

One-on-One Work

Come Prepared to the Tutoring Sessions

Each type of tutoring situation demands different forms of preparation. If you know who you will be working with or what you are working on beforehand, come prepared some with activities you have planned in advance. If the learners or materials you are working with change frequently, there is little planning that can be done. However, you should try to make yourself aware of different strategies and materials that will work with different styles of learners so you are prepared for different challenges.

Adjust Your Approach to the Learner's Age and Background

Are you working with children, teens, or adults? What is the cultural/linguistic/economic background of the learner you are working with? Your approach will change depending on the age of the learner, the proficiency in English, literacy level, etc. For younger children, it is important to remember that you are the adult and you need to guide the session. With older learners, both teens and adults, work collaboratively to make sure you are covering things that are of interest and valuable to them. Whenever possible, make sure your materials are culturally- and age-appropriate.

Have Goals for Your Tutoring Session

Whether the goal is helping the learner finish a worksheet or understanding how to multiply fractions, make sure the goal is realistic both in terms of what the learner is capable of and what you are capable of teaching. Work with the learner at the beginning of the session to collaboratively set goals. Figure out how you are going to assess whether you have achieved the goal at the end of the session. For example, if your goal is to read a story, check for understanding afterwards.

The Learner Is Supposed to Do the Work, NOT You

This is very important. You are helping a learner to do the work, not doing the work for him. It doesn't help anyone learn anything if you do a worksheet for a learner and his teacher may think he understands a concept when he doesn't. In a session, the learner should ALWAYS be more active than the tutor—this indicates that he is doing the work. Unless you are demonstrating, you should be observing while he does the work, not the other way around.

Build On What Your Learner Already Knows

Ask your learner how he or she has been taught to do an activity in school, especially when helping with homework. This way you can build on what she already knows and not confuse her with new information. Don't assume that because a learner asks for help she doesn't know how to do it. She may just lack confidence in her ability. Ask her how she would do it before you show her.

Don't be Afraid to Change Your Approach

If one strategy or method isn't working, try another one. People have many different learning styles: Some learn better by seeing, some by hearing, some by writing, and some by doing. If you are having trouble thinking of a way to explain something to a learner, ask a fellow tutor if they have any suggestions. If you can't figure out how to explain a concept when helping with homework, ask your learner if he has any other work that you can help with. Better to use your time assisting him effectively.

Check for Comprehension

If your learner is nodding along to your explanation of a concept, this doesn't necessarily mean she understands. Ask your learner to explain a concept in her own words or do an example problem to check for comprehension. If she can't, try to figure out where she is unclear and explain it again.

Respect Your Learner

Recognize that even if he has trouble in one subject area, he may have good skills in another. Don't assume that your learner doesn't know something. Give him positive feedback when something is done well.

Know Your Learner's Name and Use It Frequently

Saying her name is a great way to get a learner's attention. Make eye contact and use her name to remind the learner to get back on task if her attention seems to be wandering.

Be Yourself, Remain Patient, and Have Fun!

Developing a relationship with your learner, even if you are only helping them for an hour, will help the learning process. Introduce yourself. If you are working on something that used to give you trouble, share that with her. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something and you need to ask for help. It will make the session more enjoyable for both you and your learner. Finally, remember that learning is a life-long process, and it takes time. Staying patient will help keep the learner's morale up if she is getting frustrated. Encourage her to keep trying.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ellen Alcorn (ecalcorn@bates.edu) at the Harward Center.