

# HOW TO TUTOR

RELUCTANT WRITERS



by Abigail Wisser

# SO, WHAT MAKES YOU THE MOST NERVOUS ABOUT TUTORING?

hello, disembodied voice!



in general, I would say that I'm afraid of tutoring a reluctant writer — someone who, for different reasons, struggles with writing or just straight up refuses to do it.

## WAIT, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF. WE TALKED ABOUT THIS.

I was getting to it!



gosh

well, I'm Abi, and I'm a new tutor. I had a lot of anxieties when I began tutoring, and most of them had to do with the paradox of those people who come to get help, and then resist or refuse the help.



## NOW TELL THEM ABOUT WHAT WE'RE GONNA DO!

listen, Mick



if you're just gonna yell stuff, at least come do it next to me.



HEY!



so this is Mickey, my co-narrator.

he's named after writing center apostle Muriel "Mickey" Harris.

speaking of writing center legends...



Writing center prophet Stephen North wrote a phrase that we want to use to orient our goal —

which is, ultimately, learning how to effectively tutor different kinds of reluctant writers!



RIGHT.

SO, North says that...





OUR JOB IS TO  
MAKE BETTER WRITERS,  
NOT BETTER WRITING.

— STEPHEN NORTH

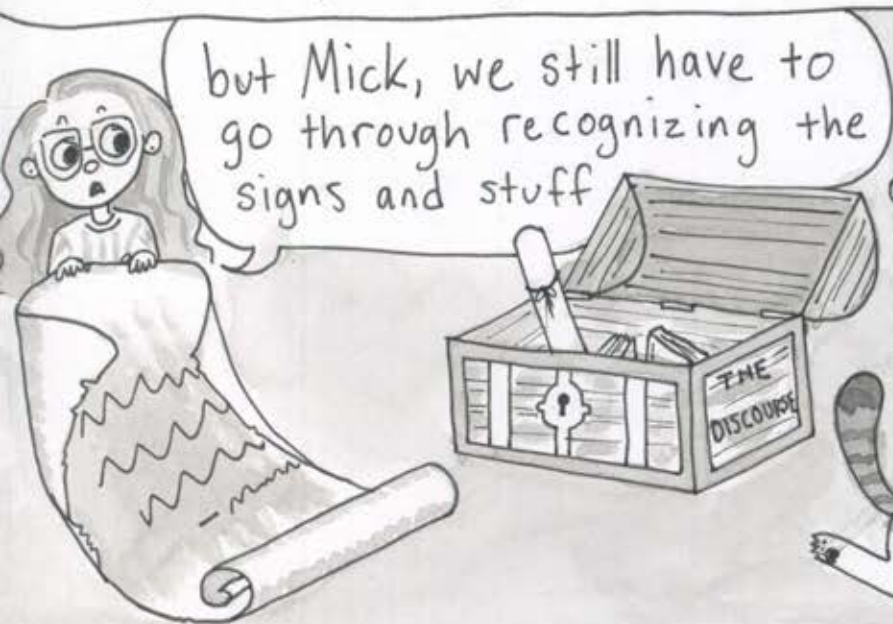


tutors, we live and  
**DIE** by that statement.

by making better writers,  
we make better writing!

the writing center isn't  
a fix-it shop. our goal is  
to guide and teach writers  
to make their own  
writing choices!

ALRIGHT. enough pre-game chat.  
let's go meet reluctant writers!



we'll walk and talk.





Okay, so if a writer :




- is unusually quiet
- seems nervous or distracted
- doesn't answer questions sufficiently, or at all
- hesitates or refuses to read her paper out loud
- refuses to give you a copy of the paper
- cannot verbally explain what he wants to work on in the paper



... then you may have a reluctant writer in your tutoring session. We'll look for those signs when we meet the writers.





next, we have some basic steps to take after recognizing your writer is reluctant.

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- 
- 
1. Take a deep breath. Remember your goal is to objectively help the writer.
  2. Remember, the writer is the expert. Get her to own her own paper.
  3. The reluctance of a particular writer could be linked to psychological stuff, like a fear of failure, or maybe the writer had a really bad day—either way, just accomplish as much as can be done on the assignment as possible while still being understanding. You're a peer tutor, not a counselor.



4. If a session goes badly, don't blame yourself. If you could have tutored better, learn, and move on. The wheel in the sky keeps on turning.





... are you the tutor?

uh, yeah! sorry I'm late! I'm Abi.

I'm Joyous!

ohhh! are you Joyous to be here?



haha, sure

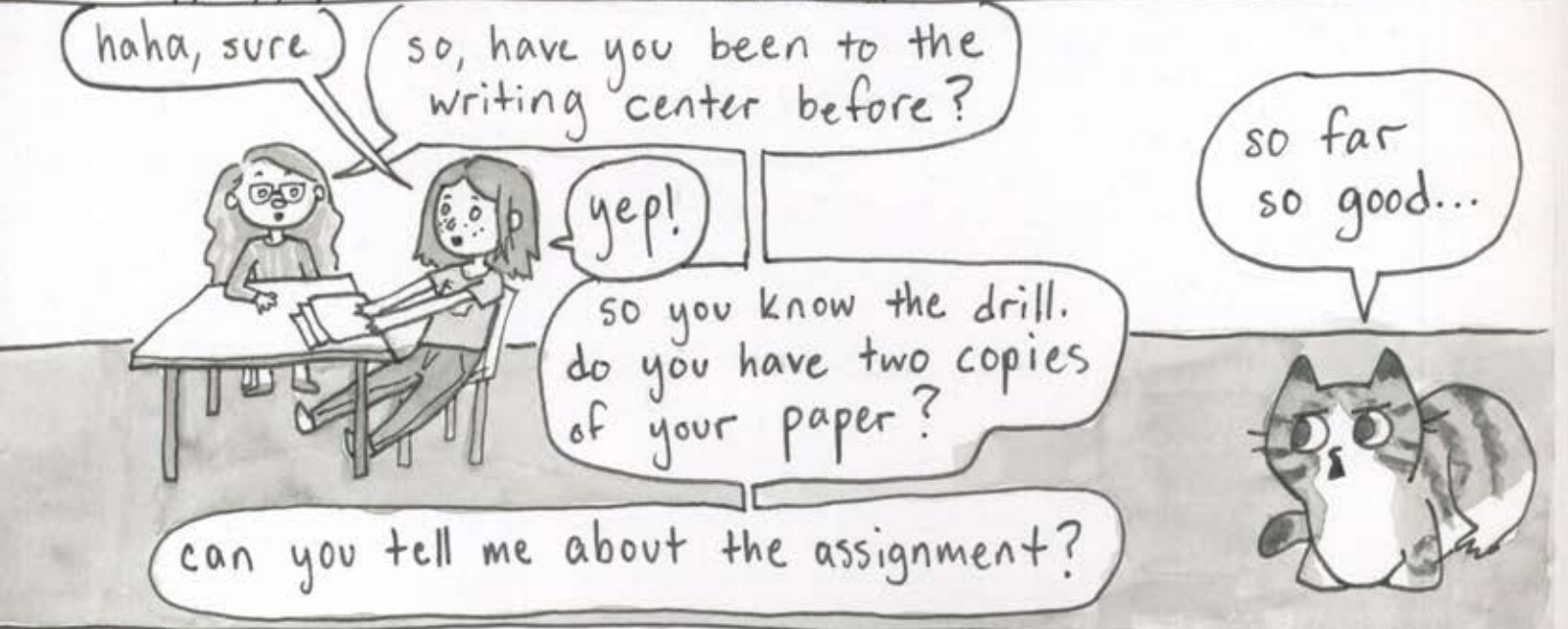
so, have you been to the writing center before?

yep!

so you know the drill. do you have two copies of your paper?

so far so good...

can you tell me about the assignment?





(my topic is fracking.)

okay, for or against?

against, I guess.

okay, what are your goals for this session?

ummm... if my points make sense?

alrighty, would you mind reading your paper out loud?

sure.



# 15 MINUTES LATER...

so your paper is well-organized, which is GREAT, and your points are well laid-out in this draft. but, as a reader, I think I could use more information. for example, in your first point, you talk about how and why fracking is dangerous to workers



uh huh

what information could you use to elaborate on why fracking is dangerous to the workers involved in fracking?



I guess I could include specific stories of workers who've been injured, or maybe include stats of how many people get hurt in a year?

UGHHH. I don't want to do this paper anymore, I don't care about FRACKING.

that's great!



HOUSTON, WE HAVE A BORED WRITER



I just picked fracking because the professor listed it as a potential topic and it seemed easy.

WHALES!

that's okay!

what other things do you care about?

UMMM....

whales



they're dying and they need me!

there you go! you conveniently and quickly brainstormed a topic better suited to you! come back to the writing center when you have a draft about why we should save the whales!

this was a pretty easy session. the writer's reluctance was because of the boring topic, and once that was identified, Abi and the writer made progress on the paper by changing the topic.

thanks!



heads up, it probably won't always be that easy, kids.

with bored writers, ask lots of questions, use brainstorming techniques like listing or clustering to change the topic or make it better!



is the tutor coming? because my professor required this for our first paper, but I have stuff to do,

travelling between panels is weird

also I think you should hurry, this kid means business.



hey, I'm Abi!

Mark

I've got a paper from freshman composition. can we make this quick?

comp, huh? so it's a required visit?

yup.



(you don't seem excited!)

to be honest, I probably wouldn't come if I didn't have to

I'm a good writer. And I'm an engineering major, so I really won't have to learn how to write the next great American novel. Writing isn't as important in STEM programs.



you're seeing this, right? this writer's reluctance is because he was forced to come to the writing center AND because he doesn't think writing is important.



that's a double whammy, kiddos.



yeah, it's not super fun when someone **MAKES** you come, sorry about that.

\* Kill Bill sirens \*

let's see Abi try for a small success.

well, I won't waste your time or mine, but I do disagree with you about the importance of writing in your engineering studies.



say you have an engineering assignment

okay

say the organization is a little off and my work gets



Bs and As

OH, I'm sure! but say the organization of your problem-solving is explained unclearly or too generally. couldn't that cause confusion in a future career? maybe even slow down the work effort?



I guess, but that's not me.



okay, well, let's read the comp paper. mind reading it out loud?

# 17 MINUTES LATER...

Wow. your engineer's mind worked for this assignment—the writing is concise but detailed enough. it follows a logical train of thought. but, I think it could flow better in some places. for example, what about switching these two paragraphs?



I guess



it's not a bad suggestion, but I think I'll keep it as is.

that's fine! you know your material better than me.



I know you didn't really want to come, but I'm glad you did. I enjoyed reading your paper! was the session helpful at all?



it was... okay.



maybe I'll be back some time



he probably won't, but his attitude changed. I bet he's gonna switch those paragraphs.

WRITER  
#3



hey, you did alright with that guy. it was nice how you sympathized with him. I think he might even take your suggestion!

thanks

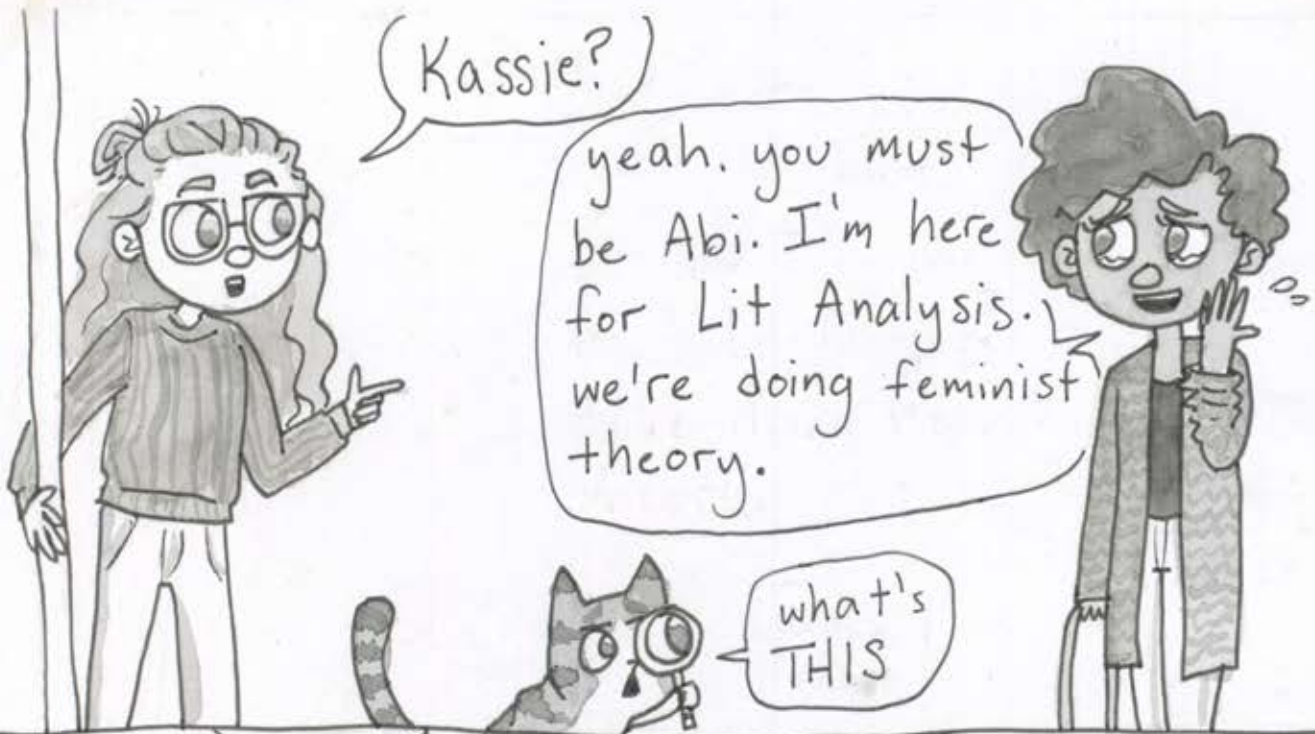
maybe we changed his mind a little about how great writing is?

Mom, it's fine. No... I mean... Mom, I gotta go, I think the tutor's here.

I'll call you back...

No, I won't text him!! Okay. Bye. Love you.





Kassie?

yeah, you must be Abi. I'm here for Lit Analysis. we're doing feminist theory.

what's THIS



TEARS!

we have an OVERWHELMED, EMOTIONAL writer



will being overwhelmed hold the writer back from working on the paper?



so, tell me about your assignment!



(well, I chose Pride and Prejudice for this paper. it was one of my favorite books growing up.

I don't really have a draft,

so this is more of a brainstorming session?

yeah, I want to figure out a good working thesis.

okay!



so what I'm thinking right now is arguing that the setting plays a major role in the development of Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship, that because of the distance... the distance between them because of how...



how... the English countryside... \*sniff\*... separates them and strains or deepens their relationship... and um \*sniff\*

you okay?

YEAH, yeah, I'm just going through something, it's fine, it's just all hitting a little close to home

you know, distance is hard and I get Elizabeth. long distance is hard. IT'S HARD.



hey, when's this paper due?

in two weeks

so you've got time. want to reschedule? it seems like you have a lot on your mind.





yeah, I think that's a good idea. I'll be back in a few days.

your idea is good. I can't wait to hear about it then!



thanks

to quote Leslie Knope: 'Men are dogs.'



um

thank you



you know, Mick, I almost continued the session. think I should have?



# WRITER

# # 4



nope. her subject matter was directly related to the thing bothering her. I think you made the right call.





Sam?  
I'm Abi.

hey

so, is this your first time  
in the writing center?

uh, yeah. how does this work?

well, we'll read your paper  
out loud and work together  
to improve what you want to  
focus on.

so you don't just mark it  
up and give it back?

nope! you're the expert  
on your paper

uh, I'm not an  
expert. I'm  
not really a  
good writer.  
that's why  
I'm here.



dust

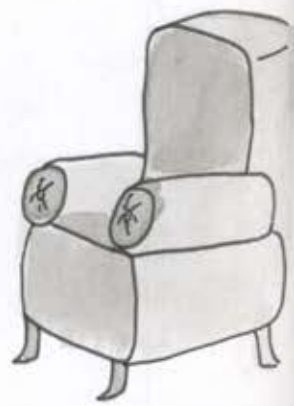
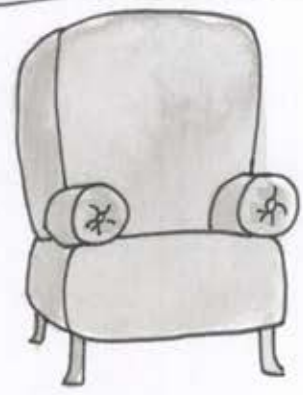
dust

oh, I think you'll surprise yourself.

DING DING  
we have an  
Unconfident Writer



yeah, I don't know. my high school teachers marked my papers like they were coloring books. I suck at grammar and stuff.



he doubts his ability and fears judgment

there's way more to writing than just grammar. and writing is a learned skill anyway — you can get better! I was not great when I came to college, but now I've written tons of papers and grown as a writer!



okay, but don't expect much. it's not a good paper.



this is gonna be BEAUTIFUL.



# 10 MINUTES LATER...

... those elements are what make Pan's Labrynth a successful film.



the end

WOW! I've seen Pan's Labrynth, and you totally did justice to it with your word choice!! the part when you analyze the scene with the Pale Man was so VIVID.



Really? or are you just trying to make me feel better?

no! you can really paint a solid word picture! that said, I think your thesis might be a little general.



I told you it wasn't a good paper. I don't even know what a thesis is.

and we haven't even touched my grammar, which I know is bad



a thesis is the Main Idea of the paper. did you work with Main Ideas in high school?

oh, yeah. I know what that is.

great. so your main idea now is that the elements you write about in Pan's Labrynth make it a successful movie, right?

yeah, pretty much. how can I make that more specific?

well, what's the movie's message? what is it about?



um, that scary army officer dude killing everyone, and how that's ... bad.

NICE. that's a beginning!



11 MINUTES LATER...

... okay. so these elements of Pan's Labrynth make the film successful in depicting how institutionalized evil destroys itself.

yes! that's a pretty good working thesis.



okay. cool. but what about my grammar? are we out of time?

I can give you some grammar worksheets, but for now, focus on weaving that thesis through the paper. you could come in again for grammar!



so are you feeling okay now?



yeah, actually. I'll try to schedule another appointment.

sounds good! I'll see ya.



WRITER  
← #5



oh, hey Mick

how did you get here before —

DOESN'T MATTER

we have a situation

DING



We've got a shy introvert on our hands.



how do you know?

I tried to talk to him while you were in the elevator.



it was like talking to a ROCK



okay.

hey there! I'm Abi.

I'm Jay



okay, so what are we working on?

brainstorming

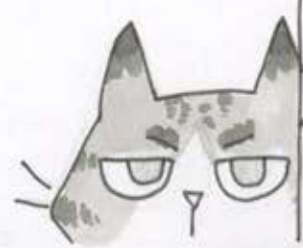
brainstorming what?

anything

okay, what's the assignment we're brainstorming for?



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TRY MINIMALIST TUTORING!



movie review.



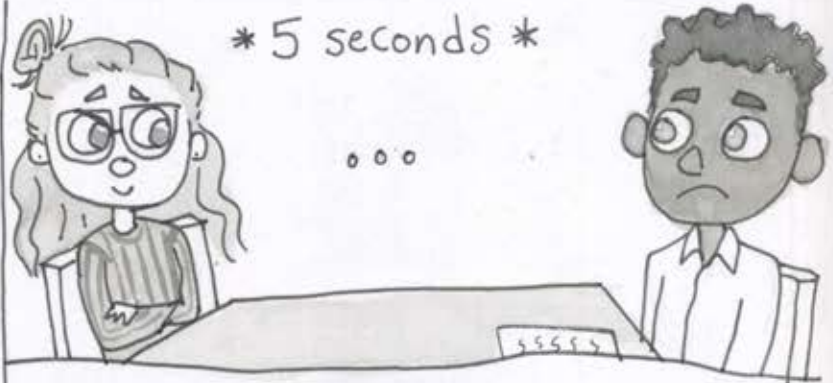
okay, so what are some movies that you like enough to write a review about?

I don't know...

STEP ONE:  
ASK A QUESTION

STEP TWO:  
LEAN BACK

STEP THREE:  
WAIT 20 SECONDS



I like Star Wars?

great!

which movie?



um, I like The Last Jedi

is it... good enough to write about?

SUCCESS!



does your syllabus say you can use any movie?

yeah

then it should be fine.



you can email your prof to check



so, with our time left, want to make a list of things you liked about the movie, and things you didn't?



uh, okay

do you want to make the list together, or do you work better by yourself?

probably by myself



okay, here's a notepad. I'll check in on you in ten minutes.

okay



# 10 MINUTES LATER...

how'd ya do?

okay. I think.



these are great points!



put these points into a first draft, and then I'd love to see you in here, look at it again, and then prep for a final draft.



okay, thanks!







ya know, a little friendliness and affirmation goes a long way





well Mick, how do you think we did?

our best. I think we encouraged some writers, and that butters my biscuit.



please don't use that phrase

no



**THE  
END.**