



A TUTORING NARRATIVE

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What are your perceptions about the tutoring process? Each experience might be different, just as each writer, each tutor, each person is different. To explain what I perceive as a collaborative process, it seemed almost appropriate to write about how this article was written. I can't show you the handful of drafts that I struggled with in order to submit this, but maybe I can illuminate the changes that happened over the course of each draft.

While people have their own writing process, it's fair to say that a few things always stay the same. For example, writers usually start with an idea, then do some research, and perhaps have a conversation about the ideas and the evidence they've found. What follows is often more brainstorming, then outlining, and finally, writing. Over the course of six weeks, I met with a writing tutor to develop this article. The philosophy of the Writing Center infused the tutoring sessions, and I am attempting to weave this philosophy into the writing.

After writing a bumpy first draft that didn't come to a conclusion, I felt pretty stuck. I chewed on that feeling for a week and then made an appointment with a tutor. We started the session by talking about my writing process. I explained my struggle with writing, particularly with creating structure and getting my ideas across in an accessible way. The tutor listened to me and then asked me some questions.

The cool thing about the questions tutors often pose to writers is that they are open-ended: "Why do I want to write about collaboration?" "What has been my previous experience with collaboration?" "What did I discover from the session?" Open-ended questions rarely feel like judgment; instead they support the nature of collaboration. Having to answer these questions brought me some awareness about my own writing process, my areas of resistance, and what I find helpful. For example, I discovered that I'm resistant to outlining my ideas, and I like having my ideas summarized by another person because that helps my clarify my thoughts. Through talking about what I discovered in my tutoring session, I realized that I wanted to write about the discovery and learning that take place when the exchange of ideas ripples across the red and silver ribbons of the Formica tutoring tables.

I wouldn't have known that I wanted to write about the importance of collaboration if I hadn't had an entirely collaborative tutoring session in the Writing Center. Is this making sense to you? I

shared my ideas with another person, and these ideas were recognized and given shape. I discovered what I wanted to write about by talking about my writing with another writer. Mind-blowing! In a sense, my tutor didn't even have to do all that much besides ask me a few pointed questions and write a few things down.

I'm not surprised by the simplistic yet extraordinary impact that tutoring consistently has on my writing. The meeting of minds in a collaborative setting is something I experienced from the beginning of my career at Evergreen. I was a returning student who had little background formatting a college-level essay, getting my ideas across, and expressing my thinking in a critical way. I was not only learning to polish the way I expressed my thinking, I was also learning how to do "true revisions" of my writing, where I would allow my writing to grow beyond where it was first planted. This critical approach to writing rests on examining the evidence and thinking behind a writer's ideas.

The third time I was tutored on this article, the tutor gave me some strong feedback. First, he told me the places he was getting lost. Second, he asked me to work on my transitions, and third, he encouraged me to end the article. Due to the narrative nature of this article, as well as the concept that writing is never done, I could easily keep on going in a horrifying cycle of revision and process. His suggestions felt like permission to just complete something even if it turns out crappy.

For the fourth session my tutor focused on clarity, transitions, and organization. He did this by "glossing" my paper. He read the article and summarized each paragraph's main point. He also looked at my approach to transitions and explained the places where I was frustrating the reader's expectations. To help with my reorganization, I then did my own glossing. This helped me to understand what the content of my paragraphs were and to determine where things needed reorganization.

I wish you could see through all the layers of this article, drafts number one through seven, see how things morphed and shifted. What I started out saying ended up taking me other places. I probably would not have come to the same ending had I not been tutored. I gleaned from this feedback that writing well (academically) often comes down to a few simple things. First, you need to tell the reader where you are going, and then you have to go there. It is never a bad idea to gratify the readers' expectations. Second, brainstorming and outlining are useful because they help me keep my focus. And third...well, sometimes it's just nice to have someone tell you where they get lost in your idea. My tutor gently nudged me towards saying what I mean, and meaning what I say. It's really that simple.