

Helping Students in the Writing Process

Tips for Tutors

1. Pre-writing

- Use a brainstorming device such as:
 1. The “I remember” list.
 2. “I used to _____ but now I _____” exercise.
 3. Feeling exploration: “I feel happy that _____” etc.
- Do the exercise first, then share it with your student to encourage trust and stimulate ideas.
- Encourage your student to do the writing as much as possible.
- Work in class together or assign writing for the student to do at home.

2. Drafting

- Emphasize that spelling, grammar, and punctuation do not matter in the first draft. Concentrate on the flow of ideas.
- Try these techniques:
 - List details before putting together sentences; arrange them in connecting circles or as lists grouped for similarity.
 - Student and tutor each write a draft (tutor modeling).
 - Student dictates and tutor writes.
 - Tutor assigns writing on the topic for your next meeting.

3. Responding to first draft

- Have your student read the draft aloud to you.
- Concentrate on content, not mechanics. You will correct later.
- Ask questions which help the student focus. You want the piece to be clearly stated, complete in detail, and interesting to read.
- Suggested techniques:
 - Be positive: point out the things you like about the piece.
 - “Say back:” summarize the main idea in your own words.
 - Ask for more detail in specific areas.
 - Make one or two suggestions to improve content. Do this in the “What if . . . ?” mode, which lets the writer decide whether to make the change or not.
 - Occasionally ask for the student’s opinion on your own writing. Your willingness to do this shows the student that acceptance of criticism and rewriting are part of the process for all writers.
 - Depth of revision will vary. Some students will want to write many short pieces and move on. Others will prefer to add on to and revise the same piece for several weeks. The main thing is to do some writing at every session.

4. Revising the draft

- Revision may be done during the tutoring session or assigned as homework, depending on the length and purpose of the piece.

5. Editing for correctness

- Use the editing process to teach matters of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- Focus on only one or two editing skills so that the student is not overloaded with or discouraged by corrections.
- Produce a clean copy when it is needed for publishing or beneficial to

the student. This can be done several ways:

- You correct the problems, then write or type the clean copy.
- You correct the problems on the draft, then have the student copy the writing in its correct form. (This is helpful in short pieces but may be discouraging in longer ones.)
- Student enters the text into the computer and makes his or her own revisions and corrections. (This is the most desirable if the student has the abilities and the program has the resources.)

As in all aspects of the tutoring partnership, use your judgement to maintain procedures that will:

- encourage the student.
- help the student learn specific skills.
- help the student become increasingly independent of the tutor.

Source: Clark, W., Fuerstenberg, R., Gabler, C., Goethel, J., & Milne, E. (1994). Put it in print: How to produce a book of writings by adult literacy students. Eau Claire, WI: Chippewa Valley Publishing.