

Tips and Tricks for Tutoring High School Writing

By Fall 2019 ENGL3381: *The Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing*

“I’m jealous because you get to work with high schoolers and talk about tutoring without me.”

- Kat Gonso, literary extraordinaire

Step 1: *Sit down with the student*

- Ask what they’re working on
- Try to ask open-ended questions that encourage a response
 - ◆ “What are you working on?”
 - ◆ Asking if a student needs help gives them the opportunity to deny your assistant
- Familiarize yourself with the assignment. Ask if they have a rubric or assignment sheet/outline (if they don’t, ask if anyone near them does!)

Step 2: *Take a few minutes to get to know the student*

- Icebreakers
 - ◆ Talk to them about yourself, e.g. your hometown, your major, etc.
 - ◆ Ask a silly question. e.g. What is your favorite food?
- Get to know their background in the context of the work. i.e. their grade, their favorite subject



Step 3: *Ask the student how they would like you to approach their work*

- Do they want to read the piece aloud?
- Do they want you to read the piece aloud?
- Do they want you to read the piece silently?
- Is there anything in particular they want you to focus on while you’re reading?
- Ask them about the work they have done so far?
 - ◆ Is this a rough draft?
 - ◆ Have they written their introduction and/or conclusion yet?
 - ◆ Stage in the research process, if applicable?

Step 4: Read their writing (even if it's just an outline)!

- First, read the text: just read; don't make any edits and/or pass initial judgments
 - ◆ If they haven't written down anything,, ask questions that will prompt curiosity pertaining to the assignment
 - ◆ Write down their ideas so that you have a tangible document produced by the end of the session
- Second reading:
 - ◆ Start off with a specific positive comment!
 - E.g., "I really liked _____ about this paragraph" or
 - "This sentence points to how passionate you are about the topic"
 - ◆ Take note of any areas of confusion
 - ◆ Try not to focus on grammar unless that is what the tutee is requesting or the grammar is preventing you from understanding the argument
 - ◆ Use questions
 - Is this a reliable source?
 - How do the ideas flow?
 - ◆ Respect the student's voice and vision
 - Remember that you are not the author of this piece - they are! Ensure that they maintain their agency and authority.

Step 5: Leave the tutee with something to work on!

- Suggest without demanding
- Work with the student to decide what comes next in the writing process (e.g. logical next steps, a continuation or extension of something you worked on together, or revision techniques)

