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# Every Student is a Writer: Building Confidence through Tutoring Sessions

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## Abstract

Students often feel inadequate as a writer when entering a tutoring session. Tutors can instill confidence in the student by praising what they are doing well. They can also let the student express their ideas in the session, then the tutor and student can build off of those ideas together. Overall, the tutor can help the student see themselves as a writer rather than someone who writes, which will give the student conviction beyond the sphere of the classroom.

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English 4910

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### Every Student is a Writer: Building Confidence through Tutoring Sessions

The first word I hear is my own name. “Sandra,” the student says. “I. Struggle. With English.” I almost want to laugh. I can see how serious they are, how much they believe in their own mediocrity, yet I have just finished reviewing their paper before the appointment, and part of me wants to ask, “How?” They haven’t completed the paper yet, but there are no grammatical errors and they have answered all parts of the prompt so far. Of course there are always aspects that can be improved upon, and the student’s main questions pertain to developing the part they haven’t written yet, which we are able to work on. But my initial confusion remains, lurking in the back of my mind throughout the appointment. Why does this student believe they are bad at writing? And why is this feeling not specific to just one student, but prevalent across most of my appointments?

I have determined that too many college students lack confidence in their own work and are seemingly content to feel that way as long as they fix their writing enough to get a good grade. This seems especially common among underclassmen and/or students in programs other than English—a fact some are quick to put forth as though to preface their work before I presumably pronounce some sort of condemnation upon it. If they don’t believe in their writing abilities, they will always feel slightly inadequate in life. All of these students need to be instilled with true confidence in their writing in order for them to succeed not only now but in the future, and that is something tutors should strive to accomplish in their sessions.

One of the best ways to instill confidence in students is to allow them to hear affirming praise from a source outside themselves. A tutor named Sara Mozingo talks about this tactic in her article on empowering students. She says, “As a tutor, I can make the student feel more competent by acknowledging their strengths. When a student is told they are doing things right, they are more willing to hear suggestions for things that need to be changed” (Mozingo 4). While we aim to not have a large authority presence as tutors, students will still view us as people with credibility in the writing field—credibility greater than their own. Thus, when they receive praise from an ostensibly official source, they can more easily believe in their own strengths.

Another vital aspect of instilling confidence in students during tutoring is to let them fix their own paper. This may seem counterintuitive, but it doesn’t mean you don’t help them; it means you guide them to find their own solutions. Part of that is giving them feedback based on their own ideas. In her article on active listening, tutor Stephanie Fielding says, “The majority of the time, students know what they want their essay to say ... they just need us to let them express it” (Fielding 3). In the appointment I mentioned before, the student told me they didn’t really know what they wanted to say in their paper. Then I asked about their claim, and they ended up presenting me with some thoughts that made ripe material for a potential paragraph. I told them they’d basically just written a paragraph and explained how their ideas related to their claim, and they were surprised to realize the validity in their points. In a way, they had given themselves the rest of their paper and I had just made that clear to them. If we build off of the student’s ideas, they will know we are listening to them, and they will feel validated as a writer because our suggestions will essentially be an expansion of their own thoughts.

The most important thing anyone can do for themselves in any stage of writing is to think of themselves as a writer. You must believe that you are what you want to become, even if only in the beginning stages. When I took a Poetry Writing class my freshman year, my professor told us we were all poets. Even if we'd never written a poem before, we were all poets strengthening our craft. I had never written poetry very seriously before, but suddenly I was a poet, and suddenly I believed it. I didn't believe I was very good at first, but I still believed I was a poet. If a student is able to think of themselves as a writer instead of just someone who writes, they will be giving themselves the credibility they need to believe in their own work. A person is not a writer because they are an English major. They are a writer because they choose to be. If we acknowledge students' strengths and build off of their ideas, they will be able to gain the confidence they need to see themselves as writers. That confidence is perhaps the most beneficial result of a tutoring session because it will stay with them longer than any assignment will, and will influence them beyond their writing because they will believe in themselves.

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