

Parker Wade
Writing Center Philosophy

My writing center philosophy is focused on meeting the individual needs of students. Every student is different and unique, and requires varying forms of assistance when tutoring in the writing center. I believe that learning is greater than perfection, and my primary goal is to instill the confidence that students need in order to achieve their full potential. Stephen North once said, "In a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction." The writing center doesn't exist to fine tune or fix writing; it exists to guide and improve writers. It is about the person, not the product, and my job as a tutor is to equip the student with the necessary skills to improve their papers on their own. I feel that I am there to patiently walk through the paper with the student, as opposed to quickly running through it editing commas. Again, the focus and purpose of the writing center is the quality of the writer, not the writing.

Directive vs. Nondirective tutoring is a common issue in the writing center, and my philosophy is centered on a healthy combination of both. Carino, in his article "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring," presents a formula that is helpful when determining which technique is necessary for different sessions:

More student knowledge + less tutor knowledge = nondirective methods.
Less student knowledge + more tutor knowledge = directive methods.

Every student is different and requires different tutoring methods, and with this formula in mind it is easy to determine the methods needed to successfully aid the student with their work. Though I do not believe that tutoring comes down to a formula, as each student is unique, I do feel that this is a helpful technique when deciding how much directive tutoring needs to be done, as well as how much nondirective tutoring the student can handle. Some directive tutoring is generally necessary, as students must be taught in order to learn and grow, but I personally believe that the primary form of practice should be non-directive tutoring. Above all the student and their understanding of the work is the primary focus, and my goal as a tutor is to support them and guide them in the ways needed to achieve success.

It is important to remember that students have individual identities, and it is my job as the tutor to discover who they are and collaborate so that I can best help them. Collaboration is a very important learning tool and an almost essential part of a writing center. The student must be willing to collaborate with the teacher, as well as the tutor, and vice versa. It is not the easiest aspect to implement, but normally the most difficult of tasks are the ones that are worth the time. Such difficulty also pushes and challenges our somewhat conventional ways of organizing writing centers and every other tutoring center. Thonus suggests a technique that is useful when collaborating that includes evaluating, suggesting, and accepting or rejecting. Basically, tutors evaluate

the work that has been done, offer suggestions, and then allow the student to either accept or reject the idea. Whether the idea is accepted or rejected, it is up to the student to expand or provide another focus, so the work is still their own. This creates confidence in the student because they are doing their own work, while also allowing them to deepen their critical thinking skills and ability to articulate ideas.

The final portion of my writing center philosophy revolves around the importance of listening. Dipardo says in her article that rather than “talking less,” perhaps what we need to do is “listen more.” This directly parallels with my philosophy, as I am a believer in the power of listening. As a tutor it is my job to not only listen to understand the assignment and the work, but, more importantly, to get to know the students that I am working with. Without having somewhat of an understanding of their background or history, I cannot adequately help them. Giving the student control over the conversation during the session also gives them the confidence to take control of their work.