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Rigid

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Abstract: As tutors, we are asked to do the same task on a daily basis. Because of this monotony, we can fall into a rigid routine that may have us saying and doing the same things. This article examines the leading causes of these rigid sessions and some helpful solutions. More precisely, it focuses on the critical aspects of conversation and how this simple idea can promote better tutoring sessions. A basic outline of a productive conversation is provided as a reference.

As a new tutor, I have tried to absorb as much information as I could about what makes a meeting with a student successful. Through my own tutoring and observations of others, a pattern began to emerge. It came down to this, a session without constraints is more productive than a rigid one. Rigidity occurs when tutors do not allow the conversation to move in a needed direction because they have a comfortable format established. Much like an ordinary academic paper, tutoring sessions have an introduction, a body to the session, and the same closing remarks. Within this set format is little room for growth, creativity, or learning. These stiff periods are detrimental to good conversation and a hindrance to a fluid writing process.

In the introduction of a paper it is a writer's job to draw the readers in with a hook. Perhaps it is a story, quote, or fact, anything that leaves the reader craving more. First impressions are the hook of tutoring. According to *Psychology Today*, a favorite medical magazine, it takes less than seven seconds to make first impressions ("First Impressions"). It is in these opening few moments the stage is set for the rest of the session. However, if we are rigid in our initial approach, it can create a mutualistic feeling through the entire meeting. A common opener I am guilty of using countless times is, "Have you been to the writing center before?" This opening question can come across dry and overused if not careful. Instead, we should try to greet the student casually and naturally. Warm introductions will help prevent a rigid mentality and set a productive tone for the rest of the session. However, once the hook has been established, we must maintain this fluidity throughout the bulk of the meeting.

The body of a paper is where a writer must explain and develop points made in the introduction. The same can be said of a tutoring session. After we have made our introduction the body of our session is where we must explain and develop ideas along with the student. It is

in this core section where rigidity becomes most apparent. Nevertheless, overcoming this problematic area is as simple as exerting the energy to maintain a good conversation.

Like a healthy heart pumping blood, beneficial conversation keeps the session alive. Imagine for one moment talking with a friend. The things you say, for the most part, are usually not planned and build on each other. The same should be said of any tutoring session. From the moment we begin, we should be working together with the student to craft a paper. Admittedly, holding a conversation is not always a relaxed task. It's quite the opposite. Dialoguing with someone takes time and energy. This dynamism must be utilized two ways within a conversation; through talking and listening.

In today's society maintaining colloquy can be problematic. Some students we meet won't know how to sustain themselves conversationally. Thus, it will fall on our shoulders to be the vernacular commander. Meaning we will need to lead the conversation at times, pushing it in the direction it needs to progress. This movement can be hindered if we succumb to the closed-box mentality when the topics discussed in a session are not allowed to move outside the limitations of writing. These students we meet with are people who have lives outside of the confines of the writing center. Show interest, ask questions, be personable, and in some circumstance make a new friend. Once we have shown our attention, we must actively listen to what the student is saying.

As stated in the Oxford Online dictionary, "Active: (of a person) engaging or ready to engage in physically energetic pursuits" ("Active"). Active listening requires more than merely listening; it is a "physical, energetic pursuit." The disparity between active and passive listening can be demonstrated by a simple test. While someone is talking, are you calculating what to do or say next? Alternatively, are you watching body language, looking for cues, trying to

determine what is going to be said next, and attempting to understand the ideas someone is delivering? Statistically, 20 to 30 percent of what we say in a conversation is misinterpreted (Lake, 1). The connection between these numbers and understanding originates from passive listening. We can improve this statistic if we take the time to understand and practice active listening. Two methods we can use to become active listeners lies in non-verbal and verbal cues.

Some simple, non-verbal cues we can use to display our attentiveness include greetings, eye contact, posture, and mirroring. First; by greeting and maintaining eye contact, we become accessible and open in our body language. Vulnerable posturing is a sign of sincerity and candidness. Examples of this could be facing the student while keeping arms and legs uncrossed. Mirroring is the act of imitating someone's movements and position. When done correctly, mirroring can help to build rapport and connections between you and the student. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to exclusively exhibit non-verbal cues but must include verbal signals to complete the conversational equation. These may involve remembering, questioning, and clarification.

In the book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, a key takeaway is remembering people's names. "The average person is more interested in their own name than in all the other names in the world put together" (Carnegie 73). This simple notion holds much power. Using names in conversation shows you are actively listening and remembering what they say. Another verbal cue equally important as remembering is having a questioning attitude. This type of approach involves you asking questions, open or closed, depending on what the situation requires. Open questions are those that need more than a yes or no answer. Contrarily, a closed-ended question would be one that can be answered directly. Dissimilar to popular belief a closed-ended question is not always inherently wrong. There will be some situations when these types

of questions can be quite advantageous. Different circumstances require various forms of open and closed questions. And finally, the last verbal cue that shows active listening is clarification. This idea is straightforward, if something is unclear, ask.

These tips and ideas help us as tutors to have active, beneficial conversations. One where we both come away from a session feeling like we have learned something. Advantageous conversations promote growth, clarity, understanding, respect, and are the foundation of a solid session. However, most importantly it creates a defense from a rigid mindset. The only thing left to do is finish with a bang.

Conclusions should demonstrate the importance of ideas, synthesize information, and end on a positive note. Make sure to review with the student and check for understanding. It is especially important to keep track of what is talked about in the session. I have found the best way to do this is by typing or writing down keywords of ideas discussed. These key ideas will help us to pull the whole session together and leave a positive impact.

With these thoughts and ideas as a blueprint, we can now create a more productive environment for learning. Eliminating the rigidity from our introductions, conversations, and conclusions pushes us to become improved tutors.

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