended I simply brushed it off and realized that me being a female Psychology student who was also a math tutor ultimately did more good and broke stereotypes. So my best advice to those who may be insecure in their potential tutoring remember you have your job for a reason, and you have all the skillsets to do your job exceptionally and your mind can be your own worse enemy. I had to learn to reconstruct my thoughts about my ability so I can prove to myself and my tutees that relied on me that I can live up to my title. I believe struggling with my own personal confidence in my tutoring ability was the biggest hindrance for me.

Once I was more confident in myself I realized that my sessions ran smoother because the tutees rely on me, and if I give off the vibe of uncertainty they won’t feel comfortable and the learning environment will be deterred. So upon my attitude change all my sessions got better and I realized that I stopped worrying so much about myself and more about the students which led to more interactive work with them because I was talking less and letting them talk more. I then acted more as a facilitator and not a teacher, I always encourage conversation with the students and encouraged them that they know more than they think they do, and that they are their own best teachers. I gave them what I once lacked which was confidence.

Overall from my education in learning how to be a tutor and facilitator from Education 96 I learned that the way we view ourselves and our education greatly influences how we will perform. I also learned that working in groups is better than working alone. It may seem obvious to some but I learned the reasons why which I feel like is the more important part because I always come across those students who shy away from collaborative work. However since I now am educated on the benefits of peer to peer learning and studying I can tell them the benefit of interacting with others rather than just telling them
to just because. Lastly I learned that patience is really a virtue that should always be practiced, especially as a MSI tutor. That is so because anyone can come to your sessions, and everyone has different personalities and learning styles and you as the tutor have to learn how to cater to all of them and put your personal comfort and references aside and cater to the student while remaining ethical of course. Even though I may have illustrated this job to be daunting it has provided me with some of the best lessons in life I have ever learned, and is also very rewarding. Being able to walk around campus and see previous students I tutored tell me how much I helped them is priceless.
Dear new LSS employee,

First of all, I would like to say congratulations on the new job! Personality, it has been one of the more rewarding jobs and experiences I have had during my four years here at UCSC. This job is both rewarding and challenging, so remember that you being a student comes first. Once you find the balance, you will be able to excel and offer students the support they need. Reflecting on my experience of being a MSI leader for AMS5 – Intro to Statistics, some key points of advice come to mind.

It is really important to find who you are as a tutor. Think about your favorite professor or teaching assistant, what did you like about them? Try to incorporate some of those things into how you work with your students. For example, I find it really helpful to let my students know that I too am a student and have had struggles. I also really enjoy joking with my students. This helps break the ice and allows them to not worry about needing help.

Another important thing specific to AMS5 is practice problems! Some professors assign mandatory homework which is really helpful because it forces students to practice. I find it really helpful to choose a few problems from the textbook or to come up with problems of my own to give to the students as warm-up problems. This provides a nice self check for the students, they can see how well they know the material and measure how often they needed to refer to their notes while working through the problems. Sometimes working through one of the warm-up questions answers a question they had on the homework. I also do a lot of quick assessments for more conceptual topics because sometimes students don’t catch the conceptual parts of the course. By doing quick assessments you are able to give them a quick quiz and then review and reinforce those important topics.

In all of my sessions, I really encourage students to work with each other as this has proven to be beneficial in improving learning. This can be difficult in smaller sessions but just because there are only a couple of students doesn’t mean you should be the one doing all the work. When working out problems in front of students, make them work with you. Ask questions about formulas or conceptual questions like “What’s the purpose of doing it this way.” This way you are keeping them engaged and they aren’t just writing down what you’re doing but not paying attention.

On that note, it is important to mention that this job has a huge learning curve. I feel like most tutors I have talked to, including myself, say that their first quarter being a tutor they lectured a lot. Remember that the students get enough lecturing from the professor so it is important for tutors to try to take on different methods and strategies. Your first quarter you may fall into the constant lecturing but make sure to reflect on this and ask yourself how you can change things up. I’ve been tutoring for four quarters and while I have a pretty good idea of what I like to do, sometimes it changes. Know that students have different ways of learning so it is nice to be flexible in your skills and think about how you might ask questions or teach topics differently.

One final note, is that it is okay to offer “advice” about the course. You’ve taken this class so you know what you did to succeed. Even though everyone has different studying strategies this allows them to have another idea to try out for themselves. I don’t know about you but personally my studying style changed a lot throughout my college career, some things may have worked for one course but not another. It is fine to tell your students what you did or even what you wish you would have done. I have found a lot of my students will try something I suggest and report back that they made a slight adjustment and it’s working really well for them. Encourage students to share their study techniques with each other.

Good luck in your exploration as a tutor. I hope this letter offers some helpful insights but remember to make it your own. If you’re struggling to figuring it all out, you have a great staff to offer support and assist you so use the resources they have to offer!
To the future Learning Assistant of AMS7:

I would like to begin this letter by saying that you are in for a treat. Working with Learning Support Services has been one of the best experiences I have had at my time here at UCSC. I believe the students who get the opportunity to work for LSS have a more fulfilling experience than those that do not, and I hope you enjoy your time as much as I did.

One great aspect of all the training that is provided by LSS is that a lot of the activities, workshops, and discussions are discipline specific, so all the math/statistics tutors are grouped together during trainings. This has always been beneficial to me, because each discipline has its own challenges and nuances for how best to educate students, and so by being able to talk to your fellow math tutors it is a great way to learn strategies and techniques that you can incorporate into your work. One thing I feel has contributed to my success as a Learning Assistant is the fact that I don’t actually like math, and yet work as a math tutor. In discussions with other math tutors you usually hear something along the lines of, “I feel my enthusiasm for math helps me get my students enthusiastic about the subject as well.” But for me, it has always been the opposite. I don’t like math, and that has been my motivation to make math fun for my students, because I know the importance of making math fun for me. Now, I don’t know which camp you fall into, but I feel that whether you like math or not, using your personal relationship with the subject to make the sessions more enjoyable and productive for the students is key.

This may sound corny, but working with LSS really has shaped who I am as a person. The most noticeable for me is public speaking. Before working for LSS the idea of public speaking absolutely terrified me. But facilitating an MSI session, when you have fifteen students relying on you when they are most vulnerable (i.e. asking for help), it forces you to move out of your comfort zone whether you want to or not. When you have people depending on you it helps you grow as a person. Now, after seven quarters of working with LSS, I am comfortable with public speaking and working with people. My experience with LSS helped me with other jobs as well, including the UCSC Summer Orientation. I had a blast giving campus tours and speaking with people from all backgrounds, and I believe I would not have been able to do it without the time working with and the support from LSS.

You will face a lot of challenges working as a Learning Assistant. There will be days when your MSI session doesn’t go exactly as you have planned, or what you anticipated would be the mood and response of your students will end up being wrong. Hopefully those days are far between and you can reflect on what went wrong and make your future sessions better. It is easy to see your students as a homogenous group instead of a collection of diverse individuals all with different needs. Some will respond more positively to your teaching strategies than others. The key is to not take a frustrated student personally, but to take that as an opportunity to help the student in need. Being a Learning
Assistant is a constant learning process, one that challenges you for the better. I wish you all the best in your future work, and I hope you enjoy being the Learning Assistant for AMS7 as much as I did.

Sincerely,

Jessica Johnston
Dear newest AMS 11A MSI Learning Assistant,

First of all, congratulations! I can't begin to describe what an amazing opportunity this is going to be for you. You should definitely be excited for what's about to come with your sessions and teaching! In a challenging class like AMS 11A, you'll find frantic students coming to you confused by the complicated theories described in class. Although this can be scary if you're a first-time teacher (like I was), you just have to remember them, and yourself, of what the basics are. How do you find a derivative, limit, one-sided limit, etc.? Even though every theory explained in class is extremely important, it's not what the students are tested on and expected to know in full detail. It's hard to be able to differentiate the different notations of expressions and understand the terminology! If you are terrified of public speaking like I was when I started this position, just remember to talk loudly and practice beforehand so you can just talk to the class instead of reading the paper (trust me, it helps)! Just make notes of everything you want to say and you'll be golden! Also make sure you pay attention in the lectures throughout the quarter so you can differentiate what they need to know and what they won't be tested on. For each of my sessions, the goal I usually came prepared with was concepts they were going over for the entire week (usually 3-4 concepts). It was really helpful already having a plan because when you ask students what they want to go over, you won't always get a response! Once discussing a concept with the class and asking questions to see what they do know, I found it easiest to work out an example problem on the board, then have them practice on their own or with others and share on the board afterwards. That way, they learn each concept they need to know, and are able to practice on their own, which is the best way to practice math problems.

When doing examples, try to focus on application problems (from either the book or Katznelson's Review Questions online) because those are perfect practice for the midterm and final and what they ultimately need to take from the class in order to move on to AMS 11B.

If you have any other questions about anything that you encounter throughout your MSI experience, feel free to contact me via email!

Ellen.espinosa@gmail.com

Good luck with everything!

-Ellen Espinosa
Dear Future BIOL 20A MSler,

I want to start off by say congratulations. You just landed yourself the best on-campus student job you could ever hope for. I’m not saying this because the pay is incredible or because you have a set schedule (although those things are true), I am saying you have the best student job on-campus because what you will be doing will actually make a huge impact for the students. Not only do you truly help students achieve goals they are struggling towards, but you get paid for it too. How great is that! However, this job is not something that you can slack off in. You have an incredible responsibility to your students. They rely on you to give them the help they need, whether they are able to articulate it or not. In many cases the students who are struggling the most are the ones who ask for the least amount of help, and it is your job, your responsibility, to incorporate these students into an active learning environment. Many of the students you will be working with are underclassmen who have never taken a college level biology course before. Be mindful of this. Be mindful that the lecture hall and professor may intimidate them, that they may have little or no foundational biology or chemistry knowledge, and that their experience in this course could unwarrantedly shun them from the major and career they hope to achieve. Although these are some heavy thoughts to keep in mind, it is important to maintain a safe and friendly learning environment as well. Students need to know that at least someone cares about their progress. For some of your students, you are their only approachable source of help, so be there for them. All anyone can ask of you is that you try your hardest. Don’t expect to be a perfect tutor your first quarter; you will learn a lot with experience. But never stop caring for your students or trying your hardest.

As far as specific advice for tutoring Bio 20A, it is important to always stay conscious of the fact that this is at least the first college level molecular biology course these students have taken (some students haven’t even really been exposed to molecular biology in high school). This means that you really need to approach the course from the basics. Assume that your students have no context for the material, unless otherwise told. The general context you think about biology in is not yet how these students think of biology. This means that you are not just teaching your students the material, but you are also teaching them how to think and talk like a biologist. Your job is to transition students into loving the field of biology and that starts with getting them to stop thinking about biology in the cartoony pictures and concepts and to start thinking about biology in the context of Brownian motion, genetic coding, and chemical interactions.

This job is fun. And you do really make a difference for your students. They really appreciate the time and effort you put into facilitating their learning, so don’t let them down. The worst feeling you can have as a tutor is seeing your students have to retake the course. So try your hardest, be friendly and helpful, and not only present the material, but try to facilitate the students to start thinking like biologists.
Dear new Tutors and MSI learning assistants,

First of all, welcome to the LSS family!

Let me begin by telling you a little bit about my experience as an MSI learning assistant for BIOC100A, B and C. To be honest, when I first started this job, I was quite scared. I was a really shy person who couldn’t even speak up in class without getting nervous. I was a person who lacked confidence. However, I applied for this job because I didn’t want to stay that way. I wanted to change for the better. I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and, most importantly, I wanted to share my love for biochemistry to everyone. In order to do so, I stepped up, and I know that you did too.

It was rough at first, because the professor who taught BIOC100A last year was a different one. The materials the two professors focused on were totally different. However, if this is the case, don’t let it discourage you. It might take a bit of time, but you will get the hang of it! You will end up learning more than you ever will by taking on this challenge.

As for the sessions, I made a lot of mistakes during my first few ones. My sessions didn’t go according to plan, the methods I used weren’t so effective, etc. What I’m trying to say is, I didn’t get it right when I first started. It took time for me to finally found the right strategy that worked best for my students (Think-Pair-and-Share strategy) and to be able to identify what my students were struggling with. These only came from trials and errors. So don’t be discouraged if you just started and are not getting it all together right away.

To sum up my experience as an MSI learning assistant, it has been an honor. I got the chance to improve my leadership skill and build my confidence, since I had to step up and lead the sessions. I got the chance to improve my time management skill, by learning how to balance time to study for my own classes and prepare for my sessions. I also got the chance to improve my creativity skill, since the more creative I could be, the more I could make my sessions interesting and engaging for my students. I also learned how great it feels when my students smiled when they understood the materials better after coming to my sessions. The phrase “I got it!” became my most favorite thing to hear. I always felt really appreciated whenever my students said “Thank you so much!” “These practice problems are great!” and “I’ve always been looking forward to your sessions.” It’s been a really great year for me and if you get the chance to tutor the whole series just like me, do it. You will get to know your students better and know how much they improve throughout the year. I wish you the best of luck and I hope that you will gain a lot of experience!

Best regards,

Nuttha Mahakanchanakul
To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Tyler DeWitt and I was an MSI instructor for the Biol 101 course (Molecular Biology) in the Spring of 2016. If I could give you any advice I would start by letting you know that diligence, patience and organization are the three qualities that I have found to be of the most importance to my success as an MSI mentor. Diligence is a quality that I believe anyone assisting other in the learning process should have. There were many times throughout the quarter when I was having a difficult time keeping up with prepping material for my sessions and with my own classes as well. I would make weekly problem sets that corresponded to the current material, but I would find myself spending more and more time preparing these worksheets for my sessions and began to feel behind in my classes. It took me several weeks to become fast enough and allow more time for my own classes and studying, but I honestly feel that my students benefited from having the extra weekly practice material that I would prepare. In order to maintain a diligent ethic, I was forced to become more organized.

Organization is probably the only quality that every mentor will have to obtain. Between the complicated and time consuming time-sheets, the requirement to take the additional STEV 96 class, the attendance in the class itself, the three sessions, maintaining full-time student standing, working off campus, and in a lab on campus I found my days completely packed. I was completely forced to organize my schedule and plan ahead, which I was previously unaccustomed to. However, being organized allowed me to continue all of my activities, and will definitely assist you in your pursuits too. Patience was probably the most difficult and important tool as an MSI leader. There will be times when you find yourself doing your best to explain something to your students, and your explanation won’t match up with their own thought process. Not only is this frustrating for the student, but also for you as a tutor. I remember feeling like I had failed and just couldn’t communicate my explanations clearly. This is a very critical point for their learning as well as your own. My only advice for this type of situation is to not give up on your student and keep trying new ways to explain the topic. Sometimes just the slightest change in phrasing or even just repetition can allow for the student to see the new perspective and also allow you to adjust your teaching style accordingly and even become more aware of the differences in individuals learning styles.

All three of these skills allowed for the bettering of myself as a mentor and also assisted in the interactive learning of my students. However, I can offer a style suggestion for your own MSI sessions as well. I believe that working in groups of three allows for the most effective learning because it allows students to communicate their initial ideas in a smaller environment before the larger group of students. Being an MSI mentor is challenging and time-consuming, but the pay-off is great; nothing feels quite the same, or remains as memorable as assisting someone else in their own learning. Additionally, it is surprising how much more can be learned by teaching someone else and help our own growth as a fellow student. Good luck, and I hope this letter of advice may help you in your sessions!

Best, Tyler DeWitt
Dear Future BIOE 20B MSI Leader,

This is my first quarter as an MSI leader for BIOE 20B, but I have been a BIOL 20A tutor and MSI leader in the past. Personal qualities that have been helpful to me in all of my positions with LSS have been that I am outgoing and extremely motivated. This helped me connect with my students and communicate with them that I too have struggled in classes and have overcome hardships with a strong work-ethic and reaching out for help.

When I first started my BIOE 20B MSI position, I was a bit nervous that I would be unable to explain the hundreds of details about animals, and especially plants since I am a human bio major. However, making sure I paid attention in lecture helped abate this nervousness. I remembered details quicker than I thought, and was able to incorporate information, for example, diseases, from relevant classes to make things more interesting in my explanations to my students; this was helpful to catch the attention of students who obviously thought the class material was dry.

Everybody is nervous their first day in leading a whole new group of students, but with time, the level of anxiety lessens thanks to the development of personal skills. Some skills my position with LSS augmented are public speaking, how to scaffold, how to see material in different lights, and how to be better organized. These skills helped my mind be at ease because I became more confident in my ability to deliver information successfully and efficiently, however, there are always ways to improve.

Challenges I face as an educator are refraining from lecturing, keeping one student from dominating a session, and improving the morale and curiosity of my students. I have found that prefacing sessions with my expectations that students participate and not rely on me for answers helps get them into game-mode. However, it is important not to sound too strict so they will want to come back! That’s why I always crack jokes when I can and come up with funny ways to remember things for tests; this helps them have fun with the material and have a desire to engage with it. Asking scaffolding questions keeps me from lecturing, and incites group discussion. If one student is answering all of my scaffolding questions, I have found it is useful to ask for student input from another side of the room, or to use the really vocal student’s intellect in explaining things completely. This is beneficial to everyone, including me, because a lot of people have different perspectives on things, and it is important to share them to obtain a more complete understanding. Additionally, it elucidates that knowing how something works is different than clearly explaining it using key terms. The interactive methods LSS training has shown us are also really helpful to refrain from lecturing, although it is sometimes difficult to think of ways to incorporate them. This comes with time!

I have found that with the plant section of the class, it is easier to incorporate these methods. The grouping of the information, for example, vascular vs. epidermal vs. ground tissue, and xylem vs. phloem, gives definitive boundaries in which material to assign which group to become experts on and share later. Also, there are lots of drawings that the students have to be able to label, which makes the sessions very interactive. When learning plant anatomy, I drew the same picture on a couple different white boards and split the students into groups so they can work together to label it from a given word bank, which I found to be very effective since structures like thorns vs. prickles vs. spines and sessiles vs. stipules can be confusing unless a picture is involved in the explanation.
Although for me plants are easier to incorporate interactive strategies, interactive strategies are still very possible to incorporate during the animal section. For example, assigning groups to become experts on different aspects of the circulatory system, such as electrical conduction in the heart vs. blood flow in the heart, or on different aspects of the digestive system, such as stomach function vs. small intestine function, and sharing later in group discussion is a good idea. Additionally, I have found what part of a system comes into play at what point, and which structure follows the next is confusing for students. To help my students figure out, for example, where the larynx is vs. the pharynx or the trachea, I have them look through their notes and try to dry a very simple schematic involving structures and arrows to figure that out. Then, I have them talk about function, and what triggers what to be released from where (such as a bolus entering the stomach triggers gastrin release from stomach mucosal cells which triggers HCl release from parietal cells in gastric pits). I feel anatomy is better to talk about before function.

Anyways, I hope my advice is helpful to you and you enjoy your position with LSS. Have fun with it, get to know your students, and don’t be afraid to admit you don’t know something. You will be setting a good example by asking the professor questions; your students should learn to communicate with their professors and TA’s anyhow.

Sincerely,

Lisa L.
When I first learned that I would be the MSI learning assistant for Biol 105 (genetics), I was really nervous. Two years had passed since I took the class myself. I wasn’t very confident in my abilities to teach the subject to other students. At first I perceived this to be a disadvantage, but surprisingly, it helped me relate to the students more. Biol 105 is the first upper division biology class for most students in the class. After having taken more upper division biology classes, students learn to approach questions differently than they were used in the lower division classes. Certain concepts that seem so fundamental and simple to us at this point are completely foreign and overwhelming to many of the students in Biol 105. For me, having to re-learn the material with them helped me relate to students for whom these concepts were completely new and have little to no experience approaching biological questions that require a lot of reasoning as well as an understanding of the material.

Many students coming straight from the Biol 20 series are used to answer questions in biology by selecting the answer the looks familiar as opposed to critically thinking and reasoning to first determine what the question is asking and then attempt to answer that question using what is known about the system. In my sessions, a lot of the students, especially those who came regularly, felt really confident in their understanding of the material before and right after the test. After the tests were returned, students learned the hard way the importance of taking your time when you approach a question and not to rush through a question just because the question format looks familiar. I would emphasize at the beginning the subtle difference between types of questions students will usually see in upper division biology classes compared to those they saw in lower division biology classes—it’s necessary for students to take their time and carefully go through each line of the question to really understand what the professor is asking. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize the conceptual meaning of the ratios we get from particular crosses. If students don’t understand from what or through which mechanism these ratios arise, they’re more likely to use the wrong method to calculate the probabilities of particular phenotypes in progeny just because the question looks like a question they've seen before.

In our own upper division biology classes, we get increasingly comfortable using technical terminology that we sometimes assume everyone know what we’re talking about when we use this kind of language. It’s important to realize that many students in Biol 105 aren’t very familiar with these terms, and although they should be encouraged to use proper vocabulary when discussing problems or concepts with you and other students, remember to first explain each new concept and the technical terminology associated with it using vocabulary they’re already familiar with before using it yourself absentmindedly as you explain concepts.

Biol 105 is a tricky class to be a MSI learning assistant for because the first half is very computationally heavy while the second half concentrates more on molecular biology. This makes it difficult sometimes since you have to be comfortable explaining the math behind the statistics we use to predict the phenotypes observed in the progeny of particular crosses, while also explaining, and sometimes emphasizing, the biological significance and context of this math. Then there’s this drastic shift into molecular biology concepts where many students tend to do a lot better in this section when they struggled in the previous section, and others that experience the opposite situation. This makes it
difficult for the learning assistant to balance explaining the math to those who are more inclined toward understanding molecular mechanisms and pathways, and then explaining the molecular mechanisms to those who tend to prefer the math. It gets difficult at times because most of the time you need to figure out at least three different ways to explain concepts.

Since Biol 105 moves quickly and has this dramatic shift in the nature of the material being taught, it's important that at the start of the quarter you determine when the midterm(s) is and what material will be tested. All five of my sessions this quarter have had consistent and frequent attendance, and there's never enough time to cover every single concept covered in lecture in each session. I'd start early and begin preparing a comprehensive midterm review early so that you're prepared when you need to hold a midterm review session and have to balance preparing for your own midterms around the same time.

Equally important as preparing students by ensuring that they understand the material presented in lecture is encouraging students to be confident in their abilities. Often times in MSI and tutoring, I've noticed that a lot of the time when students get frustrated and discouraged with the material they're struggling with, it's because they get overwhelmed early on and get too flustered to think clearly enough to analytically approach the question. I always tell them that when they get stuck on a problem and feel like they just don't know how to answer the question as a whole, to first start with pieces and identify what they do know. After doing that, hopefully things will start to come together. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but it's better than just getting discouraged and overwhelmed and then giving up on the question. If students are feel confident about what they do know, it's easier for them to connect the right dots when their minds aren't clouded by intimidation.

Try to make MSI sessions fun. When seemingly difficult concepts are introduced in a fun and simple way, it tends to stick more in students minds. When I learned genetics, our professor encouraged us to use pipe cleaners and beads to represent alleles on chromosomes to understand mitosis and the different types of gametes that arise from meiosis of a cell with a particular genotype. I went to the dollar store and made some 'chromosomes' for the midterm review, and found them to be really helpful in explaining what is happening as cells segregate in meiosis to produce different gametes. Another method I tried to make learning seemingly complicated concepts more fun is I'd make practice questions with interesting and sometimes fun phenotypes so the students could have a little fun while they did the math to find the answer. Also, when explaining how to elucidate biochemical pathways by feeding different nutrients in a pathway to mutants that can't grow without the nutrients, I used the lucky charms as the intermediate nutrients in the pathway.

Another thing to remember is to not freak out if you don't know the answer to every question. You're not a textbook and at times students may expect you to be, but you just need to remember that you're human and shouldn't be expected to know every little detail about genetics. If you don't know the answer, be honest. Many times I've been brought a question that I don't immediately know the answer to. Instead of guessing and having students think my answer is correct, I just let them know that I'm not really sure what the answer is, but maybe if we all work on it together, we can figure it out. This way, the right answer is usually reached, and students get the opportunity to see how you approach questions to answer them. I tend to ask myself questions about the system and try to use what I already know about the system to hopefully make sense of the situation described in the question. As I approach the problem, I ask these questions out loud to myself and to the students. By asking these
questions, you are able to engage students and get them to start thinking critically and collaborating to see how other students think through these kinds of questions.
Dear New Employee (BIOL 110 and 130),

Tutoring students is an experience that I have found to be challenging, yet extremely rewarding. I have tutored for both Cell Biology as well as Human Physiology at UCSC for LSS and it has proven to be a job that I truly came to enjoy. Tutoring for upper division biology courses can be intimidating, especially when amongst other undergraduate peers, some of who can be your friends or people in some of your own classes. However, the best advice I can give in order to be an effective tutor for upper division biology courses, is to review the material and be able to condense it. Biological pathways can be extremely detailed and complex, and I have observed that most students find it difficult because they try to simply memorize it all. In my first sessions of the quarter, I make it clear to my students that I will always be asking them questions, "why", because more important than memorizing all the names of the proteins involved in a process, for example, is understanding why they are there at all. Keeping this idea in mind has helped me generate session plans and activities for the students, which according to them, has helped them draw out the ideas that they are supposed understand from the abundant amount of reading they are expected to do.

Another piece of advice I should give is to remember that you have to tend to your own studying too! At times, I devoted much more time to preparing for tutoring than I should have been, and I realized I was putting off other things that was important for my own academic achievement. Overall, as I’m sure you will see, your ability to help students through the course, will be greatly appreciative of your work, especially because these courses in particular are difficult. The biggest challenge I face when tutoring might simply be the fact that I can tell when some students have the answers in their head, but what holds them back from speaking, and answering a question is their confidence in their understanding, and their fear of being wrong. Lack of self-efficacy, or ones ability to be able to trust themselves enough to display that they know or can do something, is something that many students, and myself included, commonly struggle with. Your role as a tutor can play a big part in being able to induce self-efficacy in your students, which to some degree is more important than being able to teach course content to a student. Good luck in your endeavor to be an educator! I can also be contacted if you needed any advice with tutoring, even if you wanted any tips from one biology student to another, at UCSC.

Best of Luck,

Shadi Arjmand
shadiarjmand14@gmail.com
Human Biology B.S. Undergraduate Senior
Research Participant in the Camps Lab at METX-UCSC
Hi there! You might not know me, or maybe you might, but I’m Ellen and I am/used to be (depending on when you read this) the MSI Learning Assistant for Chemistry 1B. I’m writing this letter to you (or you all) both because, let’s be honest, it’s part of my training and also so I can impart some of my advice to you. I guess just a little bit about myself first before I start, so you can get a sense of who I am. I’m currently, as of Spring 2013, a 2nd year Marine Biology major who also decided to minor in Chemistry after falling in love with Ochem (yes I’m weird). I was hired to be the MSI Learning Assistant for Chem 1B Spring 2012 right before we were let out for the summer, so this quarter (Spring 2013) is my 3rd quarter doing MSI for the General Chemistry series. I started out with 1B, was then assigned to MSI for 1A in the winter and now I’m back to the Gen Chem class I love, Chem 1B. Now that the introduction’s all done, let me tell you some of my experiences with doing MSI.

So I don’t know what the LSS tutoring/MSI programs are going to be like in the future, maybe they haven’t changed, but when I was hired, the Chem 1B MSI sessions started off as completely drop-in only. As a 2nd year student who: only had 1 year of college experience, used to only tutor floor mates with Chem and had never attended MSI before, EVER; this was a totally new experience to me. I didn’t know what to expect, nor did I know what I was in for. I will say, though, the one great thing about MSI-ing for an intro series is that you get a coworker (I’m sorry tutors) to help you out. Hopefully, that person (if you are doing MSI) is a veteran and isn’t new just like you, or at least has attended MSI before. I’m so eternally grateful that my coworker was like on her 9th quarter doing MSI for Chem 1B. If you do get a coworker like that, I urge you to become immediate best friends with that person. I’m not even kidding. I told her that it was my first quarter doing MSI and that I felt like I had no idea what I was doing, so she basically immediately took me under her wing and told me to ask her questions whenever I had one. Knowing that you can have someone like that to depend on while you’re still learning the ropes is such a great gift to have, but you can’t depend on them forever. I knew that my coworker could only me so far and that eventually she would graduate (she’s graduating this quarter, Spring 2013). And as much as she was an amazing example to follow in terms of how to handle situations, answer tough questions and things like that, I knew I couldn’t just mimic exactly how she carried herself because it’s kind of weird and I knew I liked to do things my way. While you’re still getting a handle on things, I would say that the most important thing is finding out what kind of tutor/mentor/learning assistant you are. My coworker liked to answer questions first, but I liked to find out where my students are first. One thing I do warn against is becoming best friends with the board. It’s a terrible habit I developed because, well honestly, it’s really convenient. If I could ever go back and redo things, that’s definitely the first thing I would change. I realized, after doing that for a really long time, that aside from the fact that we’re not supposed to do that since we aren’t lecturers (that’s the professor’s job), doing that is also
extremely draining. Yes, it does take a little bit more time of your weekend or Monday to prepare a game plan for how to carry out your session without having to lecture and it’s so easy to just resort to lecturing, but at the end, actually having them do the teaching on their own is so much more relaxing and kind of lets you work less. It took me 2 ½ quarters to realize that; don’t repeat my experience, seriously. Plus, you’d be surprised at how well some people understand the material AND how good they are at explaining on simpler terms to their peers. As a tutor, you understand the more complex stuff because you’ve already been there, but these students are just starting out on this material, so sometimes it might like you’re explaining something in crystal clear terms, when in reality it still doesn’t make sense to them. Preparing interactive activities for them to work things out with their peers in the session might benefit in more ways than just giving them extra practice, a chance to meet new friends and learning from teaching; you, yourself, might actually learn new ways to explain something on more applicable terms for them that you would have never thought of.

Something else I would encourage you to do is never be afraid to ask the professor, even if you’re a tutor and not an MSI Learning Assistant. It’s not a bad thing to pick their brain a little, especially since not every professor has TA meetings and if they do, you’re not always invited. Talking to them or asking them questions sets a good example for the students to help encourage them to talk to the professor too. It also lets the professor know that you’re a part of their teaching support staff too, not just the TA’s, especially if the professor is relatively new and it’s a heavily freshman class so like practically nobody knows what LSS or MSI is at all. Not only that, but it also shows the professor that you really do care about the students that do seek your help and that you’re using all available resources to help them out. Plus, it helps establish a good working relationship between you and the professor (you know, in case of letters of recommendation and the sorts).

For the MSI Learning Assistants reading this, one thing I wish was imparted to me when I first started was the news that group sizes grow exponentially during the weeks of midterm and finals. I mean like my coworker from the first quarter that I started working had told me about it, but she made it seem like it would be no big deal (obviously because she’d been working for like the 8th quarter already). It was the biggest understatement of the year. It’s probably the weirdest feeling ever being an MSI Learning Assistant having to go from a month of regularly seeing certain students and getting to know them in the session, to like 20-30 students that you have never seen before in your life except the week before exams. It’s probably also the most frustrating thing; having students that regularly come that can’t get their questions answered as much as you want to, simply because there are like 20 other students who think they can get a crash course on the material that was covered over the past month. Those sorts of situations really test your patience, and the way you can think on your feet. I don’t know if the program that was new when I started is still running, but during my 2nd quarter as an MSI Learning Assistant, LSS initiated a sign-up only MSI commitment type program where students who were willing to commit to 1 session per week the whole quarter were allowed to sign up for sessions where the session size would perpetually be held at 12-13 students max. Personally, I loved this program simply because I would never have to deal with those horrifying pre-midterms/finals weeks. It also really allows you to get to know the students and to pace your session according to how they learn, once you get to know them and learn all that information. Before the program was initiated, I thought it was so
hard to be personable to the students simply because you never knew if they’d come again, ever. Sometimes, when I think back to my first quarter, I still wonder if I came off as super hostile to the students because so many of my friends used to tell me that I seemed scary when they first met me.

That’s another detail about this job, being personable and not coming off as scary. The professor already has that job to come off as terrifying and hard to talk to, so don’t be in a rush to take their job. You’re here to help and the easiest way to knock down barriers is to make yourself more relatable and comfortable to talk to. It also brings me back to finding your style of holding your session. I think it’s all right to put some of your attitude and personality into holding your sessions because even though you are their tutor/MSI Learning Assistant, you are also their peer. Sometimes I wonder if it’s kind of unprofessional to put some of my attitude into the session, but hey, it keeps the students entertained and feeling like it’s something new and different from what they’re used to. Don’t be scared to chat with them either, or open a little bit of your life to them (save except adding them on Facebook while they’re still your student, that’s just awkward). What I mean by opening a bit of your life to them is like maybe telling them your weekend plans (the legal type) or like that you have a midterm you’re studying for this week or something. It lets them know that you’re a person and a student too, that you also have classes and tests to worry about. Even letting them know that you were once not great at doing some of the material covered in class is all right too, or I hope it is, because sometimes they hold you on a pedestal and think that you can do everything; letting them know you hate writing essays or once never understood how to integrate or balance redox reactions lets them know that it’s okay to struggle with a subject and that they can and will eventually figure it out too. One thing to be careful of, though, is come priority enrollment season, they might turn to you to ask about professors or classes, especially if they’re going to start upper divs. There’s a reason why we’re told not to give them advice on what to take and stuff because that’s not our expertise and you saying which professor is easy or not might come back and get you since everyone’s judgment of who’s easy or not is different. The only thing I do tell them, though, is to give the class and/or the professor a chance for them to like the class/the professor before saying whether or not they like the class, the professor or both, rather than basing their judgment on what other older students say about them.

One of the greatest thing about being a tutor or MSI Learning Assistant for LSS is that not only can you reach out and help so many student, you also get to meet so many new people through the training class (if LSS still does that in the future) and the staff trainings themselves. You’re surrounded by so many people who are in the same shoes as you and are potentially going through the same struggles as you. It’s a great way to meet new people and make new friends. Colleagues are also a great pool of resources to bounce ideas off of, especially if you come across something difficult or if it’s your first time tutoring or MSI-ing for the subject. You can get so much advice on how to explain or teach a topic from someone who’s done it before. Like when I was switched over to teach Chem 1A from Chem 1B during Winter 2013, my coworker I met in the training class was similarly switched from Chem 1C to Chem 1B that quarter. She would tell me her worries and I would tell her topics students might potentially run into problems with. In the spring when I went back to Chem 1B, she would offer her practice problem sets she made for her students the previous quarter. Having those kinds of coworker friends really goes a long way when you need help with something, like having someone cover a session, asking advice for
or helping you co-lead a study session. It’s not just about the others in the class, though, because your bosses are good resources too. Yes, like professors, they might seem scary to talk to sometimes too since they are your bosses, but they used to work this job too and they have so much more experience.

Is asking to be observed by them scary (because you will be at some point)? Hell yeah it’s scary, but it’s for your own good, even if they ask to do that after you’ve been doing the job for a couple quarters (I’ve been there). They’re there to give you constructive criticism, so take it because not only does it do you good, it also benefits your students, and everything we do is for the benefit of the students, right?

I think this might be the last thing, but maybe not, we’ll see. But (potentially) lastly, I think there are some things that are just out of your control. Like in the case where you did everything you could to help some students be it answering their emails even if it was sent sort of late at night, staying a little later after an MSI session to help them understand a concept and even telling them to go to discussion and every office hour available, there will be some students who still don’t do well in the class. It’s one of the most crushing things working this position, probably right next to reading a really angry post-quarter survey (but sometimes those come from students who’ve only attended 1 session that’s right before the midterm or final). But for the cases where students still don’t pass, you sometimes really just have to step back and tell yourself that you did all you could to help them and you tried your best. Then there are the students who tell you don’t get things but don’t try to understand them either, they ask the same questions 15 minutes after you already addressed the problem and they don’t come on a regular basis (at this point, I think I’m more referring to students in the sign-up MSI program). How do I handle them? I really try my best to have them care and see why they aren’t trying, like if they’ve just given up or if it’s because they “don’t like” the class or something. If it’s something addressable like those two, I just try my best to lift them up because sometimes it might just be a self-confidence issue. Sometimes, especially if it’s a lower div, majority freshman class, you have to remind them to not be shrouded just by what they’re experiencing now and look further out into their college career. I tell them there’s a reason why gen chem’s tough right now, because those general concepts will be needed for other classes and upper divs, or I’ll give them something to look forward to by telling them that once they can get past gen chem and their lower divs, upper divs are so much more interesting and fun. It’s kind of weird, sometimes, how empowering it can be just to have them step back and take a look and what they’re working towards, instead of just having them focus on what they’ll get at the end of the quarter. There will be students, though, that have really just gotten to the point where they’ve hit rock bottom and neither encouragement nor gentle pushing will work. I really have yet to figure out how to help those students, maybe it’s something that a professor would have experience with, I guess I could ask about that...

Okay I swear this will be the last thing. I think, students and everyone else aside, the most important thing about working this job is yourself. This job takes a lot of hours away from you, especially if you’re an MSI Learning Assistant. It’s super important for you to learn how to find a balance and manage your time to avoid any stress-induced mental breakdowns or anything. As an MSI Learning Assistant, I know how hard it can be if like you have an 8AM and then the lecture of your MSI class right afterwards. So I know how bad of an idea it is to try to not get enough sleep working on a project or a paper and then having to go to your class and then theirs, even if coffee and 5-hour energy keeps you wide awake and
functioning for the duration of the class. If you have a session that same day, you’ll be so drained; it’s horrible because you need to absolutely give your students 100%. So be sure to manage your time so that you have yourself-time to give you a mental and/or a physical break, and to get your own stuff done without sacrificing your own mental and physical health. Not leaving enough time for yourself is the worse idea ever because that’s just more stress for yourself (trust me, I’ve been there too with 2 writing intensive classes, an off-campus internship, 2 hard lectures plus MSI on top of that which left me with no me-time whatsoever). Stress makes you so much more susceptible to getting sick and the likes, and sometimes it can carry over to work. Don’t be a grumpy tutor/Learning Assistant for your students; that’s the last thing they want from someone they’re depending on to help them with a tough class. So #1 thing about this job: take care of yourself, that’s most important.

Hopefully I’ve told you enough about the things you can expect during your time working here in LSS so you can mentally prepare yourself for things that may happen. Of course, you all might not come across everything that happens like how I described it to be, since being an MSI Learning Assistant is different from how LSS Tutoring or Sophomore Academy works. Things vary across programs, so what tutors or Sophomore Academy mentors might have struggles that I might never experience, so I won’t be able to address them but I hope the best for everyone during your time working here for LSS. The pros of working at LSS definitely outweigh the stress and stuff that comes with it, and I definitely love/loved working here, so I truly hope your experience working here will be as great as mine is/was too.

Sincerely,

Ellen Kuang (Chem 1B MSI Learning Assistant)
Some advice for the Chem 1C learning assistant

If you’re reading this that means you got the position for the job, and for that I say congratulations. I promise you that this experience will give you skills that you can carry on later in life. You will learn more about the subject you’re teaching this quarter, as well as about yourself. You’ll be challenged in ways that you’d never been challenged, and yes, that is a good thing. This job has definitely been one of the best decisions I’ve made in life, and I’m sure it’ll be yours too.

So now I’ll get to what it’s actually like to be a student learning assistant for Chem 1C. First of all, you should know that rather you’ve been teaching for one quarter or for 8 quarters, the first session of each quarter is always one of the most nerve-wracking sessions you’ll ever experience. One starts to think, “Oh my gosh new students! Will they like me? Would they be as awesome as my old students? Will I have a student who questions everything?” It’s normal to be a little nervous, just remember to breathe. I remember when I first entered the class as the teacher, I thought to myself, “Wow. This is going to be my classroom for an hour. My classroom. I’m going to be teaching here.” It was so surreal to me. Then when the students came in I knew it was real alright. This was happening; I was going to teach the class. I remember standing in front of the room and all the students staring right at me, hoping to get enlightened of what the professor recently talked about. For the first few moments I just had to remember to breathe. As you’re going through the material you’re more than likely going to mess up. THAT IS OKAY. It’s your first day. If you feel that some students may judge you just tell them, “I’m sorry, it’s my first time. Please bear with me.” Another good thing to ease the tension is to not be afraid to crack jokes once in a while. Laugh. Smile. Do the hokey pokey (Don’t really do that). I’m going to be perfectly honest with you though. There are going to be those off/bad days where you feel that you don’t know much. There are going to be those days where you question why you’re even teaching. You might even say, “I don’t even know how I got this job.” But if you stick it out those bad days are going to soon turn out for the good. Believe it or not, almost every learning assistant you’ve seen has went through this, including me. I have to say though, after sticking it out I can honestly say that the good has outweighed the bad.

You will definitely form bonds with your students. In fact my co-worker likes to call them her “kids.” Now I don’t know if you want to go that far or not, but you do kind of get that sort of bond. You start to get to really know your students and are able to recognize how they learn (visual, auditory, or hands on), and will be able to help them in that way. How they feel about the course after you teach them will definitely effect how you feel as well. Nothing feels better to see one of your students come up to you after seeing their test results and say, “I got an A!” Knowing that you helped be a part of that is just really awesome. Another cool thing about teaching students for a quarter is that you’ll still get to be a part of some of their lives after the course ends. I have many old students who come up to me and are like, “Hi Gabbie. How are you?” It’s also good to hear what they’re doing after they took the course you taught.

The main thing I want you to take off this message is that yes, there are definitely going to be those days where you’re just exhausted. You might have times where you might not understand a problem, or a
particular student is giving you a hard time, but I promise that you’ll make it through all of that. How can you possibly improve as a learning assistant if you don’t ever make mistakes? I’ll answer that question for you: you can’t. Just remember to smile, and know that whatever difficulty you may encounter, it will get better, and you’re not alone. You’ll start to pick up good teaching strategies; like organization skills and having students work together. By the way, a good way to get the students active in your mandatory session is to write each individual student’s names on the board. Make sure each student gets their own separate space on the board. Each student may work on whatever problem you want them to work on. It could be the same question, with the same numbers or the same question with different numbers (for they won’t cheat). This tactic is good to learn students’ names and to see if each student really understands the material. Remember that every day is a learning experience. I am extremely confident that you’ll be one of the best learning assistants out there, and you’ll have a great time teaching. You got this! Just please, remember to breathe and you’ll be just fine.
Dear Future Chem 1C Tutor,

Hi, My name is Shirley and I am the Chem 1C tutor for Spring 2013. I was previously a Math 2 TA for 2 quarters, and this is my first time being a learning assistant for a science course. To me, this is a harder subject to teach compared to Math 2. Since I haven't taken Chem 1c for 1 and a half years, being a Chem 1C Learning assistant was tough. There were countless times where I have made mistakes, and multiple times where I could not answer a question. This is when I feel like quitting and begin to beat myself up. But it's okay. When situations like this arise, take a few breaths and try to see if other students have an answer. The questions that can be asked are endless, and it's okay to not know some. Take about 2 hours every week to prepare for the MSI sections, grasp the material, try to retrieve the memory of chem 1c from when you took the class. If you recently took Chem 1C, then teaching this course won't be as tough since everything will still be fresh. Most of the students come to MSI section to get homework done. I usually spend first 20 to 30 minutes going over concepts and give some example problems before I actually start on the homework. It gives them a chance to refresh their memory of what went on in class, and then I spend the rest of the time going over homework problems they are stuck on. Some homework problems are tough, so I usually do all the problems at home just to make sure I'm doing the right calculations and I won't teach them the wrong material. It's all about preparation. If things go wrong during a section, just take a breath and don't beat yourself up for it. Refer them to their TA's or professors office hours if you get stuck. Prepare each week. It takes a lot of time, but it's worth it. Your experience may be different from mine. This is a great job, take in the experience and enjoy it! You'll do great. I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Shirley Shan

Chem 1C MSI
Dear CHEM 108 Prospective Tutor,

Congratulations! You have been hired to work in one of the most fulfilling positions offered at UCSC. I'm sure you might be thinking that working in a lab and creating new age defying breakthroughs in medicine or technology might be more beneficial, but hear me out. My name is Theresa Chow, and I have been a tutor for quite a few quarters. My major is Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology, and that has allowed me the chance to tutor in various courses. I have been a MSI and subject tutor covering a vast array of subjects from the Calculus series, Organic Chemistry, and Biochemistry, as well as General Biology and other miscellaneous courses. Through LSS, I have gotten a chance to help so many students and you will too. If you do not yet feel as if your position is of great importance, think of this: you, out of the many attending this college, get to mold the futures of others. And what is more amazing is that you were chosen out of many others who are well qualified.

With the knowledge that you mastered in your classes, you are paving the way for others to follow in your footsteps, inspiring them and encouraging them to work harder. In all seriousness, let's face it; many students abhor attending classes in general. The ones who go out of their way to attend extra sessions are those who are dedicated and really want to learn, and that willingness already makes your job so much easier.

However, with every job, there are caveats. Tutoring, may it be MSI or subject tutoring, is hardly ever a walk in the park. Though you may get diligent students who attend your sessions ready and prepared to learn, you will also face those who abuse this program, expecting only answers and are unwilling to work through the processes. This can come in many forms, so make sure you keep an eye out for those who are struggling and attend sessions only to have others do their work for them.

I will not focus on a specific subject in which I have tutored because the truth is, the mindset and basis of what you project to your students have core similarities, but you must come into it on your own. I will not leave you hanging, though. I do have a few suggestions which will hopefully make your job easier. First off, do not be nervous. Whether or not you are comfortable with public speaking, tutoring a group of your peers will make you get over that. What will help you through some awkward sessions (and you will have awkward sessions) is keeping in mind that your students are there to learn from you. You have all the knowledge necessary to do well in the course. Contact the professor, because they will have resources for you as well. Also, remember to remain confident, energetic and friendly.

Secondly, you will get shy students, or those who are unwilling to answer questions out of fear of embarrassment if they answer something incorrectly. One method I use when faced with a group of new students is that throughout the session, I would purposely make a mistake so that they can correct me. This ensures that they are paying attention, and lets them know that their tutor is a student just like them, and is capable of mistakes as well. However, if that doesn't work, when in doubt, give them a little push. Offer a reward in exchange for a worked out problem. I offered candy, and it does wonders.

Though you will be challenged with smarty pants students that will purposely find any way to correct you, or unwilling students, this job is amazing. I cannot begin to tell you how great it is to see my
past students advancing in their majors and seeing their confidence levels rise up because they did well on a test. You get to play a major role in that. I hope you will feel as proud of your students as I do mine.

I'll leave you with a few words of warning. Do not bad mouth any professor, student, or co-worker in the presence of students. Regardless of whether you are a classmate or friend, keep in mind you are a tutor, almost like a professor yourself, and you must stay professional. And finally, check your email constantly. Best, Theresa Chow
Hey new MSI Learning Assistant! A little about me is that I have been the MSI instructor for this class for a year+ by the time you are reading this. I think the most important quality for this job is to genuinely enjoying teaching. The reason I say this is because if you are taking this position, odds are that you are a busy person. I was no different, so by the time I had to attend the MSI section, I was dead tired. But the reason why this didn’t affect my performance was because this was my break throughout the week. I looked forward to talking to them about this subject and that gave me energy to facilitate a learning environment effectively. This takes me to my second point of a good learning environment and what I think that contains. I think the key to a perfect environment is friendliness. They should feel some enjoyment at the MSI sessions. Occasionally crack a joke, or even spend a couple of minutes letting them vent about the test they just took or just talking about the weather. Those few minutes spent on random topics can make the rest of the session run a lot more smoothly. I essentially try to get rid of the mentor-mentee relationship and instead try to establish a “hang-out” environment.

During the sessions I try to form groups for almost all our exercises because if they don’t understand the concepts from me, maybe learning from peers who see the problems in a similar fashion could help. Another important quality for this class is to know what examples are important to test each concept. Examples are key in my MSI sessions. I don’t ever really explain topics verbally, but instead I explain topics through the students working on problems and learning it when they see how they get the answer.

I think one of the hardest things to do in the sessions had to have been dealing with irritated students who just want the answers and get frustrated when they don’t get it. Another big personal trait that is important is patience dealing with these students.

This job definitely takes a lot more than other on campus jobs, but since it requires so much work, the rewards make it worth it. From making new friends to hearing students come and thank you for helping them pass the class.
Dear future employee,

I was an MSI tutor for CMPS 11 with Charlie McDowell. I’m writing this after my first year, but I can say that this experience absolutely increased my enthusiasm for both teaching and computer science.

However, there are certain things I wish I had known. First, review everything. Usually in your session and someone asks you a question, you’ll be totally fine. You’ll feel bad, though, if the professor asks a question to the class during lecture and someone asks you advice and you cannot give them a reply with 100% certainty. Students will sort of automatically treat you as an all-knowing almost authoritative figure. There are wrong, but it is important that you really master as much material as possible and then work on letting them see you as a peer that can help them.

That sort of attitude should come across in your sections. Treat the sessions as a professional learning experience, but make sure it is a relaxed environment. The students that come to you are going to be the ones that get stressed out and panic during lectures and labs, so just lecturing at them and seeming too authoritative is just going to drive them away. Don’t spend much, if any, time lecturing. Maybe in the beginning it will help to explain major review concepts, but for the most part people with almost constantly are on a different page. The best strategy you can adopt, I believe, is work on people’s individual problems. Actually sit down with them, read questions entirely, and make sure they are with you every step as you both work through it. This way, you don’t waste other peoples time, and you help whoever you’re working with learn more effectively.

Another big piece of advice would be to let people work together. Students are surprisingly very honest about not just leaching off others in an MSI environment. Furthermore, they learn so much better when they collaborate on problems and get to talk to someone who is learning this stuff at the same pace, and from the same place, as them. Let them come to you after they both get officially stumped. Once they ask you a question, just nudge them in the right direction, because there is a good chance at least one of them will get where you’re going.

Basically, make the environment very hospitable and be hospitable yourself. Come across not as an extra TA or professor, but as the student in the class that happens to get most of the material and can explain it really well. Students letting their guard down is the only way they’ll absorb this information that can be very scary to them.

Good luck,

Thomas
Dear future Earth 100c learning assistant,

I started off the quarter nervous about talking in front of a group and worried about what would happen when my students asked me a question I didn’t know the answer to. I was also worried because I somehow managed to get an A in the class, but I wasn’t sure how that happened. Meaning, I didn’t feel like I had a firm grasp of the material. Regardless, I took the position.

For my very first session, I went through the first homework set and figured out how to do all but the last part, which I thought would be simple because it was just algebra. I had ideas on what I wanted to write on the board and how to explain the concepts. I got to the classroom, did my introduction, gave them some time with the problem set, and started writing. I felt like I was tripping over my words and explaining incorrectly the whole time. However, later, some students said they had understood me. I guess the moral of the story is trust yourself, and try not to get too nervous of the first day. Also, later in the week my students spent an entire session on what I had thought would be a simple problem, so don’t over or underestimate your students.

In the beginning of the quarter I would typically start by separating my students into groups based on which problem they were working on and give them some time to discuss in groups. The amount of group time I scheduled in started off smaller, when I was less comfortable with silence, and grew as I grew more comfortable with my position. I would then start from the beginning of problem number one. Once I set up the problem, I would put down the chalk and let the students work on it for a while. Then, I would bring them back together, set them up for the next step and repeat. I think this is a good strategy for the first few weeks when the students are getting used to doing math problems again. It is also helpful for them to use Emily’s recipe for doing a problem set. If you just ask them problem specific questions, they may not be able to do that for themselves come test time. So, especially with some of the students who need more attention, make sure you go through the recipe with them when they ask questions. Usually, they say something about how they don’t understand this part, start telling me what they did, and I realize they are confused because they missed a major part of the question or directions. I tell them to back up, and we go through the recipe together. Then I give them advice on that particular problem if they are still struggling.

Near the middle of the quarter most of the students really began to use the time for group study work on their own. They would come in, I would tell them to work in groups and sometimes I would just sit there and wait for someone to ask a question. After the first midterm I stopped going over one problem with the whole class all together and began answering specific questions each group had. This meant I would repeat a similar explanation multiple times, but I think it is better to cater to the different learning speeds and styles by answering individual questions. Also, when they were just working in their groups I went around to each group to see if they had questions. I usually found that there were questions they wanted to ask, but didn’t raise their hand to ask. I think it is very helpful for the learning assistant to go up to each group and ask if they have questions because they may be too shy to ask and/or may go off on a completely wrong path if I don’t stop them. One thing I hadn’t been expecting is that people sitting next to each other are not always working together, so it is a good idea to check in with every student as you walk around and make sure all of them are comfortable with the problem.
To whom it may concern,

I have tutored students in different courses within the Business Management Economics major including Intermediate microeconomics, Intermediate Accounting 1&2, as well as Audit. Three personal qualities and academic strengths that were important in helping me successfully tutor my tutees were: Being Dependable, Well Spoken and Knowledgeable of the topics. Being dependable helped me do a good job as a tutor because if students emailed or reached out to me with any questions or concerns I was able to give them the necessary help by either answering any questions myself or referring them to the adequate resource. My dependability quality helped the students feel more comfortable with me because they knew that they had someone they could trust. Being well spoken was another necessary quality because by being able to clearly explain what I was trying to convey, the students were able to focus on the lesson itself and not on figuring out what I was trying to say if I were to pose jumbled thoughts; doing the latter could have the students leave more confused and/or discouraged. Knowledge of the topic is definitely an important one because even if a potential tutor passed a class with a good grade, but did not retain the topic then it could be troublesome explaining something that one didn’t fully grasp. I’m not saying that it’s mandatory you have these exact qualities because everyone has different unique qualities that work with them, but it’s important to use the qualities that you do have and use them to your advantage.

When I first started tutoring I was trying to figure out different ways of having students be involved in my sessions because I wanted them to be involved in learning, not just hear me talk all the time and get another lecture. My biggest challenge was trying to encourage all students to participate and not just the 1 or 2 students who always spoke out take lead of the session; I wanted everyone to get an opportunity to speak and respond to questions I would ask. After trial and error the most effective techniques that worked were starting the session with a very easy basic question about the chapter or topic we were going to discuss and to talk to the person next to them about it because that would get students out of the quiet zone. Another technique was making activities where they would need to work with the person next to them and then come up to the board and explain to the other students how they got their result. By getting students within sessions comfortable speaking to each other I was able to help them with that initial peer communication would later result in exchanging of emails, setting up studying times and asking each other questions regarding the course. It was great seeing students reaching out to their peers because it would expand their available resources which could potentially help them do better in the course.

Overall, being in front of a group of students can be intimidating, but once you learn what works for your tutees and yourself sessions go alot smoother and both parties will benefit from the tutoring /MSI sessions. Stay confident and continue to learn with and from your students, if you make any mistakes or don’t know something it’s okay to let them know that you will get back to them later because they would appreciate that more than an immediate, but wrong answer. Good luck!
Dear Econ 2 MSI leader,

Welcome to LSS, and a start to another exciting school year. You are now a peer educator in econ 2 and will be holding three sessions a week. This is what you should expect this quarter regarding your new position:

During your first session you will feel lost and have a sense of confusion
You will not know the answer to all the questions the students ask you
You will encounter students that want to give up and feel totally helpless
There will be awkward moments of silence and confusion among your students

But don’t worry that is just part of being a peer educator and LSS has a great staff that is always ready to listen and answer your questions. Now, being a peer educator will also bring you many benefits, such as:

You will feel more confident
Obtain more experience talking in front of a group
Feel great when you help a student understand the material

Although this may sound like a lot, once you are holding your session you will grow to be a peer educator. In the education 96 class, although at the time you are taking it may not seem applicable to the course, believe me you will gain a lot from it. It is easy to just lecture the material, but it becomes more of a challenge when you try to facilitate the material. After being an MSI leader for five quarters I would strongly recommend to try really hard to create a relaxed interactive learning environment. At the beginning of the quarter this will not be easy, as the students don’t know each other. In my sessions what I have done, is simply to ask the students to sit in the same table or same area. I believe that if you get the students to sit next to each other and create partner activities eventually everyone will feel comfortable. As the quarter goes on students will feel more comfortable talking to each other and towards the end of the quarter everyone will be working together. But be prepared at first you will get awkward moments of silence, but as long as you always encourage students to talk and ask each other for help, your sections will be more interactive.

As a peer educator doesn’t worry about not knowing the answer to all the questions the students ask you. It is okay not to know the question to everything, you could even take the opportunity and scaffold the question and everyone can work together to find the answer. This would not only teach the students how to break down questions and find the answer, but work together as a group. Econ is a concept that I believe one should apply to everyday life. If you ask a student a specific concept and they can only tell you the definition, then I don’t believe they know the concept. Going through concepts with the students and applying it to everyday life not only can serve as a measure of understanding, but also makes the material more applicable. If the students are able to apply what they know into their everyday life, I believe they will retain the material. Have fun and enjoy your job, it’s not every day that you get to teach what you love at this age.
Fellow MSI leader,

My name is Edgar Osorio, I am currently the MSI leader for Econ 100A. I've been an MSI leader for two quarters now, both quarters I've taught Econ 100A. One of the biggest “shockers” you will encounter in the beginning of your MSI teaching career is realizing that your MSI sessions will not always go as planned at first. By this I mean that instead of having an MSI session where everyone is happy and participating as you probably have imagined in your head, you’re going to encounter a classroom where your students expect you to know and do everything. This can be frustrating for you as an MSI leader since you want them to participate and learn, not just copy down what you write on the board. This can be avoided by getting the students out of their comfort zone from the start, and this all starts by how you introduce yourself. Don’t just give them a name and what your majoring in but rather give them a name, a little personal background about yourself (like what you enjoy doing for fun etc.), a major, when you took the course your teaching, the struggles you had and what you did to get the grade you wanted. This will help get your students to be comfortable asking and interacting with you and set a positive connection from the start. Another problem you’ll run into is getting people to stay involved in your sessions; most times people come in wanting you to spoon feed everything to them but at the end of the day that’s not the best way for them to learn. A great way to get people to participate in your section and make it fun is to offer candy as a reward. This has proven successful in both quarters I have taught MSI as students truly immerse themselves in the subject at hand in my MSI sections. The way I like to do this is I assign my students randomly to groups and I explain to them that the people in their group are now their team members and throughout the session they will have to help each other work through problems and earn points, which will determine the winners at the end of the session. The grand prize is always chocolate bars that my housemate had brought from Colombia when he went to go visit his family during winter break. The interesting thing about these chocolate bars are that they are made on a plane, which is why they are called “JET”, they load the ingredients onto big airplane and produce the chocolate in the air which gives it a different consistency then regular chocolate. I let them know this and they go bananas with excitement. Hope this helps, and good luck on your first day teaching, you’ll do great!

Yours truly,

Edgar Osorio
My name is Jin. I applied to work at the Learning Center Spring of 2012 and was hired as a MSI Learning Assistant for Econ 100B Intermediate Macroeconomics Fall of 2012.

I applied to be a MSI Learning Assistant, thinking, "I want to help people study and learn." Being a learning assistant is tough work and requires lots of training and discipline. I've always had strong motivation for learning and doing well in school. It is thanks to this motivation that keeps me going, to devise study strategies and manage my time well. These academic strengths came in handy when I realized I had to learn a lot of new material in the class I was the learning assistant for. I was taking the class along with students that would attend my sessions. Being able to manage stress and time well would be the best skill to have taking on a MSI position. Stress can influence your behavior during MSI sessions as well as the performance in your own courses, so it's best to keep stress under check by managing time.

In addition, I found that being organized, resourceful and keeping a positive attitude in the face of challenging topics goes a long way. The organization will help you be up to date on material being covered, keep track of sign-in sheets and plan out sessions. Being resourceful as in utilizing the textbook, and sometimes outside material such as the Internet to clarify difficult topics will pay off for you and help guide students in the right direction in terms of studying. Students come to MSI sessions wanting to learn and get some help, they may already be confused and not feeling very well. It's not always a good sign if their MSI Learning Assistant is also confused and hating the course. A bit of enthusiasm and not beating yourself up when you can't answer a question is really helpful. When I can't answer a question, I usually ask if anyone else can answer the question and if not, I get back to them with an email later.

However, MSI Learning Assistants are here to help students with their learning and studying, not handing them the answers. But often students tend to expect MSI Learning Assistants to know the answers to everything, and it shouldn't be embarrassing to tell a student to ask a TA or a professor. In this manner, students are encouraged to utilize more of their resources to help them learn and understand. Other difficulties that I've experienced and experience still are not being prepared enough, and lacking knowledge. To minimize the problems of not feeling prepared enough and lacking knowledge, it's best to pay attention during lectures, take good notes, ask the professor and TAs for help, use the textbook, and plan your sessions ahead of time. At the same time, it is wise to set standards and limits for sessions. If I would like students to bring their textbook, copies of their homework to sessions, I would make those expectations clear.

After becoming a learning assistant, I've become more observant in noticing emotions that appear on students' faces. This is helpful because you can spot anyone, who seems confused or bored and that
helps you slow down or quicken the pace of the session. Communication between you and students should be a top priority. I would call myself socially awkward, but through the course of this year I've become more outgoing, socializing with students about how their quarter is going and if they had a good weekend. This helps me connect with students and relate to them as a peer.

I recommend connecting with students like a peer, and make sure they understand that everyone's on the same boat. Tell them, "Hey! I am a student just like you and I have definitely been in similar situations. I've gotten through some difficult times and survived, I think I can be of help." I struggle in economics classes just like everyone else, but Econ 100B was the one class I had the most difficult time in. It was that very class where I failed my first exam in. It was also that very class where I worked day and night, outlined the textbook, re-did all of homework problems and studied day and night to finally get an A on a curve in the course. Seeing the results made my hard work worth it. But of course, the results weren't so apparent in the process. I was studying like a mad woman for the second midterm and I still got a C. Deciding to work even harder did pay off. I'm glad that I didn't give up. This is the story I tell to students who seem extremely worried about doing well in a course or plainly scared about not passing. It is always difficult to see students in panic and that in turns actually negatively affects their performance. So it's always ideal to try to calm them down by helping them plan study strategies.

The Educ 96 training for new MSI Learning Assistants is informative and gives a ton of resources that will help in holding effective and interactive sessions. My favorites were the packets handed out featuring the different tutoring strategies for large study groups and the reader. I love reading the essays in the reader. The reflections and observations from previous learning assistants and tutors made me more aware of how tutoring can have a positive impact on a student's learning and what to watch out for. In addition, there was a peer observation assignment in Educ 96. Actually seeing an effective MSI learning assistant inspired and motivated me to help students study and learn better with your sessions.

I hope my experiences and reflections help you in your journey in learning on how to be an effective educator.

Best,

Jin
Dear Future MSI tutor for Intermediate Macroeconomics 100B,

You were hired for this position because you are qualified. You are a good student, you did well in this course, and have the skills to be an effective communicator and peer educator. Being responsible, organized, and dedicated to this job come without saying. However, from my experience I would emphasize the importance of being sociable, relatable, and flexible. When students come to MSI for the first time, whether it is for the quarter or the first time ever, they don’t know what to expect and often feel shy or uncomfortable. Furthermore I have also noticed that it can be intimidating having a peer student act in a role superiority. Thus, I think the first goal you should attempt to achieve in your sessions is comfort. This, for me, at times entailed making a total fool of myself! I’m not particularly extroverted and so I had to go a little out of my own comfort zone to try and make the students feel at ease. I initiated casual conversations to get to know them better and I practiced learning their names. Also although preparation definitely helps to ensure a smooth session, you can’t 100% predict who will show up or what the students’ needs will be. Thus, I found it really important to be flexible with my own agenda and adaptive to whatever the particular session presented.

As you know, 100B puts extra pressure on its students to pass because it is necessary to continue onward with the major. This means sometimes students just want the answers and/or they might pressure you for “secret” information. A few things about this: #1 you cannot read the professors mind. You will not know exactly what will be on the test or quiz. Don’t beat yourself up about this, all you have to do is show up to your sessions and do the best you can. Which leads me to #2: you are not the professor, so you most likely will not know the answers to every problem you are asked. That is okay. The first time I realized I didn’t know the answer a student asked me, I felt like a failure. It was embarrassing and awkward. Luckily similar situations happened throughout my quarters of tutoring, and so I got much better at handling them. You’ll find what works best for you, but what I ended up doing was usually asking the student additional questions to see if they can lead themselves to a solution and/or admitting to not know and committing to researching an answer, as well as encouraging the student to seek further help on the problem. Humans make mistakes and as tutors we are no exception.

#3 You are a student too. At times I felt so invested in my students’ grades and well-being that I sacrificed some of my own well-being. While in the moment I didn’t think twice, looking back I would advise myself to draw more clear boundaries. You are not responsible for the tutee acing the class. You are extra support, but ultimately they have to cross the finish line on their own.

Also I learned through this tutoring experience that 100B can vary dramatically with different professors. Each has his/her own interpretation of what the most information a 10 week quarter of macro should teach its students. No matter the course outline, I think if you try to break down the concepts into “apples and oranges” (meaning relatable and tangible concepts) then students will get a better grasp for the abstract theories presented in the lecture. Also don’t be afraid to speak up in lecture to clarify what the professor is saying!

The tutoring class that you are required to take will touch on a lot of these fundamentals and provide strategies for being a successful tutor. However, from my experience I found that I learned the most through trial and error. The first quarter I tutored this course I was more nervous, less confident, and
spent more time lecturing and less time facilitating peer learning. The second quarter I was more comfortable with the materials and also found a routine of engaging students by having them work in small groups as well as leading parts of the section.

Overall, have fun! For me this job was extremely rewarding and I learned a lot about myself and gained a deeper understanding of macroeconomics!

Best of luck, Dayna Vogt
Dear Econ113 (Econometrics) Learning Assistant,

I was in your position at one point and I would like to lend some helpful advice as you are entering into being a Learning Assistant for Econometrics. Econometrics is a course that many students find challenging. My MSI sessions were basically full for every session. When you are the Learning Assistant for Econometrics you may end up working with a class that has a different professor than the one you have taken it with. When something like this occurs it’s important that you know it’s okay if you do not know the answer to every question the students ask but be as prepared as possible and feasible. I have recently dealt with this issue and I have realized as long as you are trying the students will understand especially when you say you will get back to them through email or the next MSI session and fulfill what you’ve said. The Econometrics class I worked with for my MSI was challenging because the professor liked to do proofs and I did not have to do these when I took the course with another professor and this is what the students found most challenging. In order for be to help them to the best of my ability, I maintained contact with the TA’s and asked them about the proofs to prepare for MSI and if I came across a question I did not know in MSI I would email the students.

One thing that has really helped in my MSI is to realize that you are the students’ peer and you should try to communicate with them to make them feel more comfortable to participate especially in an upper division because you may find that many of the students attending are the same year as you and may be in your other classes. You need to maintain a balance between being a peer and being a leader. When I showed up early to MSI I would communicate with the students and ask them how class is going to make them feel comfortable prior to the session.

It’s important to remember the different strategies you are taught in Educ96 because they will be something you will use to get students to participate. I usually used one group discussion in the beginning of the session to get through important material and break the students up into to smaller groups to work on homework or any other material for the econometrics class. The students who were not actively involved in the group discussion usually were more talkative in there smaller groups. You can use a variety of these strategies to get students to participate.

One final piece of advice I would like to offer you is to be confident in yourself because if you are not, you may double think what you say and the students can tell if you do not believe it what you are trying to explain. You know the material because you took the class before and did well so don’t underestimate your knowledge. Be confident and talk with confidence because the more you believe in your ability to help the students the greater the likelihood they will get the most out of your MSI session.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Espinoza
Dear (Econ 113) MSI Learning Assistant,

Tutoring can be one of the most rewarding and educational experiences during your time at college. However, there are many challenges. Econ 113 (Introduction to Econometrics) is a very mathematically rigorous course. There are a few qualities and strengths which I found particularly helpful in my position as a tutor for the class. While it is a bit cliché, I think patience is one of the most important qualities to have as a tutor. Even though the material might seem intuitive to you, it’s important to consider that the students haven’t seen it yet. In addition, because Econ 113 is quite math intensive, there might be new notation, statistical methods or proofs that the students haven’t seen before. Being able to communicate clearly and effectively with the professor and the TAs is also a must have quality. If there is material that you are unsure of, don’t hesitate to reach out to the professor and ask. I found this most important during midterm season when students are reaching out for support, and you might not have all of the answers to their questions. Finally, a strong academic background in statistics is necessary as a tutor for Econ 113. While the class applies statistics to the real world, there is still a strong theoretical component. Being familiar with relevant proofs would certainly be beneficial to the tutor. Personally, I had to revisit the ordinary least squares proof and the omitted variable bias proof to ensure I understood the concepts well.

MSI differs from lecture and section in that it’s much more interactive. There were many different strategies which I implemented to help facilitate a more engaging learning environment. The two interactive learning strategies that I most often implemented were the “group discussion” and “clusters” exercise. I found these two to be the most effective. I used these strategies to cover a variety of material, from homework examples to full blown proofs. Furthermore, I incorporated quick assessments into my sessions to verify that the students actually understood the material. These two academic strategies (in tandem) certainly helped in my effectiveness as a tutor. The biggest difficulty I encountered as a tutor was finding ways to build student self-efficacy and encourage participation in session. Some of the math behind the proofs and practical applications is really daunting. I noticed that the group discussion technique wouldn’t be as effective when covering the material most unfamiliar to the students. This is when I implemented the clusters technique to encourage group discussion. In addition, I started to use quick assessments to determine if the students were learning, and what I needed to review most.

While I don’t have one specific experience that I found to be the most memorable, I really enjoyed getting to know the students who regularly attended my sessions. In my opinion, this is one of the greatest parts about being a tutor. In addition, it’s one of the most important aspects of MSI: peer tutoring. All of the learning assistants are undergraduate students as well. I think this fosters some feeling of solidarity, and allows for the students to better relate to their tutor. Working as a tutor, and taking the Education 96 class, have both helped me to become a better student. It’s often said that the best way to study is to teach the material to someone else. But beyond that, I’ve learned exceedingly valuable learning strategies and techniques which I’ve been able to apply to my own coursework.

Sincerely,
Gethin Wade
Dear future LALS 100B MSI Learning Assistant,

Congratulations on your new student position, you will enjoy this job a lot. As you already know the Profe aka Fregoso is a wonderful professor to work with especially with the content of the class. I know I loved the LALS 100B class and hopefully you did too to the point that pushed you to be the Learning Assistant for that class. So my experience overall as Learning Assistant for the class has been wonderful, it was a bit nerve racking at first but overall it was a learning experience for me and the students.

For the first weeks I felt like I did not know how to facilitate the sections but just experimenting with the theoretical aspect of the class, flash cards, pair activities and media examples really helped me and the students. So for the first half of the section I would use flash cards with the terms that were given in lecture and have people pair up define, present and then discuss possible examples. The other half of the time I would display media examples aka YouTube videos, and images. As the quarter progresses with book readings I tend to reference the readings more and I don’t have any visual examples and tend to make it more of a discussion based section.

Also, it is kind of hard planning your sections in advance because sometimes it based on whether or not the students actually did the reading so it best to relate to in class material in situations like that. So when you have a situation when you don’t know what to do make sure to relate the lecture content into possible discussions. It is important to make use of the space also like rearranging the furniture to have a welcomed session and using the boards. Just remember that you are there as their learning assistant and help them learn through your past experience in the material. Good luck, if anything hopefully this helps. - Ruby Chavez
Dear student,

Prior to my hiring by Learning Support Services I had already developed personal qualities and academic strengths that have proved to be useful and helpful in my position as a teaching assistant for MATH 2, accelerated college algebra. Some of these traits would include, but are not limited to: a sense of humor, open mindedness, good communication skills, a generally positive attitude, time management success, and of course an efficient ethic of hard work. I would say these characteristics were developed from my extracurricular activity and academic workload that I was maintaining before working as a teaching assistant.

Some skills that I developed as my time teaching algebra progressed were more personal skills rather than mathematical skills - I knew how to do the material, I just became more personable with presenting it in a clearer and cleaner manner. At first it was hard teaching mathematics to a group of fifteen strangers but it quickly became easier to become comfortable with all the different attitudes, personalities, and learning styles. I improved my effectiveness as an educator by consulting alternate methods of explaining topics and solving problems in order to present multiple perspectives of explanation to my students; I feel this helped my students generate a wholesome understanding of the material.

Difficulties that gave me a run for my money during the fall 2012 and winter 2013 quarters (as MATH 2 is not offered in the spring) were more logistical than intellectual. By that I mean my students were fully capable of doing the work, understanding the material, and succeeding on quizzes and exams... but oftentimes lacked the motivation of preparing properly, being productive in section, and using all resources available to them. This is really a difficulty many students comes to face, since it’s easy to get distracted in a college environment where we are surrounded with young, like-minded people all the time.

As far as the EDUC 96 (tutoring training class) and weekly meetings with my supervisor, Charis Herzon, goes I would say that they did very little “harm.” Those extra few hours every week for class and/or meeting preparation is what I refer to as “harm,” as I quickly became extremely busy and time became rarer and rarer. Charis had great input every Monday meeting and Holly Cordova (EDUC 96 instructor) had several activities for the class to do each time we met that I learned a lot from. Both of these experiences have only helped me develop as an educator. I hope that you find this letter of use and I wish you the best of luck with your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Nikolas Parisis
Out of all of the positions LSS offers, Math 2 and 3 are unique. It is a very personal position, since you will be seeing the same students for more than 60 hours throughout the quarter. Since the sections are mandatory, you also have the difficulty that many students will not want to be there, unlike voluntary programs like MSI or subject tutoring. However, I feel that it is one of the more rewarding positions as well – because you can actively watch your students change as the quarter goes on, and you can leave them at the end of your last section with the feeling that you watched them grown in math, and it was thanks to your help.

The first section is always rough – even so though, you should do your best to prepare for it! Try and write out a plan for the section, with flexible time increments for each part. An icebreaker is always good, try and think of something different from boring ones you have seen done before. Also, make sure sometime that first day to describe who you are, give the students your email, and talk about your policies towards grading, food and headphones in the section room. Setting boundaries is really important this first day – feel free to tell them that it is your first section, but don’t let them walk all over you! You need to hold firmly to that division between student and LA, and make sure they don’t think they can just run section however they feel like it.

I have found that the more organized I run my sections, the better. I will send an email out to my students before the first section of the week, explaining very clearly what I expect them to bring in to section, what I expect them to know, what we will be working on, and when things will be due. I also write a daily agenda on the board, which helps keep both me and the students on track. When you make it clear that you have expectations for your students, they are more likely to try and rise up to meet those expectations, even if they are high. When you do not set clear goals or ask them to push themselves, they are not likely to be as motivated to try harder.

Also, one thing that is not always obvious in the beginning is to be careful with your phrasing and body language. You probably know not to ever tell students they have asked a stupid question, but there are other comments you can make that can be just as demoralizing. For example, telling students “Don’t worry, this problem is easy” can be really demotivating to students who still do not understand it, but they may not feel like asking questions about it, because it is such an “easy” topic. Also, with body language, if a student asks you a question and you sigh a bit or just look frustrated, they are much less likely to want to ask you questions later, because they feel like they are bothering you.

Lastly, self-reflection is always a good thing! You should never come out of a section feeling like it was as good as it could ever be and there was no possible way of improvement. Definitely feel proud when you come out of a section that went really well, but always ask yourself how you could make it better. You could make this more structured by putting a suggestions box in your section room, or just by reflecting over your sections after the week is done. At the end of the quarter when you get your evaluations, hopefully they show that change in you as a section leader to be a positive one the students appreciated!
To the future MATH 3 LSS staff members:

Being a part of LSS staff has been the most rewarding experience of my time here at UCSC. Of course, there have been other experiences while here that have helped shape me into the person that I am today, but I believe that working as a Learning Assistant for Math 3 contributed the most to my aspirations and goals for the future.

Beginning the position in Fall 2012, with the largest enrollment of freshmen into Math 3 in several years, it was stressful trying to get acquainted with the students and the system used to allow students to choose sections. However, once sections were chosen, everything seemed to run smoothly. The first section was scary, having been the newest addition to the LSS staff and not having very much experience teaching a group of 16 students. A few helpful tips for the first day of section: (1) Make sure to be friendly and energetic while students start filing into class and through the duration of class, this helps them feel comfortable to approach you with questions or problems concerning section. (2) Do not be afraid to be yourself! The greatest thing you can do is establish yourself as a student so they do not perceive you as all knowing or all powerful. (3) Do an ice breaker! It does not have to be something embarrassing or ridiculous but, something that can get you to put names to faces and allow the students to get to know their classmates.

Being a Math 3 Learning Assistant taught me time management and patience. Having to remain diligent in your own classes while balancing sections, grading, and lectures seemed scary at first but, adjusting yourself to the requirements of college as well as work is a very rewarding experience. On top of being a better scheduler, an important take away from this job was patience. Working with students that have trouble understanding material, do not want to participate in class, and/or have negative feelings towards the subject are the most difficult parts of the job. Attempting to help someone understand material that does not make sense to them requires patience and hard work on the part of the Learning Assistant. You must always remember to be approachable and easy going to ensure that the student does not feel unintelligent when asking a question. In addition, there are those students that are not interested in participating in the activities done in section. These students also require patience, however, they need a firm hand to make them engage in sessions and to help them understand the material as well.

Being given the opportunity to work with LSS has been a privilege and will remain a privilege to those who want to begin working with the great LSS staff and helping educate the students of UCSC.

Regards,

Madison Johnson
Dear MATH 19B Tutor,

First of all I would like to congratulate you on your position. Teaching for LSS is the most rewarding aspect of my college career. My experience with LSS began when I was hired as a Drop-in Math tutor. Of all the positions, this is one of the most challenging. As a drop-in tutor you must be confident enough in your abilities to help students of all levels of mathematics within one day. If you were hired for this position, it means that the staff felt assured that you can deliver, so do not stress about it. This position is very unpredictable which is a positive thing in my opinion, and you get to interact with a variety of students.

I have also worked as the subject tutor for Math 02 and Math 03. As a subject tutor, you meet with your students (up to four) for one hour per week. They usually come in with homework questions prepared to ask you, and if they do not, encourage them to do so. From my experience, all the students that decide to attend tutoring are more than willing to put in the hard work, they just require a little more time to understand a topic. As a math tutor it is better to teach concepts rather a bunch of formulas. It is important to realize that these students want to learn; they want to comprehend the material. Remain patient with them and encourage them to ask questions along the way so that they can get the most out of an exercise.

Currently I work as the MSI tutor for Math 19B (Integral Calculus). Working as an MSI tutor is different in that I get to attend the lecture along with my students, and I hold three sessions a week with up to twelve students in each session. This position has its set of challenges, however it is in my opinion the easiest of all three because I have an insight on what the students are experiencing in class. With the other positions, you do not know how the professor taught a certain topic, but as the MSI tutor, you get to see first-hand the professor’s approach and the topics they want emphasized for the exams. Using this first-hand account, you can plan out your study sessions according to the class lectures. Through my experience, MSI students, unlike LSS students, do not come in with homework questions prepared, and since you get to meet with these students three days a week, it gives you the opportunity to pick and choose problem sets that you feel will be most advantageous to the learning of the lesson. If you are interested in becoming an educator, being an MSI tutor is the perfect position for you. You have your own classroom and get to run your own lesson plans.

Amongst all these experiences, one of the most important things to keep in mind is to be open with your students. Make sure you listen to their concerns and really go the extra mile to be attentive to their needs. Patience is key when you are a tutor. You must treat every question with the utmost importance, and do not hesitate to reiterate a point more than once for a student if need be. Our goal as a peer tutors is not only to assist students in the specific subject they need help in, but also to help their academic careers cumulatively. Offer study tips and tricks that work for you, and always try to relate to the students by sharing the obstacles you had to face when you learned the material for the first time.

Once again, congratulations on landing the most rewarding job on this campus. I wish you all the best with your experiences. Do not stress or be nervous, you would not have been hired if you were not
qualified. Remember that every student is capable of learning any subject; some just need good tutors like you to break it down for them. I hope you enjoy working for LSS as much as I have.

Sincerely,

Hrag Tarbinian
Dear Future Math 22 MSI Leader,

This letter is to help prepare you for this position that will assume for this quarter.

In my personal experience, I found that being a positive and encouraging leader promoted a better environment for the students. The students were more engaged and more willing to participate during the sessions. You want the students’ learning environment to be as positive and as comfortable as possible for their benefit; the more comfortable the students feel, the more they are willing to seek help.

Comfort starts with you. Going hand in hand with providing the best environment for your students, you must be welcoming and friendly. A way to accomplish this is to know your students’ names. This promotes a personal relationship, allowing them to see you as an equal instead of a figure of authority. This mindset from the students makes it easier for them to be able to ask you questions and help on their problems if they do not feel intimidated by you. Then, the energy spent on being intimidated by you can be better spent on focusing on the material and allowing you to help them.

Make an effort to keep them involved. The strategy that I have found most effective in my experience is reciprocal teaching. When you are teaching the students, you want to provide them with guidance and strategy. You do not want to give them the answers. This mentality is the foundation for reciprocal teaching; it is ideal for the student to be able to teach you or tell you the steps because it promotes their understanding. Instead of going through the problem yourself, call on students and ask for an approach or the next step to the problem. For example, if the problem asks to find the cross product of two vectors, ask them how to set up the problem and ask for the succeeding steps. With this strategy you are able to evaluate how much they understand from lecture, homework and MSI sessions, as well as evaluate what you can do to improve their understanding. You can watch them go through the motions of the problem, or have them guide you through it, and gauge where exactly they struggle the most. Having the idea of where their difficulties lie allows you to provide clarity when appropriate and optimizes their understanding for the material.

Keep in mind that it will not always be easy. I have encountered some challenges, and you may as well. For example, I found that I was not always able to answer the questions posed during my sessions. While it may be difficult to admit that you cannot answer it, remember that you do not necessarily have to know everything. It is okay to stop, take a step back, and tell the students that you can e-mail them the proper approach when you figure it out. Instead of wasting time during session trying to solve a difficult problem, just move on and come back to it when you can. It is best to make sure that the group as a whole can move forward, but that might be difficult when teaching a group larger than the usual group size. Do not be surprised at the sudden increase of people that show up to sessions shortly before a midterm or final, but be cautious that the larger group may be more difficult to assess for the students’ understanding. Not every student will comprehend the material at the same pace nor will every student inform you if they are confused, so you would have to make the judgment call to move onto a different topic. Before moving on, you should make an announcement for any students who are still confused to wait until the end of the session for you to help them further. Another way to battle larger groups is through the method of clustering. Simply divide the students into groups of three or
four, however many you feel would be effective, and require them to teach other. You can then have more power to facilitate in smaller numbers.

Remember to relax and enjoy what you are doing. Take pride in helping others, and believe that you will do an exceptional job. Best of luck, April Le
Dear future Music 30 MSI leader,

I hope you will find leading MSI for Music 30 as rewarding as I have. Having a student tell you that they did so much better on their last ear training quiz because of MSI is a great feeling. Hopefully you are as eager as I was to train some ears.

I held this position for two years, and obviously the second year was easier than the first since by then I had grown comfortable and confident with the ways I ran the sessions. I say “ways” and not “way” because everybody learns differently. I quickly found out that the way I solve melodic dictations is not the same way that many other students do. Not only would I reinforce the tips the professor would give along with my own personal methods of problem solving, but I would also give the students a chance to discuss among each other their own methods that they have found useful. People have shared helpful methods that I hadn’t ever thought of before.

One of the nice things about having a big range of exercises to do in ear training is being able to change the subject if a student is becoming visibly frustrated. Can’t handle any more melodic dictation? Ok, let’s just do some interval recognition then. One of the hardest things I’ve had to deal with in an MSI session is a student who becomes completely discouraged and wants to give up. They’ll pack up their stuff and say something like, “I can’t do this,” and head for the door. I feel like this is one of the most crucial moments in a student’s learning process. Of course, it’s necessary to understand that sometimes, somebody just needs a break. So, I’m not going to stop them from leaving but I will do my best to encourage them to return next week. I remind them that they get better with every minute of practice, even if it’s slow-going.

The first few sessions I led, I was a bit nervous and unsure of what to expect. Don’t spend your sessions hiding behind the piano though. Be interactive and encourage the students to voice any problems they might be having. And don’t forget to take advantage of the resources in the classroom. Ear training is, of course, an aural based subject, but drawing diagrams of chord structures on the white board can benefit those who are better at learning through visual means.

I would say that the most important thing to keep in mind is that everybody learns at a different pace and in different methods. It makes me happy knowing that I’ve made a difference in these students’ education, and you can really see it in them when they talk so excitedly about how they nailed their last quiz. It’s definitely worth it.

Best of luck, Jen Lependorf
Hello New LSS Employee,

Firstly, let me say congratulations on getting employment at LSS! I hope that you are excited for your new job. I’ve been working at LSS for about a year and a half now, and have gained so much from the experience. I’m currently a third year Electrical Engineering major, and have been a tutor and MSI Learning assistant for multiple Computer Engineering courses. However, I believe the advice that I’ve provided in this letter can be applied to a large variety of academic subjects. It’s my hope that this letter will give you a little perspective and information that you can consider while you are running your own sessions that you can use to fit to the situations you will face as a tutor.

There is a lot to be said about working as a tutor or MSI Learning Assistant. You will learn a great deal about becoming an effective educator through LSS, and hopefully this letter will provide some insight as well. However, tutoring is not always predictable, and there are skills you won’t be able to learn and master without some practice on the job. Fear not though, I’m confident that as long as you put in effort to grow and strengthen your tutoring skills, that you will be a very successful tutor. You will find that you never stop learning as a tutor, as there are countless strategies to approach students who have a wide range of learning styles and backgrounds. With practice, you will be able to gauge what strategies will be the most effective way to communicate with your students and assist them to learn.

The most important piece of advice I can give you is this: put the learning process in the hands of your students whenever possible. Vague as it may sound, it’s really a vital component of tutoring that can be the difference between studying a concept and mastering a concept. While you may feel overwhelmed by the task of getting your students to actively participate in the learning process, it’s not as hard as it sounds as long as you are willing to be a leader in your tutoring sessions. Here’s an example: rather than lecturing and going over practice problems on the whiteboard in front of your students, you can give your students problems from their homework and have them work independently or in pairs, and make yourself available for questions.

A really good way of getting students involved in the learning process is to put a student in the role of a teacher. The rule is simple: if you teach someone a concept, you understand it. This has proved to be one of the most effective strategies I’ve used in my own sessions. Encourage your students to assume the leadership position by employing activities where students teach each other and allow your students to explain concepts rather than doing it yourself. You might also have one or two students come up to the board and work out a problem for the rest of the students in the session, a strategy which works well for small group tutoring. If you are an MSI Learning Assistant and have 12 students in your session, you can have students get into groups of three and have each work on a problem, and then have each student go over their problem for the group and answering the questions from their peers. Also, if you know that one student has mastered a concept, and you have another student asking a question pertaining to that concept, have your first student teach it to his/her peer. You will have to be directive to carry out these activities successfully, but the high majority of the time your students will be very receptive to your directions. Not only will your students gain a lot from this approach, but it will also encourage a communicative, comfortable learning environment in your sessions, which is also a very important component of tutoring sessions.
I’m sure you’ve heard a lot through training at LSS about allowing your students to be active and not to spend your tutoring sessions lecturing on the board. This can be frustrating for new tutors and Learning Assistants, as a lot of times they feel like their students expect them to lecture and go over problems and will not be receptive to educational activities. However, you will be surprised to see how receptive your students will be to your directions. While some students do indeed expect a tutoring session to be more of a small group lecture, they will likely be pleasantly surprised to have more involvement in during tutoring and will learn more from a session that employs strategies that will make them an active learner. It is your session and you are entitled to run it as you like, so do it in such a way that helps your students learn the most. This is not to say you should never be at the whiteboard and going over concepts with your entire group. This can also be effective, especially as a way to go over new and challenging subjects that your students are struggling with and get everyone on track. However, I would advise you to limit this time as much as possible, and to have such “lecture” time be more of large group discussion. Ask your students questions throughout this discussion, allow them to ask questions, and you can fill gaps of knowledge as needed.

As I said, most of your learning will come with practice. There may be times when you feel like your students aren’t learning or your strategies aren’t as effective as you may like. Don’t be discouraged! Use it as motivation to look into new strategies and communication methods. By the end of the quarter I can guarantee you will have learned a great deal and have gained a lot of confidence as a tutor, educator, and leader.

I wish you the best of luck!

- Sierra Catelani
Dear Future Learning Assistant,

As you begin your new position as a modified supplemental instruction learning assistant you should be aware that you are in the position of supporting a large group of students in a particular class, and that such high expectations and responsibility should not be taken likely. Working as a learning assistant comes with its challenges, especially at first when you become accustomed to your own, most effective teaching style that comes from experience and education. Remember that you have faced many trials academically and succeeded, and that these students are in the same place you were quarters ago. You will have students who go to MSI wanting to be challenged while other students are confused about the basics and it is up to you to make sure both groups feel like they have gained something because of the MSI support.

I believe that you should go into a session with confidence, optimism and energy. Confidence comes from knowledge and experience; so make sure to arrive to your session well prepared to answer and ask any question (of relevant material). Just as you have a role to play, remind the students that you are not the solution manual and that they are expected to go to MSI having at least tried the homework or read the book. Never give out an answer but have the students come to find it themselves. Always ask what they did, where they got confused and to explain their reasoning, because often times it is the concepts that get overlooked which are so critical to the problem solving. Build upon what they know, clarify the key concepts and ideas and ask them questions. I also found that making a goal clear in the beginning of the session was helpful because as the session progressed and the students’ goals were met, their confidence increased; but if the goal was only partially met then they knew what they had to work on. Ultimately you want the students to not only gain better understanding of the material but more independence as learners so that they can use these skills in other classes; such as breaking down the problem, drawing pictures, working with others and looking back at the notes and text as a reference for example.

Do not lose sight of the fact that you are all students. MSI should have a comfortable atmosphere where students are free to talk to you and amongst themselves. It’s good to take a breather from the material before or after the session and make casual conversation, because as they feel more comfortable talking to you they are more likely to ask you for help on the material instead of shy away.

Working for Learning Support Services is incredibly rewarding and one of the best jobs for students on campus. The work you do helps your fellow banana slugs succeed and there is nothing more enjoyable then having someone tell you they finally understand something or get a high five because they did well on an exam or hug you because they passed the class.

Sincerely, Isis Topete.
Dear Future LSS Employee,

My name is Greg Tupper-Eoff and I acted as a Learning Assistant for Biology 135, Functional Anatomy.

There were many personal qualities and academic strengths that helped me prior to be a Learning Assistant, and one of my words of advice is to use every weapon in your academic arsenal. Since I worked in a physical therapy office prior to be a Learning Assistant I was able to use a lot of the body mechanics that I had practiced in my work experience to teach body motions kinesthetically. I’m sure that you have some reason and or specific experience and I suggest you use it. Additionally, I was an RA at Crown College and so I knew many different communication techniques that were helpful for getting group collaboration; the bottom line is we all have skills that are unique to us and so finding a way to integrate those in some way is something I highly encourage.

I know I was extremely scared for my first session and one of the best parts about working as a tutor, is that as they’re learning from you, you also have an interesting opportunity to learn how to be a better instructor. One of my greatest struggles and subsequent rewards was figuring out how to present the material in a way that actually was instructive as opposed to me just trying to copy a lecture. I gave something a try, realizing that it was probably equal chances of being successful as a total flop, and in the end the students really liked it. One of the most important things to actively work on, is determining how best to serve your students, regardless of the class you’re in charge of. If the class is based on solving homework like problems (typical in math classes and chemistry) then allowing them to practice what they’ve seen in class would probably be really useful. In contrast, a class that focuses on memorizing facts (like in many biology classes) would probably be better served by finding a way for them to go over the material in a way they haven’t seen before, where they’re given a chance to try and recall what they’ve heard in lecture.

One of the biggest challenges came in the fact that when I was acting as a Learning Assistant, the people who came were all at varying comfort levels with the material; some had studied extensively and were coming to the MSI sessions to fill in the last of the gaps, while others were essentially using the MSI sessions as a second lecture. Finding a lesson plan that was flexible became extremely important because I had to find a way to teach both ends of the spectrum, and potentially both at the same time. Along that same line was finding different ways to present the material. For me, I learn primarily kinesthetically followed by visual, and lastly auditory (hence why I hate lectures so much). For that reason I tried to find other ways to show the material that way other people like me can get something out of the lesson as opposed to just having a regurgitation of the lecture. Teaching body motions by actually letting people do them I thought was a much more effective way to teach them than just reading to them what “protraction versus retraction” was. I think to that end the most important goal for anyone is to learn how to be flexible and adapt your lessons to best serve the needs of your students.

I wish you all the best in your time as an LSS employee and know that regardless of your background you’ll do great.
To those of whom will academically help their peers,

It is an honor to write you this welcoming letter and I congratulate you in getting employed by LSS. This means that you have proven to be a great leader in academic instruction and you have not only mastered the subject for which you’ll be tutoring but as well have successfully manifested the ability to engage and impact intellectuals in their academics. Now, as an LSS employ you’ll have to overcome many obstacles, some of which that do not deal with academics, and don’t worry they’ll be a great amount of training provided to prepare for these obstacles and any situation whatsoever. Actually, the training themselves may be a slight obstacle but don’t worry they won’t take over your free time.

Overall, your time in LSS will be filled with great connections, academic challenges, and social situations. I remembered when I first became an MSI learning assistant for physics 5A; it was a plot twist in my collegiate life since I never imagined myself tutoring or at least interacting with my peers in a university while occupying a completely different title. At first I was a bit lost on what to do and what to expect from my sessions. But I have to say that after a while I began to build upon my personal qualities and enhanced my academic determination, sense of an individual’s learning capabilities, and academic curiosity which then helped me build a sense of trust with my students and build create concrete connections with them, understand their creative thought process and critical thinking capabilities, and craft colorful sessions which encouraged my students to engage, understand and have fun with their subject. These skills were all good catalysts which helped me initiate my first few successful sessions in the beginning of the quarter.

However, after a few sessions have gone by I’ve noticed that many of my students were falling behind, looked confused during the sessions, and were shy to admit that they had any questions. Although calling upon those who were shy might encourage their participation in these sessions and thus insure that they obtain something from these sessions, many of times I’ve seen more discouragement and discomfort when I do call upon them. Thankfully with the training that’s been provided by LSS and the Stev 96 course, I obtained some useful skills which helped me engender the impact and effectiveness of my sessions; one of which is quick assessment. Quick assessment made me monitor my students’ progression in the subject and helped me determine which concepts I should focus on more, which ones are good to practice more, and which theorems we should analyze more. Since I was overseeing the physics 5A sessions, it was easy for me to test my students’ skills by bringing upon conceptual questions and introduction quizzes in my sessions, which in fact was easy to do since there is a voluminous amount of physics problems provided by text, online, or even in your head. Soon enough my students’ critical thinking skills and self-empowerment in their academic efficacy began to engender. I even recalled one session dealing with kinematics where my students seemed hopeless at first, lost in the question I brought upon to them, but their ability to apply theory helped them complete and understand this concept. It was a mere problem dealing with finding a simple one-dimensional equation for velocity in respect to displacement of an object. The question itself scared all of my students, as you can imagine, since they didn’t understand what I was asking for. But, after a few suggestions popping up from other students with the help of their preliminary knowledge in some simple algebra, my students slowly began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. At the end, the result we achieved looked a bit weird since we had a square root in our
function, but one student suggested to square both sides, and after a few more gazes everyone began gazing in awe! One of my students said, and I quote, “Wow, did I just do that!”

Working alongside your students is an amazing experience and seeing them surprise themselves with the skills they contain within them and you being able to unleash their potential in a problem that none thought was possible to decipher is just an enlightening epiphany. This session along with many other sessions where my students and I tackled, persevered, questioned, and even struggled on these physics problems made me realize how much academic potential an individual has and it has helped me create professional bonds with all my students. I respect my students as the intellectuals they are and thus they respected me as the individual who puts effort into helping them academically. Thanks to my experience as an MSI learning assistant I have acquired the ability to connect with others more professionally in such a natural way and I came to realize that even though I may be a tutor to my students, there is no barrier that stands between us and thus I am able to cooperate and work progressively with my students, with ease.

Furthermore, I hope you take my experience in mind as you begin your first few sessions as an LSS tutor. Take heed in the Stev-96 course and the trainings, they provide very useful knowledge for you to create effective sessions. Keep in mind that you are the tutor so your students see you carry a great amount of responsibility; they might even believe you’re a graduate student. Take every student’s idea into consideration; after-all there’s always more than just one right answer. And overall, just have fun with these sessions, don’t scare your students because they are human beings so create social bonds with them as well.

I wish you luck in this job and in your future endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jesus Javier Serrano
Dear Future Learning Assistant,

Presumably this is being read by a physics student, or at least someone who is a learning assistant for physics, so I'll start with the compulsory Feynman1 quote:

All of those students are in the class, now you ask me, \"How should I best teach them?\" ... My theory is: that the best way to teach is to have no philosophy\ is to be chaotic and confusing in the sense that you use every possible way of doing it. That's the only way I can see to answer it so as to catch this guy or that guy by different hooks as you go along. Now, I do disagree with Feynman about the confusing bit, but that was probably his excitement and enthusiasm bleeding into hyperbole. Besides that comment, I'll just let Feynman stews; he's good like that. I started o_ during spring quarter, so the training class wasn't where I learned to be an MSI LA. Thus my advice to you is much more of an experimentalist's take: carve your own niche and employ the tenets of science. That is, if something works, keep it; if something doesn't, chuck it. In the training class you'll get the formality from the views Vygotsky and other social scientists studying education to specific class room learning strategies. While I'm glad I know about the Zone of Proximal Development (theorist is me), take the learning strategies with a grain of salt. You can except them at face value, chuck them whole sale, or play Dr. Frankenstein with them.

Find something that works for you with your students in your sessions. If the environment isn't right then everyone flounders, including you. That said, don't expect everything to go as planned. You will have those days and students you simply cannot reach. Do try to minimize those and always strive for improvement, but remember that you won't have a hook for each student at each time. Some are just too fancy for your lures. Those days will suck, and, even after over two years of doing MSI and LSS subject tutoring in which I have become an accomplished tutor myself, I still have them. Those days where I'm on the bus going home and thinking, \"Why on Earth did I respond that way to that student? I completely missed what was in front of me!\" Some of these missteps are fixable; you can come back to the issue before or after class if you see the student(s), shoot them an email, or catch them at your next session.

Sometimes, you just have to count your bruises. Having friends in LSS is helpful in this way, people you can commiserate with. (Be mindful of public discussions and students privacy, though!) Just remember: we all have those days. But aside from seeking solace with your com-munity of fellow educators, there's something else to keep in mind: the good you do. You will be invaluable to your students. You are the older student, not so much of a wise fool anymore but someone who can navigate the treacherous waters of the course material. A brief aside: I was astounded by this my first quarter. While of course I did well in Physics 5C, I was terrified of having to teach it, especially as the _rst class for which I did MSI. I remembered the not getting it and being up until 4 AM in futile attempts at figuring out E&M. However, that extra year, that decompression time after the quarter ends, seeing it all again in lecture, and not being responsible for the material yourself (i.e. for a grade) does wonders. You'll be surprised at how all of the potholes you once stepped in, that your students are currently stepping in, are now all paved before you. So be nervous {a little bit is a good thing! but know that you'll be _ne. And now back to our regular programming: You are someone your students will rely upon {the magic maker and the A saver. For every bad session I have, I have dozens of good moments and many really good moments. These are moments where students send
(Footnote 1: If you don't know who Feynman is, please look him up. This Nobel Laureate of physics has been called "The Great Explainer" and "The Smartest Man Since Einstein," and a familiarity with just about anything he has done will help you in your as well as your students' academic careers (especially if you and your students are physicists in the making!). An email after the quarter ends, give a handshakes or a hug after finals or study sessions, get excited about the otherwise drudgery of taking a determinant, become anxious for the material of future courses I hint at as teasers, have sparkling eyes as their curiosity is satisfied (or because you've wet their appetite), and, most humbling, give thanks for allowing them the chance to pass the class or even to stay in the major. Each example I listed is true, for myself and other learning assistants, and, with some effort, for you too. You, oh future learning assistant, will be in, no small way, significant to your students' academic careers. This brings me to my last point of advice: Take your work seriously. With my involvement with LSS and the physics department and SPS to an even greater extent, I can definitively say that taking your job seriously pays off big time. It does this in two ways, one, by showing those around you that you are reliable (something your students shouldn't be second guessing), and by conditioning you forever more challenging tasks and roles in life. If you can do the hard work, then you have more doors open to you. If you are used to hard work, most other work is then easier. But it seriously pays off for your students as well; your hard work is work you are doing on your students' understanding. It is the hard work and commitment precipitates the previous paragraph. Things like holding 3 hour sessions or 6 hour study sessions (the limits, as I am writing this, are 1.5 hours for both and that's what I put down on my time sheets anyway; Here's where Charis starts being a little displeased with my letter!). While I don't get any overtime pay, I do get the training and stamina that comes from doing long amounts of physics.

Another example I want to give (as it's something else I do that Charis tells us not to do), is the entire homework set each week. Again, good training, but also the effort of doing each week's problem set means I know what was is happening in a way that attending lecture doesn't give. It also gives me the understanding I need for the structured group chaos (my hyperbole to Feynman's confusion) which defines how I run my own sessions. I've gone through the mathematics and refreshed my memory of what's important, what's hard, what is needed, and where my students will fail. I don't like it when my students fail, so I do what I need to and what I can to ensure that they don't. For me, that means the entire weekly problem set.

Some of the rules are flexible. Start by adhering to the rules to get your footing, but mold you sessions into what works best (your own niche. Remember: we are all just figuring it out as we go along, some are just sleeker than others at it (a dirty secret of politics and leadership). So go out to your sessions. Take the good and ditch the bad; make the sessions your own and put in effort and your intellectual might (if it wasn't there, you wouldn't be here reading this now!) into your position. Your students will be counting on you and the rewards of your hard work will follow. You are a Learning Assistant.

Sincerely,

Paul Bergeron
Dear Future Physics 6A MSI Leader,

Hi, my name is Johnny Zhang. First off if you are new to Learning Support Services I want to congratulate you on getting a job with Learning Support Services. It is a great environment to work and learn in. One of the things that have surprised in my time with LSS is that I have truly learned while working. I want to share the a few things that I have learned with you.

One of the most valuable lessons that I learned during my time in MSI is that no two sessions are the same. Each session is going to be made up of different students with differing learning styles. You must learn to adapt to each session and have different teaching methods. Some sessions you will have to lecture more while other sessions individual contact is preferred. Do not worry, as you will develop a sense of which style a session will require quickly. I wish I could tell you what to look for or what to sense but it is really an acquired skill. You will learn it with time. Also do not worry about if you do not know different teaching styles. The training you may have already had and most definitely will have will prepare you for this job.

Most of the students you will have are not going to be physics majors. Instead you will be seeing a majority of biology and chemistry students. These students are just trying to get through the physics 6 series as a prerequisite for their major or graduate school. Try not to get discouraged if they are not as into the subject as you are. Don’t be discouraged if the students are not putting all their effort into this class, as they will likely have other classes that they deem more important. Try to make the students see physics as something more as just a prerequisite. Show them that it can be interesting and fun. It will make your job a lot easier but most of all it will help your students learn much easier. At the end of the day this job is about helping students learn and anything that you can do to make that process easier is a plus.

If you do hold review sessions, I suggest that you make your own review sheet with your own problems. While going over the professors practice exam is good, the students are usually given the answers to the practice exam already. Any extra problems that a student can get their hands on will only help them understand the topic. The students really appreciate it when you come into a review with your own review sheet. Another thing that I have found useful in sessions is to give a quiz at the end of the session. It tests the students to see if they have grasped the subject that you have gone over during the session. It also gives you feedback to see if the teaching method is appropriate and effective for that certain topic. Just like how different students learn differently, different topics need to be taught differently.

There are a lot of resources to help you in your job. LSS should have a file with all the review sheets and lesson plans that I have made throughout my time here. I hope that you will look over them in order to get a sense of how I ran my sessions. Feel free to use the review sheets in your sessions. If you ever run into a problem that you cannot solve on your own, do not hesitate to ask for help. All your co-workers are willing to help. LSS has a great staff in the office that can answer all your questions and get you all the supplies that you need to run your sessions. Lastly, just be yourself during your sessions. I know that it is hard but try not to be nervous. The students are looking for someone who is confident. They want a sense that their MSI leader knows the subject. Being hired already tells me that you have the
knowledge. You need to project that sense of knowledge to your students. Speak loudly, speak confident but probably most important of all speak in a friendly tone. What I have found is that a lot of students come to MSI because they know that it is their peer helping them. Some students are intimidated by their professors and are looking for a different environment to seek help.

I wish you the best of luck and I have no doubt that you will succeed in this job. Hopefully one day you will be able to pass on your experiences to another future MSI leader.

Sincerely,

Johnny Zhang
Dear Friend,

My biggest struggle with tutoring physics was getting participation from the students. Showing them how to do the problem is not enough for them to understand it, and even explaining it to them step by step doesn’t fully integrate the concepts. In order for them to really understand the material they have to struggle and find their own way of understanding the problems. I often would do problems on the whiteboard and only write down what they told me to, even if their contribution was wrong. I would show them why their ideas were wrong and didn’t work rather than tell them beforehand.

Some of my best realizations about tutoring came when I had no clue how to solve a problem, either because I had forgotten an equation or a concept. I would simply ask the students to help me work through the solutions and let them teach me. This often resulted in me gaining a better understanding of the concepts overall and me being able to explain things better to them. If you’re like me and not a physics major and ever get stuck on a conceptual question, finding someone who is a physics major in LSS could be an invaluable resource.

Have fun, relax, and enjoy being an asset to those who really need you.

Best,

Keegan Bowers
To new Psych 1 MSI Employee

Hello Future Leader of the World and new LSS employee!

Congratulations on getting this great opportunity to make an impact on the lives of your psych students and make some good money. This job really is a great way to further your own understanding of psych and influence how your students understand the material.

I am going to tell you how this position has changed me as a person and how I have improved as a tutor and hopefully you can get some ideas on how to approach your sessions.

I am really passionate about learning about people and understanding social interactions so this position was a great chance for me to inspire others to find themselves through psychology and make connections about human behavior and cognition. I have been a Learning assistant for this class for 3 quarters now, so I have had a good amount of time with this material and feel like I know what students are able to pick-up on pretty easily and what they have some more difficulty with. Going through the material over and over definitely solidifies your own understanding of the material so you are capable of explaining it fully to your students. I would say that having this position has helped me become patient with my students and increased my ability to effectively communicate the main important points with the students.

Some important things that I have learned/gained through this experience are: 1) be calm, treat your students like people, not subjects and let them know that you understand what they are going through and psychology is a great way to connect because a lot of what they will be learning is something you can all connect with. 2) Be sure that you yourself are confident with the material and are able to transfer the definitions of the terms into solid examples and be able to explain how/why these theories are the way they are. Be sure to open up the theories up for discussion and comparison to encourage the students to think critically about everything that they are learning. 3) What I have found works the best in terms of structuring the sessions is to break students up into small groups and give each group a small task. Give them a chance to talk with each other about the material, and then come back together in a big group and have each small group present to the rest of the session what they have found. Encourage everyone to speak about something, and question them about the theories (ex: what would Piaget think about the “Baby Einstein” trend in modern society according to his stages of development?) Encourage your students to APPLY the material they are learning about to their own lives.

In general, have fun! Help your students see the world through a psychological perspective. Help them to value the scientific method and research process related with psychology and encourage them to think about how/why psychology is relevant to them in their lives and potential career paths!

I have faith that you will have a great time learning with your students. Just know: you are all people, you all experience psychology every day!

Have fun! If you want any other tips/advice/methods feel free to shoot me an email.

tacrowl@ucsc.edu  Si se puedes!  -Terra Crowl
Hello New Psychology Tutor!

Congratulations on getting such an awesome gig with Learning Support Services. If your experience is anything like mine, you should have a wonderful time at this job, and build a lot of meaningful memories and skills going forward. I’ve been an MSI learning assistant for Psyc 1 for all of the 2015-2016 school year. I’ve also participated in some individual tutoring for the class, in addition to a couple of other Psyc classes. I’ll speak primarily about my time in MSI.

Coming into the job, I had an inkling that I would enjoy it. I’ve always taken an interest in my psychology courses, and I like the feeling of helping friends understand a concept. Both of those qualities will help you immensely as an MSI tutor. In fact, the more interested you are in the subject the better, because you will likely hear the same material multiple times if you get re-hired to tutor for the same class. Ultimately, it has been really interesting to hear the same information taught each quarter, with the same punchlines and stories told by the professors. It is not only a great opportunity to observe a professor’s methods, but it also makes tutoring easier as you become more familiar with everything. Familiarity has given me more wiggle room to try different tutoring methods in my sessions, and I feel that I’ve gotten a better handle on what works for students as the year has progressed.

One of the tips I can give to a new tutor such as yourself is to put yourself in the shoes of your tutees. Most of them want to improve their grade in the class. Most of them tend to take passive roles in sessions, and want you to just feed them information (besides the one or two students in each session who prefer to do a ton of talking). Of course, your goal is to facilitate active and engaging conversation about class subjects, and for them to do it among themselves. My best sessions are ones where I assign a task (such as going over each point of the study guide, or coming up with their own potential test questions), and they fill the room with their voices. I’m happy to answer questions, but I tend to redirect and see if their peers can provide answers instead. What you want is for the students to actively engage with material, because this will lead to them making connections and storing information into long-term memory. If a student reads from their class notes word for word, this is a troublesome sign that they are not actually remembering what they have heard in lecture.

Another tip is to always be encouraging, and never belittling. Especially when a student gets a concept wrong. A lot of us are so afraid of looking foolish and messing up, but it’s important to remind everyone that messing up is actually a good thing. It means that you’re learning, and you’re more likely to remember the times you were wrong, and then make a mental correction about it. Outside the classroom, people tend to tell me that I am a kind person. This is why I was so astonished and disheartened when one of my first student evaluations said that I was mean and condescending (they had been to one session and never returned). I wish I knew what it was in my tone that made the student feel that way. It’s hard to know whether it was me, or if the student was just having a bad day. But the lesson was that you may not come off to your tutees the way you intend to be perceived. So, just try your best to be understanding, and recognize the patterns of what students tend to struggle with. That way you will be less surprised if someone doesn’t know something you would expect them to.
get. Just because the answers are clear in your own mind certainly doesn’t make it clear in theirs.

At the end of the day, I love what this job has done for me as far as my own personal and professional development. I feel so good to have had such a meaningful job this past school year. Beyond the occasional nerves, I love that I look forward to work every time I have a shift. If you’re lucky enough to have a co-tutor in your class (like I did in Psyc 1), then you can share my enjoyment of having a coworker who knows exactly what you’re going through each week. I would highly recommend joining with a group of tutors who meet at least every other week, to discuss things. It’s a great support group, and I walk out of each meeting with a helpful tip or bit of information. Also it’s just a fun way to make friends.

In addition, this job allows you to develop great leadership skills. I now know what it’s like to not only be a student, but to facilitate other students’ learning. This is applicable to various academic and professional settings that you’ll encounter later on, and it will hopefully give you a confidence boost in your own abilities.

Whatever tutoring style that ends up working well for you, and whatever lessons you learn from all this, I think this job will be worthwhile. I hope that you have a great time, and that you appreciate this amazing opportunity to work with LSS.

Sincerely,

Maggie Parsons
Psyc 1 MSI Tutor (2015-2016)
Dear Future MSI learning assistant:

You’re probably somewhat scared about how you’re going to do as an MSI leader. I know that when I was first starting this job, I was so afraid of coming off as dumb in front of my students, especially since it had been over a year since I had taken psych stats. But it really isn’t that big a deal; quite honestly, there will probably be many students in the class that are better at stats than you are. Even so, it isn’t that big a deal because our job isn’t to be information-banks but to help our students develop strategies for being successful in class. Being an MSI leader is a lot easier than you think, so my first piece of advice is to calm down and stop worrying that you’ll do a terrible job as an MSI leader.

It is best to let your students know as soon as you can that as an MSI tutor, you are not supposed to have all the answers to their questions. Your students should know that your job is not to teach them, but to help them teach themselves and each other. This makes it seem less rude when they ask you a question and you respond with, “I don’t know--how ‘bout we look in the book?” It definitely feels weird not answering their questions at first, but the more you redirect their questions and encourage them to look in the book, the better they become at solving problems on their own. During my first few sessions, students were not used to this and kept coming to me for help. But the more sessions I have had, the better my students have gotten at solving the problems correctly, either on their own or with the help of their peers.

It’s also good to start getting your students to work with each other as soon as possible. For the first few sessions, I would have my students guide me through the problems on the board, but only a few students would participate. Instead, it is better to have the students do problems in small groups of two or three people so that each student feels involved in the process. I’ve done this for my past few sessions, and they seem to flow very well. I also got students to exchange emails so that they could email each other to check their answers and collaborate. I would suggest doing this right away because students often have incorrect answers and less-than-stellar performance in their homework, which they cannot undo and just makes them approach the class with a negative attitude.

My last tip is to make 100% sure that you have written the correct instructions on your practice problems for MSI. I once had accidentally asked students to conduct a t-test even though I had given them the population standard deviation. The result was a group of confused, hopeless, and frustrated students who almost despised their MSI leader (I had to stay with them a bit longer to correct my mistake). So make sure to proofread your problems!

Another difficulty I’ve had as an MSI learning assistant is being unable to make the students feel energized for the sessions (not surprising, since it’s a stats class). It’s definitely good to arrive a good ten minutes before session and start conversations with the students, which will get them to feel more comfortable around you. I also sometimes bring snacks to share with my students, and I try to remember their names. As long as you show them that you care about them, they will be more willing to participate and less shy in MSI sessions.

That’s about all the advice I have for being an MSI leader. Congratulations, again, and enjoy your time as an MSI leader!
Dear Future Learning Assistant,

I want to start off this letter by saying that being a tutor and MSI instructor has been one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences I've had in college. You learn so much about yourself, others, and teaching. As I am now about one week away from finishing my undergraduate degree, I can honestly say that the skills you gain as a teacher are unlike the skills you will gain anywhere else.

When I first became a tutor, it definitely took me a while to figure out the best ways to help my students. I was working with two students in two different classes, both who had more than 3 hours each of individual tutoring per week. I think one of the biggest things I didn’t understand in the beginning was the relationships you form with your tutees, and how to use these relationships to your advantage. After spending several hours each week with these students, you really start to understand them as people and you become really invested in wanting them to succeed—not because you want their academics to reflect well on your tutoring, but because you can see how hard they are trying and how much they want to succeed. When your students do well on a test or assignment, it feels like you have succeeded too. On the flip side of that, I also had to realize that when a student did poorly on an assignment, I could not take it as a direct reflection of my performance as a teacher; everyone has a million things going on in their life, and we as tutors cannot feel responsible for every point of a student’s grade. With this in mind, I learned the importance of developing an emotional relationship with my students so that they feel comfortable telling you what might be holding them back. Lots of students don’t realize that professors will often be accommodating if there are extenuating circumstances affecting their academics, and often having another person to strategize on issues like this can be very helpful. Though this might not be a typical responsibility of a tutor, I found that, in the end, forming these deeper relationships greatly helped in the overall learning process.

In my second quarter with LSS I became an MSI tutor for Psyc 2, Introduction to Statistics for Psychology. This was a very different experience for a number of reasons, but mostly because of the number of student you have to teach. I had to quickly adjust my teaching strategies to accommodate the twelve person groups. One of the biggest difficulties I’ve had as an MSI instructor has been getting students to participate. It is honestly really scary to ask the class a question and to have blank faces staring back at you. On a certain level, you just have to accept that this is going to happen. Especially in early morning sessions, it doesn’t matter how many jokes I make, or how many strategies I employ, there is always going to be a hesitation to participate. I think this may partially be due to the fact that many of the students in Psyc 2 have extreme anxiety around math, and many of those students are required to take the class and don’t really want to be there. Especially in my first quarter doing MSI I found myself getting very frustrated when students wouldn’t participate. If none of the class is participating, it might be a problem with your teaching. If just a few people aren’t participating, it is probably their apprehension that’s holding them back. In either case, it is important to not get discouraged. Just keep trying new things, and make sure your students know that you’re human too; you’re trying your best, but if they have any suggestions for activities, problem sets, etc, use their suggestions, and make them feel like their voice is being heard.

Though I’ve had a lot of great experiences as a tutor, one experience definitely stands out. A first year student I was doing one-on-one tutoring with asked me during one of our sessions if I would
help her on a transfer application; she was very unhappy at UCSC and wanted to go to a new university. I told her that I would be more than happy to edit her application essays for her outside of tutoring hours. Obviously this is not a responsibility of a tutor, but she came to me as a friend and I knew she would benefit from the extra help, even if that was only an hour of my time. A few months later, she got into her the university she had applied to. She emailed me a couple of weeks ago thanking me for helping her and told me she wouldn’t have been able to get in without me. I doubt that’s the case, but I was so touched that she went out of her way to email me and thank me for my time. This really made me understand that people really do appreciate help, even if it is only an hour of your time.

Being a tutor will be one of the best experiences you have in college. Take this incredible opportunity to learn about yourself, and I am positive you will grow immensely from the experience.

Best,

Olivia Arstein-Kerslake
Dear new Psych 10 MSI,

CONGRATULATIONS!!! Go ahead, do your happy dance. Done? Nope? Okay, keep going. Now that you have that out of your system you’re starting to feel those nerves, am I right? The ones that feel like you’re standing in front of your students in your underwear not knowing the answer to the one vital question they need to know to pass the exam? Yes, that will pass as did the happy dance stage; however, it will never completely fade. To help you overcome nerves, fears, and general scary day dreams here are a few tips for you to prepare yourself.

Have a separate binder for MSI: this includes a section for current class notes, current book notes, notes from when you took the class, yellow sign-in sheets, and purple log sheets. I personally enjoy the accordion folders because they are not as bulky and look more professional. The reason why I am telling you to physically prepare your materials is because you do not want to show up to a session leaving everything behind. This mishap is less likely to occur if you view MSI as its own class with its own personal binder/folder.

Look at your past notes. I meant to do this over spring break but things got a little too crazy and I ended up having my first session without going over my notes from when I took the class. Granted, I had been to lecture so I was refreshed of the information, but reviewing my past study guide and key things past teachers had highlighted would have given me a better direction for my first session. And believe me, those nerves you are suppressing right now, will immensely rise right before your session. Therefore, it is conducive to your sanity to see the bigger picture and be a step ahead of your students, rather than blindly trying to find the correct path.

When you introduce yourself that first day you are trying to convince people to go to an extra class. Students do not want to do this, even though it will help them. Therefore, think about your opening announcement. The one that I wish I had done is to scare them first, then get personal, then get logistical. What I mean by that is to have 1/3 of the class raise their hand and tell the rest that this is the amount of students who will get a C or worse, which is means to be kicked out of the psychology department (or whatever the statistic is for that year). This is a new technique from the same old, this is my name; this is why you should go. It grabs their attention and scares them a little bit. Then you be nice and introduce yourself and get personal. Now how to get personal? For me, when I took psych 10 I was warned that it was a hard class, that most people failed, heard the MSI speech and believed I was the exception who could ace it. Then I took the quiz that determined if you would be recommended to MSI (early alert quiz) and absolutely failed it. I mean bad. Then I went to MSI every week, actually read the book, and ended with an A. This forms a connection between a large group of students and yourself instantly. And then discuss the logistics of MSI and how it works. This grabs attention, forms a bond, so they are actually paying attention to the logistical (boring aspect)

Look at past MSI’s study review sheets, study guides, and activities. They are a good resource! For one thing, if you happen to have the same teacher as a past leader had you chances are that teacher
will highlight and test the students on the same material/concepts. Furthermore, if you have a plethora of activities that are flexible to the varying number of students who attend your session you are less likely to be stumped during a session. Reviewing past MSI leaders’ suggestions on activities and which work best with which sized groups gives you an arsenal of activities that force students not only to interact with each other, but to also interact with the text. This as you will learn in your logistics meetings, is one of the best ways you can learn a new concept.

Always check your email and the class website (usually ecommons) before every section. The teacher may have posted a study guide, and if you go about your session without focusing on the study guide the students may not be too happy. Plus having a study guide is an easy model to base the topics you will cover in your session. Just make sure you know exactly what you are talking about (with an example) before you try to explain a concept to a confused student.

That is all the advice I have at the moment. I am sure I will think of others to tell you later on, so feel free to contact me with any issues or ideas. LSS will have my email and, if you contact me you will soon find out, that I am a talkative person. Good luck, breathe, you got this!

Best,

Caitie Sullivan
Dear Future Psych 10 MSI Learning Assistant,

First, congratulations on your new position. Being an MSI Learning Assistant will likely be one of the most rewarding jobs you have ever had. This position will allow you to hone your teaching skills and develop the ability to communicate with a diverse group of people and make new connections each quarter. Being a tutor is an on campus job that lets you make an impact in the lives of so many students and you will probably see them around campus later on and still have a connection with many of them.

As for the actual position, Psych 10 is an extremely fun class to teach. One thing to remember going into it is that this class is specific to Developmental Psychology, something that a good chunk of psych majors will not be interested in if they are pursuing other branches of psychology. This is a good thing though because it gives you the chance to help them become interested! One thing I find really useful is to relate all of the concepts they learn back to their own lives and give real life examples that make something abstract become meaningful. It’s especially easy to do this with Psych 10 because every student had a childhood and grew up and went through a lot of the developmental stages they are learning about.

One thing to remember is that this position will be scary and difficult at first. Speaking in front of a group of students who expect you to know everything can be hard, but it will definitely get easier over time. Something that I found helpful is to incorporate some personal stuff into the session- get to know your students beyond just being students and you will connect more with them and build rapport. Also, let them know from the beginning that you’re a student too and you don’t know everything; this eases some of the expectations and pressure on you. Most importantly, have fun with this job! You will really get out of the job what you put into it; it can be something that changes your life and that leaves you smiling at the end of every day (like it is for me) or it can just be work and it’s up to you to take the extra steps to make it something special.

Good luck and have fun!

-Andrea McDade
Hi! This is Kathy Vu Nguyen. I was the MSI Learning Assistant for PSYC 181: Psychological Data Analysis with Professor Douglas Bonett for Spring 2013. I’d like to congratulate you for getting the position. I remember when I had my interview with Jessica Maines. I was so nervous. I felt my body temperature rise and almost started sweating. In the end, I got the job and was overjoyed. I’m sure you’ll find that working with your fellow students as their MSI Learning Assistant as awarding as I did.

As a Learning Assistant, I felt my organization and communication skills helped me the most. I outlined my schedule for sessions and planned ahead for that week. I worked to be ahead of class lectures and finished module study guide questions and data analysis problems before my students. With this, I was prepared to answer any question to the best of my abilities. If I wasn’t sure, I asked the professor for clarification, and he would explain the concept again in class. My ability to promptly communicate with students, Professor Bonett, and the supervisors at LSS helped me be efficient. I gave students the information they needed, helped them with questions they didn’t understand, kept the Professor aware of student progress, and ran my sessions effectively.

I believe that skills such as organization and promptness are essential to being an effective Learning Assistant. Besides that, I know that being passionate and enthusiastic is an important part of being a Learning Assistant. I took the job for work experience and as a way for bettering myself as an individual. As a Learning Assistant, you must be reliable, patient, and encouraging. Students appreciate it when you can relate to their situation as an undergraduate. Be friendly so they’ll feel comfortable with participating in sessions. At the same time, make sure not to overstep the boundaries of professionalism. You have to be able to maintain a balance in your relationship with your students as a Learning Assistant.

While working, I learned to be more proactive and gained leadership skills. I’m not an extrovert and usually don’t initiate conversation. As a Learning Assistant, I needed to step up. I facilitated discussion, assigned groups, and made decisions that I felt would benefit the students and their learning process. Being a Learning Assistant for this course can be difficult. Some concepts are more conceptual while others are more mathematical. You have to accommodate for this while taking into account that students can be auditory or visual learners. Some students will need to have things explained in multiple ways or do not understand the material at all. Be an effective Learning Assistant by getting students’ feedback. Useful techniques include scaffolding and probing. See what the student already knows by asking simple questions (probing) first. Then, build on top of their knowledge by asking increasingly difficult questions (scaffolding) until the student understand that complete concept and can explain it back to you or a peer.

You will have shy students who won’t speak at all during sessions. You may not know how much material the students know. They might be more comfortable or less intimidated speaking in a smaller audience. A way to get the students to participate is through group work. An effective strategy is the jigsaw method. Split up the students into small groups. Assign them parts of the study guide or data
analysis problems. Have them work in their small groups first and then share their answers with the entire session at the end.

I know that this course is offered once a year in Spring, so you will need to review or re-learn the material. That’s what I had to do, and it’s normal. Also, be aware of your own limitations. It’s okay if you don’t know everything. There is only so much you can do as an undergraduate. If you can’t help the student, direct them to other resources that may help them (Professor Bonett or the TAs). There is no overall effective way to teach everyone. Just do your best to help those you can. While working as a Learning Assistant, you will have to juggle your job, classes, and possibly more. Please remember to let yourself breathe. Self-care is important. Don’t stress yourself out or make more work for yourself if it isn’t absolutely necessary. If you want to make reviews for tests, I hope you find the reviews I made to be useful.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I had a wonderful time working as a Learning Assistant. I hope you’ll also enjoy helping others learn and do well in their class while obtaining more skills for yourself that may be applicable in the future.

MSI Learning Assistant PSYC 181,
Kathy Vu Nguyen

If you need any tips, advice, or want to discuss your experiences as a Learning Assistant, my e-mail is nguyen.kathy116@yahoo.com.
Dear Future Sociology 10 M.S.I Learning Assistant,

First and foremost congratulations. This is an amazing opportunity for you to not only gain professional tutoring experience, but to learn more about the subject, other student body, and yourself. Know that you are more of an equal to these students than you may realize, and the more that you make them understand that, the better your attendance will be. The truth is, unless you are an MSI for a professor you have previously taken, there are just as many amazing things for you to learn while in the classroom as well as for the students. Each professor has different aspirations pushing them to teach Sociology 10, and it is vital to hone in on what that is to better understand readings, lecture, and the deeper meaning of the class, according to the professor, for these students to grasp. I am sure, seeing as you are reading this, that you are an outstanding student who takes diligent notes, and obtains great grades; don’t lose that. It may become easy throughout the quarter to feel as if the material is repetitive, and you may feel as if you “already know this stuff.” When that time in the quarter starts to creep in, remember this simple cliché; you don’t know everything. Not to be confused with the fact that you most likely know quite a bit, if not most, of the material. It is just important to realize that there is always something new to take out of every lecture, no matter how repetitive the ideas and notions may feel. It is those new pieces of information that enrich your sessions, because you are not only able to apply your previous knowledge to the material, but you will be able to truly engage the students with material the way their specific professor intended it to be. This brings up another huge aspect of being an MSI instructor.

Sessions can be fun, informative, engaging, and low stress as long as you do a few simple things beforehand. Always prepare at least 2 to 4 options on how to run the session. This really does not take up too much time, and makes the environment structured and productive. There will be days when you have 1 student, and days when you have 10 students begging for deeper explanation on W.E.B. Du Bois’s Color Line theory because their midterm is in less than fifteen hours. Having a rough session plan, or three, can greatly reduce hesitation, and confusion with in the session. Maybe start off by sitting down in your assigned room before the session starts for ten or fifteen minutes. Then think of a few activities/questions for 1-3 students, and then another set of interactive learning strategies set up for the chance that you may get a group bigger than 5. When you are organized and on time, the students take the session much more seriously, and gain respect for you as their tutor. Even when a student asks you a question that you do not know how to answer, do not take that as a bad thing. This just simply reaffirms the notion that you are their equal, which you are, just with a tad more classroom experience with this specific course. Everyone is human, therefore no one knows everything, and that is a good thing.

With Sociology 10, the most important tool that we can give students to take away from this course is how to apply these thoughts to real life. The truth is, as you know, that these issues and problems that they are learning, are still perpetuated today, just in different forms. Racism, slavery, gender discrimination, immigration, colonization, just to name a few, are all continued cycles in society. This is why your job is so vital to the full understanding of this course. The Professor, and TA’s, are all there to dive deep into course material, theories etc., but we as MSI leaders have the fun job. We are given a space to let these students apply all of these topics to today’s issues. We can take these ideas, readings,
and lecture slides, and bring them to life! In reality that is where all of these things are happening anyways, in real life. That is why our job is so important. You have the opportunity to open the eyes of someone who may have never known how we have institutionalized racism. This could be mind blowing for some students, and could potentially help them become a more educated and tolerant human being. True, many of these students may be taking it as a GE, but the majority of the students do have some level of compassion, and interest in these issues. As an MSI tutor you allow them a space to express this towards the material. The more excited you are about the subject, the more excited that the students will be about it.

To sum this up, I hope that you take full advantage of everything this position has to offer. You have the opportunity to learn more, meet new and enthusiastic students and staff, and most importantly help students feel comfortable with material that they may have otherwise never understood. Always be approachable, and energetic. Everyone has bad days, but your job for just one hour and 15 minutes every session, is to be on task and to be excited about learning. Students will catch on if you are not, then they will not be, and that defeats the whole purpose of MSI. In addition, know that the Learning Support Service staff is an amazing group of individuals who are always willing to help you. They have helped me feel at home in the ARC Center, and they are all extremely concerned with the success of MSI sessions. So if you feel overwhelmed, lost, or even if you are just happy because a student told you that because of you they got a good grade, do not hesitate to email, call, or go in and see the staff. They are a great back bone to remember that you always have. Other than that, I would say that you are more than ready to conquer your first session as an MSI tutor! So put on a smile, get ready for some interesting lectures, and ignite your flame for education, because once you ignite it it’s hard to extinguish (which is a good thing).

Sincerely,

Noel Parisi

MSI Sociology 10, with Professor Susy Zepeda, Spring 2013.
Dear LSS employee,

Congratulations on being hired by LSS! You’re in for a challenging, but rewarding ride!

I have worked as an academic mentor for psychology students since Fall 2015, and I’ve learned so much more than I imagined I would. However, the earliest sessions are usually the hardest, so I want to give you advice based on my experiences.

First, I want to let you know that all the skills you’ve picked up from your classes will definitely come in handy when you have your sessions. I was a psychology major helping students that were barely getting into psychology, so there were times that I needed to use the skills I learned in the major to help them out. For example, I took Learning and Memory (Psych 129), which gave me a lot of great tips about studying and retaining information, and I shared what I had learned with my students. Being able to write effectively and conduct research were important skills that I learned as a psychology major, and I applied these skills when I helped my students with their essays. Lastly, my organization skills became very useful when planning and facilitating my sessions. Being organized is a skill that benefits students in every major, and staying on top of things makes your sessions run smoothly.

Don’t be nervous about having to apply your skills immediately because throughout the course of your work, you will be learning lots of new skills. As part of your training, I’m sure you’ll be required to take a Peer Tutoring class. Although it may not be the most ideal class to take, you really do learn a lot about being a better teacher and a better learner yourself. When I took the Peer Tutoring class, I didn’t expect to learn as much as I did. Some of the most applicable concepts I learned were about self-efficacy and its role in academic success. I also learned about a few different strategies that helped facilitate my sessions. If you put effort into that class, you will get a lot out of it, and you’ll be better able to help your students.

Although LSS staff will gladly help you be a great tutor, MSI learning assistant, or academic mentor, the position is not without a few difficulties. I think the main difficulty is seeing students who are not improving or who don’t seem to be using your advice and suggestions. I’m sure that you applied for your current position because you’re good at your particular subject and you want to do your part to help your peers and help lessen the achievement gap. And you might come into the position feeling like you can help everyone do well if you just work hard enough. However, you might eventually realize that you can’t help everyone. The students have to be responsible enough to seek help, implement the appropriate strategies, and have the desire to do well and excel. It is not enough for you to want that for them. There will be times when not all students pass, but you must not blame yourself. There’s only a certain amount of effort and patience you can have before it becomes clear that you might not be able to help a student. I came into my position full of energy and optimistic that I would be able to help anyone, solely based on my own performance. I learned this was not the case when I saw some of my students putting forth less effort than what was needed. After speaking with my mentoring peers, I realized I can’t blame myself for the failure of others. This is a joint effort between the student and yourself, not just yours.
However, the position that you’re in can be incredibly rewarding. One particular victory that I remember fondly is when one of students passed her statistics class. In fall quarter when I started working with my student, she was struggling with a statistics class that was a prerequisite for other classes in the major. I tried to help where I could, but ultimately she didn’t pass the class. The next quarter, she retook the stats class and I saw that she was changing certain habits/strategies that had led her to do poorly the previous quarter. I gave her tips and strategies, and I saw that she was slowly but surely integrating what she learned in our sessions into her own study arsenal. She started going to office hours and extra tutoring for stats, she started doing her homework much earlier than before, and she came up with study plans for midterms and finals. I saw the she put a lot of effort into this stats class, and even though she received a less-than-great score on the stats midterm, she kept going and striving to do better, and eventually she passed the class with a B+. I was incredibly proud of her, not only for passing, but also for taking everything I had tried to teach her and putting it to action and sticking with it. This experience also boosted her self-efficacy, and I hope that she’ll be able to build on this victory in subsequent quarters.

In sum, I just want to congratulate you on obtaining your position, and I wish you the best of luck. You’ll do great, and I can assure you that you’ll make positive changes in our students.

SOPHMORE ACADEMY MENTOR: IMAN BARRE

Dear Sophomore Academy Mentor,

Congratulations on your new position! You have just been selected to embark on a journey that will not only influence another student, but will provide you with a learning experience that will change your own perspectives as well. Each mentoring experience is unique and although it is impossible to fully prepare for what may come, we hope this letter will serve as a useful first step.

As a Sophomore Academy Mentor, your role is a dynamic one—ever-changing to best fit the needs of your mentee. Some days your student may need some encouragement to motivate them when their confidence and determination is low; other days you may play the role of cheerleader to provide positive reinforcement to empower him/her on a job well done. No matter the hat that is worn, you are always a guide and resource for your mentee.

As students, our academics are not the only things we juggle. Along with school, many students work, are involved with on- or off-campus organizations and have families that may require varied amounts of attention throughout the school year. As a mentor, it is your duty to pay attention to all the different aspects of your mentee’s life that may impact his/her performance in school. Part of your role is to serve as a non-judgmental listener and offer to direct your student to resources on campus that may help their situation.

Being a mentor comes with much responsibility as well as reward. Some days you may feel successful and accomplished; some days you may not. One of the most important things to keep in mind is that you are never alone. Advisors at Learning Support Services are well-equipped to help you in any way you need—whether it’s to discuss specific difficulties with a student or to check in to relay how the
mentoring process is coming along. Being aware of and utilizing your own resources will not only shape you to become a better mentor to your student, but it will also alleviate some of the stress.

We wish you all the best on your journey! Iman Barre
SOPHMORE ACADEMY MENTOR: SHERRY POOT

Dear new LSS staff/student,

My name is Sherry Poot and I am a second year transfer. My position in LSS was of a sophomore academy mentor. I was placed with a sophomore that was in academic probation and had done poorly her first year at UCSC. My experience this year at LSS as a sophomore academy has been pleasant and surprising.

I began as a sophomore mentor in Fall 2012. When I first began, I was nervous and anxious to meet my sophomore mentee. My biggest fear was that my student would not want to work alongside with me. When I first my student I was not sure what role I should play. Should I be a strict mentor? A friend? Chill in our meetings? What if she thought I was being too strict, or that I did not care? I knew that during our meetings we were supposed to study and go over study habits and skills that would help my student come out of academic probation. I was just unsure on how to approach it. However, after a few sessions, of where we talked and then studied, my student and I began a peer mentorship.

I had the same student throughout the 2012-2013 academic year. I got the privilege to experience the change of my student. She has become very successful in all of her classes and has succeeded in boosting up her gpa. Although I encountered small challenges in the beginning: not knowing how to approach my student, not knowing if my studying skills would help my students, and now knowing if my student will respect me, my experience was great.

My advice to you is to take things slowly. In the beginning it might be a bit intimidating, but it is worth it in the end. The students are in the program to learn and to get out of academic probation, they are just as nervous as you. The experience is completely worth it. Be prepared to learn alongside with your student. I know I did!

Sincerely

Sherry Poot
SOPHMORE ACADEMY MENTOR: MARTIN PURDY

Martin Purdy
Spring 2013
Sophomore Academy Mentor

An Attempt at Advice

I have found myself a niche in tutoring and mentoring that I previously did not realize existed. Being mostly introverted in nature, having the responsibility and opportunity to teach others has provided me with an outlet and mode of expression that I now find myself craving. With that being said, the position of an “educator” in a general sense is one of extreme influence and responsibility and not to be taken lightly. As tutors and mentors, at the most basic level we are being paid to help people. These people happen to be other students like us and are likely to be studying the same subjects and passionate about the same things, a fact which has the potential to make the work considerably more challenging, but also significantly more rewarding. All in all, a pretty awesome job in my opinion. For my past two years here at UCSC I have worked as a subject tutor primarily in Bio 20C (Ecology and Evolution) and as a mentor in the Sophomore Mentor Academy. Because I have found being a mentor to be more challenging and I have spent more time in this position, I will attempt to focus my commentary on experiences and advice in regard to this position.

Out of the two the two positions I have held, I must say I have found being a subject tutor to be superficially more fun and gratifying. Initially, I also found this position to be more challenging. As a subject tutor I was required and expected to know the course material backwards and forwards so that I could explain any concept and alleviate any confusion or misunderstanding (this may be an overstatement, but it is partially the way I perceived my role as a tutor and something every tutor should aspire to). Whereas, my only explicit responsibilities and requirements as a Sophomore Academy Mentor was to study with my mentee for some set number hours each week and exhibit “good study habits.” At the time of first reading the job description I wasn’t even sure if I knew what good study habits were. I had done very well in most all my classes, so presumably I had these study habits, but I was unable to identify them. It seemed to me that my success in college was mainly a result of my overall attitude on academics and responsibility rather than my study habits. My study habits, upon self-reflection struck me as being haphazard, inconsistent, and often quite poor. Although I did not fully realize it at the time, mentoring was immediately a more complex and dynamic position because it required a degree of critical self-reflection and analysis absent in my subject tutoring position.

My immediate confusion revolving around study habits illustrates what I believe to be the most challenging aspect of being a mentor, which is the inherent difficulty in defining what exactly your role as a mentor is. As an LSS employee you read articles, have discussions, attend training seminars, and participate in activities with your colleagues, all of which are designed to help you be a more effective MSI, subject tutor, or mentor, but none of which tell you exactly who to be or how to act. This makes sense as there is no cookie cutter curriculum to create the perfect mentor/tutor for all subjects and students. In fact, flexibility is one of the most important qualities a mentor or tutor can have and is
absolutely essential to a healthy mentor-mentee relationship. As a mentor you are supposed to exemplify what it is to be academically successful, impart wisdom and experience when relevant, and offer support and encouragement with the end goal that your mentee will take control of their learning and maximize their potential, academic and non-academic. Basically, you have to be Yoda... a little intimidating right? However, I have found that open admission, and even emphasis, of your own faults and imperfections as a mentor to be better than the alternative. Perfect students do not exist, and trying to create and exude a persona of academic excellence in a mentoring relationship can be more damaging than helpful. At a basic level, a mentoring relationship is grounded in the ability for both parties to relate, connect, feel comfortable with, and understand one another. This sort of relationship is not achieved through focusing on differences, but rather emphasizing and discussing areas of similarity and things you find mutually interesting or relevant. This may seem obvious, but I feel as if I did not go into either of my mentoring relationships completely conscious of this fact, and on a small but fundamental level this outlook could have improved both.

I have rambled enough and I will now try to be a bit more efficient in my advice. Perhaps the biggest challenge I have encountered as a mentor is trying to find the balance between being supportive/understanding and being honest in attempt to hold my mentee accountable when he won’t. This means that you cannot always be a friend, but sometimes you must be something more (what that is I am not exactly sure). I deeply believe that the most important function of a mentor is to be supportive, understanding, and helpful. However, the trick is to know when you must compromise being supportive or understanding at the sake of being ultimately more helpful. Sometimes this necessitates slightly uncomfortable conversations or non-friendly interactions and confrontations (something I initially tried to avoid at all costs). For this reason, I think it is of paramount importance to create the most open and fluid dialogue possible as soon as possible. I failed to do this immediately in my most recent mentoring relationship, and it was not until halfway through the first quarter that we had our first real conversation about expectations and how we each perceived the role of the other being in the relationship. It is essential that the roles that are created through weekly meetings and tutoring sessions are openly discussed and mutually determined. If these roles are never discussed in an honest and explicit fashion, then I believe it is unlikely that the relationship that naturally evolves will be one that is based on mutual agreement and will likely suffer for it. Also, if what may initially seem like awkward dialogue regarding these sorts of issues is not created and practiced early in a mentoring relationship, it will become increasingly difficult to initiate later on potentially making certain issues seemingly impossible to discuss or bring up months down the line.

Being a mentor (and tutor) has certainly been the most challenging job I have ever had. However, if you are passionate about learning and teaching, I believe it is also one of the most gratifying and rewarding jobs to be had as well. I hope that some of the above nonsense may be helpful to someone at some point in the future.
Dear Future Sophomore Academy Mentor,

I hope you are excited about your new position as it is a great opportunity and extremely rewarding. As a sophomore academy mentor, you get the chance to help guide one or several students along the path to success and develop a close bond.

Initially, it may be difficult to develop a trusting bond with your student(s). My first few weeks with my student were somewhat awkward and quiet. I would ask her the questions I thought I needed to ask such as “What homework do you have to do today?”, “How are your classes going?”, “Are you going to office hours?” etc. While these are valid questions to ask and I still ask these questions after a year with my student, in the first few weeks, these questions seem forced as if I am only asking because I am getting paid to. Our sessions were somewhat quiet in that I wasn’t entirely sure how to help my student. However, as time went on, we developed a much stronger bond and our sessions became a much more comfortable space. This all depends on personality types, but with a little time, a professional friendship will form between you and your mentee(s).

An important thing to realize about these students is that they are human and will struggle. They have been struggling and it will take time for them to adjust. They may still struggle in the beginning and you have to work through those struggles together to find the best solutions. My student was so set on her major but did not pass one of the introductory classes. This was a big disappointment, but we didn’t want it to create a damper on the rest of the year. We decided to focus on the achievements that she made even though she did not pass the class and had to switch majors as a result. I could see how hard she tried during the quarter and how much effort she put into the class, so I let her know that. That grade and this major change did not define her as a student. It is important to focus on what your student(s) is doing right and bring those achievements to light. They may already be in a place of low self-esteem and confidence and struggles like this may come up. You have to help them realize that it’s okay and help them move to a place where they can achieve.

My last piece of advice that I can give is to work all year long to make sure your student establishes good study habits. You only have one year to work with the student and then they have to continue working on their own. Therefore, it is important to help them develop the necessary skills to study on their own. You should be confident in their abilities by the end of the year. You may not achieve a level of 100% confidence in your student, but making sure they grow all year long until they are at a better place is necessary. I know that I have so much pride in how far my student has come and know that she has done so much to make sure she succeeds in school, but I still worry about her next year because she may start working on a hard minor and I won’t be around to help her. I have confidence that she will seek our help if she needs it though.

Overall, being a Sophomore Academy Mentor is an amazing experience and you are very lucky to have such a wonderful job. Good luck!

Sincerely,

Corinne Rushing
Dear Future Sophomore Academy Mentor,

My name is Anna Russo and I was a 4th year studying Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology. I am writing to you in order to offer some advice about the position itself and some of the experiences you may face this year.

I had the privilege of mentoring three ladies last year who were interested in the Sciences. My first mentee was interested in Cognitive Science, my second was interested in General Biology, and my final mentee was interested in Human Biology. Each of them had their own distinct personality and over the year I learned that they all had different reasons for being in the Academy. Whether it was one bad quarter they faced or a year of struggles with adjusting to college, all three girls had one thing in common. All three wanted change and all three wanted to become better and more independent students. They just all had different ways of executing it.

My first mentee was already on top of her school-work before our first session began. She had her study plan organized, knew when her finals were and was ready to make the changes needed to improve her grades. The one thing my mentee struggled with was her confidence. Having this same issue myself, it was important that I continued to encourage her throughout the quarter and praise her for her hard work. I never had the chance to be a mentee when I was a sophomore, and I would have really appreciated that someone believed in me when I was making this transition my freshman year. What also helped install confidence in this mentee was not only telling her about my past experiences but that as a mentor, I was still struggling with time management issues and continuing to learn how to be a better student. Having her know that I wasn’t this elite student who never had to struggle with anything, she was able to open up to me about what she was feeling and we were able to create a casual environment for our sessions. She was then able to tell me that she wasn’t interested in the Sciences and that she was interested in Sociology. I encouraged her to go after what she wants and since then, she has been getting A’s and B’s in her Sociology courses because she has the interest in the subject. By creating a relaxed environment, she developed the confidence to change her major to Sociology. All she needed was someone to talk to in order to make the change she needed to pursue what she wants.

My second mentee however was much more reserved. She had an interest in pediatric medicine, but had a long way to go in order to reach these dreams. The one thing I learned about this mentee is that people have different personalities. While making a comfortable environment for my first mentee allowed her to open up, it did nothing for my second mentee when I did the same for her. She was still responsive to my suggestions for studying for classes and participated in activities when I asked her to, but she was still reserved about her struggles and worries about school. Eventually, she withdrew from the program due to the amount of stress she was facing. Sometimes you can do everything help someone out but things won’t work out for the best. All you can do is known that some things are just out of your hands and that it may have the best thing for her at the time. Maybe her idea of change was taking a break and recuperating before starting over.

Working with my final mentee is where I learned the most about being a mentor for Biology majors. She was interested in the subject, but she was not very aware of the amount of hard work that was
needed to excel in college. She often visited home on weekends, studied a maximum of 3 hours the day before a test and questioned why she failed the exam, and expected that I could change her life around in a single quarter. She believed that I was a miracle worker, that if she did everything I told her, she would get straight A’s. I had to learn how to be assertive enough so that she was on top of her school work but not putting myself into a position where I’m too authoritative. It’s still important to be that source of encouragement and support, even when you need to be a little harder on them so that they understand the importance of college. A critical point for this was during Winter quarter. She failed both her midterms for Chem 1C and did not take my advice or study suggestions seriously. Three weeks before her finals, I sat her down and had to be really honest with her. I told her “Look, I can tell you how to study and help create these study guides for you, but if you aren’t willing to put in the work outside of our sessions, there’s nothing more I can do. You have to want to get A’s and B’s in your classes because I can’t do your homework or take your exams for you. If you keep going at this rate, you will not do well in these classes”. While it was hard for me to be this truthful and not “sugarcoat” the situation, she needed to hear this. Unfortunately it was too late for her at this point in the quarter and she ended up not passing the class. She was also disqualified from the major. I had a talk with my former boss about this situation and he noticed this same behavior from her when he had meetings with her throughout the quarter. He told me, “If you did everything you could, wipe your hands clean.” This was something that I needed to hear. You may face a similar situation and you may think that you aren’t a good mentor because you aren’t directly impacting your student and they’re magically getting better grades. Don’t make these assumptions. Just know that you will do all you can and let it go, and try to start fresh for the next quarter.

During Spring quarter however, I definitely noticed changes in her study habits outside of our sessions. I noticed her more frequently at the library studying on her own on the quiet floor as opposed to sitting with her friends attempting to study at a café. She began studying with groups of people for class as opposed to sitting by herself. She began to make changes and took school more seriously, and started getting better grades on exams. I like to believe that it was because of this situation and because of our talk we had. All she needed was a firmer push to make these realizations.

The main point I am trying to say here is that each mentee is different. Your mentee(s) will respond to school, stress and challenges in different ways and it’s important to take note of all of this and be flexible to adapt to different personalities and learning styles. Being a mentor is a constantly changing environment in that sometimes, you can’t predict how a session or a quarter will go. You will still be learning while they are. You will still be improving when they are. And one day, their success will turn into your success. It all just takes time and patience. I wish you the best with your new position, and don’t forget to take advantage of LSS if you ever need any help with anything. They’re there to help students succeed, whether they are a mentee or a mentor.

Take care,

Anna Russo

Former Sophomore Academy Mentor
Dear new employee!

I’m writing to you today to give some words of wisdom I’ve gathered from my five quarters of tutoring and mentoring. Although the two positions are a little different, there is a lot of overlap in terms of the challenges you come across.

In regards to your first tutoring sessions, don’t stress!! I always find it useful to get to know your student a little more. Ask about what classes they’re in, what’s their major, their year, etc. Talk about their interest in the course, why they’re taking it, and so on so that you can get an idea of why they are seeking tutoring. This way you can know what their goals for the session might be. For example, some students seek tutoring to get an A in the course, others simply to pass the course. You can always come back to this goal throughout your sessions. You’ll find out sometimes that your student may be really down on their studying and keeping up with the class material. This is why it’s always important to go back to their goal! This has helped me a lot to keep my students motivated and to show I’m here to help you get that A you want!

One thing I learned as a tutor was to be patient with your student. It’s easy to become frustrated when they don’t understand the material at all, when they come to a session unprepared, when they give excuses as to why they don’t get the material, and so on. It’s important though to stay positive and supportive. At least they have come to tutoring which shows they want to learn! So often times, we as tutors have to adapt to these situations and roll with the punches. Part of this requires having a balance between being a friend and being strict with your goals and purpose of tutoring. I sometimes have to reiterate, you signed up for tutoring so that I could help you, so you have to meet me half way! or something along those lines. Remember how I said you figure out the goal of the sessions at the first meetings? Always come back to these goals to keep your sessions purposeful and fruitful.

I’ve learned through my experiences and through collaborating with my LSS peers that what makes a good tutor are being good at problem solving and adapting to challenges; being a good communicator, which involves being patient and calm, but also friendly and on their level; and one needs to have a passion and desire to help others learn. We’re here to tutor for a subject, but at the end of the day, we’re here to work with students to help them learn. So the relationship is very important in the process of learning.

Lastly, three points I would share with you that I found most useful from my training with LSS... I would say to 1) collaborate with your student to set goals for the class and for the sessions and to always come back to them; 2) plan and implement a quick assessment during a session to see if your student has an understanding of aspects of the material. This can be a quick question that they must answer verbally or written down; and lastly 3) share stories with other LSS tutors. In the meetings or outside of meetings with LSS, talk about your frustrations, your challenges, what has worked for you in your sessions, and what has not. All LSS tutors are super helpful and knowledgeable and are more often than not running across the same challenges that you are. Don’t be afraid to ask Jessica or Charis for help either! We’re all a team working to help our students. :)

Best of luck!  MaiLinh Niemi
Dear BIOE 20C Tutor,

If you’re reading this, then you must be the new tutor for BIOE 20C. Hi, there. This quarter (Spring 2013) was also my first quarter tutoring BIOE 20C but it was a great learning experience. As an LSS employee of about 2 years so far, I had majorly taught Math2/2S up until now. Biology and tutoring in comparison, is very different. It is a very good idea to review your old notes prior to start of quarter. There will be points in your sessions that you realize you’ve completely forgotten a certain concept or process. If this is your first time teaching biology, I would really recommend going to sit in on the class, even if you don’t get paid for it, especially if you learned the material under a different instructor. By putting yourself in the same position as the student, it’s easier to teach them. I think personality wise, you should be both approachable and un-awkward. A good way to do so is to relate your own difficulties in that same class and show students that it is okay to ask questions even when they believe it to be stupid. Making conversation to keep the discussion going is also important when tutoring because having only 4-6 people will undoubtedly bring about awkward silences where no one wants to speak up. At these times asking “do you have any questions” puts students on the spot and I’ve found that they respond less favorably to that question than the alternative “what do you think is most difficult in the last lecture” or “How do you feel about this concept, I know many people who have had questions about it.”

In being both a tutor and a section leader, I’ve learned the art of active listening and sensitive criticism. The listening really helps (more in sections, where the TA student ratio is much larger) when you’re trying to find out what learning style each person has. Also, what I find in tutoring and section is that generally students would know generally the correct answer, even if not specifically, but are lacking in self-efficacy. This would cause them to second guess themselves often. By trying to use direct criticisms sparingly and direct them accordingly towards the right answer, they receive direction more openly (from my experiences).

As an educator in general, my worst problems included quiet students who were uncooperative in group work and unmotivated students that bring down the morale of the section/session in general. Some students are just taking the classes for a GE or for pass/no pass so their effort level is often lower than those taking the class for a grade/major. In the situation, I’ve had to constantly remind students that no matter their situation, they are required to be here. I’ve yet to come up with a good method to solve this situation. But that’s why teaching is going to continuously be a learning experience.

Have fun.

Elle Yuen
Dear Prospective Tutor,

Congratulations! You have been hired to work in one of the most fulfilling positions offered at UCSC. I'm sure you might be thinking that working in a lab and creating new age defying breakthroughs in medicine or technology might be more beneficial, but hear me out. My name is Theresa Chow, and I have been a tutor for quite a few quarters. My major is Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology, and that has allowed me the chance to tutor in various courses. I have been a MSI and subject tutor covering a vast array of subjects from the Calculus series, Organic Chemistry, and Biochemistry, as well as General Biology and other miscellaneous courses. Through LSS, I have gotten a chance to help so many students and you will too. If you do not yet feel as if your position is of great importance, think of this: you, out of the many attending this college, get to mold the futures of others. And what is more amazing is that you were chosen out of many others who are well qualified.

With the knowledge that you mastered in your classes, you are paving the way for others to follow in your footsteps, inspiring them and encouraging them to work harder. In all seriousness, let's face it; many students abhor attending classes in general. The ones who go out of their way to attend extra sessions are those who are dedicated and really want to learn, and that willingness already makes your job so much easier.

However, with every job, there are caveats. Tutoring, may it be MSI or subject tutoring, is hardly ever a walk in the park. Though you may get diligent students who attend your sessions ready and prepared to learn, you will also face those who abuse this program, expecting only answers and are unwilling to work through the processes. This can come in many forms, so make sure you keep an eye out for those who are struggling and attend sessions only to have others do their work for them.

I will not focus on a specific subject in which I have tutored because the truth is, the mindset and basis of what you project to your students have core similarities, but you must come into it on your own. I will not leave you hanging, though. I do have a few suggestions which will hopefully make your job easier. First off, do not be nervous. Whether or not you are comfortable with public speaking, tutoring a group of your peers will make you get over that. What will help you through some awkward sessions (and you will have awkward sessions) is keeping in mind that your students are there to learn from you. You have all the knowledge necessary to do well in the course. Contact the professor, because they will have resources for you as well. Also, remember to remain confident, energetic and friendly.

Secondly, you will get shy students, or those who are unwilling to answer questions out of fear of embarrassment if they answer something incorrectly. One method I use when faced with a group of new students is that throughout the session, I would purposely make a mistake so that they can correct me. This ensures that they are paying attention, and lets them know that their tutor is a student just like them, and is capable of mistakes as well. However, if that doesn't work, when in doubt, give them a little push. Offer a reward in exchange for a worked out problem. I offered candy, and it does wonders.

Though you will be challenged with smarty pants students that will purposely find any way to correct you, or unwilling students, this job is amazing. I cannot begin to tell you how great it is to see my
past students advancing in their majors and seeing their confidence levels rise up because they did well on a test. You get to play a major role in that. I hope you will feel as proud of your students as I do mine.

I'll leave you with a few words of warning. Do not bad mouth any professor, student, or co-worker in the presence of students. Regardless of whether you are a classmate or friend, keep in mind you are a tutor, almost like a professor yourself, and you must stay professional. And finally, check your email constantly. LSS likes to spam.

Best,

Theresa Chow
Dear New LSS Employee,

Hello! My name is Chantal and I am currently a first time tutor for BIOL 80A, Female Physiology. Along my journey as a new tutor and as a student in the LSS class, I have learned a good deal of important things, some of them through trial and error, and I want to share some of these experiences with you!

As a tutor, one of the most important things I learned was that, since you don’t have to attend lecture and didn’t have to take the class with the current professor, it is very important to have solid communication with both the professor—even if its just to get the syllabus and announce your sessions—and with your students. In fact, halfway through the quarter the class fell behind and these changes weren’t reflected on the syllabus so in situations like this it is even more important to ask the students where the class is and what they need help with.

Throughout the quarter, I also had to rely on a number of qualities to be the best tutor I could be. Three of these qualities that helped me the most were being sociable, understanding, and good at explaining a wide variety of concepts and materials. Being sociable was important because it facilitated a relationship where the students weren’t intimidated by my position as a tutor and where they felt comfortable asking questions. Being understanding was important because by showing that it was normal to be confused about the material and trying one’s best to cater to the different student’s needs made it so the students got the most out of the session. Being good at explaining the materials in different ways was extremely important because it made the sessions a good investment for more than just one type of student.

A skill I learned during the quarter of tutoring was how to prompt students to think in a metacognitive manner. Before the position, I knew how to approach materials in this manner but I never fully grasped how to direct other students in that direction without overwhelming them. Anyone can do metacognitive thinking in any field, it just takes different forms and they don’t have to be terrifyingly frustrating to accomplish.

During my time as a tutor, I experienced a couple of difficulties. One of my biggest difficulties was getting my students to participate in the sessions when the quarter first began. It was hard because, often times, they didn’t seem to be comfortable sharing the information they knew and doubted how good their grasp was on the material being covered. Another difficulty (along the same lines as the previous one) was getting all of the students to participate an equal amount. This was because, after a while, some of the students became very comfortable in the sessions and readily answered any questions I posed but others would still stay completely silent during the session, regardless on whether or not they knew the answer.

During the job I also had a number of memorable experiences. My most memorable experience was one of my midterm review sessions. During this session, 5 students said they were going to attend but then 11 showed up. It was extremely difficult to handle such a big group without any preparation but at that point, without even consciously thinking about it, I started trying out different interactive learning strategies to see which one worked best. This experience resonates the most with me because it was the most prominent instance of
“learning by doing” for me and it made me feel more confident as a tutor that I would be able to handle anything that came my way during the sessions.

Overall, this position helped me become a better student as I developed the skills to be a better facilitator. This position has helped me become a better student in the sense that it has helped me become better at helping my peers and at asking for help in a manner that helps me get the most out of my education. Not only that but this position also helped me improve my communication skills as a peer and as an aid.

I hope your experiences will be as enlightening as mine were and that the growth you undergo will be relatively painless (I’m sure it will, the class you have to take really helps in making it a fun group journey instead of a lonely jump into the abyss).

Sincerely,
Chantal Herrera
Dear Bioengineering Tutor,

I offer you my most sincere congratulations on your tutoring position. It has been both a privilege and fulfilling experience to have tutored for Introduction to Biotechnology (BME 5) these past two years. Before I offer my advice, here is a little bit about myself. I am a Bioengineering major with a passion for understanding cancer as well as neurodegenerative diseases. I work in a non-coding RNA lab on campus where I am working on my senior thesis. The past two summers I have interned in a biotech company which allowed me to better understand practically how therapeutic drugs are produced. The knowledge and perspective that I gained from being a tutor has helped me in my own research as well as my studies. It is your job as a tutor to pass on your experiences, successes, and even failures to help your students do well.

BME 5 is an introduction class as well as a general education class. You are likely to run into students that are not motivated about the subject. I believe it is your most crucial duty as a fellow scientist to get students enthusiastic about the subject. This can be a very daunting task. I approach each tutoring section by stepping into my students shoes. I need to understand what their problems with topics are and how they approach them in order to understand their thought process. With any engineering and science class, there is a specific logic and thought process that needs to be developed. I like to focus on developing these skills though problem solving. I tend to stay away from lecturing and focus on getting my students to think about the topics through diagrams and flow charts.

From my sections, I have found that students can fall quickly behind due to the intricate details that are presented on each topic as well as their lack of familiarity with the subject matter. In order to get rid of their fears I like to break down my sections and help boost their confidence by helping guide them to the answers.

My goal is to get students to understand the big picture and be able to organize and connect topics. I like to have my students make flow charts or tables outlining similar technologies and then explain how they connect. For example, upon studying different types of sequencing technologies I had my students generate tables for type outlining the mechanism of how the sequencing technology works, how efficient it is, what is unique, the length of the read, and how it differs from the other technologies. These sorts of activities give students a chance to apply and think about the material with their peers as well as take home an organized study sheet.

You will run into students that are going to challenge you. When I first started tutoring this scared me. I felt like I needed to have all the answers and not having an answer made me seem weak and unprepared. If this happens it is okay to tell them that you will get back to them after making sure. You will also run into students that don’t say anything. It is your job to prod them with questions or get them to participate. What I like to do in these situations is try and call on this student for their opinion. I have run into sections where my students will say they have no questions. I like to turn these sections into a pop quiz type section. I will put a question on the board or a technology such as somatic cell nuclear transfer and randomly select a student to go up and solve it out and explain the steps with
diagrams. This allows me to one, confirm that the student has learned the concepts and two, it keeps them on their toes and helps them reiterate and teach to other students.

This class jargon heavy, so what I like to do is create flashcards for each lecture and have students pair up and work on them as a warmup. Another way I like to start my sections is with a warm up question. I will put a question on the board which relates to a topic they just learned and have them answer it as soon as they walk in. This allows me to gauge what direction the section should go in.

For my midterm review and final review, I make a jeopardy game. There is nothing like good, fun competition to make students engaged and participate. I break them up into groups and have them answer all the questions and see which team can get the most questions correct.

You, as a tutor can influence your students in more ways than you think. If you can make someone love biology, that’s great, but if you can make someone appreciate and understand how they best learn or teach them the skills needed to approach science and engineering classes then that is in my opinion the best skill you have to offer them. It is a wonderful feeling when you see the students you helped excel not only at the class you tutored them for, but other classes as well due to the study skills and strategies that you helped teach them.

At LSS, help will always be offered to you if you ask. Don’t hesitate to ask about any issues or problems that you need help resolving. I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Janani Ravikrishnan
Dear newest member of LSS,

First off let me congratulate you on your newly obtained position, subject tutor. You are about to have the most enjoyable time here at UCSC. The role of a busy student as well as a worker may initially sound a bit unsavory but take my word as a previous employee of LSS, it is so much fun to work as a tutor and any other position within LSS. Not only are you getting to help a fellow student but the process of tutoring is so much fun because it allows you to essentially make learning fun for not only yourself as a tutor but also the tutee. As cliché as it sounds, tutoring really does make learning fun and I hope that through this letter I’ll be able to convince you of that as well as let you in on some tips/secrets of the trade to allow you to jump into the position right away.

I was an MCD Biology here at UCSC and was hired my senior year as a BME-5 (Introductory Bioengineering) subject tutor. Initially was I was a bit apprehensive because it was my first job and because my job as a tutor meant that students were depending on me to help them understand the material and get great grades in their class. So, the pressure was definitely on when I found out I was hired. But, the initial pressure slowly ebbed away as I took the EDUC 96 course (which I’m sure you’ll take and find just as helpful as did I) and began my first quarter tutoring. I highly recommend that you take note of what EDUC 96 and what Professor Holly de Cordova says because believe me they are nuggets of gold. Professor Holly’s class taught me many things that I think were important for me to do my job as a tutor and even important as I continue through my academic and professional path. EDUC 96 not only gave actual research data of the benefits of tutoring but also gave background information about student’s mindset about school and actually seeking out help as well as introduce different techniques to match different learning styles. I would think that the material in this class is very relatable because we are all students and encounter the same problems in the academic environment. Although it may appear to be “common sense”, cumulating of all the information into a more analytical perception results in a very effective desire to be an adequate tutor for students. Let’s face it we have all been in a position where we have found ourselves struggling with a course, even if it is our major, or simply want to get additional help to ensure that we are on the right path. So the desire to get additional support is a common theme that needs to be remembered as a tutor and use that as one of your driving forces when tutoring. Now onto my experiences and some tips.

Like I said earlier I was extremely nervous when I began tutoring and I expect you to feel the same. Relax. I started my first quarter as a tutor by looking for my notes for the class; unfortunately it had been so long since I took the class so I contacted the professor for access to the class website and notes. This is something that you should do the moment you find out that you’re hired. Get on the same page as the students in the class. You have the same access to resources as the students use it! Once the professor knows you as the tutor the chances that they will give you access to midterms, homework and additional class resources are much higher and you can more effectively tutor! (Plus you might get to know the professor more that they may write you a letter of recommendation! That’s always a big plus) Once the professor knows you and your position, I would suggest attending at least one lecture and one discussion section. If you can’t attend lecture at least attend one discussion section because there you’ll be able to identify common issues with students and as such you will have some direction to structure your tutoring sessions. I went to 1 section because I could not attend the lecture and I found it to be
very helpful to stress certain areas of weakness and areas to be tested on the exams for the students. Another strategy that I found extremely helpful for teaching material as well as assessing each student’s point on the material was giving a short quiz at the beginning of the tutoring session at least every other week and have the students attempt to explain to me a specific concept in their own words. These are only a few techniques that are introduced to all tutors, MSI leaders and mentors in the EDUC 96 class.

Aside from having good teaching techniques that matches the different learning styles of the tutees it is also necessary to have the right personal qualities as well as the right mindset. I believe that to be an effective tutor one needs to be not necessarily an extrovert but willing to open up to the tutees and able to joke around and get silly to get some concepts across. This is where the cliché of making learning fun comes in. During a particular tutoring session, there was a concept about the mechanism of translation that the students were having trouble visualizing. After drawing and explaining the concept a few times I noticed that they did not understand it so I decided to take it one step further. I got up and took drew an mRNA sequence large enough on the board for me to “fit” within 3 nucleotides and acted out the function of the ribosome. Although I contorted myself to replay the actions of the ribosome and felt a bit silly, the laughter from the students and the memorable contortionist act which at one point even had the tutees playing ribosome had worked its magic on the students and they were able to understand the concept after that session. That is but one example. Aside from being silly, there also needs to be a sense of seriousness when tutoring because occasionally you may get a student who appears to lack interest in the tutoring session and just wants the answers to the homework assignments and the exams. With students like this I found it effective to either set aside some time during the session to spend some one on one time with the student or lead them in the right direction for studying by asking them to be more proactive during the sessions by answering questions asked in the sessions. Aside from these I think it’s very important to remember that you yourself are still a student and the tutees are students so there should be a sense of camaraderie and from that there should be a level of relatedness. Overall the tutoring experience is one that is I believe is good for not only future employment positions but also as you continue your academic path. If there are ever issues encountered during your employment the EDUC 96 reader is always a good source of ideas and the managers that work at the ARC center. Good luck!

Best Wishes

Stephanie Mendez
To the new BME 80H tutor,

Congratulations on your new tutoring position with LSS! As I’m sure you are aware, BME 80H is a fun introductory course to genetics. This year, I have found that most of the students who seek out tutoring do not plan on being science majors; rather, they are simply taking this class for a GE. So keep in mind that, in addition to helping students understand the material, a big part of this tutoring position is getting the students excited about science. Personally, I have found this to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the job.

This course is heavy on scientific vocabulary and it can be hard for students to adjust to the new jargon, especially in the beginning of the quarter. I have observed that many students are quick to fall behind simply because they do not understand what the genetics questions are even asking. Therefore, I have found it useful to reiterate the importance of keeping up with new terms. I encourage them to make flash cards every week for all of the new terms they learn. Also, I have made worksheets for my tutees to get some extra practice. Finally, during your tutoring sessions be sure to ask the students what words mean as you are explaining concepts or questions. For example, if you are helping the students with a cross between two heterozygous individuals, before you even draw a Punnett square, ask the students what the word “heterozygous” means. Have them explain it to you or look it up in their notes. You can also take this one step farther and ask what homozygous means as well. I have found it helpful to break down a lot of these words, as the roots and prefixes often give hints as to what the word means.

The students will probably ask you to explain a lot of concepts, but it is not the best idea to spend the whole hour teaching. Have the students work together in groups on difficult problems, especially conceptual problems. I have found that the practice problems in their book at the end of every chapter are really useful. Also, Professor Rothwell posts problems from the book that she thinks are important. Usually, I will do some of these problems with the students or have them work on them outside of the tutoring session; it is amazing how many tutees aren’t even aware these practice problems exist.

One of my favorite tutoring strategies is related to these practice problems. Usually, this works best with a larger group, but you can do it individually as well. I like to split the students into two groups and assign them different problems pertaining to the concepts they’re learning that week. As the students work, observe them and only help if they really get stuck. The beauty to this strategy lies in watching the students teach each other. Usually, if two students are working together on a problem, they can figure it out by working together. They teach each other and you are just there for support. Therefore, the students with a better grasp of the material get extra practice with the concepts by helping the students that are struggling more. After they have finished the problems, have each student present a question and the solution to the entire group. This way, everyone has a chance to explain a problem and their reasoning behind the solution. Ask them questions as they present to make sure they really understand concepts. Rothwell’s exams can be tricky and they seem to focus on the understanding of basic genetic concepts that underlie many of the problems in the book.

Finally, I have found it very useful to use quick assessments in my tutoring sessions. You will learn about this tutoring strategy in the required LSS tutor training course, but I will mention it here as well in case you want to try it sooner. Basically, you construct a quick question that can be answered in five minutes
or less. The questions should focus on what you covered in the tutoring session that day. At the end of the session, have the students work individually on the question. They should be able to get it right, since it is fresh in their minds. However, if they don’t get it right you know that something about that concept didn’t stick with them; you can prepare to work it into the next tutoring session the following week as well.

I hope this letter has helped prepare you for what to expect as a tutor. Remember, have fun with it! Many of the students will look up to you, and if you show an interest in the material and make learning fun, they will not only appreciate you as a tutor, but you will find them actively engaging in the material as well. Get them excited about genetics and point out its relevance in everyday life. I have found that many students who aren’t science majors are still fascinated by the field of genetics and ask intriguing questions. Good luck!

Best,
Torri
Dear New CHEM 109 Tutor,

My name is Hannah and I am currently the CHEM 109 tutor. This is a fun class to tutor, but it comes with some issues, as does any tutoring position. It’s fun because if you like organic chemistry like me (which I assume you do since you’re tutoring this class) you get to help fellow students solve the many puzzles of O chem! It’s challenging because not all students are like us—many students are terrified of O chem and are mainly taking this class because it is a medical school or other health field requirement.

My first piece of advice is that this is the type of class where you’ll want to reserve study rooms in McHenry or S&E Library, because it may require a lot of chalkboard or whiteboard use! It’s silly to just sit around talking about mechanisms and reactions since on an exam the students will be expected to draw these things out. Don’t forget—having them practice reactions on the chalkboard is just as beneficial as it is for them to see you write things out on a chalkboard, so give everyone a turn if they want it!

Here are some attributes I found generally useful going in to any kind of first tutoring session. You have to be friendly—arrive with a smile, introduce yourself, ask what classes your students are taking, ask if they’ve ever been to tutoring before and what brings them to your session. Start building up a rapport with students when you first meet them. Try to form some connection, and it will make them feel more comfortable around you. Confidence is also essential. Arrive well prepared to talk about topics you think will be important for the first session. (Hint: a review of acids and bases is the most important material for the first few weeks of CHEM 109). If you aren’t confident you might come off as nervous and then your students won’t be confident in you either.

There are a few difficulties I’ve run into this quarter in this position. The biggest issue has been balancing group dynamics. Everyone has different learning styles and different levels of confidence. Some students will dominate the discussion, attempting every question you throw at them, while others won’t say a word the entire time. Since there is a lot of material in CHEM 109 I usually make an ‘agenda’ at the beginning of the session of what everyone wants to cover. Don’t let the chatterboxes choose everything. Specifically address the quiet ones and ask what they would like to go over. They might still say they have no questions but at least you tried!

Another important thing to keep in mind is making sure students understand what was just discussed. Asking questions like “does that make sense?” “do you want me to repeat that?” “do you want to hear that a different way?” or “so can you guys explain to me what I just explained to you in your own words?” are all good follow-up questions to ask to make sure the students understand what’s going on.

The most helpful “interactive learning strategy” I’ve used for this class is asking a more quiet student to draw a reaction or concept out on the chalkboard while having all of the more talkative students direct him or her.

Overall I have found that tutoring is a great experience for both the tutor and the tutee. It has improved my confidence and deepened my understanding in every subject I have tutored. I find it to be most rewarding when students leave the session looking relieved and relaxed and express to me how much help the session was. I hope that you enjoy your time as the CHEM 109 tutor! Good luck!
Sincerely,

Hannah Cundall
Dear Future Chemistry 151A Tutor,

In my quarter here as a tutor, I have learned that one of the best things you can do is come prepared with examples (that you've already worked through). Although you may understand a concept more in the abstract, when someone is first learning something, it has seemed to be easier for students to follow along and work through an example together, rather than just trying to explain how to do something. I often find that I get a lot of blank stares when I go into a more lecture style. For instance: learning all the point groups and symmetry elements can be very overwhelming and confusing to try to explain beforehand, but if you have examples to work through, students were able to see the elements themselves, and how to look for them, and have learned a lot quicker than from just an overview of how to assign them.

That being said, you also have to be flexible. If what you've prepared for isn't what the student needs help with, you should help the student with the area in which they are struggling the most. I found it helpful to have student e-mail me topics or specific questions at least 24 hours before our session would meet, that way I could work through those problems thoroughly and brush up on any topics I needed to prevent them from catching me off guard. And don't be afraid to look something up, or answer it in a follow-up e-mail if you are unsure of the answer. Better to give them the correct info a little bit later than the wrong answer on the spot.

I would also suggest that you have the students try to work out the problems from the problem sets/end of chapter notes beforehand, that way they will have specific questions and you will have an idea of how much they already understand, and exactly where you need to fill in the gaps. It will also save you time, as you won't have to do all the problems beforehand, just the ones they'll want to go over! And also, don't be afraid to slow down or take a step back and work through a part more carefully with a student if you can sense that they are not following something. In an individual session this is easy, as it is all about that student, but this can be more challenging in group sessions. I have also found that, if someone understands something that another student is not, that having the students explain it to each other can be very helpful. They may say it in a slightly different way than you did that helps it click with the other student. And if that one student can explain it to another, you will know that they really understand it! And if you have anything that you are unsure about academic-wise, go to the professor's office hours or e-mail him/her. Hope you have a good quarter and good luck tutoring!

Sincerely,

Allison Matthews

Chem 151A Tutor,
Letter of Advice for Computer Engineering Tutors

Dear reader,

I am delightful that you became a tutor for the LSS as it also benefits your education. I will give several advises for becoming a more effective MSI tutor and subject tutor. These are things you may want to think about throughout.

< MSI >

A. Find many possible ways to understand the material and find the best way for the group as a whole

Personally, I am great at seeing things in a simple and concise lens, and it is either a hit or miss for the students. What I learned, though counter-intuitive, it is a good idea to figure out all / most of the possible ways to understand the given material. By pointing out ideas in each of these ways, you can test which way is best for the group of students and simply stick to it for the rest of the quarter.

B. Create group problem solving dynamics doing problems in portions

The issue with engineering is that sometimes the material becomes too difficult for the people who go to MSI to answer – even as a group. To address that, lead the group through a (custom) problem by having each student contribute a small part to the problem. If you have a board, invite each of them to come up and do a portion of applicable problems. If they are stuck, try to ask leading questions.

C. Encourage brainstorming and redirect students for design-based problems

These problems can be done in infinite number of ways. It is necessary to ask students if they have some ideas on how to get started on designing something. Give them the perspective on the outcome of their design – ie: there will be these specific issues if you do it this way so how should we solve that? Help them organize the assignment into what is being asked and how they would address each of the parts.

< Subject Tutoring >

A. Becoming relatable or friends with your tutees

It is often over-looked because even if you have friendly conversations, it is only on the surface. To know someone on a personal level means to understand their situation, interests, etc. This will become apparent if you jumped the line from a tutor to a friend. Anyways, this is important not because it is simply easier to communicate with the person, it is more that they are with you when they go over the hardships.

B. Have students re-learn a concept stuck-confusing to them from scratch

When your tutee(s) are extremely stuck, you should start everything anew as if they have not heard of the concept before. This is a little different from scaffolding (going back one step each time they are
stuck). It is sometimes very effective for someone to see the same thing in a completely different perspective because it clears them of pre-conceived notions about the concept which may be wrong or misleading.

These are just a few pointers to get you thinking about how to conduct sessions and I wish you good luck.

Current Position: MSI CE100, Subject CE12

Previous Experiences: Subject CS12B, CE12, CE8, etc?
Greetings New CMPE 80N Tutor!

Congrats on getting a super fun tutor position. I’m not just saying that, either. I’m sure you’ve taken this class before with Tracy Larrabee and she is just a hoot. Well now you get to relive those fun moments by helping out students who may not understand binary, IP addresses, or the TCP/IP stack right away.

I’m sure you know that most people take this class for a GE or as a requirement for the Economics major. That means that you will be dealing with a lot of people who don’t want to go to lecture, who won’t put effort into studying, and who will expect you to teach them everything. Although it’s not within your job description (or your powers as a human being) to make these people care or be self-driven, you can help them to focus in on the most important skills and concepts in the class.

Make sure from the beginning that they are comfortable with binary. If they aren’t it’s going to bite them in the ass over and over again. Make sure you continually remind them of the 5 layers of the TCP/IP stack and whenever you work on a lab or study for a quiz that you point out what layer of the stack that concept is operating on. Make sure that they know what an IP address is, what a MAC address is, and how those are different.

Tracy always uploads her slides with notes onto Ubiquitous Presenter, so check those out when you are preparing for a session. In addition to some funny memes she always indicates what’s going to be on the quiz, so pay special attention those slides. Most of the concepts are best taught visually, so it would be a good idea to tutor in a room that has a chalkboard/whiteboard so you can draw things out. Also, be sure to check out the class website frequently for information about what the class will be going over in lecture, labs, quiz dates, and other helpful information in the class forum.

As I mentioned earlier, you are going to be working with a lot of people who are not Computer Engineering/Computer Science majors. Though this definitely enhances the probability of sessions being frustrating, try to use this as an opportunity to make sessions fun. Pretend a computer is a scared princess up in a tower that is too afraid to share her IP address or MAC address with everyone out in the big bad network kingdom, so she never discloses these numbers to anyone outside her subnetwork. Pretend that encapsulation/decapsulation is like a post office constantly putting a new postmark on a package. Remind them how cool they’ll look at parties now that they now how to do binary and hexadecimal!

Have fun with this position and don’t get stressed out if you don’t have answers for everything.

Sincerely,

Lauren Saguilig (your predecessor)
TUTOR CMPS 5P: CODY CHILDERS

Cody Childers
LSS subject tutor
Currently teaching: CMPS 5p, 10
Previously taught: 10, 12a, 12b

1) The personal quality that I found most helpful was simply a desire to help my friends. Before working as a subject tutor, I was constantly tutoring my friends in various classes, including one friend who I helped with math constantly for 4 consecutive quarters. It was natural to start helping random people through LSS because I had quite a bit of practice. This one is subject specific, but I found it much easier to teach lower level computer science classes since I have mostly mastered the basics. If I had to start college over with the knowledge I have now, I would probably get perfect or near perfect scores in CMPS 5c/5p/5j/10/12a, because the basics are most important in teaching the classes I teach. Being able to live-code is also good, since it makes it easier for tutees to see things on the whiteboard. Plus it’s a good skill to have in general, being able to know what code does by looking at it, rather than have to compile and test it first.

2) While teaching through LSS, I picked up a number of skills. The important thing for computer science (especially when the students are taking a programming class as a GE) is to equate it to math as best as possible. Computer Science isn’t typically taught in high schools, so they walk into class knowing nothing. However, they should have at least some algebra, so finding a way to make it equivalent to something they already understand is key. As far as personal skills, try to make sessions interactive. Often students just walk in and simply state that they know nothing about what’s going on and don’t know where to start (common especially in the first couple weeks). Be interactive, ask questions, make them draw out the program in a few lines of English (i.e. pseudocode) before you write any code. Don’t be afraid to make the person that never has an answer, answer a question. At the very least, someone else in the session will get tired of waiting and blurt it out, and that often starts a degree of group collaboration.

3) I have had 3 problems that I could call biggest difficulties. The first was that my very first student had Asperger’s syndrome. My advice: if LSS doesn’t give you any special training like they didn’t to me, don’t be afraid to run to the DRC and ask questions yourself. The second was the students who just don’t get it. I have had a couple of students who cannot retain anything programming at all, and I still don’t know if it’s because they don’t care or they just don’t have the mentality to pick it up. For those, I find it helps to get them 95% done with their programs and tell them what they have left to do. I don’t want them to be frustrated and give up, but giving them the program minus a couple of required features makes a big difference towards them completing the assignment at all in the first place. Finally, you have the know-it-all students. For example, I have one now who seems to think he’s right on everything and fights me when I tell him he’s wrong, just because he took CMPS 12a before and now he’s in 5p (and
completely ignoring the fact that I might know what I’m talking about, because as of this time I’ve taken CMPS 10/12a/12b/20/25/101/109/148/179 and know a thing or two about code). For me, it’s very frustrating to deal with that level of arrogance, especially if your repeated attempts to show him why his way wouldn’t work get nowhere. I finally just resorted to over-complicating it. He tries too hard to make lists in Python work the same as arrays in Java, and it just doesn’t happen. I start writing things in C++ and make him look at the stuff gained by #include<vector> to see the closest equivalent structure in another language. That’s a case by case basis though, don’t consider that the catch-all for these types of students.

The most important learning experience I had was when I sat in on a session for CMPS 25. The tutor just asked the student what their assignment required, showed him what menu options could help him find the new features covered in class, and gave a couple suggestions. Granted 3D modeling is very artistic and programming usually isn’t, but I try to stick to that model, make the students tell you what to do and only write things on the board once they have agreed amongst the group that it is correct.

Rather than write a book, here’s just a list of things that I’ve found helpful that weren’t already mentioned above. The biggest thing is passion. I find programming super interesting, and I get really excited talking about it. I had one of my closest friends in a previous session, and she was complaining that I made the material too exciting. She wanted to hate programming, but I made it so rewarding that she was starting to enjoy it, contrary to what she expected to be like during the class. The absolute biggest thing to remember when teaching introductory programming (especially people who are taking it to fill a GE and never take another programming class), make it exciting. I promise your sessions will be so much easier. Another reason I like the introductory classes is that the assignments are easy to do, so I use my prep time to do their homework before I have to teach it, and then use that as a reference. It makes all the difference, or else you’ll get flooded with emails because the stuff you put on the whiteboard and never checked doesn’t work. Now, I find functions are the hardest thing to teach, and just a couple weeks ago I figured out a way to teach it without fail. I write something like this on the whiteboard:

(some random polynomial) \[ 2x^2 - 5x + 7 \]

(-b±\sqrt{b^2 - 4ac})/2a

#done in python cause it’s what I’m doing most recently, but it’s easy to see if you don’t know python

def quadratic(a, b, c):
    r1 = -(b + sqrt(b*b - 4*a*c)) / (2*a)
    r2 = -(b - sqrt(b*b - 4*a*c)) / (2*a)
    return r1, r2

(-2±\sqrt{(-5)×(-5)-4×2×7})/(2×2)

#code

root1, root2 = quadratic(2, -5, 7)
I find its best to teach functions in this way because it does 2 things: it shows how to write a function for something they already know (and didn’t know was a function), and it shows them both parts: the equation for the function and what it looks like in code, and how to use it. They know the parts from math, so that parallel showing how a function is just a set of instructions to solve a specific problem suddenly makes it click. I haven’t had a single problem since I came up with that. To speed things along, I often go slowly over how to use and format output from print statements early on, but towards the end of the quarter, just write them. Same goes for all IO. If its new, spend a lot of time going over it. But if its week 7 in CMPS 12a, don’t even mention System.out.println(). They should have it by now. I also run into this issue a lot when teaching classes for Patrick Tantalo. He really likes math-heavy programs, using stuff like the Euclidian Algorithm or listing the first n prime numbers. It is key to understand the math, because you will get nowhere teaching the code if they don’t understand the math. That is why, early on in the quarter, I emphasize writing pseudocode for the assignment, so they know how to set it up. I do teach a lot of code, but my biggest thing is to teach the thought process. They may not understand every line you need for a program, which is why you are there. But if they know how to get it done and walk in with pseudocode and maybe the IO stuff done, it puts both of you in a better position for success. My biggest piece of advice, that comes up almost weekly, is that you don’t need to know everything. I personally am a very strong java programmer, but occasionally I’ll come across some code that I don’t know. Sometimes a student will ask me if what will happen if you write something one way or another. I don’t bring my computer to sessions, so I simply respond “try it.” That takes some of the burden off you, and encourages them to do a little bit of guess and check, which helps because let’s be honest, that’s what a lot of learning programming is. It also helps if you do know what the problem is. I once had a student that was working in Python and was wondering why the line:

print('some string', someVariable)

wasn’t working. She was positive that she needed it to look like this:

print("'some string', someVariable")

I knew what it would print, but I told her to try it. Sometimes, experimenting with those little errors can tell you more than the teacher can. That’s all I can think of for advice, so hopefully you can find a few nuggets of wisdom in here to help you out. Best of luck tutoring!
Dear future LSS employee,

After my first quarter as the LSS tutor for CMPS 11 I have learned many valuable things during my employment. This job is very rewarding, but also can provide some challenges if this is your first time as a tutor for a class. Here is my advice for new LSS employees:

Before the class even begins the best thing you can do is brush up on the material that is covered in the class. If possible I would look up past offerings of the course and see what material the professor will go over. When I initially took CMPS 11 I took it with McDowell, but as a tutor for Tantalo I’ve noticed that he teaches this course in slightly different ways. The main difference I’ve noticed is that Tantalo puts a bigger focus on Unix and math based programs while McDowell devotes time to Java GUI and programs with string parsing. If you are looking to be a tutor for this class but have never taken it with the professor who is going to teach the course, then I recommend looking through their past exams and programs and adjust to their curriculum. You are not required to attend lecture, but it may be worth attending at least the first few lectures just to get a sense of the professor’s teaching style and how they present the material.

Before your sessions for the week start take an a hour or two to refresh yourself on the concepts that will be covered over the week. I would also recommend looking through and doing any programs or labs that are due within the next week or so. This lets you know what’s going on in the class and what material the students may struggle with.

Additionally if you find yourself in a situation where you do not know the answer to a question asked by a student, don’t be afraid to tell them you don’t know. It is better to tell them that you aren’t sure than to give a half baked answer. Of course it is a bad idea to do this too often as it will seem as if you don’t know your stuff.

One final piece of advice is to make your sessions a relaxed and comfortable environment for students. A point that was stressed during training for new tutors is that these tutoring sessions are not supposed to be another lecture for students. I’ve found that sessions that let the students interact with you and work together on the material go more smoothly as they are given the chance to discuss the material in a way that is not possible during a lecture. Students may come to tutoring because they are too shy to talk to the professor/TA’s so I think that this point is incredibly important to a successful tutoring session.

Overall working at LSS is very rewarding job and I hope that you will take this advice to heart.

Good luck.

-Will Herrera
Prepare for one of the most rewarding jobs any undergraduate student could possibly have on campus. I found my job to be highly fulfilling when I could say after a quarter that I helped students excel in one of the most difficult courses for Computer Science majors. Before you start I’d like to share with you some of my experiences working in this position for a year.

The first thing which really threw me off in this position was how different the class was depending on which professor was teaching it. There’s at least 4 different professors who all teach CMPS101 and they all are very different. It would be highly beneficial to you to immediately know what the professor wants and how he plans on teaching the class. For things such as induction the written format for a proof can be dramatically different. Another issue I ran into with all the different professors was that they all would teach different, sometimes very difficult material. Students will expect you to be an “expert” on this material which often meant I had to look ahead and study the material which was new to me before sections. Nothing is worse than being unable to help a student because you don’t understand a material yourself. On the bright side, I did enjoy getting to learn new material, many of which has become relevant in my later courses.

As you know, Computer Science 101 joins the programming aspects from courses such as CMPS12B and the math aspects from courses such as CMPE 16. This was difficult for myself, and is for most students as well. I found it beneficial to myself to identify which of the two aspects of the course, programming or math, was a student’s strong point. When aiding a student I would attempt to talk to their strong side. By making the part which they were weaker on (which was usually the Math side) relevant to what they were better with (usually programming). It builds self-confidence and brings relevance from something they care about.

I have to say the biggest learning experience for me during training was when I realized my real goal for this job. It goes without saying that you don’t just hand out answers to homework, but I used to only make it so that the students would understand the concepts needed for their assignments and midterms. When I realized that our true goal was to enable the students to succeed in their entire future here at UCSC and onward my entire perspective changed. By enabling students to do better, sometimes just by sharing something as simple as a good study habit, I witnessed growth in their academic abilities. The moments when I see a student dramatically improve is what makes this job so rewarding for me.
Not everything will always go perfect during sections, but all I can say is to just move on and learn from the experience. You’re going to get better at your job as you gain more experience. I hope you enjoy your time here as much as I have.

Sincerely,

Andrew Ringer
TUTOR EART 3: TARRA CMAGROS

Tara Camgros

Lower-division Earth Sciences Tutor 2012-2013

To whom it may concern,

I have tutored multiple lower-division Earth Science classes in the past two years, including Oceanography, Geology of National Parks, and Earth Catastrophes. Though these classes have different topics, they have very similar basic concepts and problems that students run into in the course of the class. Because of this, I'll talk about these classes for the most part as a group.

I had the advantage of a broad background in earth-science-related topics from being involved in 4-H and school projects before college, so tutoring these classes was easy for me. I had a good enough grasp of the concepts that I could bring up a real-world example for almost anything we talked about – which sometimes led to tangents about glaciers or the 1906 San Francisco earthquake or ocean currents in discussions of unrelated topics. However, I don't think this is a bad thing – I've had students tell me my absurd enthusiasm for these subjects makes the concepts more interesting for them.

Something that I keep running into is the fact that many students have no background in science, and therefore have no basis of understanding for concepts like plate tectonics, volcanism, and geologic time – which are inherent to Earth Science classes. We often revisit these concepts throughout the quarter as the students gain a better grasp of the ideas, and can look at them in a more complex sense. Earth Science classes are fantastic in that the concepts nearly always have visual elements to them – usually impressive ones, too. This quarter, I spent twenty minutes in one session watching videos of Japanese tsunamis with two students so they could see how the water acted. Hollywood movies had given them the idea that tsunamis are giant cresting waves, while I wanted to show them that tsunamis are more like massive walls of water that act like floods on steroids. In this case, YouTube helped. Don’t hesitate to seize opportunities like this – if they want to learn about something that is related to what the professor is discussing, which will ultimately help their understanding of the class, then who are we to stand in their way? Be flexible, and your students will surprise you.

I found that having my notes from when I took these classes was invaluable – if the class is being taught by the same professor, 95% of it will be the same – and even if it's being taught by a different professor, it will still be very similar. Also, if you still have the class textbook, bring it along. You being prepared usually gives the students more incentive to be prepared themselves – plus the book can be helpful if you need visuals or the exact definition of something from the glossary.

I have found that allowing the students to drive the course of the sessions gets better results and gives the students more power over their education. I'll come to the session with a few concepts I want to cover, but if the student feels their time would be better spent discussing different topics covered by the professor in the past week, I'll drop my schedule and go with theirs – as long as they understand the main concepts I would have talked about. For the most part, my sessions are question-and-discussion. The students ask questions, then discuss amongst themselves and/or with me (if it's a single session) what the answers might be, and why. The “why” is very important in Earth Science classes, because many “whys” are related. Earthquakes and volcanoes are both tied to plate tectonics,
tsunamis and landslides are both tied to earthquakes, and so on – and if the students understand the “whys” of one concept, that gives them a sounding board for the “whys” of another concept.

When engaging in such discussions, I find it helps to ask “does that make sense?” instead of the more accusatory “do you get it?” or “do you understand this?” Not saying “you” makes the question less aggressive, and makes it lower-risk for the student to answer “no” to, because it doesn't put the blame on them. It just means they need a different explanation.

Last but not least, professors are your resources as much as they are the students'. Contact the professors (though Earth Science professors I've contacted are often slow with emails) and see if they have review sheets or practice tests you can use in your sessions. If not, don't hesitate to make your own, if the students want. Remember, we are here for our tutees, so don't hesitate to ask how their weekend was, or how their day is going. It will remind them we're students, too, and we know what the class was like.

Good luck!

-Tara Camgros

(Class of 2013)
First off if you have trouble public speaking try to think about like this. They are only here because they don’t know and want the answer. This makes you superior to them and that should help give you confidence. Also, relax, I can guarantee that you will not have a single session without a hitch. Mistakes will be made and you will just have to roll with them. When a student finally asks you a question that you don’t know the answer, it is okay to tell them to ask either the professor or the TAs. Other than that you can try to work on it with them. Show up to meetings with the teacher and also ask a lot of question you think the students will have trouble with. The students will fight you tooth and nail on working in groups during MSI, but will do it if it is given to them as an order because they have been conditioned that way in school. A great thing to do before every session is to use icebreakers so the students get to know one another. This will aid in getting them to work together. My last bit of advice is to have fun and enjoy.
Olga Dubinskaya
Accounting Tutor

My life as a tutor

To whom it may concern,

I have been tutoring for various accounting courses at UCSC, such as Econ 10A, 10B, and Advanced Accounting. I found that there are a lot of complications in teaching more than one course at a time; and even more complications arise when the professors teaching a course are not the same as when you were enrolled. When this happens, the teaching style and the layout of the class may vary. Whether you decide to tutor just one course or more, I have a few suggestions that may make your life a bit easier.

First and foremost, remember that even though you are a tutor, you are also a student and have the right to make mistakes. Even our professors do not always get the right answer initially. What I have done is asked my students to email me questions ahead of time so that I can prepare for the sessions in order to make it more productive. Even if the student does not email questions prior to the meeting, there are always our old exams and notes that we can use to run the sessions. Use the resources available to you. Whether it is exchanging information with the course TA’s, using your old exams or even professors who will gladly offer textbooks and access to course websites, it is important to utilize all of the resources available in order to maximize the potential impact on your tutee’s learning.

When tutoring two different classes, especially when there is a combination of both upper and lower division courses, you need to remember that the level of knowledge and terminology you use when speaking to your tutee may be above or below their level of understanding. It is very important to be able to adjust your teaching style to where your tutee is in their academic journey (upper vs. lower division, course progression, etc.) in order to increase the efficiency of the session, as well as reduce confusion. Making this a priority is critical to tailoring productive tutoring sessions.

Another important point (geared primarily towards group sessions) is to facilitate the building of not just the relationship between you and your students, but also the relationships the students have with each other. I try to engage them in some form of conversation. Often the topic of conversation is regarding their class. As an example, I would ask about their quiz and how they did, what they consider the hardest part of the chapter, or simply steer the conversation away from school and ask what they did during their weekend. I try to facilitate relationship building with my students by letting them work on the problems together or seek each other’s help when necessary.

After a few sessions, you will catch onto when a student truly understands the material or when they just claim that they do. In any case, little quizzes are always helpful in assessing a tutee’s understanding of the materials. Always know that there is nothing wrong with picking a student to answer the question about the material. Ultimately, this will only help them better grasp concepts behind the material because they will be forced to work through the thought process, leading to increased comprehension.

Overall, tutoring is not as daunting as it might seem. It is an amazing experience that allows you to help fellow students along their academic journey, while developing vital leadership skills that you can take
with you into the workforce. As long as you put in the time and preparation to create a productive session, you will minimize personal mistakes. If a mistake does happen during a session, use it a learning experience with students to show that mistakes are ok as long as the proper steps to rectify them are taken. Good luck and make sure to enjoy the opportunity you have before you.
Dear LSS Employee:

To start off, congratulations on your LSS employment! If this is your first university job, congratulations on receiving employment through the University of California Santa Cruz. I tutored a variety of electrical engineering courses through LSS which include EE80T, EE103, and EE171. Hopefully you will find this letter short, sweet, to the point, helpful, and worth your reading.

Tutoring will be an enjoyable task if you like to help people learn. Without this key quality your students might be looking at their watches throughout the sessions and you might even be doing the same. The speed with which you physically talk can influence a student’s stress level. For example, if a student comes into tutoring previously stressed about their grade, rushing through problems might increase stress levels and the student might feel like they aren’t grasping the material. Try to keep an even, controlled flow while you speak; their body language will reflect their understanding and comfort. If you are comfortable in new situations such as meeting new people, you will have no problem making the students feel comfortable with you on your first session.

The biggest technique I learned during tutoring was how to handle situations where you simply do not know the answer. If the student is asking you a problem you do not know how to solve, hopefully they, or someone else in the session, will have at least attempted to tackle the problem on their own. LSS encourages an interactive learning environment. Therefore, ask the student to draw their ideas on the chalkboard, even if they think their thinking is wrong. This will give you some insight not only to how the student works through problems, but might even give you a clue on the next step or two. It is great when students can help one another out. If a problem gets too cumbersome, it might be a good idea to admit your defeat (sometimes earlier than wasting too much time) and work your way up from the basics or simply move on to something similar. A second technique is to have practice problems in your back pocket. These are especially useful when students do not have many questions to ask, or if you are stuck with a silent group. Have them work through problems with you. If you are in a situation like this, but do not have any problems prepared, get good at making problems up on the fly. The best part is, sometimes you only have to introduce the steps to tackling a problem, not necessarily even ever getting the final answer.

The largest challenge I’ve faced was being stuck with a group of 4 students who did not want to participate. They merely wanted to see homework problems done for them, and have the information spoon fed to them. When stuck with a group like this, you might want to lecture more than tutor. Some students do learn best while sitting alone in silence, but if they just want you to provide the answers, then maybe skip the homework entirely and create similar problems to discuss.

It is most important to remember that you are a student yourself. You are not the almighty professor of knowledge; sometimes professors themselves even need to take an ego hindering pill. If you find it difficult to lead your sessions, hopefully hearing other student's testimonials will lead you to the assistive learning strategies best for you, your sessions, and your students.

Sincerely,  
Christopher Ligocki
Dear Future Environmental Studies MSI Learning Assistant (For ENVS 23 and 25),

Hello! As the Learning Assistant for ENVS 23 and ENVS 25 for the past few quarters, I have acquired many skills and tools for success in facilitating MSI for these courses. These are all things that I really wish someone had told me before I began this position!

To start, I would like to say that even if you have no experience as a tutor, you can still come in with passion and enthusiasm for the subject and for helping others. That being said, I feel that lesson plan design is crucial to the success of any lesson. I have always used an Understanding by Design framework, which I have found to be very effective for facilitating MSI sessions in Environmental Studies. (UBD is a lesson plan building methodology that you can learn more about online). Essentially, this framework for lesson planning begins with identification of a few enduring understandings, or larger ideas that you want students to have a strong understanding of by the end of the lesson. After the enduring understandings have been formed, now is the time to focus in on specific charts, ideas, vocabulary, and concepts from that lecture that stand out as important and related to your larger enduring understandings. Once a list of these topics has been created, you can now think about how to best use interactive learning strategies to facilitate your students’ learning of these concepts. My favorite interactive learning strategy involves putting students in pairs, giving them a topic to learn, and then regrouping to have each pair share what they learned with the larger group.

Advice for ENVS 23

This class is very science-based and focuses on many cycles and larger aspects of Earth’s systems. I have found that many of the concepts learned in this class are taught best by creating visual aides on the board. (For example: Carbon and Nitrogen cycling, Hadley cells, and El Niño are all very visual concepts). One technique that has worked very well for me has been to have students get into groups and illustrate and label one of these concepts/cycles. Then have the students explain their illustration to the group. This is a very effective learning tool for ENVS 23 that caters to multiple intelligences including visual, spatial, and linguistic learning.

Advice for ENVS 25

ENVS 25 is a very economics-based course. You may find that students will need the most help with the economics problems that are assigned in class and on the exams. Many of the students in this course are not Economics majors and do not have very much background in this field. You can help these students by creating a scaffolding to facilitate learning. Make sure that students understand the mechanisms behind each part of the problem before beginning to work on the problem. When helping students with these problems in a session, you have many options for interactive learning strategies. I liked to have students solve the problem in pairs and then have each group explain one part of the problem while we reviewed it on the whiteboard. This gets students engaged in the problem, rather than just watching you solve it on the board. You will surely find your own interactive learning strategies that work best for sessions. One last note, coming from someone who does not have a lot of background in Economics (aside from taking this class), I want to let you know that if you are also in this situation and struggling to
understand the material or practice problems, do not hesitate to ask the TA or professor for help or guidance. They are more than happy to help you out!

In my time as a Learning Assistant, I have come to believe that in this position it is most important to be approachable, use interactive learning strategies to guide your facilitation, and to make the learning experience effective and enjoyable. Lastly, I want to wish you the best of luck! Enjoy the great experience that you are soon to have as an Environmental Studies Learning Assistant!

Cheers!  ~Sarah Hendrix
Dear Future Tutor,

I hope you are excited and ready to help some students! However I bet you are very nervous, which is totally fine because I was too. I thought I had everything under control though because I thought with my knowledge and organizational skills tutoring couldn’t be that hard. My first tutoring experience was with Film 20B: Introduction to Television Studies, and at the time I was in Advanced Television Studies, so I didn’t think I needed to go out of my way to help the students, just be supportive and patient at the sessions and talk them through their questions. But I quickly learned that, a lot of the time, students will ask you questions that you do not immediately know off the top of your head. For instance, one of my tutored students was actually really smart, I wasn’t exactly sure why she even signed up for tutoring, but it turns out a lot of students just like to talk about the material and think out loud, they aren’t necessarily struggling. However, as a result of this my tutee was really challenging how much I knew and remembered from the intro class. If this happens to you I would say don’t panic, there is nothing wrong with looking over the readings or some textbook passages to refresh yourself and then have more of an idea of what to explain to the student.

I think this was a huge misunderstanding I had going into the position. Sure the LSS instructors tell you that tutors are different from TAs in that we are supposed to be at the same level as the student and not some intense master of the material, but you still want to appear intelligent. For me, I didn’t like having to read over my tutee’s notes and readings because it made me feel like the student thought I wasn’t smart enough to be tutoring. On the other hand, I think most of the time the student appreciated me taking the time to read over some passages from the readings or glance over some of the vocabulary from the textbook because it showed that I cared and wasn’t just trying to make up answers to move on to a new topic. So if you are put in this kind of a situation where you don’t feel as smart as you want, it’s ok. Just be honest and say, “Oh you know, that is a really good question. Why don’t we look at that together?” That way, you and the student can mentally process the material together and think about what kinds of things are making you understand content a certain way.

Something else I would like to advise you on that I was not prepared for was the writing ability of your students. On one occasion I was tutoring a film student who was not only struggling with writing about film, but was having trouble with basic essay-writing skills in general. This is a very tough position because sometimes the tutor session would focus a lot on how to write an essay and we wouldn’t get as much time as we wanted to go over the television studies material. I think in this case it would have been best for me to advise the student he seek the help of a writing tutor. You don’t want your session to only deal with essay writing skills because to really help someone with that it would be best to read the tutees full drafts and go over little details, whereas tutoring sessions should focus more on the critical thinking of the material. I know it is hard to tell someone they need to go back and get help with something they may feel isn’t that bad, but most likely nobody has really approached the student bluntly to open their eyes that they need the extra assistance. So if something like this comes up where you feel some basic skills are in need and require further help in addition to the help that you can provide, don’t be afraid to tell your student about the many resources we have on campus for problems just like that. Hopefully it is a situation where the student just wasn’t aware and is thankful that they can get the extra support.
One last issue that came up was telling a student that he did not answer the essay prompt. This was very hard because when the student came to me he had already written a rough draft and the essay was due the next day, but unfortunately the tutee focused on one portion of the prompt and completely forgot about the other. I did not tell him to rewrite his essay because that is just overwhelming, however I did reanalyze the prompt with him so we could tackle what kinds of things he may have missed. I would say if you are tutoring students and they want to come to you to talk about an upcoming essay or an essay they have written, tell them to bring a hard copy of the prompt or print one out yourself if you have the chance because actually reading what the professor wants is very important. So after going through the prompt line by line with my student we were able to underline key words that related to critical analysis that he did not tackle. Although his face was completely blank and I could tell he was unhappy, it was still important that he heard this concern and read for himself some of the ideas he may have overlooked. I know something like this is really difficult because you want to be the student’s friend and let them know how much you care and want them to do well, but honestly sometimes that means you need to be painfully honest and ask that he or she does a little extra work to really get a firm grasp of the ideas.

These were all the main problems that I dealt with my first quarter of tutoring. I think all of them can relate to an idea that sometimes tutors need to be straightforward, especially in the liberal arts, and explain to a student that they need to approach something differently. Which, I think this is harder for the liberal arts classes because a lot of the time the grading is subjective, so how do you tell a student that he or she needs to improve something? You are not necessarily 100 percent right or wrong, nor are they. I think what is crucial is to just explain that, in your experience, you have seen a certain style of writing or a certain manner in breaking down ideas have success. I would caution you to not be too authoritative and say that there is a right and wrong answer, but to express what has or has not worked for you and your peers.

That being said, it is also a good idea to try and relate to students as much as possible, because I found the more comfortable they feel the more they will be willing to open up about questions. If you create an image where the tutee understands that your key qualification for the tutoring position is that you took the class and got a good grade (and perhaps are also studying the subject and know about it in different contexts), then he or she will be less inclined to put you on some kind of pedestal and be intimidated to ask for help. This way, you and your tutees can have more fluid conversations about the material as opposed to your student feeling like you know so much and are just going to lecture them. One of my students actually knew the material for television studies really well, but was struggling with how to translate the ideas from the readings into his essay. However, once I started to make him feel more comfortable and open to talking about what he doesn’t get from the readings, he was able to think out loud and it made more sense! So it seemed like reading abstract thoughts out of the reader just wasn’t working for him.

In conclusion, don’t be nervous and just be ready for a wide variety of students with very different goals and needs for the tutoring sessions. You will do great!

- Pauline Disch, Film 20B Subject Tutor
Film 20C Subject Tutor Advice

20C is a bit of a surprising class for both tutors and students. Introducing Digital Media, apparently, comes with an amount of difficulty. During my time tutoring for the class, I met students who had difficulty with the course’s content and others who had difficulty with its very approach to said content—throughout, however, I believe I managed to be somewhat helpful, and here’re a couple of the things I did.

1) Close reading: The students I met, for the most part, were basically unfamiliar with much of the work that goes into reading academic articles. Either they had glossed the assigned readings before the lectures (and the subsequent meetings they had with me) and not "gotten" much from it, they read everything and understand relatively little, or they hadn’t read at all. In facing all of these problems, I spent many a session essentially reading select paragraphs aloud with them, breaking at each period, and running over just what they had understood. When they came up empty, I often asked them to go through the sentence inquisition and pull out each section of the argument they were having trouble understanding. After a few weeks of messing around with this approach to the readings (which, to be fair, can be fairly dense), I encouraged the students to employ the technique independently. Invariably, the students who were struggling with even basic understandings of the readings were starting to come to sessions with a vastly deeper understanding of the subsequent readings.

2) Being familiar with helpful supplementary material: Considering the broadness of the content of the course, it was tremendously helpful to be able to bring in instructive materials to each session that weren’t necessarily covered by the lectures themselves. For instance, in considering the meaning of the depiction of gender in some video games, it was helpful to have some knowledge of Judith Butler’s arguments about gender and identity in mind—and to keep the spirit of such things in mind throughout tutoring for the course. Students benefited tremendously from seeing the course material applied to popular and academic culture not explicitly outlined by the syllabus itself, as doing so engaged them in basic critical thought and brought the more wonky material into meaningful understanding.

3) Articulating the possibilities of the creative projects: While the projects themselves seem to change depending on the professor teaching the course, they do consistently aim to illustrate the potential for creativity within new media and digital art. In my experience, however, a number of the students are intimidated by the technical knowledge required to do well on each. If you as a tutor can work to mitigate that fear while also displaying just how creative the projects themselves allow them to be, the students will really open up to the assignments.

That said, each student and session will come with something of its own challenge, and you'll simply have to be as ready as possible to address them. Doing so shouldn't be terribly difficult, but it will require flexibility on your part—good luck!
Dear LSS Tutor,

Congratulations on your new job. I’m certain that it is well earned. However, in spite of your capability and dedication, you may be somewhat nervous about the task before you. Know that there will be times when you feel unsure of yourself and have as many questions and doubts as the students with whom you are working. And, know that this is normal.

I have experienced these same insecurities on many occasions. One of the most important things that I have learned during my time as an LSS Subject Tutor for French (levels 1-4) is that a language is only as uniform as its speakers, which is to say, not at all. As a tutor, students frequently ask me for help with translations and compositions and expect concrete and immutable answers. “How would I say...?” They ask, anticipating a word-for-word translation that conforms to their intuitions about the English language.

“It depends on the sense you want to convey,” I explain, “What is the context of utterance? What is the emotion you want to express? With whom are you talking?”

And these questions do not even begin to scratch the surface of the complex speaker-interlocutor relationship that studying a foreign language sheds light upon.

“Why does all of that matter?” They ask, “Isn’t it all the same as long as the sentence makes sense?”

As a competent speaker of (at least) two languages, you, future LSS Tutor, are aware that these considerations do factor greatly into the way that we structure our speech. How do I choose whether to ‘tutoyer’ or ‘vouvoyer’ if I do not know to whom the pronoun ‘you’ refers? How do I decide whether to employ the ‘il faut’ or the ‘je dois’ construction if I do not know the degree of obligation that I am expressing with my phrase?

In speaking and in tutoring a language, you become acutely aware of how flexible communication really is. There is more than one way to say almost anything (although, nothing else quite captures the perfect simplicity of ‘je ne sais quoi’...) and in most cases, it is a matter of convention and taste that determines whether one version is preferable to another.

That being said, it is clear that teaching the rules of grammar and pronunciation are not enough if you want to help your tutees to achieve mastery of the material they are studying. Sure, sentence diagraming, grammar worksheets, and constant practice conjugating verbs are all essential to your job. Embrace grammar! Learn to love it, because you will spend long hours reviewing direct/indirect object pronouns, conjugating the subjunctive, and rehashing the difference between definite and indefinite articles.

But, as previously stated, this alone is not enough. Grammar is the skeleton. Without grammar, you’re left with a muddle of words that lack any kind of intelligible relationship to one another. But–at the risk of stating the obvious—you NEED WORDS! If you don’t flesh out the syntactical skeleton, you won’t get very far.
So, how do you do this? Speak. Talk. Laugh. Tell stories. Tell jokes. In French. This is by far the most valuable piece of advice I have for you: talk to your tutees and make them talk to you. Most students are secretly (and exceedingly) afraid to speak another language, especially in front of someone that they consider to be a more accomplished or experienced speaker. We are all afraid to be wrong.

I have worked with students who compose beautiful papers and can barely stammer out a coherent response to a basic comment ça va? It isn’t because they need more practice with the subjunctive. And it isn’t because they need more practice with the ‘au café’ vocabulary flashcards. It is because they lack confidence, rather than knowledge.

Thus, one of your greatest challenges as a tutor is kindling this confidence in the students you work with. You can do this in many ways. First off, don’t lecture at them. They already have a professor for that. A very accomplished Ph.D–level professor who diagrams sentences on the blackboard and teaches them to pronounce ‘le pamplemousse’ properly.

Lecturing is not your job. Instead, be an interlocutor. Engage your tutees in conversations in which they are interested (music, movies, books, forest raves, the ridiculous cost of an apartment in downtown Santa Cruz) and they will talk to you en français. You need not resort to extreme measures, even with the shyest of individuals. Once you get them talking, then you can worry about the details and help them to perfect their grammar and expand their lexicon. But it is absolutely imperative that you break through this barrier.

Remember the first time that you spoke French in front of a native speaker? This is more or less how many beginning French students will feel talking in front of you. But you can set them at ease. With patience, positive feedback, and a wise selection of conversational fodder, your session will turn into a regular blabber-fest. And when friendly chitchat can provide solid knowledge, you know that you’re justified putting down the pen and closing the textbook. Grammar review is assez bon, but speaking, speaking, speaking is how the greatest learning occurs.

Parle beaucoup et amuse-toi!

Best (et bon courage),

Camille Charette
Congratulations! Here marks the beginning of your journey as a French tutor. I promise you that you are on your way to a challenging, but incredibly rewarding experience.

First off, I would like to strongly encourage you to speak entirely in French during your sessions. I worked with second-year French students, so their speaking proficiency was such that they were able to carry on conversations entirely in the language. It is far too easy to give in to the pitfall of speaking in a language that you and your tutee/s are comfortable with (i.e., English). However, the only time that is really productive for you to do so is if the tutee/s really have no idea of what you’re attempting to explain to them.

This leads into the next point I would like to make. French 5 and 6 are the classes where students begin to read lengthy texts. A few of my tutees were struggling with reading comprehension. In order to remedy this, I would read the book with them and, at appropriate stopping points, would ask them to give me a brief summary of what we just read. Whether this summary is done in French or in English is up to your discretion. I found that, occasionally, my students would simply reiterate the vocabulary (while summarizing in French) without understanding what it actually meant.

If the students seem to be doing alright with reading and the course material, it may also be useful to bring in extra materials. If the student does not have any questions and seems to be doing alright with both the grammar and with Marius/La vie devant soi, then you could either read ahead in the play/book, or break out another book. Le petit prince is always a favorite.

As you may know, French 4 focuses heavily on relative pronouns, while French 5 focuses mostly on the use of the subjunctive. When working with these two subjects, I found it easier to bring in the book that I used when I was learning French in high school. When I used the book, it was called Reprise, but you can find the same book under the title The Ultimate French Review and Practice from McGraw-Hill. This book was far easier for me to find modules and exercises for the students to use, especially ones they haven’t seen before.

Below are some example exercises that I have used for French 5 (adapted from exercises in Reprise), when working on the question forms for qui/qu’est-ce qui/que and à/de qui/quoi. I have underlined each phrase that must be questioned. (The students were given these examples without the underlines, of course.)

Poser des Questions

Posez deux ou trois questions pour chaque phrase donnée.

Monique a pris des billets.

La fête m’a surpris.
Mes parents ont acheté des médicaments.
Yves a reçu une mauvaise note dans une de ses classes.
Gabrielle a besoin d’une revue.
Elizabeth a apporté le gâteau à la réunion.
Je connais le garçon mignon dont tu parles.
Eugène permet à ses petites soeurs de voir trop d’émissions.

Let’s take (6) for instance. The three sentences that the student would need to come up with are:

Qui est-ce qui a apporté le gâteau à la réunion? (replacing Gabrielle)
Qu’est-ce que Elizabeth a apporté à la réunion? (replacing le gâteau)
A quoi (or où) est-ce qu’Elizabeth a apporté le gâteau? (replacing à la réunion)

With the next set of exercises, I focused more on translation, as this is what a few of my students struggled with in the spring quarter.

Traduire
Traduisez ces questions.

What is the best way to study?
Who are you looking for?
What are you thinking about?
What are my parents reading?
Who is cooking right now?
What’s wrong? (Lit: What isn’t going?)

I decided to put the last example in there, as it is a question that students will most likely have heard or may need to use if they are in a French-speaking environment. (I first learned the answer “Qu’est-ce qui ne va pas?” when doing a doctor’s office skit in French 1.)

As for relative pronouns, I have attached an email that I sent to some of my students, prior to their test. Note the lame attempt at connecting relative pronouns to popular music culture. However lame it was,
it DID help my tutees remember which pronoun to use during their test! I began the with an exclusively professional demeanor, but then I realized that the students were not quite as receptive to me as when I dropped the façade and acted more like a peer.

The French professors have told me that second-year French is far more vocabulary-heavy than first-year is. Because of this, I would never hesitate to plug Quizlet.com. I had French with the founder of this vocabulary-learning website for five years. He actually created it specifically for our French 3 class when we were assigned a crazy amount of vocabulary to learn over a weekend. Another online resource that many people do not know about is BonPatron.com. This is a website where you can copy and paste your paragraphs into a field, and it will return grammatical errors with the reasons that they are wrong. Of course, it is up to your discretion whether you would like to give this resource to your students, but I found it to be useful even in the upper-division classes that I took.

I hope this letter was useful (and didn’t bore you) and that you have a successful tutoring experience!

Meilleurs sentiments,

Caroline Iwamoto

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Appendix: Relative Pronoun Email

1. Recap on combining sentences with relative PRONouns (ok, the acronym spells PROF, but I wanted to make a pun):

    Prepositions!! Are there any? If so, use a form of 'lequel' or 'qui,' if whatever's getting turned into a pronoun is animate. Don't forget the composite forms of lequel (e.g., auquel, duquel, and their forms). Also, watch out for prepositions that don't have anything to do with the part that you're moving/changing into a pronoun (e.g., 'à la Défense').

    Reference: What is getting turned into a pronoun? Is there an antecedent (what the pronoun refers to in the main sentence)? If there is no antecedent, you're probably going to want to use something like 'ce qui/que/dont.'

    Où: You guys are pretty good with this one, but don't forget that you can use 'où' for time, as well as location.

    Function: You know that thing that's getting turned into a pronoun... What's its function in the relative (subordinate) clause? Is it the subject (so you would likely defer to 'qui')? Is it the DO? The IO (which would require a preposition)?
And on that note, I can't stop thinking about the music video for "Function" (E-40). Just think about E-40 as the subject of the relative clause. And for the sake of this terrible analogy, think of all those scantily-clad chicks as the objects (as much as I reject the objectification of women) and the other rapper dudes as the prepositions. Rapper prepositions are never without their scantily-clad entourage of preposition, right?

2. Don't forget to check (sorry I couldn't make an acronym...):

   Agreement: Not only number and gender in the forms of lequel, but also if the subordinate clause is in passé composé. Just remember what has to agree with the verb in the PC cases, though -- it may not be what's getting turned into a pronoun!

   Order: Are all of the prepositions stuck to a pronoun (lequel/qui)? If not, why is that preposition hanging around?

   Parts: Make sure that all of the parts of the original sentences are accounted for. What is leftover after you make and move the pronoun? For example, do you have a floating 'de' when you've already created a 'dont' to replace something?

3. I promised you guys a poem, yeah? It may or may not help you with relatives, and [spoiler alert] it's a kind of morbid/depressing French poem. I've bolded what the PC verbs are agreeing with and underlined how the verb in the sub. clause is agreeing. (But notice that the last few lines are no longer in PC.) Here's « Le Message» by Jacques Prévert:

   La porte que quelqu'un a ouverte
   La porte que quelqu'un a refermée
   La chaise où quelqu'un s'est assis_
   Le chat que quelqu'un a caressé_
   Le fruit que quelqu'un a mordu_
   La lettre que quelqu'un a lue
   La chaise que quelqu'un a renversée
   La porte que quelqu'un a ouverte
   La route où quelqu'un court encore
   Le bois que quelqu'un traverse
   La rivière où quelqu'un se jette
   L'hôpital où quelqu'un est mort.
4. You didn't think I'd leave you with something that depressing, did you? I was trying to find inspirational French music, and this is all I got.

Madagascar 3 - Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien

If you'd like a longer version (with Spanish subtitles, I think... it would help if I actually spoke Spanish), here's a clip from that movie about Edith Piaf Ma Vie en Rose/La Môme:

"Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien"

That's quite a bit of information to load you with, but hopefully it comes to some meaningful end.
Sehr geehrter/geehrte Nachhilfer/Nachhilferin,

So, you are the new German Tutor for UC Santa Cruz. Are you excited? You should be. Tutoring for LSS is a very rewarding job, both for your own Academics and your personal work experience. Why? Good question, I’m glad you asked. It is rewarding because you are able to see students come to you in the fall (or the beginning of the quarter) and grow in their understanding of the language, culture, and history of German and German speaking culture. You are able to share with them your own understanding of all those things and, if you have a familial connection, your personal story. All these things make the language come alive for the students as well as for you and you will find yourself relishing those moments where something clicks for your students or when you begin to include more German in the session because the students are more motivated to speak with you. And your own grammar will flourish, both in English and German. You will have to look closely at the structure of sentences so that you can explain the concepts that they are learning. You, by bringing your students back to the English, will be able to show them how the building blocks that they have can be extrapolated.

But, you may be saying, I will see that later… I don’t know how everything will work out. What if things don’t go well? What if I can’t connect with students? What if…? All the “what ifs” may or may not actually happen and if the worst happens, you have resources. Loads of them. You have the LSS staff, who are amazing, by the way, you have the professors themselves, you have books and readers and things that you used to learn the language and you have a wealth of knowledge that you can pull upon. Whether you are being asked about a grammar concept or simply learning strategies, you have loads of information available to you.

Now, sometimes it may be difficult. You may have a student who is only there because he or she has to be. He, I will use this pronoun for simplicity’s sake, may simply want you to give him the answers, to do his homework for him, or may not even tell you everything. You may have to pull information out of him bit by excruciating bit. And that’s okay. Because, if you pay attention closely to his work, he will get better. He will improve. Sessions may be hard, but the point is to help him, and you will. Maybe not to the same extent as another student, but remember, everyone is different.

That is rare, in my experience, because usually a student who goes through the entire process of signing up for tutoring is highly motivated. It’ll be okay. I’ll be good even. Every student will bring with them motivations and reasons for why he chooses German. Some for family reasons, some because they are Music students and need to learn German because of Bach and Beethoven and Mozart. If you figure out why everyone is learning German, you can meet them where they are.

And you know what? You will do great. You will. Believe me. I haven’t met you but you have been selected for this position and that means you got this. No matter what your accent sounds like, no matter why you learned German, you will do awesome. And if you struggle, remember that the
professors are more than happy to see you in their office hours, remember that LSS staff is here to support you, remember that you did this and that you know all of it, even if some of the concepts feel so far away.

So good luck, though you won’t need it; have fun, because you will, and keep a positive outlook on tutoring. You are a teacher, but one that has just recently been where your students are so you have insights their professors don’t. Use what you have and you will be awesome.

Thank you for being the new German tutor. Thank you for joining the LSS team.

Christine Bell

German Subject Tutor

UCSC Learning Support Services
Dear Future Member of the LSS Family,

My name is Jeff Day and I was a subject tutor in primarily Humanities based classes for most of last year. Good luck in your endeavors into the tutoring world, it’s going to be pretty interesting! Simply put, tutoring is both really hard and really easy. I know that seems like a pretty meaningless and ridiculous thing to say, but I really think it’s true, and it will make sense as I explain myself. Keeping this principle in mind will probably make the whole experience a lot easier and more enjoyable.

To be an effective tutor, a really fine line needs to be walked. You are not a teacher, but at the same time, you are not a student and a study-buddy. Where does that leave the position of a tutor then? This is one of the aspects of tutoring that is most “difficult”. You can’t take yourself too seriously, but you have to be a source of authority on the subject. The way I found easiest to balance the seemingly unbalance able is by trying to be approachable and demonstrate a real concern with the students and the topic. I guess this is what is “easy”.

Having legitimate concern and interest in the material that you are tutoring is extremely important. I guess that’s part of the territory with Humanities based classes and the way I’ve always approached my personal education: sincere interest. That’s what’s been easy about my experience of tutoring, I care. The caring translates into a certain capability with the material that I can tell is palpable by those whom I tutor. So I guess the moral of this portion of the story, if you aren’t already into the things you study and aren’t legitimately interested in education, get “into it” for both yourself and those who you are about to tutor. Learning with students who actually want to learn (why else would they chose elective tutoring?) quite possibly is one of the most amazing and rewarding experiences I have had at the University of California Santa Cruz.

Although as an educator I have a long ways to go until I’m competent and completely comfortable - if that is even possible - this experience has been a really eye opening experience for me. I hope that by keeping in mind that although the work is difficult, it can be interesting and great. It just matters how much you want to put into it. Just remember, with great power comes great responsibility.
Dear Student,

I have been working with Learning Support Services for about three years. I have held multiple positions as a Subject Tutor, MSI, and Sophomore Academy Mentor. I have tutored primarily for Sociology, Latin American and Latino Studies, and Literature. These are very reading and writing intensive courses. From what I have learned on the first day it is nice to have a small icebreaker. I go for the usual state your name, college affiliation, major, and hometown. I find that a lot of students find out they are either in the same class, college, or are from the same hometown because of this and make small connections which make them feel more comfortable coming into the session. The first day I usually like to ask why they are interested in the courses they are in and how they are enjoying school (for the most part students are first years). This usually allows for everyone to slowly start feeling comfortable since tutoring session is small and it’s easier to get to know each other a bit more.

In terms of overall advice for leading a session, these are my words of wisdom. Try not to let anyone be quiet; what I usually do is try to make eye contact with everyone in the room. I usually ask, “what do you think?” or “what do you have on your notes”. Whenever I ask what the student knows about lecture or notes taken that usually gets someone to talk. There are some shy quiet students but it’s also nice to remind the students to treat the session like a very small discussion in which they do not have to necessarily know everything but should feel comfortable saying anything; there are no wrong answers we are all in the session to learn and to talk about our ideas and connections we are making with lecture and the real world. This is particularly helpful for me as a Sociology and Latin American and Latino Studies tutor because the classes want students to begin thinking critically about history, society, and the world. I usually ask students, depending on the topic, if they can think of any examples they have seen or experienced and this makes it easier for students to make connections and gain a deeper understanding of theory, which can tend to be dry. For example, recently we have begun talking about education in Sociology. In particular we have been discussing redlining and social mobility. We are discussing the book’s discussion on social inequalities. I asked the students to think about how education is viewed overall and how they see it. I asked them “why are you in college?” most of them said to get educated to get a good job. From that point I went on to discuss how education is viewed as the ultimate equalizer in which everyone starts out in a level playing and anyone can go to college and move up in society (social mobility). I asked them if they believed this to be true, a lot of them said yes, but to an extent. Then I asked them why they believed this, they gave me their personal experiences with education and I connected this with the text and theories, in particular neo-Marxists and other sociological theorists. This allowed them to understand the chapter on education in a way that would be easier for them to understand. My advice is that you do the same. As a tutor, for the most part, you will have a deeper understanding than the student on certain topics and think about how you learn and what made it easier for you to understand certain theories, themes, topics, etc. and apply it to your pedagogy.

Another thing about the first day is set your rules. Let them know that you will not tolerate X,Y,and Z. Also, if they know in advance they will not be able to make a tutoring session with you to email you so that you do not waste your time. Set your courtesy rules and make them understand that you are also a student and it your “our” time not “your” time only. I usually give my students my phone number so
they can text me since not everyone checks their email on time, etc. If you build this kind of relationship with your student they tend to be very understanding although I warn you that not everyone will email you ahead of time, however, doing this does make it a lot less likely. You can even set a rule “do not text or email me after this time or I will not see/respond”.

Since these classes are very writing intensive another thing I have students do is when they know they have a very important paper due, to bring in a draft of their work. I have students discuss their thesis/topic out loud around in a circle. Based on what they say I would say “well it looks like X and Y are writing about very similar topics, where did you find your information” or something along those lines. This activity allows for students to get ideas form one another. After they discuss their papers and resources out loud I like to pair students with similar topics together so they can work together, look at each other’s drafts, etc. During this time I go around each different group and ask to take a look at their papers while they discuss the topics. I try to be helpful in the writing process and always remind them to go to Drop-In Writing Tutoring at LSS and if they have further questions to talk to their professors and T.A.’s (basically remind them they have other resources aside from you as a tutor). If you only have one student in a session, this process can be more one-on-one which is also helpful.

You may face some challenges. Sometimes a student might not bring the book or come prepared to ask questions. If this happens try asking what they learned in lecture or what they have in notes, I have found this to be very helpful. If that does not work ask what the students think about the class so far and where they are struggling, what they are enjoying, etc. This can also lead to a discussion about the topics and themes of class.

Do not be shy. Get out of your comfort zone and be ready to talk to a class full of students. They are not judging you; the students actually see you as someone to ask for help. Don’t be nervous, be personable because remember that the T.A.’s we like the most are the ones who make us feel comfortable and like we can actually go talk to them. Think, “who would I like to talk to/ask questions to?”. With that in mind, leave your problems at the door. Whatever is going on in your life as a student (or personal life) be prepared to be positive and energetic at your session, it will show if you are not in a good mood. If you absolutely feel like you cannot do this, let your students know. State, “sorry I want to let you know that I am not having a very good day so do not take my current behavior/energy personally”. They will appreciate this much more than if you just come in with an off-putting attitude.

Good luck!

Samantha Lopez-Martinez

Sophomore Academy Mentor

Subject Tutor
What I realized in tutoring is that to be a good tutor you have to really understand Latin, but to be a great tutor you have to understand people. Empathy and comedy are really important for this. You have to connect with your students on a personal level to get through to them. By joking around you can break down barriers and become closer. And of course empathy is important to see where they’re coming from and what they’re struggling with. One thing in particular that I didn’t expect when I started tutoring was that many of my students would be struggling not just with Latin but with their emotions. I had several students that had test anxiety or such high stress in class that they would forget answers that we had practiced a thousand times, or they had low self-confidence that held them back from learning. I had to use empathy and comedy to try to create a learning environment that they could do well in. I tried to be a mentor, a good example, and a friend.

Another important thing is being consistent and using patterns. Create patterns for the students to follow when they have to answer a certain kind of question. For instance, when translating a sentence, first look for the verb, then the subject, then separate the clauses, etc. Make sure they always write declension in the same order (Nom, Gen, Dat, Acc, Abl). Based on the student’s weak points create a system for them to use when the approach translation, make sure it’s consistent, and practice it again and again. Choose a few essential things for them to focus and create a groundwork so that they don’t panic in the face of a sentence they don’t understand but instead take it piece by piece with a method.

Also, I can’t stress enough that preparation makes the difference between a mediocre session and a great session. Don’t prepare so heavily that the lesson is rigid. There still has to be space for the student to lead the session in the direction that they need it to go in. However, going into a session with a list of possible directions and ideas for each of them can make the session much smoother and more effective. Have a few practice sentences or exercises ready, note anything interesting in the homework that you want to bring up, have a game or activity prepared. If you go in confident with a good idea of what you want to do and how you want to do it, it will be smooth sailing.

My last point is about enthusiasm. This is something that gets thrown around a lot and is possibly reminiscent of bored McDonalds employees with forced smiles. Forced enthusiasm is awful, so I’m not saying to fake it and pretend to be absurdly happy. Nevertheless, being enthusiastic and excited during a session can really raise the energy level and make students get invested in the subject and put more effort, not to mention making the whole experience more fun. If you’re the Latin tutor, chances are you like Latin, hopefully a lot. If you’re not naturally enthusiastic, try to dig down and think about why you’re learning and teaching Latin, why you like it, what makes it fun and interesting. Think about all the funny, absurd, and fascinatingly complicated things Latin has to offer and get yourself pumped up about it. Because being excited will make you a better tutor and will inspire your students to go above and beyond. Create a learning space that’s funny, interesting, and actively engaged. Good luck. Ave atque vale!

Michelle Plouse

Latin Tutor
Dear Future Employees,

Being a tutor can be a difficult job to do. At first, it seems easy especially when you know that you got an A on the class and you understand the materials well. However, passing that knowledge to others can be a hard task. I always have to adjust to different students as they have different learning styles. Some students are visual learners. Some are auditory learners. Also, some can be kinesthetic learners. Taking into account these differences in students is very important. Tutoring for politics, I thought that it was very crucial for me to explain the concepts verbally. However, after explaining the concepts over and over again to one of my student in an individual tutoring session, she seemed to not grasp the concept. I considered taking a different stance and took a pen and draw diagrams (to show the dynamics within the concepts, i.e. the different philosophies that guides the US Constitution). I drew a Venn diagram to show the differences between the different philosophies to show how they differ and interrelate at some points. This example is to show you that being able to read students and consider their abilities are the first steps in having a successful tutoring session.

Another important thing is to be able to push your students to read the materials. At the beginning of the quarter or the first time that you meet the student, impart a sense of responsibility. Discuss the role of each other as well (i.e. what is your role as a tutor and what is his/her role as a tutee). This helps you send the message that you are not there to teach them, but there to help them learn the materials. And there is a big difference. Perception of the roles should be the first thing in your agenda. Lastly, always know what is happening in lectures. As a subject tutor, we are not required to go to lectures to know what is happening (unlike MSI). Heed the professor’s advice occasionally. Always take into account not just the materials and what you (the tutor) and the student thinks, but also what the professor thinks. After all, they are the ones evaluating the student’s work. Congratulations again on your new position at UCSC Learning Support Services and good luck!

Best,

Karl Rubio
Dear Tutor,

First of all I would like to congratulate you on your position. Teaching for LSS is the most rewarding aspect of my college career. My experience with LSS began when I was hired as a Drop-in Math tutor. Of all the positions, this is one of the most challenging. As a drop-in tutor you must be confident enough in your abilities to help students of all levels of mathematics within one day. If you were hired for this position, it means that the staff felt assured that you can deliver, so do not stress about it. This position is very unpredictable which is a positive thing in my opinion, and you get to interact with a variety of students.

I have also worked as the subject tutor for Math 02 and Math 03. As a subject tutor, you meet with your students (up to four) for one hour per week. They usually come in with homework questions prepared to ask you, and if they do not, encourage them to do so. From my experience, all the students that decide to attend tutoring are more than willing to put in the hard work, they just require a little more time to understand a topic. As a math tutor it is better to teach concepts rather a bunch of formulas. It is important to realize that these students want to learn; they want to comprehend the material. Remain patient with them and encourage them to ask questions along the way so that they can get the most out of an exercise.

Currently I work as the MSI tutor for Math 19B (Integral Calculus). Working as an MSI tutor is different in that I get to attend the lecture along with my students, and I hold three sessions a week with up to twelve students in each session. This position has its set of challenges, however it is in my opinion the easiest of all three because I have an insight on what the students are experiencing in class. With the other positions, you do not know how the professor taught a certain topic, but as the MSI tutor, you get to see first-hand the professor’s approach and the topics they want emphasized for the exams. Using this first-hand account, you can plan out your study sessions according to the class lectures. Through my experience, MSI students, unlike LSS students, do not come in with homework questions prepared, and since you get to meet with these students three days a week, it gives you the opportunity to pick and choose problem sets that you feel will be most advantageous to the learning of the lesson. If you are interested in becoming an educator, being an MSI tutor is the perfect position for you. You have your own classroom and get to run your own lesson plans.

Amongst all these experiences, one of the most important things to keep in mind is to be open with your students. Make sure you listen to their concerns and really go the extra mile to be attentive to their needs. Patience is key when you are a tutor. You must treat every question with the utmost importance, and do not hesitate to reiterate a point more than once for a student if need be. Our goal as a peer tutors is not only to assist students in the specific subject they need help in, but also to help their academic careers cumulatively. Offer study tips and tricks that work for you, and always try to relate to the students by sharing the obstacles you had to face when you learned the material for the first time.

Once again, congratulations on landing the most rewarding job on this campus. I wish you all the best with your experiences. Do not stress or be nervous, you would not have been hired if you were not
qualified. Remember that every student is capable of learning any subject; some just need good tutors like you to break it down for them. I hope you enjoy working for LSS as much as I have.

Sincerely,

Hrag Tarbinian
Dear Prospective Tutor,

Congratulations! You have been hired to work in one of the most fulfilling positions offered at UCSC. I'm sure you might be thinking that working in a lab and creating new age defying breakthroughs in medicine or technology might be more beneficial, but hear me out. My name is Theresa Chow, and I have been a tutor for quite a few quarters. My major is Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology, and that has allowed me the chance to tutor in various courses. I have been a MSI and subject tutor covering a vast array of subjects from the Calculus series, Organic Chemistry, and Biochemistry, as well as General Biology and other miscellaneous courses. Through LSS, I have gotten a chance to help so many students and you will too. If you do not yet feel as if your position is of great importance, think of this: you, out of the many attending this college, get to mold the futures of others. And what is more amazing is that you were chosen out of many others who are well qualified.

With the knowledge that you mastered in your classes, you are paving the way for others to follow in your footsteps, inspiring them and encouraging them to work harder. In all seriousness, let's face it; many students abhor attending classes in general. The ones who go out of their way to attend extra sessions are those who are dedicated and really want to learn, and that willingness already makes your job so much easier.

However, with every job, there are caveats. Tutoring, may it be MSI or subject tutoring, is hardly ever a walk in the park. Though you may get diligent students who attend your sessions ready and prepared to learn, you will also face those who abuse this program, expecting only answers and are unwilling to work through the processes. This can come in many forms, so make sure you keep an eye out for those who are struggling and attend sessions only to have others do their work for them.

I will not focus on a specific subject in which I have tutored because the truth is, the mindset and basis of what you project to your students have core similarities, but you must come into it on your own. I will not leave you hanging, though. I do have a few suggestions which will hopefully make your job easier. First off, do not be nervous. Whether or not you are comfortable with public speaking, tutoring a group of your peers will make you get over that. What will help you through some awkward sessions (and you will have awkward sessions) is keeping in mind that your students are there to learn from you. You have all the knowledge necessary to do well in the course. Contact the professor, because they will have resources for you as well. Also, remember to remain confident, energetic and friendly.

Secondly, you will get shy students, or those who are unwilling to answer questions out of fear of embarrassment if they answer something incorrectly. One method I use when faced with a group of new students is that throughout the session, I would purposely make a mistake so that they can correct me. This ensures that they are paying attention, and lets them know that their tutor is a student just like them, and is capable of mistakes as well. However, if that doesn't work, when in doubt, give them a little push. Offer a reward in exchange for a worked out problem. I offered candy, and it does wonders.

Though you will be challenged with smarty pants students that will purposely find any way to correct you, or unwilling students, this job is amazing. I cannot begin to tell you how great it is to see my
past students advancing in their majors and seeing their confidence levels rise up because they did well on a test. You get to play a major role in that. I hope you will feel as proud of your students as I do mine.

I'll leave you with a few words of warning. Do not bad mouth any professor, student, or co-worker in the presence of students. Regardless of whether you are a classmate or friend, keep in mind you are a tutor, almost like a professor yourself, and you must stay professional. And finally, check your email constantly. LSS likes to spam.

Best,

Theresa Chow
Letter of Advice for the new subject tutor for Linear Algebra (Math 21)

Congratulations on receiving the subject tutor position for Linear Algebra; your aid in assisting your tutees will make quite a difference in not only how they will do in the class, but also how well they will do in their university experience.

As a recent Linear Algebra tutor, there were some things I learned while tutoring that I would like to pass on to you as words of wisdom and some things to maybe consider as you begin your journey of tutoring. I am sure as you begin tutoring, you will develop your own personal tips and tricks for this job, but just in case, here are some tips from my experience tutoring.

In addition to your normal course load, you not only help your tutees in the subject material, but also act as a role model, an inspirer, and perhaps a spark for motivation to them. I have divided this letter into three sections of advice: logistical tips, tutoring tips, and tips pertaining strictly with the Linear Algebra subject tutor.

The set of logistical tips are things I have picked up from my own experience, and surely you should be able to pick up some of your own as you go through the quarter. I will say however to be organized; for tutoring you will have to find semi-academic public places to hold your sessions; the best places are usually ARCenter or the study rooms at Science and Engineering and McHenry Library, but since the ARCenter is usually reserved for MSI sessions, the study rooms are going to be your best bet. These rooms provide a great place for sessions and a sense of security for those that may be shy. You will want to reserve these rooms, and since these rooms are taken fast over the course of the week, so be sure to allocate enough time to book them before they are all booked; I often spend some time on Friday nights booking my rooms for the following week so I do not have to worry about rooms during the week. Again, as the quarter moves along, you will pick up your own tricks for this job.

One important idea to keep in mind is while you are their tutor, you are not their teacher or TA for this class; you are to help and aid in the learning process, but in no way are you in charge of the tutee’s learning process. That being said, you will want to implement tutoring strategies that focus on the tutee leading their own learning. Be sure to focus on having your tutees (and not you) work on their problems while you help on the side lines. Make sure to tell the tutees to come with questions and attempted problems so that sessions can be productive. Encourage group work, group discussions, and problem solving sessions at the board. Ask many probing questions as you and the tutees devour problems together. Have them convince themselves and yourself of concepts, problems, and results. I often remind them that they should not believe everything I say, and that they should convince themselves of
results. Remember that you want to motivate proactive and effective studying strategies that they will be able to use as they continue with their college career.

Finally, here are some tips pertaining with Linear Algebra tutoring. You will recall how important the concepts are in this class to solving problems and understanding the scope of the class, so you will want to motivate an understanding of concepts over the computations. Many of the problems will involve Gaussian Elimination on matrices of some sorts, but understanding the problem and what the problem is asking is important to arrive at a precise conclusion; and of course to understand the problem, we need to understand concepts. I found myself really encouraging the understanding of concepts and comprehending what the problem is. This usually revolves around the three questions: “What does the problem want?” “What does the problem give us?” and “What do we know about what the problem gave us?” You will also know that Linear Algebra is a lower division math class which will consist of first years and second years who probably are not used to reading a math book, and may come to a session without any reading done. In that case, you’ll want to motivate them to read the pertaining chapters, and it’s always best to start them off in the tutoring session. I also usually remind them by “getting their money’s worth on a textbook by actually reading it.” Finally, a quick assessment (which you will learn soon enough) of concepts is useful to warm to what needs to be discussed in the session.

One last important idea: it is important to remind yourself and your tutees that their work ethic is a reflection of how well they will do. This is a mantra I follow by and promote to my tutees and even my own friends. If your tutees do particularly well, be sure to congratulate them and remind them it was a work primary on their part that got them there. If your tutees do not do as great, don’t beat yourself up, as you do not have control on what they do, but be sure to help them and push them in the right direction. In (somewhat) short, help them towards the light at the end of the labyrinth, but don’t take them there. Remember your job is to aid the tutees in the subject material, but also provide insight for the tutees so they are able to learn and study independently, utilize the necessary resources provided, improve in their weaknesses, and change the focus to understanding the subject instead of the needing of a good grade. Them reaching the light on their own is an achievement they should gain on their part (with of course the help of you).

I hope this letter has given you some insight and some tips for tutoring this quarter. Whether or not you take ideas from me, I am sure you will develop your own tutoring habits and rituals for your own success. Also be sure to keep in touch with your fellow employees as we all help each other out too! I wish you the best for tutoring and a great quarter. Good luck, work hard, and believe!

All the best,

Jackson Hsu
Dear MATH 22 tutor,

Congratulations on your new position! In my opinion, being a part of LSS and working as the MATH 22 subject tutor is an entire experience that is daunting, challenging, and very rewarding. At first, things may seem strange–but only because the whole experience is probably new to you. From my personal experience as a current employee and previous MATH 22 subject tutor, I have several recommendations and pieces of advice when it comes to being an employee and a subject tutor.

When it comes to solely being an employee, things are fairly straightforward. The staff members will usually tell you most of what you need to know in the beginning, and if you have any questions at all, do not hesitate to ask one of them. This means that whether you want to walk in physically and ask, or send a quick e-mail, you should clear up any doubts, questions, and concerns that you might have. In addition to this, you’ll find that checking your school e-mail very, very frequently will be almost mandatory. This is the main way that the staff members will contact you for any reason, as well as your students. The main way I communicate with students outside of tutoring sessions is through e-mail also. I estimate that I check my e-mail about 5-10 times on any regular day, and so any important message from the staff members that are time-sensitive may be dealt with right away. In short, it is important to constantly stay in contact with the LSS staff and bring all your questions and concerns to them.

There are a wide variety of aspects when it comes to actually doing the job as a tutor. When students come to sessions, I believe that they do so to seek help at the individual level–the reason being that lectures for this class hold 200+ students, so that all of their individual concerns and questions cannot be answered by the professor or TA’s. Whether it is due to the limited resource in time and attention for those teachers, or for any other reason such as being uncomfortable visiting their office hours, it will be your job to do your best to do the best for every student. This is where peer tutoring and your job as a tutor will come in to play. One of the biggest misconceptions they may have of you is that you will be exactly like the professor–completely knowledgeable on all aspects of the subject and ready to lecture about it at a moment’s notice. However, this is not your job. To pose a question: what if all the students in the session have different concepts and areas of focus that they wish to learn? It would be impossible to address every single concept within that one hour of tutoring, and to only address some of them for some students would be unfair to others, which brings up another important concept–you must treat every student equally fair for the sake of not only learning, but justice and overall goodness. But at the same time, you should cater to everyone’s specific needs. Thus, in a way, one could think about treating the students in an equal manner, but servicing to them differently. In theory, I think there is no best teaching method. The best teaching method, in my opinion, would be one that the students feel help them the most, but is also comfortable for you to do. Therefore it is also important to constantly ask students for their feedback and how they are feeling about various aspects.

One strategy of peer tutoring that may help tremendously is one that I think is undervalued by students themselves. There is a large chance that one of the areas one student wants to learn about is well understood by another student. Furthermore, it would be possible then to pair students up into specific groups such that there is a symbiotic, mutual, beneficial relationship such that there is time allocated for student A to speak to student B as a sort of teacher about something they know, and then a reversal happens where essentially student B then becomes the teacher for A. This then opens the opportunity
of forming friendships, exchanging contact information, and the students themselves deciding to meet up outside of the classroom to engage in further learning. As a tutor given one hour with students in a group per week, there is only so much you can do. No two groups will ever be the same. The most challenging part is to figure out what helps everyone the most, because the optimal tutoring technique will always change from group to group. Although there will be times where you will be faced with the expectation of being as knowledgeable as TA’s and professors for the class, just know that that is not the case. If there was a problem that neither the students in the session or myself could solve, I would do my best to eventually come to the solution and try to explain it to them through an e-mail or at next week’s session. I figure it is best to admit your honest capabilities, but then also show your efforts to help the students through their struggles. As subject tutors, we are not required to attend section, so being on top of all the material can be challenging if you do not already possess a mastery of concepts in MATH 22. That being said, I encountered several topics not covered when I had taken the class, so I had a bit of learning to do myself in order to help students. Luckily, the professor teaching the class for the quarter I tutored, Mark Eastman, posted all his lecture notes and lessons online so I could see what he taught without an overbearing dedication. To have this sort of dedication seems good, but as every student knows, they must allocate their time wisely, and being a student ourselves is a job in itself.

Although there are countless other topics to continue about in regards to tutoring and what I’ve come to observe through working with fellow students, I trust that you will embark on your own personal journey and create several of your own observations as you navigate through these adventurous waters.

From just recently finishing one quarter’s tutoring for MATH 22, I can say that I’ve acquired a greater understanding and appreciation for multivariable calculus, become a better tutor than when I first started out, learned about several individual students not only students but as peers and people, and last but not least, appreciate and further invigorate my passion and efforts of being a learning assistant/tutor—I hope this experience does the same and more for you.

Best of luck,

Lawrence Chong
Dear Future Math (23B) Subject Tutor,

Congratulations regarding your employment! This letter contains advice that I wish I had received prior to my first quarter as a tutor, during which I tutored Math 23B.

You want to create an environment where students feel comfortable asking and answering questions. To do so, get to know your students and some of their other obligations outside of Math 23B. During the first session, hand out index cards and ask students to write three things: 1. their name, 2. the classes they are taking, and 3. anything they would like to see during tutoring (perhaps example problems, a quick discussion of the topics learned in lecture, etc). Address them by name from then on. Separate your own studies from your position as a subject tutor. In other words, give your students your undivided, undistracted attention to let them know that you want to spend your time helping them even though you have your own studying to do.

As I encourage my peers to apply for positions as tutors, I hear the same concern: “I’m afraid I won’t be able to answer a question.” If you are stuck on a question that a student asks, suggest that the student ask his/her TA (or professor) and explain that the TA has years more experience than you. You can also let your students know that you will look into the matter and email them later, but for the sake of time you would like to move on with session (an hour a week is not a lot!). If you don’t feel as prepared to help students during tutoring sessions as you would like, do not hesitate to put in extra work. Watch supplemental lectures to prep for tutoring (perhaps lectures offered through MIT OpenCourseWare). Then, you can refer students to these resources (at the beginning of the quarter I send an email to my students and refer them to http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/mathematics/18-02sc-multivariable-calculus-fall-2010/ and http://ocw.mit.edu/resources/res-18-007-calculus-revisited-multivariable-calculus-fall-2011/part-v/ for extra help). I also recommend that they review integration techniques and send them a few YouTube videos by PatrickJMT. I don’t have the time to watch supplemental lectures during the quarter, so I do so during the breaks. You can also refer your students to Drop-in Math tutoring. You are not their only resource! Encourage them to be in touch with their professors and TAs.

Be confident! Students can tell when you’re not certain of yourself.

Let your students know that this is your first quarter as a tutor, and let them know you are open to feedback; at the end of each session, ask your students if there is anything they want to see differently during the next tutoring session.

During sessions, ask students how much progress they’ve made on the homework to understand where everyone is. Ask what topics were covered in lecture during the week. As a subject tutor, I don’t go to lecture (but I do follow along with the class lecture notes, if available), so this is an excellent way to gauge the student’s understanding so far. If a student feels that something was unclear in lecture, other students chime in to clear things up. If there was a universal source of confusion, then you can explain the topic. Ask your students to exchange study tips.
Of course, you want your students to participate. I like to demonstrate a single problem on the board and then try to get students to come up to the whiteboard or chalkboard and solve problems on their own. If students would rather stay seated, I ask them to guide me through the problem and ask them questions that they answer from their seats. ("How do you parametrize this region?") Simplify and establish a goal for each problem. For example, list the things you need to solve a problem, like a parametrization, a graph (of a region), a vector field in terms of the parametrization, and a normal vector.

Lastly, be confident in your abilities—you are a tutor for a reason!
TUTOR MATH DROP-IN: OLIVIA SORENSEN

To the future drop-in math tutor:

Congratulations! You have been selected to fill a very challenging position, and should be extremely proud of your abilities and (seriously) giant wealth of knowledge. If you've never done tutoring before - or even if you do have a lot of experience subject tutoring - you should know that drop-in is completely different from any other teaching position. It's never the same night twice, and every new face brings an unexpected and totally unpredictable challenge to surmount. But, with that said, I want you to know that the long, chalky hours you spend fielding math questions will be some of the most interesting and rewarding of your tutoring career. I've been at it for two quarters now, and while I realize that's not terribly long, I feel as though I have already learned a TON about how to succeed in this highly improvisational job. So, here's a few tips to help get you acclimated:

First, time management. From a students' perspective, waiting forever to be acknowledged is alienating and frustrating. Greeting each person as soon as they arrive with a "Hi, can you sign in before you sit? Thanks. Oh, and what class are you in?" is not only less intimidating, but prepares you for the depth of their questions. Usually, I work first come first serve, and on busy days you MUST work through the list in order, taking care not to get stuck too long with one student. And remember that you can play the order by ear sometimes, if some students are more confident (or need less attention/reinforcement) than others.

Grouping students by class will also save you significant time when drop-in is crowded. More than once, I've pushed students in the same subject together simply out of convenience for me, and they ended up studying collaboratively and actively helping each other without further prodding from me. You know how in the LSS training class, they encourage you to implement group work in your sessions? Do it. I thought at first that it wasn't possible in such an individualized setting, but trust me, it works, and it saves you having to rework and re-explain problems.

Now, for the moment of truth. My biggest piece of advice to you is this: accept that you may not know everything, and that is ok. Despite the exasperated look they'll give you, you must remember that telling a student you’re honestly unsure doesn't make you a terrible tutor or a terrible person. You're an undergraduate, not a god, and blanking on a minute aspect of pre-calculus is perfectly alright. Remind them that math is about thinking creatively and persevering in problem-solving, NOT about having immediate, simple, 'right' answers. Work with them to attempt a solution, and go with your gut approach. Ask other students in the same classes to validate and expand upon you and your tutee's ideas. Let them help you help them! My best ever drop-in was the night a physics major helped me explain an algebra problem to a Math 3 student. Because you're tutoring such a large range of mathematics, multiple opinions and approaches benefit everyone in the room.
You're still responsible for all material, however, so be as prepared as possible! Whatever experience in math you've had, use it to your fullest advantage. Bring old notebooks, flash cards, and cheat sheets for reference, and spend time beforehand brushing up on those related rates problems you don't really remember. I bring colored chalk, a sheet of common derivatives and integrals, and a trig sheet (it's got the unit circle and useful identities) to each and every session. I also have a laptop or tablet handy at all times, to check Wolfram for correctness or to help them look up vocabulary. Showing students how to use resources wisely is part of being a great tutor, since you're aiming to teach them effective study skills as well as math. Ask them to explain definitions to you; turn them back to their textbooks and notes for examples. I frequently offer to email students copies of my formula sheets. Again, it's important to be a role model academically - and friendly too!

In closing, enjoy your nights as a drop-in tutor. I certainly have! I have regulars most every weekend I've gotten everything from quiet thank yous to giant bear hugs in gratitude. Be prepared for anything, and don't be afraid. Working with students is a blast! You never know what you're going to get in drop-in...and that is incredibly exciting. Best of luck, you got this!

Sincerely

Olivia Sorensen

Thursday Night Drop-In Tutor
Dear Future Upper Division Math tutor,

I am writing to share some of what I have learned over the past few years. As I’m sure you will soon learn, this job is much more challenging than assisting with lower-divisions courses. You will, I assure you, not know everything, sometimes nowhere near it, yet the material is interested and you are a much more valuable resource for the students than a tutor often is for an introductory level course. Also, the students are more committed and tend to be more prepared and engaged with the material. Your job is different as well. You are no longer really helping students learn how to solve an individual problem anymore or helping them memorize a single technique or argument.

In my own academic career as a math major, I realized that the most effective tool in upper-division courses is a solid understanding of logical arguments, a willingness to play with approaching problems in many different ways, and the perseverance to attempt solving a problem for hours, sometimes without success. These are the skills that I hope to pass on to my students. Certainly, if there is a specific topic that they struggle with, we will go over the topic, but more important than that, almost no two problems will be exactly alike so they need to be able to think creatively and be able to apply the underlying concepts. This is where it gets tricky. How do you teach someone to be able to play around with ideas until it works, yet selectively choose the ideas that you would likely want to try first? I find that this is often what I spend my time doing.

Instead of emphasizing the solution itself to the problem, I focus more attention on why I choose to approach a given part in a certain way. While the students often just want to get their homework done and might hope that you finish your long talk on why you chose to do the first step first and the second step after, having their homework done will in no way ensure that they understand any material in the course, and likely more importantly for them, that they pass the course. So I have found really speaking through the logic behind moving from step 1 to step 2 is both necessary and challenging.

Another challenge faced is the massive amount of material you will likely be forced to recall. You won’t know how to approach every problem or recall every topic, so I make sure always to bring my own notes (unless I know the material really, really well) to tutoring so that I can reference the hypothesis to a particular theorem, or check my own homework solutions if I used their same textbook. You won’t know everything and they will understand, so don’t worry if approaching a problem in a certain way fails even if you spent twenty minutes trying to make it work out. The students understand where you’re coming from, but make sure to point out that it’s not a bad thing to approach a problem one way and have it not be successful. Use it as a teaching point. You did well in the course and you can’t answer every question the first time you try it, so they don’t need to give up on themselves if the problems don’t work out the first time.

The students you are working with will be different as well. There will be a lot of variety in academic preparedness. Maybe this is a students’ first upper division course and they won’t be able to finish their homework assignment in an hour anymore. Make sure to encourage them to start early and use all of their resources as there will probably be a lot less of them. With this decrease in resources (fewer sections, only a single TA, etc.), the students tend to value the sessions more and seem to be more respectful of the tutoring schedule. I have found that there are many less no-shows or students who
continually say they have no questions than when I tutored for introductory courses. The consistency in attendance is good, but I found a substantial increase in my large group sessions, such as having primarily 4-5 person sessions and almost never a session with only one or two students. Tutoring this large number of students (I worked with over 20 every quarter this year) makes it challenging to know their individual abilities. So don’t let any students get away with sitting quietly in the corner every session. Make sure to engage all of them and check in to see who gets stuck where. You will definitely be more effective with shy or completely lost students if you force them to show you where they are having difficulties. They will hopefully be thankful for the clarifications.

Overall, I would say you will learn by doing. As long as you have good knowledge of the material and a desire to work with the students, tutoring will overall go really well. The students will understand when an idea was the incorrect one and will still find their time with you valuable. Good luck with everything and I’m sure the students will be glad for all the extra assistance you will provide.

Sincerely,

Rachel Gaiber
TUTOR OVERALL EXPERIENCE: PATRICK RUBIO

Dear new tutor,

Congratulations upon your new position as a Learning Support Services tutor! I think that you will find working as a tutor to be a rewarding and exciting position. My name is Patrick Rubio, and at the time of this letter I am a fourth year senior History student, and I have worked as a History subject tutor, general writing tutor, and drop-in writing tutor for over a year now. I would like to share with you some advice and experiences from my time as tutor that may help you get started.

In my opinion, the most important thing to remember while tutoring is quite fundamental, and that is to be cognizant that the principal goal of LSS is to assist students in developing skills to be successful independent students. While this may seem like a pretty generic thing to say, I have found it to be helpful for remembering my role as a tutor, the student’s role as the tutee, and as a basis for both parties to understand the expectations of each session. With this approach in mind, I try to be a mentor and conversationalist rather than a lecturer, encourage various studying techniques, and allow for an open session structure.

The tutor’s role as a mentor and conversationalist rather than a lecturer is one of the most important lessons I have learned from tutoring, and while it is more oriented toward regular subject tutor sessions, it can be applied to drop-in tutoring as well. By describing the tutor as a mentor, I stress the importance of being a source of encouragement and fosterer of confidence for the tutee. This can be done by recognizing strong suits of the tutee while noticing points in which they may need additional attention. All of this assessment is done from the tutor’s own observations, and will require that you as the tutor be attentive and tactful while evaluating the tutees’ work. Naturally, this should be applied subtly so that the tutee feels genuine appreciation for their strengths and not self-conscious about weaker points. Mentoring is closely related to the careful facilitation of each session and the role of the tutee as a conversationalist rather than a lecturer. As a mentor, the tutor straddles a position between a leader and a peer, and must take care to establish a friendly relationship with the tutee that allows the tutee to feel comfortable while understanding that sessions are meant for productive academic work. The tutor-tutee relationship is unique in that while it is focused on academics, it is distinct from other situations like lectures from professors or teaching assistants. In other words, tutoring offers students a valuable opportunity to engage in academic dialogue, or a conversation that accommodates multiple participants, unlike a lecture, which features an active speaker and a silent audience. Quite simply, I have found this to be the single most rewarding aspect of tutoring as it has taken some of the pressure off of me while simultaneously boosting the confidence of the tutee, as they find themselves expressing concepts in a comfortable and non-intimidating space. The most effective way to initiate conversation with your tutee is to ask questions. Another way to maintain conversation is to stick with broad themes and concepts, and explore deeper details and points when prompted by the tutee.
Through my experiences in tutor training, workshops, and actual tutoring, I have learned the importance of using various teaching or studying techniques. Once again, this lesson can be more readily applied to regular subject tutor meetings but can also be applied to drop-in sessions. In order to most effectively assist your tutee in studying, it is important for you as the tutor to identify what type of learning style your tutee may favor. There are subtle ways in which you can do this, for example, you can visually sketch some material in a graph, table or Venn diagram and gauge your tutee’s response, and if it seems to work, your tutee may be visually oriented. Similarly, if you find that your tutee is especially engaged in conversation and seems to work problems out by talking through them; your tutee may be an auditory learner.

Lastly, I have found that having an open session structure is the best way to approach a tutoring session. What I mean by this is that while you should prepare for each tutoring session, do not let your expectations for the session dictate everything. An ideal session should address the tutee’s specific concerns while you focus the tutee’s attention on key concepts. This may be the most general thing that I have mentioned thus far, yet I find it is important for the “big picture,” and it is actually closely related to my previous advice. I hope that my advice is helpful to you and I wish you well in your new position!

Best regards,

Patrick Rubio
Dear future LSS Tutors,

As a former LSS subject tutor, I have learned much through my tutoring sessions as well as the training class. Within this letter I will express my experiences gained throughout my career as a tutor so that you may be more knowledgeable about the career path that you have started.

Foremost, being a tutor is not an easy job nor should you take your position as a tutor lightly. It takes patience, compassion, subject knowledge, organization skills, determination, diligence, and pedagogical knowledge in order to tutor students. A tutor should also take into consideration that each of their students learns in a different manner. Thus, you should be mindful of how your students learn and how to handle groups of students who may not learn in a similar manner. Obtaining these skills and traits is not impossible.

During the tutor training course as well as your experience as a tutor, you will learn many methods that will help you in your journey. If you pay attention to the training course, then you will learn the skills needed to be a tutor and about pedagogy. However, you must discover the rest of the mentioned traits through experience. This is not too much of a daunting task, so do not fear the job in which you have received, nor your students.

I have some quick tips for you that may help you succeed as a tutor. First off, actively listen to your students and pay attention to how they learn. Keep in mind that some students may have a learning disability, but do not pity them. Using teaching strategies that will be mentioned within the training course will help you fulfill the needs of these students without causing misunderstandings or harmful remarks.

Secondly, be on time and create flexible outlines for your sessions prior to each session. If you are late by more than 5 minutes, then your tutees may leave. Tardiness can create a loss of respect between you and your students. Students do not feel like they should participate in sessions if their tutors are unreliable. Also, staying organized is key for making sure each student’s questions are taken care of within an hour. An hour can go by really quickly, especially if you have more than one student in your session. Design a flexible outline with time limits to help pace yourself. However, leave the outline with plenty of time for the students to ask their questions. By keeping the outline flexible, you will be able to adjust your sessions during your sessions in case things do not go as planned.

Overall, be mindful that you are starting your road on becoming a pillar of support for your fellow peers. Your job can both positively and negatively impact your students. Through training and time, you will most likely become a positive role model for your students. Take great care of your tutees and respect them. If they are not responsive or responsible for their portion of the learning, then do not get angry with them. Instead figure out what is preventing them from participating. Then implement the proper teaching methods to include that student within each session. Make clear in your first session what you expect from the students and ask them what they expect from you. If they ever expect you to just give them the answers to the homework, do not do so. Find a way to involve students’ participation in doing their homework. Provide group settings where the students can help each other out on the
homework. If you only have one student, then let them figure out the answers, but initially guide them through their work by using examples or reminding them of prior work.

As a tutor for astronomy, education, and mathematics, I have learned a lot about myself as well as about others. My time as a tutor has positively impacted my life. I have learned how to be more of an active listener. I have learned what it means to be patient, especially with people. I hope that your time as a LSS tutor also positively impacts your life and many others. Good luck and may the force be with you.

Sincerely,

Kendra Staver
TUTOR OVERALL EXPERIENCE: KIMBERLY WALTERS

Dear Future LSS Tutor:

Welcome to the LSS team! I hope you have a great experience working with UC Santa Cruz students, staff, and colleagues. In order to maximize your experience with LSS, I’m going to impart some advice and tips that I have found useful over my time with LSS.

I was excited and anxious when I first started at LSS. I was excited to help my peers, but I was afraid that I was not going to do it right. In order to combat this, I took my training with LSS to heart. I took their assignments seriously and did my best to incorporate their lessons into my work. Don’t be afraid to experiment and see what works with your students. Be willing to ask questions and talk with your fellow staff members. Everyone is here to help you grow as a LSS staff member, and to help your students succeed. If you take advantage of the resources available to you, you should do well.

Over the course of my service, I discovered a few traits that I found helpful in my sessions. First of all, be flexible, in all facets of the position. Each student is different in how they utilize LSS services, so be ready to accommodate those differences. Secondly, be open and respectful with your students. Make sure they understand you are the leader, but that you are also a student and a peer. It’s a hard balance to maintain, but it will be worth the effort. Finally, be confident about what you know and be willing to find out what you don’t know. Obviously, no one knows everything, but impart the knowledge you do have, and go research the information you don’t have. That way both you and the students can grow from the experience. These are some of the traits my coworkers and I found helpful across the different LSS positions.

I hope you found this letter helpful. I know you will get more details about these traits and techniques over the course of your training and from your own experiences. Just remember that LSS would not have hired you if they did not see the potential for an amazing staff member in you. Trust in yourself, put in the time and work, and you will become the person you want to be. I wish you the best of luck and I hope you find this experience rewarding and fun.

Regards,

Kimberly Walters

Former LSS Tutor and Mentor 2012-2013
Dear Friend,

The biggest difficulty I found as an MSI tutor was getting the participation of my students. I find that the best way to combat a lack of interaction is to work in small groups, be amiable with your students and to try to make them laugh. Making analogies between the material you are tutoring (physics, for me) and some other part of the world is the surest and most effective way to make your students laugh. For example, today I compared the behavior of charges in a circuit to splitting one pile of burnt onions into two piles of burnt onions.

You may find yourself in a situation where you do not know exactly what to do to solve a problem. Do not worry. Have your students work it out. You not knowing what to do (or perhaps pretending not to know) forces your students give you feedback on how to solve a problem. Showing that you need their help gives them confidence, a trait that should be taught by their tutors. Having them teach the material back to you is great practice for exams, when they won’t have you there to help. They should not be too dependent on your feedback of their work.

Enjoy the material. If you show that you enjoy being with them, they will enjoy learning with you too.

Sincerely,

Dylan Rees
Dear new Physics 110 Tutor,

First of all congratulations in getting hired as the new tutor for this class, or if you are a continuing tutor, welcome back to the start of this new quarter! I am not going to lie; tutoring upper division physics is sometimes pretty hard. Even though you have taken the class already, you might not have understood it at a level which you feel comfortable teaching it. This was the case for me anyway, though I knew through teaching and tutoring I was going to understand it better. But here is the thing, our students don't expect us to know everything, and the second time around it is easier to remember things from before and actually understand it. Don't be afraid, but look forward to learning and helping others learn.

For any class in upper division physics, I think establishing the needs of your student it going to be of utmost priority. If there are students who are just trying to pass the class, then go ahead and help them, but if there are students who want to actually learn, then a different approach is needed. One of the best things I learned to do was relating concepts they were learning to things they were interested. Like if they were learning about gauges and were interested in particle physics, I would find a way to relate it to particle physics (this is one case where it works extremely well), as they were more likely to care.

In these classes as well, I think a higher stress on problem solving methods and critical thinking is to be stressed, rather than doing and solving problems. At this point, most of your students will know how to do math, and some just come for math questions that given a little more time and research from themselves, they could solve. I think in order to really have an impact on getting your students to succeed, you need to focus on how to setup the problem and how to make sure you are doing it right. Doing the “real physics” per se, rather than just grinding through mathematics in session. The first one is just done by working through the setup of tons of problems, without finishing them. This is pretty useful, because it also helps the student with homework, as maybe in session we could setup a few problems very similar to the homework problems assigned. The critical thinking and making sure you are doing the problem is the much more difficult part – especially when there is little intuition for what is happening, like when first learning about gauges and moving charges. For things like this I would do things like limiting cases of answers to make sure they make sense physically (i.e. no things blowing up to infinity).

I think the last bit of advice, which applies to all sessions, not only 110 sessions, I want to give you is to have fun and cherish this experience. It is one thing to come to each section business like and take care of everyone’s questions. It is another to make personal connections and show genuine interest in your students well being. Ask them about other classes, about what they are doing over the weekend. Initially, your students might be a little intimated as they see you as a tutor, but remind them that you are just a student as well. It makes the sessions go more smoothly, and I have noticed people become more open with their questions and struggles in the class.

Good luck!

Khilesh Mistry
TUTOR PHYS 110: MICHAEL FRAGUGLIA

I have been a subject tutor for three quarters now, and I can say without a doubt, tutoring physics 116B this quarter has been the greatest challenge. The intro physics courses (5 or 6 series) of course have their own challenges like how they are many students' first encounter with physics, but the 116 series demands a full understanding of math up to the multi-variable calculus level. This is the first physics course to call on this information so the necessary math skills sometimes aren't there. The most difficult part of tutoring this class for me however, was that the students that are taking this class are PHYSICS students. By this I mean they aren't chemistry or computer engineering or any other sort of students. And physics students generally strive for a complete understanding of the subject matter. Because of this, they will ask very good questions with difficult answers. My advice is DO NOT answer these questions unless you really know the answer. Talk to the professor about these questions or refer the student to the professor. No answer is better than a wrong answer. This subject covers some difficult concepts and it is important that the students understand completely and correctly. One last piece of advice is to at least skim the book before every session. It is important to know your way around the book.

Good luck!

-Michael Fraguglia
To our wonderful new hire,

First, before you even start reading, take a deep breath, and slowly exhale. We all could use a few more calming breaths in our life, and keeping that in mind when you tutor can make a huge difference. When I started tutoring I had this idea that each class had a set of standards, and my job was simply to get those students to reach those standards. That was it. To see tutoring simply, I suppose that’s what it is, but especially in the social sciences, it’s not all. I am tutoring politics for the third quarter in a row, and I’m getting the feeling my tutoring is improving. A big reason for that is that I am stressing less. Part of the downside to tutoring is that you rarely get a group of students who understand everything that’s going on in the course, and just need a few clarifications. Often you will have students who are nothing short of lost, and it’s tempting to try to somehow get them caught up on 400 pages of material in the short hour you have with them. I’ve done this before; you rush through the material at a mad pace because you’ve found out that your student is that far behind, and while they nod the whole time and tell you they understand: you think you don’t have time to truly make sure they have. Because they’re that far behind. Just don’t do it. I promise, it doesn’t work. They’ve already been to lecture and to section, both of which generally end up with someone talking at them. Repeating a failing system isn’t good policy.

Focus instead on the process, on teaching study skills, and teaching them how to learn. Have your sessions share reading strategies, or their tricks for keeping up with the lecture that everyone agrees is moving too fast. Take the time to explain the foundational things, explaining why neoliberalism is bad only gets you so far if your students only have a shaky understanding of what neoliberalism is in the first place. It’s tempting to skip the foundational terms and ideas, because tests are going to ask more than that, but you can’t build very high off of shaky terms and barely hidden confusion, it will all come tumbling down at some point. Take the time to check in with everyone to make sure they really understand the things the group has just talked about, if you don’t get to step 3 and 4 that day, so be it. You only have so much time with them, acknowledge and accept that, and aim to do a few things well rather than all things (mostly) decently. Looking back at the last quarters I have tutored I know I have tried to skip over the basics, because I wanted to assume my students knew them. I started this quarter with a new strategy; any term that I think my best friend wouldn’t know (she is a human bio major), make sure to ask for a definition from the group. Don’t define it for them, let them shape the conversation. I have been surprised at times, that the terms and ideas I thought would stump my students didn’t, but terms I almost skipped over, did. It’s dangerous to shape the sessions too much because we can’t read minds. It’s easy to accidentally beat a dead horse, while skipping things you thought they knew. Focus less on covering all concepts, and work instead on critically thinking about those you do. Connect concepts, compare authors, apply ideas to the real world. The brain can only memorize so much, it’s the critical thinking skills that will allow your students to make use of what they do know, rather than drop their pens in fear when they stumble upon something they don’t know or understand.

And at the end of the day, take another deep breath. I know you are doing your best, remember that you are not the only influence in your students’ lives, if they don’t get the grades they want it’s not immediately your fault. Do what you can as well as you can, and take time to smile at your students and
tell them they’re great. Never underestimate the power of positive reinforcement: when was the last


time someone told you your work was bad and there’s so much you need to do... and you walked away


t-full of enthusiasm for the task ahead?


Best of luck, and have fun!
Dear New Tutor,

Welcome! And congratulations on your new position. Tutoring will be both challenging and rewarding, and you should be excited to make a difference in the academic lives of many fellow students. Whether you’re eager or nervous, I can confidently tell you that tutoring will be well-worth your time, and hearing about students’ successes thanks, in part, to your own effort is an unmatchable feeling.

So what about the tutoring process itself? I’m sure you have a few questions or apprehensions, especially about your first session, or are anxious about the dreaded moment when someone asks a question that you simply don’t know. The thing I found most helpful is being very upfront. I was a subject tutor for Poli 70 (Global Politics), who had taken the class two and a half years before tutoring. Needless to say, I was very far-removed from the course, and simply didn’t know everything. So, on my first session, I made that clear. I told the students that I don’t go to class with them, don’t do their reading, and haven’t looked at the class material for a really long time, but then I assured them that I was there as a supplemental resource, and still had a lot to offer. This immediately instilled the idea that I would offer everything I could, but was not a replacement for class or their TAs, which I feel was a good starting point. With that said, I spent the early sessions not just reviewing concepts and answering the questions in which I could, but also each giving them advice. I advised them on reading techniques (highlighting, annotating), work ethic, and especially writing within the field of politics. Anything I couldn’t offer in the context of the class material, I made up for by giving supplemental advice.

In addition to this “supplemental” side, I did make the most of my preparation time in relation to the class. I highly recommend attending the professor’s office hours a couple of times (or at least emailing them for guidance, especially near midterms, papers, and finals), and making sure you have access to the eCommons page. I constantly checked lecture slides to prepare, and outlined a few points that I wanted to talk about before each session. Also, the professor’s lecture slides were a great point of reference during the sessions themselves. Another tip is to type along with what the students say, then format it and distribute it to them after the sessions. All of the students I tutored were very thankful for organized notes, and seemed to use them consistently in supplement to their class notes. Other than these recommendations, I’d also say I found success in speaking clearly, and keeping vocabulary limited. Politics has an entire, sophisticated vocabulary grounded in its discourse, but it is important to remember your audience-- it was an intro class, so I only spoke at an entry level. Also, rather than spending the majority of the section talking and teaching, I focused (especially later in the quarter, when I got a little better) on fostering and mediating discussion, and letting the students reach ideas by themselves.

Those are the tips and methods that I found most effective, and worked on most throughout the quarter. I didn’t start off as a perfect tutor, and I still am not even close. However, by identifying your goals and critiquing your own performance, progress will come quickly. I hope this helps, and I wish you the best!
Sincerely,

Cory Fleming
Dear Spanish and/or Portuguese Subject Tutor,

First of all, congratulations! I remember how excited I was when I was hired within my first position at Learning Support Services. You should be very proud of yourself and you should feel very accomplished, because only the best of the best in a certain subject get to help others learn said subject. Though it can be a challenge, it is definitely one of the most rewarding experiences have had.

Let me introduce myself – my name is Lena Peterson and I am a Language Studies (Spanish) major with an Education minor. When I was first hired within Learning Support Services (Winter 2013) I was hired to tutor both the Portuguese class for speakers of romance languages (60A) and the Portuguese class for people whose second language would be Portuguese (1A). I had succeeded greatly when I was in the Portuguese series here at UCSC. Later in the year (Spring 2013) I was hired to tutor Spanish 5 and Spanish 1B and continued tutoring the next class in the Portuguese series (65A). Considering I’m writing this to you in the future, I don’t know which subject you’re going to tutor but I can guarantee you will learn something about yourself as you help others learn. I have some advice for you as a student who is new to Learning Support Services or new to tutoring any of the previous subjects.

Though Spanish and Portuguese are different languages, teaching them is uncannily similar. They are both romance languages and structured very similarly, so I think that the following advice will apply to either one of the previously mentioned languages. The first piece of advice I have for you is to have the students look up new vocabulary words in a physical hard-copy dictionary. In any foreign language there is inevitably going to be new vocabulary words and I have personally witnessed the enhancement in the students’ retention of these vocabulary words when I have them look them up in a dictionary. I know as we are the generation of technology you and your tutees will be tempted to use the internet or Google Translate, but I can promise you neither of these will have the same effect. If you have a dictionary, bring it to your sessions. If your tutees have a dictionary, have them do the same. If they do not, encourage them to purchase one, as it will continue to help them over a long period of time.

Secondly, allow and encourage your tutees to use each other as resources. Though you have studied (and succeeded in) the subject you are tutoring, they are each other’s peers and encouraging their interaction will allow them to keep learning outside of your sessions. During the session, have the tutees respectfully correct each other when a mistake is made. If one tutee is stronger in the subject than another, have the stronger tutee attempt to explain the subject to the weaker tutee. They will learn by teaching and by being taught. Though your presence is important for the session (in case the tutee(s) need a grammar rule, a verb conjugation, a sentence structure, etc. explained) having the tutees interact improves the session.

Lastly, develop more than a tutor/tutee relationship with your tutees – develop a friendship with them (when possible, of course). When you first meet them ask them who they are, what they’re studying, why they’re in the class your tutoring, etc. When you haven’t seen them in a week ask them questions like how their weekend was, if they have any midterms coming up, etc. Asking them questions, admitting when you’re wrong, giving them praise and positive reinforcement when they get something right – all of these things enhance the learning experience for most tutees. It shows them
that you care about their well-being and it shows them that even though you are in a leadership position, you are also a student and a human being that can empathize with them on both of these levels. I wish you all the best in your tutoring, and I’m sure you will do amazingly. Enjoy yourself, and have fun with it!
Dear Learning Assistant for PSYC 2,

Congratulations on being hired! With this letter, I hope to give you some useful advice for being an effective learning assistant. This is my fourth quarter being a learning assistant for PSYC 2 and through all of my experiences, both good and bad, I have learned what things are essential for being successful in this position as well as things to avoid. I have composed a list of do's and don'ts based on my own personal experiences that I hope you can utilize now and throughout the quarter.

Do's

1. Be prepared for different types of sessions.

Big sessions, small sessions, sessions with shy students, sessions with outgoing students, sessions where students are prepared, and sessions where students are unprepared are all likely scenarios that you will encounter. The easiest way to deal with the possibility of encountering any of these different types of sessions is to create a plan that will work for all or some of them or at least a plan that can be easily adjusted to suit different types of sessions. I have found that having students work in groups on practice problems that they will teach to the rest of the students in the session tends to be a safe and effective strategy for any type of session. Also, having students generate practice problems for other students to solve is another good strategy for most types of sessions. Get creative and try out new interactive learning strategies keeping in mind that you might encounter a type of session where the strategy you come up with might not be as ideal. When this is the case it might useful to come up with multiple strategies or plans.

2. Assess students' learning

The goal of being a learning assistant is to help students learn course material. But how do you know if students are learning? An easy way to do this in PSYC 2 is to simply give a student a problem and see if they can obtain the correct answer. However, it is often necessary to go beyond having them come up with an answer that only requires doing computations and blindly following steps. It is very common in PSYC 2 that students will be able to do all of the mathematical computations to achieve the right answer, but will not know why they went through the steps or what the answer they got means conceptually. It is critical that students know what they are doing conceptually because the computations and steps change depending on the context of the situation, and the only way to know how they change is by understanding conceptually what needs to be accomplished. Asking students why they are doing certain calculations or asking what the results they compute mean are ways of assessing a deeper conceptual understanding. Some other methods to assess learning are having students reiterate what another student has said, having students tell you what would happen if you changed a number in the current problem they are working on, and having students come up with examples of situations in which they would apply a certain test or calculation.

3. Assess students' needs
Figuring out what students need to know, whether it be how to do problems on the homework or what will be on the midterm, will make sessions catered toward students’ success in the class. You can figure out what students need to know by looking at their homework, paying attention to what students seem to be struggling with in class, or thinking about what was difficult for you when you took the course. Figuring out what material will be difficult for students can also help you anticipate students’ questions, which will better prepare you to design an activity that will hopefully clear up those questions.

Don’ts

1. Lecture

Not only will lecturing make your job more difficult and laborious, but it does not allow students to interact and learn as effectively. Most students go to class and discussion sections and are lectured to in both of these. MSI should give students a chance to apply and practice what they are learning to get a deeper understanding of the course material and figure out what they do not know and need to study more. To avoid lecturing, come up with a structured activity that will encourage the students to be the lecturers and do the majority of the talking or writing on the board in the session. A way that I do this is by explicitly giving every student a task or problem to present or write on the board. When a student asks a question always try to get other students to answer or perhaps ask the student a simpler question that might lead them to answering the initial question. The best sessions I have had are the ones in which students take over, teach each other, and facilitate the sessions themselves.

2. Avoid shy, unmotivated, or unprepared students

I have found that these types of students are more of a challenge to work with, which is why it can be tempting to avoid them to reduce the amount of effort on your part. The main issue that these types of students have in common is lack of participation. One solution to this is having students work in groups. Group work allows students to confer with their peers who can usually teach the unprepared student, give confidence to the shy student, or pressure the unmotivated student into participating. If these students still are not participating it can be helpful to talk to them individually to make sure they are understanding the material. Trying to get as many students participating as possible will make the session most effective for the most amount of students.

3. Interrupt students if they are saying the wrong answer

When a student is saying an incorrect answer it is tempting to jump in and correct them. A better way to deal with this situation is to use their mistake to test other students or get the student who made the mistake to reason to the correct answer. Asking the other students if they can see and correct the mistake the student made will promote active listening and increase participation and understanding of the material. If the other students are not able to catch or correct the mistake then this could be a good indicator that this is material that you should cover more. Also, letting the student finish answering and questioning them about the answer can help them reason their way to the correct answer. If students are able to reason out of their mistake once they will likely remember that same process again and avoid the mistake in the future. Mistakes are wonderful learning opportunities not just for the student making them but for everyone in the session.
I hope this advice will be beneficial to you. Nothing will be more beneficial than first-hand experience dealing with the situations I discussed above. It takes a certain amount of trial and error to figure out what works for you and your students. I wish you the best of luck this quarter and hope this job will be as rewarding for you as it was for me.
Dear new employee!

I’m writing to you today to give some words of wisdom I’ve gathered from my five quarters of tutoring and mentoring. Although the two positions are a little different, there is a lot of overlap in terms of the challenges you come across.

In regards to your first tutoring sessions, don’t stress!! I always find it useful to get to know your student a little more. Ask about what classes they’re in, what’s their major, their year, etc. Talk about their interest in the course, why they’re taking it, and so on so that you can get an idea of why they are seeking tutoring. This way you can know what their goals for the session might be. For example, some students seek tutoring to get an A in the course, others simply to pass the course. You can always come back to this goal throughout your sessions. You’ll find out sometimes that your student may be really down on their studying and keeping up with the class material. This is why it’s always important to go back to their goal! This has helped me a lot to keep my students motivated and to show I’m here to help you get that A you want!

One thing I learned as a tutor was to be patient with your student. It’s easy to become frustrated when they don’t understand the material at all, when they come to a session unprepared, when they give excuses as to why they don’t get the material, and so on. It’s important though to stay positive and supportive. At least they have come to tutoring which shows they want to learn! So often times, we as tutors have to adapt to these situations and roll with the punches. Part of this requires having a balance between being a friend and being strict with your goals and purpose of tutoring. I sometimes have to reiterate, you signed up for tutoring so that I could help you, so you have to meet me half way! or something along those lines. Remember how I said you figure out the goal of the sessions at the first meetings? Always come back to these goals to keep your sessions purposeful and fruitful.

I’ve learned through my experiences and through collaborating with my LSS peers that what makes a good tutor are being good at problem solving and adapting to challenges; being a good communicator, which involves being patient and calm, but also friendly and on their level; and one needs to have a passion and desire to help others learn. We’re here to tutor for a subject, but at the end of the day, we’re here to work with students to help them learn. So the relationship is very important in the process of learning.

Lastly, three points I would share with you that I found most useful form my training with LSS… I would say to 1) collaborate with your student to set goals for the class and for the sessions and to always come back to them; 2) plan and implement a quick assessment during a session to see if your student has an understanding of aspects of the material. This can be a quick question that they must answer verbally or written down; and lastly 3) share stories with other LSS tutors. In the meetings or outside of meetings with LSS, talk about your frustrations, your challenges, what has worked for you in your sessions, and what has not. All LSS tutors are super helpful and knowledgeable and are more often than not running across the same challenges that you are. Don’t be afraid to ask Jessica or Charis for help either! We’re all a team working to help our students. :)

Best of luck! MaiLinh Niemi
To the new Psychology Subject Tutor:

Congratulations on your employment! I am sure you will find that working as a tutor is a great experience. I have been a tutor for PSYC 60, PSYC 100, and PSYC 102. I would like to give you some advice about how to tutor psychology courses.

One of the biggest hurdles to get over in tutoring sessions is how you will use your time. Teaching psychology can be a lot different than teaching other subjects such as math or chemistry. You may run across some statistical equations if your students are working on research (such as in PSYC 100); however, most of the time, the information from the course will be more abstract. It is important that you put your preparation time into making the session well-structured so that you do not end up in a loop of asking the students, “So…do you have anymore questions? …Anything?” You only have an hour a week per group, so don’t want to use your time on awkward silences!

One of the things I began doing for PSYC 60 and for PSYC 102 was making outlines based on the textbook chapters. Students tend to have trouble putting in the time to do course readings. While it is easy to sit in lecture for a few hours each week, opening a textbook often leads to opening a laptop which leads to opening an internet browser which leads to opening Facebook/Tumblr/Reddit… You get the point. I found that the students are much more likely to complete the readings if you give them something else to complete as they read. This is easy for you to do as a tutor: look through the textbook for headings of the sections within the chapter. Use these to outline the chapter. Then, under each heading, write the vocabulary words that are in the section. And finally, if you have some extra time, write a couple of questions for the students to answer about the main points in each section. This is a tool that students genuinely appreciate for their own use, and it is great for you because you can follow the chapter outline as an outline for the tutoring session (also, if you happen to tutor PSYC 60 with Per Gjerde, he relies heavily on the book for exam material!). As you go over the chapter, be sure to ask the students if they recall any of the material being covered in lecture. Material that overlaps in lecture and in the textbook is often very important for exams.

Another important thing has less to do with structure and more to do with how you can connect with students. In many cases, you will be tutoring a course that the same professor you had is teaching again. Students may ask you if you have had the same professor, and it is important to be honest about your experience. Of course, it would be unprofessional to slander and insult your professor, and it is against policy to share specific exam material with students. However, you can use your experience in order to reassure students that you were able to make it through the course in one piece (e.g. “Professor Gjerde can be difficult to understand sometimes, but if you go to his office hours, he speaks more slowly and can probably explain the concept in a different way.”).

Even though you may have done well in the course and had little trouble, do not assume that your tutoring students will have the same perception. As I said before, it is important to be honest about your experience. On the other hand, if your experience makes the course seem really easy, you might not want to go there! When a student enters tutoring, it is because they feel apprehensive about their performance. This is why it is vital that you create an environment where their concerns can be shared.
comfortably. Sometimes tutoring is not all about the material, but it can also be about how a student feels about his or her own capabilities. Try to be empathetic, encouraging, and relaxed. In turn, your student(s) will be able to ask you questions more easily.

I do hope you enjoy being employed as a subject tutor! I remember that I was incredibly nervous for my first tutoring session... In the end, it can be really fun to tutor your peers. Thanks for reading!

Good luck,

Julie Weseman

Subject Tutor for PSYC 60, PSYC 100, and PSYC 102
Dear New Employee,

Congratulations on your new tutor position! This is an exciting and rewarding journey. Tutoring students is one of the best learning experiences I’ve had—both tutor and tutee learn. I have tutored both Russian classes and Writing. In this letter I will (hopefully) give you some insight into what to expect from this job, and what is expected from you.

The top three qualities/academic strengths I found most useful to my position as a tutor were good planning skills, listening skills, and being fast in assessing a new situation. Good planning skills helped me make sure I had a plan and time for review as well as for new material. Listening skills are very important, as it is very important to listen to what the student is saying: letting them carry out their thoughts in detail. Being fast in assessing a new student and situation was very important in being able to help a student you just met, as well as in dealing with any new questions a student may bring to session.

One of the skills that I learned from tutoring was to be able to not immediately answer a question; instead, I let the student answer their own question by asking them or their peers. This helped them achieve metacognitive learning, which is the awareness of one’s own thought process. This helps students learn much better. This was especially helpful in writing tutoring. In addition, I also became skilled at not appropriating. Appropriation is when one uses another’s words/ideas for their own, and this is not the correct way of teaching. You must allow the student to use their own words, not yours.

One of the difficulties I faced as a tutor was refraining from lecturing the students. As a tutor, it is often difficult to see a student struggle and not show them how to do something. However, engaging in active learning is better in the long run. When students teach each other, they will learn better and remember it. If you are tutoring one person, you can still give them time to engage in learning by perhaps doing a warm up at the beginning of section. Organize your sessions even if you don’t know the student yet. Make sure you have a general plan for how you will pass the time!

My most memorable experiences working for LSS was when one of the students I tutored got an A on her test. I was so proud and it felt very rewarding to be able to help someone achieve in their class! This is when I saw that tutoring really does help, and it felt great to be a part of it.

This position has helped me become a better student by making me more aware of what other students struggle with. For example, reviewing notes/lectures constantly (although tedious) leads to better results than cramming in studying last minute before a test. This position has provided professional developments, especially in being a leader. The training workshops are also very helpful professionally; my favorite was the interview workshop. By coincidence I had an interview that very week, and I felt confident thanks to the speaker.

In conclusion, I want to wish you a very enjoyable and productive tutoring quarter! My last advice is for you to remain professional but still approachable; remember, you are among your peers but you are a leader! Good luck!

Best,

An Older Tutor
Dear Student,

I have been working with Learning Support Services for about three years. I have held multiple positions as a Subject Tutor, MSI, and Sophomore Academy Mentor. I have tutored primarily for Sociology, Latin American and Latino Studies, and Literature. These are very reading and writing intensive courses. From what I have learned on the first day it is nice to have a small icebreaker. I go for the usual state your name, college affiliation, major, and hometown. I find that a lot of students find out they are either in the same class, college, or are from the same hometown because of this and make small connections which make them feel more comfortable coming into the session. The first day I usually like to ask why they are interested in the courses they are in and how they are enjoying school (for the most part students are first years). This usually allows for everyone to slowly start feeling comfortable since tutoring session is small and it’s easier to get to know each other a bit more.

In terms of overall advice for leading a session, these are my words of wisdom. Try not to let anyone be quiet; what I usually do is try to make eye contact with everyone in the room. I usually ask, “what do you think?” or “what do you have on your notes”. Whenever I ask what the student knows about lecture or notes taken that usually gets someone to talk. There are some shy quiet students but it’s also nice to remind the students to treat the session like a very small discussion in which they do not have to necessarily know everything but should feel comfortable saying anything; there are no wrong answers we are all in the session to learn and to talk about our ideas and connections we are making with lecture and the real world. This is particularly helpful for me as a Sociology and Latin American and Latino Studies tutor because the classes want students to begin thinking critically about history, society, and the world. I usually ask students, depending on the topic, if they can think of any examples they have seen or experienced and this makes it easier for students to make connections and gain a deeper understanding of theory, which can tend to be dry. For example, recently we have begun talking about education in Sociology. In particular we have been discussing redlining and social mobility. We are discussing the book’s discussion on social inequalities. I asked the students to think about how education is viewed overall and how they see it. I asked them “why are you in college?” most of them said to get educated to get a good job. From that point I went on to discuss how education is viewed as the ultimate equalizer in which everyone starts out in a level playing and anyone can go to college and move up in society (social mobility). I asked them if they believed this to be true, a lot of them said yes, but to an extent. Then I asked them why they believed this, they gave me their personal experiences with education and I connected this with the text and theories, in particular neo-Marxists and other sociological theorists. This allowed them to understand the chapter on education in a way that would be easier for them to understand. My advice is that you do the same. As a tutor, for the most part, you will have a deeper understanding than the student on certain topics and think about how you learn and what made it easier for you to understand certain theories, themes, topics, etc. and apply it to your pedagogy.

Another thing about the first day is set your rules. Let them know that you will not tolerate X,Y,and Z. Also, if they know in advance they will not be able to make a tutoring session with you to email you so that you do not waste your time. Set your courtesy rules and make them understand that you are also a student and it your “our” time not “your” time only. I usually give my students my phone number so
they can text me since not everyone checks their email on time, etc. If you build this kind of relationship with your student they tend to be very understanding although I warn you that not everyone will email you ahead of time, however, doing this does make it a lot less likely. You can even set a rule “do not text or email me after this time or I will not see/respond”.

Since these classes are very writing intensive another thing I have students do is when they know they have a very important paper due, to bring in a draft of their work. I have students discuss their thesis/topic out loud around in a circle. Based on what they say I would say “well it looks like X and Y are writing about very similar topics, where did you find your information” or something along those lines. This activity allows for students to get ideas from one another. After they discuss their papers and resources out loud I like to pair students with similar topics together so they can work together, look at each other’s drafts, etc. During this time I go around each different group and ask to take a look at their papers while they discuss the topics. I try to be helpful in the writing process and always remind them to go to Drop-In Writing Tutoring at LSS and if they have further questions to talk to their professors and T.A.’s (basically remind them they have other resources aside from you as a tutor). If you only have one student in a session, this process can be more one-on-one which is also helpful.

You may face some challenges. Sometimes a student might not bring the book or come prepared to ask questions. If this happens try asking what they learned in lecture or what they have in notes, I have found this to be very helpful. If that does not work ask what the students think about the class so far and where they are struggling, what they are enjoying, etc. This can also lead to a discussion about the topics and themes of class.

Do not be shy. Get out of your comfort zone and be ready to talk to a class full of students. They are not judging you; the students actually see you as someone to ask for help. Don’t be nervous, be personable because remember that the T.A.’s we like the most are the ones who make us feel comfortable and like we can actually go talk to them. Think, “who would I like to talk to/ask questions to?”. With that in mind, leave your problems at the door. Whatever is going on in your life as a student (or personal life) be prepared to be positive and energetic at your session, it will show if you are not in a good mood. If you absolutely feel like you cannot do this, let your students know. State, “sorry I want to let you know that I am not having a very good day so do not take my current behavior/energy personally”. They will appreciate this much more than if you just come in with an off-putting attitude.

Good luck!

Samantha Lopez-Martinez

Sophomore Academy Mentor

Subject Tutor
Dear future language tutor,

I have worked for 6 months as a Spanish tutor and over this I have made numerous failures and gained many insights into being a language teacher. The key to learning a language is speaking it, rather than just studying the grammar. I would like to share some of these insights I have gained with you to help you avoid some of these failures.

Most importantly, it is important to keep in mind that learning a language is not like learning history, biology or linguistics. It's more like learning to play guitar or gaining stamina through running. It is a skill. Like any other skill, it must be practiced. One can study the grammar, but this will not directly transfer to the ability to communicate. A language learner must practice speaking as much as possible, even if they are making mistakes. Intellectually understanding the grammar is not the same thing as internalizing it. The ability to communicate is the ultimate goal when it comes to learning a language. Simply studying the grammar and memorizing the vocabulary will allow the students to express themselves in the language. The main focus of teaching should be to get your students to express themselves.

Unfortunately, many of my sessions turned into nothing more than hour-long explanations of grammar. To many people, including the students, this seemed to be ideal. However, having the grammar explained will not help you improve your ability to speak. Speaking a language is the way the only way to learn to express yourself in that language.

In fact, many students love getting grammatical explanations because it makes them feel like they have a key that they can now use to bypass any challenging situation they might encounter then they are speaking. This is, unfortunately, not the reality of the matter.

Let me share with you one of my biggest failures:

I had one student who was having trouble with gustar type verbs. She couldn't grasp what a sentence like “a Juan le molestas” would mean, as she had only seen gustar used as a chunk like “me gusta X.”. I spent nearly 45 minutes of our hour session explaining how gustar verbs work, and at the end she really seemed to get it. However, when she returned for the next session, everything I taught her had gone in one ear and out the other. She was dumb-founded when I asked her to translate a sentence like “you bother Juan”. She took very good notes on it during the session before, so I told her to review them. That hardly helped. After another 10 minutes of discussing it, she was able to intellectually understand the construction, but the problem was that she was unable to internalize it because I never gave her the opportunity to use a sentence like “a juan le molestas” in a meaningful context. A meaningful context is what is needed to internalize a language.

This was how the first 4 months of my tutoring went. I could make the students happy because I had clear answers to all of their questions about grammar. I could help them get better grades on the test, but as far as teaching them to speak at all, I was a colossal failure.
A meaningful context is when the student is using the language for purposes other than merely practicing grammar. This requires getting the student to speak about something that he or she is interested in. Believe it or not, this is actually the hardest part of being a language tutor.

Let me give you some hints on to avoid failing in the holes of only discussing grammar in a meaningless context:

Always greet in Spanish. Do not have a “let’s get down to business” approach at all. In fact, try to put off the grammar as long as possible. Talk to them about what they ate for lunch, which classes they went to, what their cat’s name is, how long they have been dating their boyfriend, anything, just talk to them in Spanish. They need to hear input and they need to produce output. Try to figure out what kind of topics they enjoy talking about, and make a note of it. If you find some aspect about them that they like talking about, run with it. Even with Spanish 1 students you should be able to do this. One of my students had an extremely large family that she really seemed to enjoy talking about. Asking her questions about what her cousins were like proved to be extremely productive. She described all of her cousins and listed how many kids each of her uncles had. Even though I had to constantly remind her to speak in Spanish, and she made uncountable grammatical errors, this was a great exercise. She didn’t think it was an exercise; she just wanted to talk about her family.

Since you and your students have the common language of English, it becomes extremely easy to fall back on this. Talk to them in Spanish even if it is above their level. Even if they are only getting the gist, at least they are getting something. When you speak in English, they are not using their Spanish skills.

Plan activities. Even 10 minutes of planning can work out really well. For one of my activities, I printed out a list of South-American countries, and I showed them on the map where each of these countries were. I then asked them to discuss with each other which country had the most people and which country had the least. Then they had to speak Spanish with one another and come to an agreement on how to rank the countries in order of population. This activity went unbelievably well. They spent a solid 15 minutes speaking Spanish and negotiating. Before we started the exercise, I wrote on the board how to describe populations and some comparison structures, vocabulary that I thought they would need in order to express how big they thought each country was.

For another one of these activities, I told the students we were on a sinking boat and I made a few lists of different kind of items. The students had to come to an agreement about what items they wanted to take to the island. They could only finish when everyone had agreed. This one went very well and the students ended up using a lot of “if... then...” clauses. If the students didn’t know what an item on the list was, I would describe it to them in Spanish until they figured it out and said it in English.

I tried to do this exercise with one of my Spanish 2 students, but her level of Spanish wasn’t high enough to do this, so instead I simply spent 20 minutes describing (in Spanish) the different items on the list and seeing if she could figure what they were. She enjoyed doing this a lot more than when I lectured her on grammar for an hour.

I have included samples of the three exercises. I intentionally left the directions vague. They would have to listen to me explain them in Spanish. Attempting to comprehend directions is a very important part of language acquisition, and is almost as important as the exercise itself.
Coming up with your own activities is extremely rewarding and truly forces you to be creative. When trying to make an activity, it's best to force the students to come to an agreement on something. This will cause them to communicate with one another, which is precisely what you want. Also, try to think of phrases they will need to express themselves accurately while doing the exercise. If you can't think of what words your students will need, try having a couple of your friends do the exercise in English, and then record and translate the phrases that that were most common or useful. If you can't come up with a clever exercise, go see one of your favorite language teachers and ask them if they have any ideas.

I am not a native speaker, nor a heritage speaker of Spanish. I have only spoken Spanish for about 6 years but I have spent a great amount of time abroad learning the language and I consider myself functionally fluent, but my ability to speak is far from perfect.

If you are like this, keep in mind that it doesn’t matter very much. Do not hold back from speaking. Your students will not notice if you screw up the gender on something, or you conjugate something in the present instead of the past. Your students need to be spoken to, no matter what their level or yours.

Discussing grammar for an entire hour-long session is not particularly productive when it comes to acquiring a language. It is also extremely boring. Your students will undoubtedly have questions about grammar, and being able to answer them is important. However, if you want to see your students improve in actually speaking Spanish, rather than just getting better grades on the test, get them to use the language in a realistic manner.

Example activities:

El barco se está hundiendo!!!! ¡Hay una isla en la distancia! ¡Estámos salvados! Podemos llevar sólo una cosa de cada lista.

1
Sacos de dormir
La red de pesca
un rifle de caza

2
Botellas de agua
Encendedor
Una lancha inflable

3
Tienda de campaña
Tabletas de yodo
Abrelatas
Lleguen a un acuerdo con tus compañeros y ordenen los países siguientes por números de habitantes.

Argentina
Uruguay
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Perú
Ecuador
Columbia
Venezuela
Surinam
Bolivia

Here is an additional activity. Ask them what advice they would give the girl who posted this on yahoo answers. This was taken directly from mx.answers.yahoo.com:
Tienes consejos para ésta chica?

¿Ya no tengo tema de conversación con mi novio :(? 

No se que hacer, como que ya no hablamos mucho, solo besos besos y más besos y si hablamos pero no como deberíamos hacerlo creo yo... Nos vemos todos los días y cuando hablamos por fb no tenemos de que hablar, solo te amo yo más, no yo más.. también que haces, nada tu nada? y repetimos eso; la verdad no se porque pasa eso llevamos 8 meses de relación *-* y la verdad es que no quiero terminar con el y menos que el lo haga, ayudame por favor!
Dear Spanish LSS Tutor,

First of all I would like to congratulate you on obtaining the position of a Spanish Subject LSS Tutor. I'd like to provide you with some tutoring advice that may be useful to you throughout the quarter. It is important to set up a comfortable environment for your tutoring sessions. Choose a location where there won't be too many distractions or noise. In the first session, state your name and ask everyone in the session to state their name as well. Share some basic information about yourself such as your major, grade level and college affiliation. This will help the students get to know you better and feel more comfortable working with you.

Afterwards, you can ask your tutees about their major, as well as the reason they are taking the class you are tutoring. It is also helpful if you ask each tutee what their previous experience with the language is, just so you can measure what everyone’s background is in the subject. This will give you more knowledge on who might need more help during the sessions. You should establish a goal for every tutoring session, meaning you will establish the points you plan on covering for each session. In order to do this, at the beginning of each session, ask the tutee (or tutees if it’s a group session) what they have been doing in class. From there, focus on what they did not understand from lecture or homework by setting up the points in the order that you plan on covering them.

When tutoring, it is important that your students come prepared with the materials and topics. It up to the student, not the tutor to bring questions and other materials that will contribute to the session. Once the students focus on what topics they want to work on, you can implement different learning techniques to make sure you cover different learning styles. For example, when explaining a grammar rule, encourage students to write down examples and anything else you say so that they have something to go back to when they’re doing homework or studying for a quiz. Also, refer to the book when you are tutoring so that the students know they have the book as a recourse to go back to when they are back home, and want to relearn or study the material.

If the room you are tutoring in has a board, utilize the board as a learning tool for those students who are visual and hands on learners. You can write on the board by providing topics from class, such as a reading they discussed in class or recent vocabulary terms. Allow your students to go to the board and jot down main points or definitions based on the topic you chose to discuss. Then as a group goes over the information and adds or edit anything you feel they left out, and again encourage them to write down the information. You also want to encourage collaborative learning in your sessions, so allow your students to work together during group sessions. When going over a lesson, ask students to ask each other questions or try having them explain a grammar rule you’re going over in class to another peer in the session.

If your students want to practice their oral Spanish, you can also try to ask them to implement their vocabulary terms so that they can also practice using them in conversation. When practicing oral Spanish, you can also set up a casual dialogue between you and your students by asking them how their day was and what they plan on doing later on that day, or over the weekend. You can also try

TUTOR SPANISH 3-6: NATALIE FRANCO
implementing the grammar rules they have learned in the conversation to make sure they practice using them correctly. For example, if they are currently going over the subjunctive tense, you can ask them to tell you about their future plans, etc. using the subjunctive tense. If the students mispronounce a word or use a word incorrectly wait until they finish their thought before correcting them. Explain why the words they used were incorrect and give them other alternatives as to what they could have said instead.

Not all students will ask to go over their oral skills with you, depending on how comfortable they are with the language. I do encourage you to try to speak in Spanish throughout the session as much as possible. Make sure you speak slowly and clearly so that all your students will be able to understand you. It is also helpful if you have a Spanish/English dictionary on hand, so that you can have students look up words they don’t know. This technique is more helpful than simply telling the students the answer because the act of looking up the words themselves give them a sense of independence, and helps them remember the word more than if you were to simply tell them the definition.

I hope that this letter of advice has given you some useful ideas that you will be able to use in your tutoring. I wish you the best of luck!
Dear Spanish Tutor,

First of all I would like to congratulate you on obtaining a position as an LSS Tutor. I remember feeling both nervous and excited when I first began tutoring for Spanish. I would like to provide you with some advice that I have accumulated throughout my experience as a tutor and hope that you will find it useful for your own tutoring.

Let me introduce myself - my name is Natalie Franco and I am a Sociology and Spanish Studies major with an emphasis in Literature. I took honors and AP Spanish course in High School before taking Spanish 6 at UCSC my Freshman winter quarter. You will learn that tutoring is a very rewarding experience in that you will learn about yourself and your students just as much as your students will learn from you. When I first began to tutor I was afraid of not having all of the answers but I realized that not always knowing the answers is okay!

When you do not know something, feel free to admit it and know that you can always look it up later as well encourage your students to look up the answers themselves, in order to encourage their own growth and engage in their learning. It is important to acknowledge your student’s question, even if you dont have an immediate answer. Just remember, do not panic if you dont have an immediate answer. Know that the Professor of the course you are tutoring is also a valuable resource and you can always redirect any questions or concerns back to the Professor. After all your main goal as a tutor is to teach your students how to lean and feel independent in the subject. As tutors your role is to share your knowledge and help students engage in the material as best as you can. Also remember that the course book is a valuable resource, so be sure to ask students to come prepared to each sessions with any materials that they think will be helpful for the course.

It is very important that you let students know, prior to your first session in an email that they come prepared to every session with any necessary materials, questions and topics that they may have. I also ask students that they forward me their syllabus in the beginning of the quarter so that I can keep track of where they are in the class and hen any major assignments or exams are coming up so that we can prepare together. This also allows me to go over any materials I may feel I need to refresh on or prepare additional practice questions and activities for the sessions. It is also helpful to ask your students to email you prior to each session with any topics the would like to review or work on for that week. That way to have a structure to your sessions, and it allows you some time to prepare before each session.

It is also important to set up a comfortable environment for your tutoring sessions. When choosing the location of your tutoring sessions, try to find a quiet area without too many distractions. I set up my sessions in the study rooms in Mchenry Library because they are private so we can talk freely and there is a white board that we can access. For your first session, be sure to briefly introduce yourself, your background in the subject, grade level, major or anything else that may be interested to share with your students. This will help the students get to know you better and feel more comfortable working with you. Remember, this is your first impression as a tutor, you want to be professional but also create a comfortable environment.
You can then ask everyone in the session to briefly introduce themselves as well as their reasons they are taking the class you are tutoring. It is also helpful if you ask each tutee what their previous experience with the language is, just so you can measure what everyone's background is in the subject. This will give you more knowledge on who might need more help during the sessions. You should establish a goal for every tutoring session, meaning you will establish the points you plan on covering for each session. In order to do this, at the beginning of each session, ask the tutee (or tutees if it’s a group session) what they have been doing in class. From there, focus on what they did not understand from lecture or homework by setting up the points in the order that you plan on covering them.

As I previously mentioned, it is important that your students come prepared with the materials and topics. It up to the student, not the tutor to bring questions and other materials that will contribute to the session. Once the students focus on what topics they want to work on, you can implement different learning techniques to make sure you cover different learning styles. For example, when explaining a grammar rule, encourage students to write down examples and anything else you say so that they have something to go back to when they’re doing homework or studying for a quiz. Also, refer to the book when you are tutoring so that the students know they have the book as a recourse to go back to when they are back home, and want to relearn or study the material.

If the room you are tutoring in has a board, utilize the board as a learning tool for those students who are visual and hands on learners. You also want to encourage collaborative learning in your sessions, so allow your students to work together during group sessions. When going over a lesson, ask students to ask each other questions or try having them explain a grammar rule you’re going over in class to another peer in the session.

If your students want to practice their oral Spanish, you can also try to ask them to implement their vocabulary terms so that they can also practice using them in conversation. When practicing oral Spanish, you can also set up a casual dialogue between you and your students by asking them how their day was and what they plan on doing later on that day, or over the weekend. You can also try implementing the grammar rules they have learned in the conversation to make sure they practice using them correctly. For example, if they are currently going over the subjunctive tense, you can ask them to tell you about their future plans, etc. using the subjunctive tense. If the students mispronounce a word or use a word incorrectly wait until they finish their thought before correcting them. Explain why the words they used were incorrect and give them other alternatives as to what they could have said instead.

Not all students will ask to go over their oral skills with you, depending on how comfortable they are with the language. I do encourage you to try to speak in Spanish throughout the session as much as possible. Make sure you speak slowly and clearly so that all your students will be able to understand you. I hope that this letter of advice has given you some useful ideas that you will be able to use in your tutoring. Tutoring can be a lot of work, but it is a very rewarding process. You will learn what methods work best for you and your students as you go. I hope that you will enjoy the learning process and embrace any knowledge and new experiences that will surely come your way! I wish you the best of luck, and remember to have fun!
Dear Spanish and/or Portuguese Subject Tutor,

First of all, congratulations! I remember how excited I was when I was hired within my first position at Learning Support Services. You should be very proud of yourself and you should feel very accomplished, because only the best of the best in a certain subject get to help others learn said subject. Though it can be a challenge, it is definitely one of the most rewarding experiences have had.

Let me introduce myself – my name is Lena Peterson and I am a Language Studies (Spanish) major with an Education minor. When I was first hired within Learning Support Services (Winter 2013) I was hired to tutor both the Portuguese class for speakers of romance languages (60A) and the Portuguese class for people whose second language would be Portuguese (1A). I had succeeded greatly when I was in the Portuguese series here at UCSC. Later in the year (Spring 2013) I was hired to tutor Spanish 5 and Spanish 1B and continued tutoring the next class in the Portuguese series (65A). Considering I’m writing this to you in the future, I don’t know which subject you’re going to tutor but I can guarantee you will learn something about yourself as you help others learn. I have some advice for you as a student who is new to Learning Support Services or new to tutoring any of the previous subjects.

Though Spanish and Portuguese are different languages, teaching them is uncannily similar. They are both romance languages and structured very similarly, so I think that the following advice will apply to either one of the previously mentioned languages. The first piece of advice I have for you is to have the students look up new vocabulary words in a physical hard-copy dictionary. In any foreign language there is inevitably going to be new vocabulary words and I have personally witnessed the enhancement in the students’ retention of these vocabulary words when I have them look them up in a dictionary. I know as we are the generation of technology you and your tutees will be tempted to use the internet or Google Translate, but I can promise you neither of these will have the same effect. If you have a dictionary, bring it to your sessions. If your tutees have a dictionary, have them do the same. If they do not, encourage them to purchase one, as it will continue to help them over a long period of time.

Secondly, allow and encourage your tutees to use each other as resources. Though you have studied (and succeeded in) the subject you are tutoring, they are each other’s peers and encouraging their interaction will allow them to keep learning outside of your sessions. During the session, have the tutees respectfully correct each other when a mistake is made. If one tutee is stronger in the subject than another, have the stronger tutee attempt to explain the subject to the weaker tutee. They will learn by teaching and by being taught. Though your presence is important for the session (in case the tutee(s) need a grammar rule, a verb conjugation, a sentence structure, etc. explained) having the tutees interact improves the session.

Lastly, develop more than a tutor/tutee relationship with your tutees – develop a friendship with them (when possible, of course). When you first meet them ask them who they are, what they’re studying, why they’re in the class your tutoring, etc. When you haven’t seen them in a week ask them questions like how their weekend was, if they have any midterms coming up, etc. Asking them questions, admitting when you’re wrong, giving them praise and positive reinforcement when they get something right – all of these things enhance the learning experience for most tutees. It shows them that you care.
about their well-being and it shows them that even though you are in a leadership position, you are also a student and a human being that can empathize with them on both of these levels. I wish you all the best in your tutoring, and I’m sure you will do amazingly. Enjoy yourself, and have fun with it!

Lizeth F. Gómez

Spanish for Heritage Speakers 4,5 and 6

Fall 2012-Spring 2013
Dear future SPHS tutor,

Felicidades! As an SPHS tutor you have been hand-picked by the coordinators of the program to help others succeed in this class. This means that you did really well in the class and demonstrated that you have the skills to be a section leader and you should be very proud of that because not many students get this position. You need to keep this in mind as you meet your students, lead you sections and encounter some frustration in the process.

As an SPHS tutor you are very unique. You are the only tutor in the LSS program that leads mandatory sections so a lot of the strategies and lessons you will learn in Education 196, the tutor training class, will not apply to you. This means that you will struggle to complete the assignments and apply what you learn to your sections. However, these will be great opportunities for you to find creative ways to modify what you learn and apply it to your position. At first you will probably be frustrated because you will be the exception to almost everything you are taught as a tutor, but don’t let this frustration stop you from doing your best and enjoying what you do. I found that talking about the assignments with other SPHS tutors before completing them was always helpful. Together you can find ways in which to modify strategies so they cater to the needs of your students. You can also experiment with different strategies and ask your students which ones they find the most useful. And always remember that you can talk to any of the LSS staff about issues you encounter, they are always willing to help.

As you know, the sessions you will lead ask students to prepare by doing additional readings which are discussed during the hour you are together. On top of this you will need to spend some time answering students’ questions and reviewing difficult concepts so managing the time you have will be something you will have to work on. While it is usually recommended that you spend half an hour on the readings and half an hour reviewing realistically this does not work. Sometimes you will spend a lot of time answering students’ specific questions and this will make you rush through the review of the readings. Other times you will find that no one has questions and all you will do is talk about the readings. It will take you some time to learn how to split your time between the two but I have found that coming prepared with some review problems always helps get things started when no one has questions. On the other hand, when you spend most of your time answering their questions I find that leaving at least fifteen minutes to talk about the readings allows you to discuss the overall content of each chapter or story and some of the key themes found in them. I found that going over these gives them a general idea about what they are reading when you don’t have enough time to really discuss everything in depth.

I also recommend you to review the class page and take notes on what they have learned in class during each week of tutoring. This will allow you to come up with some review questions or exercises when no
one brings any of their own. For example, when everyone says that they understand what a homónimo is ask them to define it for you and give you examples. Usually this catches some students off guard and it allows both you and them to notice areas where they are still having trouble.

As you interact with a specific group of students every week, be ready to meet some who give you sass. Since these sections are mandatory you will have students who are much more advanced than others and who don’t actually need the extra help. This means that sometimes you will face students who know more than you, and that is fine as long as you remind them that you are a student just like them and that you can all work together to get as much out of these sections as you can. Sometimes this will mean that the more advanced students will look bored or become a little defensive, this is why you should constantly be asking for people’s opinions or suggestions so everyone feels like they are actually participating and not just sitting in passively.

One thing you will encounter very often is students who don’t do the readings. Part of the point of these sessions is to have students practice their conversation skills as they discuss the assigned readings in depth but this becomes very difficult when no one reads or brings any questions. There is only so much you can do when no one reads, but instead of awkwardly sitting in silence you can make students take turns reading a particular story out loud. If at least one of the students reads, have him or her explain what happens in the story to other students and then get them to ask each other questions about it. Sadly this will probably happen often, and even though it is quite frustrating at the beginning try to find creative ways to get them engaged with the readings while they are in section, such as having them brainstorm themes or describe a specific character. However, remind them that they must prepare before they come to tutoring and that not reading or participating negatively affects their grade. And once everyone gets to know each other and you feel comfortable with your students tease them about not reading. Sometimes playful teasing helps break the tension and reminds them that you are a student just like them.

Finally, keep in mind that you can always talk to Professor Pagani about any difficulties you face. She is always available and can give you suggestions on what to cover during your sections as well as how to deal with specific students and their needs. I have used her as a resource a lot this year and I have learned a lot.

I hope this letter helps you prepare for the exiting quarter ahead. Keep in mind that every group is different and that there is a lot to learn from your experience as a tutor. Good luck with your sessions!
Dear SPHS Tutor,

First of all I want to congratulate you and welcome you to your new journey as a tutor for SPHS series. Now you start a new journey that will teach you a lot but also help you grow as an individual. Although I know you are probably a smart person (which is why you are a tutor) I would like to give you some feedback that will help you succeed in your new position. Now I should warn you the first thing you will have to do is take the two-unit class offer by the LSS program (is a must), in the class Holly, the coordinator of the LSS program, will teach you various techniques that could help you teach your students. However, as the class continues you will sometimes feel like an outsider but that is O.K. is normal because most of the skills thought in the class do not really apply to “our special program” yet do not worry because although it may seem like the class is hopeless, is not the way. On the contrary, in these class you will need to develop the skill of being creative so that you could use the tools that you learned in the class, twist them a little bit (in order to fit your plans/ section) and be ready to apply it with your students, such as the learning cell.

Now that I have officially started to tell you what skills/ attitude you should have let me go ahead and continue giving you tips that will make your job easier. In order to be a good tutor you need to learn how to be approachable, friendly, but also at the same time you need to be able to be authoritative in order for your students to know were the boundary is between you and them. As a tutor your students will expect you to know it all, yet your job there is to make them understand that you will help them with any struggle their having but that you are not an encyclopedia that knows everything, by stating this yours students will be able to identify with you. Why does this matter? You may be asking. The reason why is important to make your students construable is because that will be the motive that will make them want to come back to your section. One of the challenges you will face in this job is the fact that even if you have a plan for your students, the plan will not work, which means you have to either have a back-up plan or think fast because you know that you have to teach, especially because the materials you discuss in section are different than what they are doing in class (at least in the readings). Another thing you should consider is the fact that not all your students will be well prepare, which means you will need to find a way to work with all of them (the well prepare, the mid ones who are kind of half ways prepare and the ones that have no clue of what is going on). In a case like the one I previously mention your best shot is to let the student who knows his material teach the others, of course with your help, and then go from there. But most importantly, remember to always be in contact with the professors, as well as with your co-workers because they are the ones that will help you with any questions you have. So remember you are not alone.

In any case, I am not trying to scare you but rather help you succeed in your knew job, once again congratulations for your new position and I wish you the best luck.

Sincerely,

Orquidea Mendez
Dear tutor,

Congratulations on obtaining your position as a Spanish for Heritage Speakers Tutor! Out of all the students, the professors chose you because you demonstrated impressive work, and leadership skills. Have confidence in yourself and be patient, even when students give you a difficult time.

In your education course, you will be introduced to a variety of strategies and methods that will help you facilitate your tutoring sessions. Although many of the strategies could potentially be efficient, be prepared to modify most of them. Some of them may be difficult to apply to the way we run our sessions, therefore more than often you will have to change them a bit.

A strategy that I found very useful was the quick write. I began my sessions with this approach to help my students collect their thoughts before having to discuss the weekly readings. The quick write not only allows the students to organize their ideas, but it also provides some time for the students to practice their writing in Spanish. I collected their work at the end of the session, corrected it, and proceeded to discuss with them the mistakes that I found in their writing on the following week. If you use this method, slowly your students will begin to feel more comfortable with their writing and after helping them fix their errors, their work will improve. It would be great to start this strategy since the beginning of the year in order give your students as much practice as possible.

Always have your students think more critically about the readings. Do not let them give simple yes or no answers, have them expand and elaborate their opinions. Constantly ask them “why” or “why not.” This will help them to better analyze the readings and provide them with the opportunity to form concrete arguments. You want to them to speak as much as they possibly can. The point of tutoring is for students to practice their Spanish in an academic environment and slowly they will begin to improve and feel more confident. Keep asking questions and compliment them often.

It would also be a great idea to have your students go up to the board. Have them be active during the session. Whether it is conjugations, accentuation, or sentence structuring, have them take turns going up to the board to write their answers. You will learn that students could be auditory, visual, or kinetic learners. Sometimes there is not enough time in the sessions to identify how it is that your students learn best, so just provide different activities that could benefit all of your students.

I wish you the best of luck this year! Remember that you will make a few mistakes, but overall you will do great. Guide your students to think more critically, avoid giving them the answers. And always remember that all the readings are about interpretation. Everyone will have different views about the readings; remember to continuously reassure them that their opinions are valid as long as they could support their arguments. Good luck and have fun!

Sincerely,

Cristina Camacho
TUTOR TIM 50: NOE LIMUS

Dear incoming tutor,

First of all I would like to welcome you to the LSS staff, I hope for the best for you in this position. Being a subject tutor specifically for TIM 50 is great. I will warn you though at first I expected a number of students to show up asking me questions, and seeking for help but not many students seek out help in the class. If this does happen the solution is to first set a time to meet with the professor to discuss the methods he or she would like you to explain the concepts and how cover the material. Another important note I would say is show up to lecture early and with the Professors permission which they typically say yes to, explain what LSS is all about why you are there and post your sessions for all the class to see. Now about the locations of you sessions should be explicitly clear. As in clear I mean literally crystal clear, for example if I wrote ground floor of S&E library that is not clear, so be f=very descriptive of your location. Once this is all done, all you will have to do is be patient for students to come to you.

Once you have completed all of these tasks and you have yet to have one student sign up do not worry, it took me a week and a half before I got my first sign up. Once you get your sign ups, do not stress about it and be calm during your sessions. For a class like TIM 50 students usually have trouble with the study cases that they are covering that week. I would have to say the first few cases are the most difficult for students, so you must guide them to understand and practice the concepts of the class. Following this many students have trouble with understanding how a Porter Model works so you must have a fair enough understanding of how they work, look, and why they are effective. However, ultimately Database assignments are what every student needs help in. Being a totally different tool they are not use too you must let them play with it and become comfortable with it. The main issue would have to be composing Queries for tables. These are typically the issues that trouble students with class, although there may be a few smaller issues those were the huge ones that cause the most concern. I wish you the best for this quarter and best of luck.

Best,

Noe Lemus
WRITING TUTOR, DROP-IN: EMMA TRAI

Dear future Writing Drop-In tutor:

Today during drop-in tutoring I met with a student who told me that her brother passed away last week. Due to her brother’s death, she said that she really needed help on this paper because she has been unable to concentrate and to write clearly.

Last quarter, I edited a student’s very personal and very long paper about her life. This paper, in honest and detailed prose, described the numerous tragedies that had befallen her: abuse, drugs, murder, suicide, grief. It was heart-wrenching to read.

The point of these two anecdotes is not to scare you, nor is it to tell you that tutoring is a depressing job, because it is not. My point is that the greatest difficulty you will face during drop-in tutoring is learning how to confront and deal with people. During a very busy day, you might be meeting with up to six, seven, or eight students. These students come to you for help on their writing and they come to you for help with a problem—bad grammar, a disorganized essay, a vague thesis. You, as the drop-in tutor, are in a position of authority and you are expected fix these students’ problems to the best of your ability and to teach them how to not make the same mistakes in the future. Thus, because the act of writing is such a personal process and because many of these students’ essays contain information about their private lives, you may be placed in a situation in which you are shown a glimpse into the intimate life of a complete stranger. This is an odd thing to experience and is very disorientating when you first encounter it.

Now, I am not trying to say that you are a guidance counselor or a social worker, far from it, you are not qualified nor does the university allow you to be any of these things. What I am trying to say is that people come to you for help, and they come to you with the expectation of discretion and professionalism. Thus this contract of confidentiality between you and the student may make you exposed to certain delicate information about the person sitting across from you. And for these reasons, whether through the student’s own personal revelation or by the simple act of you doing your job and reading someone’s essay, you might be privy to information about this student’s life that you don’t quite know what to do with.

There is no “right” answer and there is no “right” way to respond to “my brother passed away last week.” Just stay calm and be honest and gentle with the student. And don’t feel obligated to find the right combination of words that will make up the perfect condolences. Be human is all, and don’t freak out. Also, don’t forget that this person is your peer and is a student at UC Santa Cruz just like you: they might be in your classes; they might be a neighbor; they might be a friend of a friend. Talk to them like they are one of the above, it will make every tutoring session much more comfortable for the student and for you. This applies not only to the types of situations that I opened this letter with, but it applies to all tutoring sessions. Making the student feel comfortable during your tutoring session should be one of your top priorities, whether you are discussing death or discussing run-on-sentences.

Just remember, no matter what you face in drop-in, just stay calm and breathe. And I promise it is not as scary as I might have just made it seem...

Sincerely,
Dear incoming LSS Writing Assistant,

First of all, congratulations on your new position! I have been working with LSS for four years now and can definitely say that it is one of the most rewarding jobs on, or off of, campus. As you get ready to hold some of your first sessions-relax, review your notes from WRIT 169, refresh your basic grammar knowledge, and take a deep breath. :)

For each session, I find it helpful to have students bring 2 printed copies of their latest drafts so that you both have something to look at and take notes on throughout the session. It makes it much easier to refer to places in the text for one another to look at. I find that students having a separate copy of their draft to look at and take notes on makes the session run much more smoothly, rather than passing one draft back and forth for one another to look at.

In my introductory email to students I begin by first introducing myself and asking which class they have requested tutoring for (if you are assigned to "Writing Across the Disciplines"). I then remind them of the 24 hour minimum notice to reschedule or cancel a session, and that the sessions will be a weekly commitment. Finally, I conclude my email by asking them to bring 2 printed copies of their latest draft, any past drafts with instructor feedback, the associated prompt(s) for the assignment(s), and any associated notes or books for the assignment they wish to work on. Sending an email to introduce yourself, remind them of the time and locations of the sessions, and tell them what you expect them to bring to each session will give them a better idea of how prepared they should be and what they need to bring. It will also help you avoid having no-shows.

In my first sessions with students I ask them about their intended major(s) and about the class they have requested tutoring for. I ask them how the class is going, what they have done in class so far, and what it is that they specifically want to work on in our sessions. I ask them about their own strengths and weaknesses as a writer and what their goals are for the quarter. Asking students about their own goals for the sessions and for the class will help you to get a better sense of what they need help on and what they feel comfortable with already. It is good to write these goals down and then, towards the end of the quarter, check to see what has been accomplished and what still needs to be worked on. Ending each session by asking students what they can agree to accomplish by next week helps them to better understand what they need to work on and how much time they have to do it. It also makes students feel more committed to completing the assignment(s) because they have already agreed to do so and know what you will be expecting them to have accomplished before your next session together.

Approaching sessions with an open mind to see what each student’s individual needs are is absolutely necessary. It is critical to have a general idea or lesson plan of what you want/intend to do in each session (constructed around the professors' advice and associated syllabus). However, allowing students to tell you what they need/want to work on and catering your lesson plan to their individualized needs is much more effective than going into sessions with a set plan of what to do that cannot easily be changed.
I have learned that asking students how the class is going and what they want to focus on that day is a good way to start each session. Listening to student's needs helped me to become a more effective WA and helped me learn to better gage what kind of "learner" each student was (visual, kinesthetic, oral, etc.). Paying attention to how students learn to decipher what learning styles suit them best and then finding different strategies to approach those learning styles helped me cater sessions to student’s specific needs. Some of the most effective editing techniques that I have learned include: reading essays aloud, having students do reverse outlines, highlighting statements of summary in one color vs. statements of analysis in another, and putting the theme/summary of each paragraph in the margins to check the flow of arguments and organization of the essay.

I hope this advice helps to guide you in your own journey as a WA here at UCSC. Getting to know yourself as a student and as a WA are critical to becoming an effective learning assistant. It takes time and patience, but this job is highly rewarding and looks great on future applications. Teaching and learning from students catalyzes a great deal of personal growth, you may even learn more from your tutees that they do from you. That does not mean you will not be teaching them a lot and helping them tremendously-you will, but you will also learn a lot form them in return.

Stick with it- if you find yourself getting discouraged or overwhelmed talk to your fellow WA and/or to the LSS staff, they have great advice and can inspire you to approach difficult sessions in a new way. This job can sometimes feel lonely since you work independently of other tutors and LSS in many ways, but there is a large community of WA on campus. You are not alone in this job; don't be afraid to approach a fellow WA or LSS employee to talk about strategies to improve your sessions.

Good luck! And, congratulations-you have an awesome job! Don't be too nervous in those first sessions, it gets much, much easier.

Sincerely,

Past LSS Writing Assistant
Dear Future Writing Tutor,

Congratulations on your appointment with Learning Support Services! I have worked here for a year in many different positions: Anthropology writing tutoring, STARS WRITE mentoring, writing across the disciplines, writing 2 and 21, and drop-in tutoring. This letter applies to anyone in one of those positions.

Many skills that are beneficial in every day interactions are very important towards success as a writing tutor. One of these is to be able to find the correct balance between speaking colloquially and being professional and respectful. I have found that I am more successful with a student if I use normal speech that I might use with a friend or classmate. You can do this by avoiding grammatical jargon (or at least explaining these phrases in common vernacular), avoiding stiffness or harsh words and judgment, and talking plainly and kindly. This allows the student to open up more about weaknesses in their writing and to not be embarrassed by those weaknesses or mistakes we might address. But this does not mean that the tutor/tutee relationship is not an academic one. We need to balance our everyday speech with our professional behavior. I have found that if the sessions become too lax or friendly then the student might expect me to do more than my duties entail. This might mean expecting me to merely correct mistakes in a paper instead of helping the student learn why they are wrong and fixing those problems themselves. A too lax relationship might also mean punctuality goes out the window and time can be wasted. The balance between a friendly relationship and a professional one is not the same for every student. Some students require strict tutoring sessions and others will benefit more from a friendly relationship. As you gain experience as a tutor you will be able to determine which students require what kind of relationship.

A difficulty you will encounter as a writing tutor have been mentioned above. This is that often students do not understand what our role entails and expect us to basically write their paper for them. This happens in a few different ways. The first is when a student comes with a paper with numerous grammar and spelling mistakes and expects us to correct those problems without explanations or questions about their understanding. Our role is to make better writers not create better papers. To solve this problem we can correct the first mistake and explain the reason to the student. When we come to the second mistake we should ask them if they know why it is incorrect and how they can fix it. This will help the student succeed as a writer in further classes and assignments and not merely receive a passing grade on one paper. Another way that this problem materializes is when a student comes to a session in hope of planning or outlining a paper but brings nothing. If a student does not have the prompt, the notes, or the readings require for the paper there is not much we can do. This problem is only immediately alleviated if those resources (prompt/readings/notes) can be found online. The best way to deal with this problem is to inform the student that the next time they need help planning a paper they need come prepared. This will help the student not only to be prepared but to perhaps take better notes in class and while doing their readings. The last way this issue comes up is when a student has a problem filling up the required page or word count for a paper. The problem is when the student does not respond to probing questions and expects the ideas to come directly from us. Usually we have not done the reading for the paper and have not taken the course the paper is assigned for. To solve this problem we can open up the student's class notes or readings and initiate a conversation on
the subject matter. Often the student knows more about what they are trying to write about than they believe they do. A conversation will trigger ideas for both the tutee and the tutor but more importantly the tutee will be doing the work. These are problems that I would definitely have loved to know about before so I hope this is of some help. There are of course more difficulties that will arise during your tutoring experience but all of these will become less of a problem over time.

The tutoring experience is beneficial for the students utilizing the resource but can also have an invaluable impact for the tutor. By catching mistakes on other student's papers or seeing what types of organization is awkward you will find these problems appear less in your own papers. As the experience increases your own writing skills it will retroactively increase your effectiveness as a tutor. The job also helps to increase your ability to work with others in an effective way. This is useful in group projects, future research, and in other employment. The tutoring sessions are about the tutee but will affect you in many positive ways.

Overall the tutoring experience is a very fulfilling one. As you learn to better assist students they will be extremely appreciative and you will receive a self-confidence boost from realizing how much you can really help someone else. Again, congratulations on your appointment. You are going to love it.

Jeffery Dix
Dear Writing Tutor,

First and foremost welcome to a very rewarding job, and congratulations on being hired. I am a writing tutor for Writing 2 and Writing Across the Disciplines. One of the most important aspects of the job is being aware that every student is different. After working with a couple of different students I have realized that they each have a different learning style, a different approach to their writing, and of course different ideas. I would recommend going into each session ready to find out what kind of learner they are, their strengths, and what they need to improve in their writing. I approach each session differently according to the student, however, I do introduce all the strategies I know and make sure to find out what strategies work for them and when I do not know a strategy that can help them I do my best to find one. Getting students in the habit of editing their own papers is very important because the purpose is to guide them so they can learn the strategies and not need me as the tutor anymore or not use me as someone who is just there to edit the papers for them. The first session is very important and that is the session that I would suggest to set goals, expectations, and the purpose of the session. It is very helpful to have a comfortable environment for students and allow them to grow as writers, and not just to help them create better papers.

The setup of my sessions mostly depend on what the students need help with, however, because not all students are always prepared I always make sure we use the hour we have help them as much as possible. After knowing what they need help with I set up an agenda and decide how many minutes will be spent on what. When students only have a draft I have them start brainstorming, choose their argument, or what prompt they will be focusing on. I also have students start outlines, but that does not always work for everyone. The majority of the students I have worked with say that outlines are helpful because sometimes they do not know how to organize their ideas. However, for those that do not benefit from outlines I ask them to write a free write to help them start thinking about their arguments. Most Writing 2 professors allow the students to keep editing their drafts, so I ask them to bring in their drafts when they do not have anything to work on. I aim to help them develop as writers, so I try to help them as much as possible with their construction of arguments, strategies of editing their drafts, and different forms of making sure the structure and organizations portrays the message the students want the reader to know.

Writing 2 is a very unique class as most students are in their first year, and they are trying to get away from the writing style they learned in high school. The majority of my sessions involve the explanation of a five paragraph compared to the writing style in their class. I emphasize the need of their thesis because of the focus of Writing 2. One of the most difficult encounters that I have had is helping students who faced educational inequalities in high school. If students do not have a proper understanding of grammar rules or were just not exposed to a rigorous curriculum, it shows in their writing. As a tutor I always make sure that I do not judge the student of their academic understanding,
but I instead do my best to help them get to the level that they need to be at. I often need to use different strategies with students who are struggling with grammar by introducing different material, such as worksheet that I used in my Writing 2 class to help them understand English language rules or outside resources. I have also had difficulty with non-native English speakers. Although Spanish was my first language, I have grasped a very well understanding of English, and I constantly need to remind myself that some rules in English that make sense to me may not make sense to others. However, being a non-native English speaker has definitely helped me help students who are also non-native English speakers.

There are many ways to approach Writing tutoring sessions, and the more strategies tutors are aware of, the better the tutor can help the tutees. I hope this letter was helpful and gives an idea of the things I do as a tutor. I focused mostly on Writing 2 because that is the class I have the most experience in, however, the strategies I use in Writing 2, I also use in Writing Across the Disciplines. I have mostly worked with frosh so I also take some time from my first session to inform them about the different resources on campus so they can create a network and support system. Best of luck and remember to approach each session differently and that the purpose of writing tutoring is to create better writers.

Sincerely,

Diana Gamez

Writing 2 and Writing Across the Disciplines Tutor
Dear Writing 2/20/21 Tutor,

One thing that I wish somebody would have told me before I started working as a tutor, is to not be afraid to start from the beginning. In the time that I worked as a writing tutor, I have found that some of my best sessions were the ones where the student and I worked together to plan and organize their paper. I feel that I saw the most improvement in student’s papers when we gradually went through the writing process. In my experience, some students who have trouble with developing and organizing arguments have benefited from sessions where we worked together to plan and organize their paper. This process was probably my favorite part about working with students in writing 20 and 21 because I think it helped them see the benefits of how preparing for and thinking through a paper can help them in the end.

One purpose of this gradual process is to help students develop the skills necessary for future papers. Something that I tent to stress is that their paper is an argument and each paragraph should build off one another. One way I hope that these students develop important writing skills is by remembering to treat each weekly session as a step up from the prior meeting. One way that I do this is by asking students to bringing up topics and suggestions from the week before. As weeks go by, I refer back to notes and papers that we have taken before to show them that they are relevant to the paper now. To make sure this works effectively, I encourage them to take detailed notes by avoiding short bullet points or phrases. Usually, I have noticed that if I am working with a student and they only write down a small phrase, it will go unnoticed or they might not remember what they wrote. That is why I encourage them to take specific notes by saying, “I think you should do yourself the favor of writing down full sentences, it could make things easier for you in the long run.” One example of how I direct students toward writing a well-organized paper is by asking them, “What is the next logical step of your argument?” and “Where do you see your argument going next?” I think that these questions are helpful because I think they are questions that they do not ask themselves. Furthermore, I make an effort to bring these questions back until eventually I say to them that after our numerous sessions what do they think I would ask them next, most of the time they answer with a variation of the questions that I frequently ask. This shows me that something I said stuck to them. I hope that this helps you in your future sessions.

Best of Luck,

Sonia R. Mejia
Dear Writing Tutor,

Throughout my time tutoring for LSS over the last two years, I have enjoyed the benefits of working with students from diverse populations, and, most importantly, getting to read papers written from different perspectives and on a variety of interesting topics. Because drop-in writing tutors work with up to six students during the course of a shift, this is especially true for us. Drop-in tutoring is a unique facet of LSS in the sense that the amount of work tutors do during a given shift is unreliable. Some days during drop-in, I find myself doing homework for three hours and enjoying the peace and quiet of the ARC; other days (typically around finals week), the room is packed with students, many of whom I have to turn away. Through working in drop-in, I have found that the biggest piece of advice I can give you is to not get overwhelmed.

When I first started tutoring drop-in writing, I found myself stressed out on those hectic days when students would seem to flood endlessly into the ARC looking for help on their final research papers. I especially had trouble turning students away when the sign-in sheet was completely full. However, it is important to remember that, as a tutor, you are doing the best you can to help the students and should not feel guilty about turning them away (after all, they could have made an appointment). During those days (especially when I am working a six hour shift during finals week) when I know that I still have another five students to work with and feel like I’m going to pass out from exhaustion, I remind myself to focus on one student at a time, and not dwell on all of the work that is to come. That way, I am able to devote more of my mind to the student I’m working with, while at the same time decrease my stress. I have found that becoming fully immersed in students’ papers has been the most reliable way of making time feel like it is going by faster (especially on those packed days).

It is fundamental that we as drop-in tutors remember that we are resources for students to become better writers. Therefore, it is also important to not get overwhelmed at the prospect of not having enough time to help a student with their entire paper, since our job is to help students develop the skills they need in order to revise the rest of their papers on their own. By doing this, we not only help them to improve the papers that they bring us (and subsequently improve their grades), but also help them to write better papers in the future, which will ultimately aid them in their success in college. I have found that it is fundamental to keep these ideas in mind when I tutor drop-in, as it is easy to forget them in the frenzy of students and papers.

Sincerely,

Jamie O’Quinn

Writing tutor: Drop-in, Writing 21, Writing 2, Writing Across the Disciplines
Dear fellow Writing Tutor,

Congratulations on obtaining your new position as a tutor with Learning Support Services! Throughout your time as a tutor, you will learn a lot about your tutees, as well as yourself. Keep in mind that as you begin transitioning into your new position, you will be challenged in many different ways. Therefore, I would like to offer you some advice that I hope will make your transition go smoother.

1. You will have days when you are either incredibly stressed, tired, or hungry and, on days like these, you will find that you have a hard time listening to your tutee’s comments or questions. When this happens, practice active listening. Do whatever you can to be an active listener: take notes, chew gum, repeat your tutee’s sentences back to yourself in your head. Just as it is important for a tutee to actively participate in a tutoring session, it’s equally important for you as a tutor to actively participate as well.

2. Remember: You are not typically much older than your tutees. Remind yourself that you, like your tutee, are a student. Although I think that it is important to uphold a pedagogical structure in your tutoring sessions, I also believe that it’s equally important to relate to your tutee. Help them understand that you are also learning as a student and your position as their tutor does not make you superior. Be empathetic to their needs and be aware of their insecurities as writers.

3. Always, always, always, be patient. Expect that you will need to clarify or reiterate a majority of what you say. Understand that, for most students, writing is hard and intimidating. So take the time to thoughtfully ask questions and answer your tutee’s questions to make sure that he or she understands. Your patience can greatly affect the effectiveness of your tutoring sessions.

I hope that these tips will help you as you begin your journey into the teaching realm here at UCSC. Again, congratulations on obtaining your new position as a tutor!

Good Luck!

Samantha Santamaria
Dear Future Writing Tutor,

From my experience as a writing tutor, it has had many ups and downs. It is definitely a highly enjoyable job when you see the progress of your tutees and watch as their writing improves throughout the weeks. However, there are moments when you get discouraged because your students do not show up or they lack confidence in their writing, which hinders them from doing well academically. Here are some of my personal experiences and tips on how I think would be helpful in becoming a successful writing 2 and/or a writing across disciplines tutor here at the Learning Support Services.

First, we must acknowledge that in order to obtain and fully commit yourself to this position, you should have some personal qualities and academic strengths prior to being hired as a tutor. Personally, I felt that my experiences working in an academic setting prior to applying for this position is what made me feel more comfortable being a one on one tutor. I previously worked at Kumon, a tutoring company with other kids, which made me understand how to be supportive of students who struggle in an academic setting. By being supportive and understanding, you build strong relationships with your fellow tutees and create a more comfortable environment for them to ask you for help when needed. Also, an academic strength I had prior to this position was the fact that I was constantly writing papers for my major (Psychology) or any other upper division I was taking, which made me understand the struggles students face when asked to write in a demanding academic tone, but not fully understanding how to do it. However, with my desire to assist others in need and my personal enjoyment of attending school, I felt that I was a well-qualified student to become a tutor for others.

When applying for this position, I explained in my application a few qualities about myself that made me a qualified tutor. However, after obtaining the position, I realized that those qualities were not enough to be the best effective learning coach I could be. While I personally enjoy attending school and had my own strategies to succeed in college, I was unaware of how to motivate and teach other students to feel the same way as I did. Personally, the most difficult task to deal with when trying to be an effective learning coach is finding the best way to motivate your students and how to reassure them that their efforts are not going to waste. In order to prevent my students from being discouraged, I would try my best not to be too critical and often follow up a suggestion with a supportive comment. For example, I may tell a student, “Your thesis is too broad. However, you did a great job in the introduction leading to it. How do you think you can be more specific with your claim?” Often the way you talk to your tutee makes the biggest difference in helping them improve their writing. Following up some criticism with supportive commentary or questions makes the student feel that they are capable of improving their writing so they don’t feel hopeless and think that they are terrible writers. Ultimately, you want your tutee to feel comfortable and see that you are there to help guide them through improving their writing, and not there to fix all their mistakes or point out their flaws. To engage
students, I try to build a personal relationship from the start, by asking general questions of “how was your day?” or “how is your class going?” in order to start a less serious tone during tutoring sessions so that the tutees feel that I am there to help them and I’m not there to judge them or be too critical their writing.

From the education 96 course, I gained more knowledge of different learning and teaching techniques that could be applied in a tutoring setting. However, the most important learning experience from the course is hearing the different personal encounters each tutor or mentor has with their students. Everyone has a different approach and they all learned what they feel like works best for them. Meeting the community of students that are always tutoring alongside you helps reassure you that if you ever have a problem or struggle with helping a tutee, there’s most likely another tutor or peer advisor that has experienced the same situation that can always help you out. I wish you the best of luck and hope you enjoy your time as a tutor as much as I have!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wu
Dear new LSS writing tutor,

For the past year I have been working as an LSS Writing Tutor for both Writing 2 and Writing 21. A new position can at first seem very terrifying, and one wishes that someone with experience will lend them a helping hand and offer some advice. This letter attempts to do this by outlining several tips that I wish I knew before I started this position. I also hope that this letter at least helps to make you feel less nervous about starting a new position. Learning how to become an effective writing tutor required me to use a trial and error method in my sessions, and this required analysis of what was and was not actually helping students improve their writing. I never knew that being a tutor required so much reflection, but part of learning how to be an effective tutor is figuring out what works best for each student in each session.

As a new tutor I did not realize my preconceived notions or my expectations of the sessions until I actually started tutoring. I overanalyzed the job and put unnecessary pressure on myself as a tutor, which created pre-job anxiety that could only be cured with experience. All of my expectations and assumptions about tutoring were somewhat false. For example, I thought that tutoring writing would be similar to or somewhat like coaching, but it is quite different when trying to tutor students on different aspects of writing. I also thought that writing tutors had to pretend to be “all knowing” in front of their tutees or else they would appear incompetent. I had so many preconceived notions about what it means to be a tutor and about how tutoring sessions are supposed to go, but my actual sessions were nothing like how I pictured them to be. These preconceived notions of tutoring were what I based my tutoring approach on, but once I started tutoring I quickly dismissed everything I previously thought tutoring would like. Preconceived notions do not work to the advantage of a tutor, at least in my experience.

A practical tutor knows how to use the time given effectively. One of the best things about being an LSS Writing Tutor is that your sessions with students are an hour long, and this allows you to really get to know the student’s writing. On average, I usually go the full hour with students. One of my biggest concerns as a tutor was making sure that I was able to accomplish something during my sessions. Stress to students the importance of being on time, because fifteen minutes late is fifteen minutes lost. Trying to do too much in a session can have detrimental effects. Tutoring sessions have to be as succinct as possible, and trying to cover too many things at once is not the most effective means of tutoring students. My tutoring sessions were moving at a pace that I was uncomfortable with, but in order to correct and address this problem I had to reflect on the effectiveness of my sessions.

As a new writing tutor, I actually had to learn how to be comfortable with not knowing. A good tutor knows when to say, “I don’t know, let me check and get back to you.” Sometimes as a tutor one feels pressured into believing that tutors have all the answers, but they do not. There have been several instances when a tutee will ask me a question that I have no idea how to answer. Not knowing the answer does not make one less of a tutor. I would rather tell the student honestly that I do not know the answer to their question, than give them a wrong answer that I scrambled to make up on the spot. Tutors are not all knowing, and they should not pretend that they are. I wanted to present myself as someone that my students could learn from, and I thought that meant that I had to have all the answers to their questions. I soon learned that this was an impossible goal to have as a tutor, because I never
know what kind of questions my tutees will ask me. A practical tutor knows when to let a student know that they do not know the answer to the question being posed, and feels comfortable not knowing.

Tutors should learn how to think quickly on their feet. Being a tutor means being able to quickly think on one’s feet; it means being able to give quick answers to surprising questions. There have been a couple of instances when a tutee will surprise me with a question that requires thought, but the tutee expects an instant answer. I would just advise new tutors to expect the unexpected. Tutoring requires one to either anticipate tutee questions or be prepared to answer unexpected or surprising questions.

The one thing that all tutors eventually deal with is no shows. For a variety of reasons students fail to appear to sessions and it can become difficult to work with a student who is consistently late or who consistently does not show up. This is the main reason why it is important for a tutor to not take no shows personal. If personal feelings of resentment come out, it may be difficult to help a no show, when they finally do show up to a tutoring session. The great thing about LSS is that we get paid for no shows. No shows are the result of negligence or forgetfulness and as a result should not be taken personal or thought of as a reflection of one’s tutoring ability.

The best advice I can give new tutors is to learn from experience. It really helps to take note of what works and what does not. It also takes time to adjust to tutoring, but by the third week of tutoring, I really began to enjoy the job. I think it varies based on one’s commitment to the job. If you find that you do not enjoy the work, at least you can enjoy the paycheck. One of the best parts of the job is the paycheck. Tutoring is one of the highest paying hourly jobs on campus for a reason. Tutors who are struggling with motivation for wanting to continue the job, I think money can motivate like nothing else. Tutoring can be fun, but tutors have to put in sufficient effort to make the job worth something.

Sincerely,

Ashley Young

Former LSS Writing Tutor
Dear New LSS Tutor,

I’ve tutored kids since 2005, high school students since 2008, and college students since 2011. Here at UCSC, I work as an LSS writing assistant and subject tutor. I mostly tutor freshmen who haven’t passed the ELWR (Entry Level Writing Requirement) yet in their writing 20, 21, and 23 classes. I also tutor a theatre class, THEA 10: Intro to Design.

To be able to tutor at UCSC I took two classes - writing 159 and writing 169 – but I think most of the important skills I use are things I learned while teaching. The tutoring classes here at UCSC can teach a lot, but I think the most important thing to remember is that every student is unique. Sometimes the strategies you’ve been taught are not the ones that will work for your students. Years ago, I was tutoring a young elementary school girl with severe ADHD. She had trouble learning in her math classes because she couldn’t sit still or pay attention. None of the traditional teaching strategies I knew were working. I ended up teaching her times tables while she was jumping on a trampoline. We timed her jumping rhythm to the rhythm of the numbers. This may sound crazy but it worked, and it’s a perfect example of how sometimes you need to think outside the box to be able to teach what’s inside the box of curriculum.

Being a tutor takes patience. You have to find the strategies that work for your students. When you relax and can relate to your students it’s easier to get them to open up. It’s important to be professional but you don’t need to be formal. It’s ok to tell your students “I don’t know” if they ask you something you don’t know the answer to. You can offer to look it up for them and get back to them next session or you can teach them how to look it up themselves.

Different students internalize information differently. Some students may need to talk about their ideas with you while others may prefer to write them down. A good way to get students to deal with writers block is to have the free write for 5 minutes. This strategy is especially helpful for tutoring writing but can be applied to other subjects as well. The free write clears the student’s mind and helps them focus on the material they are supposed to be working with.

When you are tutoring students who are writing papers, you can have them read their paper aloud to you and they will be able to catch some of their own mistakes without you having to say anything. For helping grammar, you can write out example problems/sentences on a white board and have the students go up and correct the mistakes. Try to get your students engaged in sessions and they will learn better. Encourage them to bring in their questions to you. In the end, you want to teach them to be able to teach themselves. If you just edit their paper for them, they don’t learn how to fix their own mistakes. But, if you teach them how to edit, they can do it themselves next time.

Although many of the techniques are writing specific, the concepts apply to all tutoring subjects. Good luck in your sessions!

Sincerely,

Genyana August
Dear New Writing Tutor,

My name is Raashi Bhatnagar; currently I am a Junior here at UC Santa Cruz. For this school year I worked as a writing tutor, first for my Core professor and then for LSS. Let me say this: working with students and helping them to do well in their writing has been one of the most satisfying experiences I have had in college.

That being said, I had my fair share of challenges that I had to face before I felt like I was actually making an impact on my student’s life. I hope that through this tutoring position, you too, get to feel the joy that comes from knowing that you helped a struggling student pass his or her writing class.

Understanding the relationship dynamics between a tutor and a tutee is much easier said than done. Not to mention the fact that each student is unique and will require a different approach. Bearing that in mind, I would strongly advise you to take a few minutes during your first session to get to know your student on a more personal level. I know that this isn’t required and sometimes there might not be any time to do this, however, I have noticed that it makes a big difference. For me personally, I noticed that learning about my students’ life outside of their writing class or the writing methods they used helped me to better understand the challenges they were facing in their writing. Taking this information and looking at their writing, I was able to help them identify their weaknesses so that the students could work on improving them. If you get the time, do make sure you take five to ten minutes just talking to your new tutee, finding out a little bit more about who they are.

Another thing that I made sure to do at every meeting was, after I read the essay they were working on that week, I would ask my tutee to pick a paragraph from their essay and read it out loud. What this helped them, and myself, to do was to identify any grammatical errors or challenges they might have. Some of my students were excellent writers, but would slip up and make some simple grammatical errors that no amount of proof reading had managed to catch. I also noticed that when my students would read out loud, they were able to catch more syntactical and transitional errors that hindered the overall flow and context of the essay. If you have a student that is really struggling with grammar, or a student that has a tendency to make simple mistakes, I would emphasize the use of this technique.

There are several methods that as a writing tutor we can employ, the two that I mentioned above are the ones that have worked wonders with me. I would highly recommend that you try them out for yourself and see what works and what doesn’t. After all each tutor and tutee relationship is different.

Best of luck,

Raashi
Friend,

What advice could I possibly give you that has not yet been covered by others? Sure enough, you have read the obvious and expected by now: tutoring strategies, student behavior, time management, etc. I, however, will share with you something less typical and obvious, something more personal. I will ask you to examine your outlook on tutoring and how you carry yourself during your time with your tutees. I am a firm believer that if you are passionate about something, you are more likely to enjoy what that is you are doing. With that mentality, I ask you to greatly consider why it is you tutor – surely it is not merely a job: the hourly pay-rate may be good, but the hours can greatly fluctuate. Rather, I am fairly certain you tutor because you genuinely want to help others.

I am a very shy individual, can be very inarticulate, and occasionally stutter; in elementary school I took speech classes to address my speech impediment. I remember being easily flustered for struggling so much to vocally express myself. However, writing always came very easily to me; writing served as the medium to express myself. Since then, with the help of others, I believe my speech has improved and I no longer see it as a major roadblock for me. It is in this experience that my passion for teaching emerged: as others used their talents to help me, I also hoped to use my writing skills to help others.

Being a writing tutor is more than just a job: it allows me to exercise my desire for teaching and to assist others, like I was once helped. Rather than viewing your tutees as mere customers, I hope you become more vested in their well-being. Seeking for help can be a very humbling experience for some students, especially for writing, which may be considered very elementary by some. Be as understanding as possible by placing yourself in their situations and imagining an instance in which you needed assistance. I hope you develop that more intimate relationship with your tutees so heavily stressed in your training. Create this intimate relationship by conversing with your tutees as you would with anyone of your own friends: ask them how their week has been; ask what plans they may have for the weekend; if they approach you with their headphones on, ask what music they are into. In time, this approach will bear fruits: you will find communication to improve between both of you, and, who knows, you may make a few friends along the way.

Happy tutoring,

Jose L. Cazares

Writing 2 Tutor
To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to begin this letter by sharing some of the personal qualities and academic strengths that have helped me be a successful Drop in Writing Tutor. I have worked for the Learning Support Services for six quarters now and in the past tutored Oakes Core Writing Courses, Writing 2, Writing 21, and Writing 23. Throughout the years, I have learned so much about myself and have been able to improve my ability to help others.

Now, being a writing tutor comes with its difficulties, especially when helping international students. Some of my most difficult and most rewarding sessions have been with international students. You see, international students are some of the most hardworking students at this university, but unfortunately most of them have not learned the basic writing skills necessary to be successful in college level writing courses. One of my most rewarding experiences with an international student involved a student who was originally from China. This student was really smart and her analysis was rich, but she was having trouble expressing herself in English. Her sentences were choppy, incomplete, and hard to understand, but when she spoke to me and explained what she was trying to say I could see how much potential her paper really had. Throughout our sessions, I practiced my patients, making sure to talk softly and clearly. I tried to match her voice since she was shy and tended to mumble under her breath. With time, my patients and constant reassuring allowed the student to feel more comfortable around me and this in turn made our writing sessions more effective. The student learned that she could make mistakes while speaking English without me making her feel any less intelligent. After countless hours of working together, the student felt confident about what she had written for the first time. This experience resonates with me, because the student later shared that she had received a B, letter grade, for her essay. This was incredible to me, because when I first read her paper I could not understand every sentence we read in her paper. Nevertheless, by the end of our sessions together her paper was finally a reflection of what she actually knew and her true capacity to analyze readings. I’m not going to lie; it was hard at first. I didn’t know where to start and how to make sure that by the end of our sessions, the student would successfully pass the course. That was the scariest thing for me. I wanted to do anything I could do to help the student pass, especially because international students are expelled from the university if they can’t pass the entry level writing courses. Throughout this experience, I learned that it is important for tutors to self-teach themselves throughout the quarter. Although it is not required of us to practice grammar once we have completed the training course, grammar review will be incredibly useful throughout all your sessions. It’s important to understand exactly what specifically the student must practice when helping international students. If you tell them to review denominators, then you are helping them self-teach themselves as well. In addition, patience is key. Tutors must remember the power hierarchy that exists between their students and themselves. Tutors must take the time to assess their student’s emotions and determine how they can make that student feel more comfortable and confident.

One of the most difficult tutoring experiences that I have had has been with students who are not open to the feedback you are giving them. I have had a couple students come in for drop in writing who question every comment I make about their paper. Now, tutors must understand were these students are coming from. These students want to be successful and most want to perfect their paper. Therefore, these students have good intentions, but tend to overthink their writing and close themselves off to feedback tutors might give them. As writing tutors, we must be aware that at the end of the day, the student will revise and change what the wish to. As tutors, our feedback is an opinion and just like any opinion, there will always be someone who doesn’t agree with it. Tutors themselves may review an essay and conflict on what should be prioritized or revised. As tutors, we will learn that an essay can always be improved and that perfection shouldn’t be the goal of writing. The goal in both
our students and our personal writing should be to challenge ourselves to try new writing techniques, to improve our writing process. As an experienced writing tutor, I can confirm that working with other students writing has helped me in my personal academic writing. Students have challenged me to think about prompts that are outside of my major, and I have been exposed to almost every expected format at this university (MLA, APA, Chicago Style). I have learned a lot and am thankful for the opportunity to help my peers and build lasting friendships with the other tutors. I wish you luck and know that this an experience you won’t regret.

Sincerely,

Nasheli Hau-Gutierrez
Dear Future Writing Tutors:

There are a few key things one must know in order to be successful at educating your peers. Tutoring isn’t an easy job. You may think that sitting down for a few hours and reading some papers isn’t exhausting, but your brain eventually wants to take a break and relax. Your back starts to hurt as you lean over a paper, trying to find the meanings within. Your eyes become dry from the back and forth motion they make as you scan line after line. And your throat becomes hoarse as you read paragraphs aloud in order to hear any potential awkwardness, sentence breaks, repetition and so on. Tutoring is exhausting. Yet, like anything else that takes hard work and dedication, the pay-off is irreplaceable. Helping students write well, whether it’s an essay, a literature review, or even a personal statement, some guiding words from a fellow tutor, like me, may help you get off to a great start (although it won’t cure the back aches, unless you bring a pillow to your sessions).

Being able to ask questions and listen is a great way to get things going with a student. If you are able to lead each session as a discussion, rather than a lecture, the session will be much more productive. Always ask for clarity rather than assuming what they mean. When a student talks about their ideas and what they’re writing about, it usually becomes clearer as they talk more.

Knowing your grammar is always a handy tool, especially when helping ESL students; however, it’s even better to know how to use resources in order to look up grammar rules. This is because, as native English speakers, we may not always know why we say or write things in that way. Looking grammatical rules up together creates more understanding for the student, rather than blindly correcting the mistake. Plus, you get to learn it yourself for the future.

Finally, being personable and understanding goes a long way in a session. No matter which side of the table you sit on, you and your tutee are students; you need to be professional, but also remember that they are your peer, therefore it’s okay to open up, share experiences, and relate your lives to the work before you. When you find relatable qualities between yourself and your tutee, not only do the sessions become much more comfortable, but also they expand for more opportunities to explore the students’ ideas. Solidarity between a student and tutor means that they won’t be afraid to speak their mind or express ideas that may seem “outside of the box”.

During my time as a tutor, my understanding of writing has expanded greatly. Not just the mechanical and technical aspects, but even the different kinds of writing that students at UCSC come into contact with. There are so many voices, audiences and approaches that we must learn to adapt. Being able to identify what kind of writing is appropriate (whether the paper is investigative, argumentative, or maybe it’s a literature review, etc.) helps to clarify and organize the rest of the writing process.

As an educator, you always come face to face with difficulties – one that hit me hard was being wrong sometimes. However, we are human and we make mistakes. Maybe you helped a student draft or outline an essay with a structure that you thought was organized, yet the professor completely disagreed and tells the student to start over. Because writing is so subjective, you may face situations in which differing opinions clash. Maybe being wrong isn’t necessarily possible when it comes to writing
tutoring, but being at odds with a professor’s idea of “good” is. It happens. We must accept this, help the student correct their structure (or whatever the situation was), and move on.

One experience I will never forget started in Drop-In Writing Tutoring. I helped a student revise her personal statement for Graduate Schools. This task seemed completely daunting, especially since I was a second year at the time. I was scared that I was going to give her ill advice and that she wouldn’t get into the schools she wanted. The session was only thirty minutes, so she ended up scheduling an hour outside of drop-in with me to continue. Her personal statement was good, but I could see some areas that needed improvement. We talked about her life and her experiences (those that were necessary for the personal statement) and after a session or two, she submitted her statements. The rest of the school year went by, and I received an email from this student during Spring Quarter. She told me that she got into all the grad schools that she applied to! The student told me that it was my tutoring that helped her and the conversations that we had truly helped her see exactly what she wanted to portray herself as on paper. Each time I meet with a tutee, I start with the importance of confidence, and how this simple element of believing in yourself is absolutely necessary for writing well. I realized that confidence is also necessary for teaching well.

I hope my advice and my experiences have helped you understand how important our role is, here on campus. We are not only educators to students, we are friends to these students that work harder than most. They seek out help when others decide to give up. They go the extra mile in order to outline, draft and revise. Writing tutoring is not mandatory, yet they still want to improve. These students deserve our full attention and effort. How can one expect to give anything less than their best?

Good Luck,

Lexie Tapke