

Ending a Tutoring Session Happily Ever After

Alexandria Janney

Sessions seem to end too quickly for me. One second I am talking with a student about his or her paper, asking questions and chatting like we are old friends enjoying a cocktail, and the next I am looking at the clock, scrambling to get my timesheet signed and getting ready for the next session. I am no good-bye expert. My sessions sometimes seep five minutes over, and topics are occasionally pushed to the next meeting. In my experience as a tutor, I have realized what an important skill time management is to have, and I have learned what a tutor can do to make a session end smoothly instead of coming to a screeching halt. The following three strategies are ones I try to keep in mind for closing a session.

- 1. Keep Track of the Time:** I realize keeping track of the time is probably obvious, but in the heat of a session, keeping track of the time is easier said than done. Time management makes me think of the groups I used to be assigned to in school, when there was some sort of class activity we needed to do by the end of the period. The groups where titles were divided amongst the students into recorder, taskmaster, and timekeeper; I was never the timekeeper. I was always the recorder. As a tutor, acting as recorder, taskmaster, and timekeeper is crucial at various points in the session, but when ending, the tutor's role as timekeeper is vital. Keep track of the time. Be subtle. Do not watch the clock so closely that you imply disinterest. When there are about five minutes left, and I remember my role as timekeeper, I usually say something such as, "We have about five minutes left. Let's finish _____." Once we finish the sentence, idea, or revision we are focusing on, I will ask the student if he or she has any other questions or concerns.

When students have a question or concern, I usually try to answer them briefly or offer another resource the student might turn to, such as a guidebook, website, or handout, enhancing writing independence while also offering assistance. I may also use resources to refresh the student's memory of what we discussed in the session when there are no questions. Otherwise, I will verbally review some of the ideas we covered. The only way any of this is possible is if I keep track of the time.

2. **Think of the End as the Beginning:** I am not trying to sound morbid or suggest that the tutor end the meeting before the student has a chance to read the first word printed on the page. I am suggesting that the tutor set goals for the session, manageable ones. Do not think of "making this student a Pulitzer prize winning writer" as a goal. Yes, optimism is great, but being realistic is of greater importance. Think "the student will develop a strong thesis" or "the student will understand the passive voice" as goals. Setting goals at the beginning by discussing with the writer what he or she hopes to accomplish not only emphasizes the collaborative nature of the tutor-writer relationship but also sets the tutor up for success at the end. The tutor can review if the goals were met and how. If the goals were not met, the tutor can offer tips for how the student can do this on his or her own, instilling agency in the writer. When the meeting is regularly occurring and time allows (in a perfect world), meaning the student's paper is not due the next day, the tutor can suggest unmet goals be discussed in the next meeting. While ideas trickling over are not ideal, they do. Remember, flexibility is not only important for gymnasts; flexibility is important for tutors.

3. **End as a Cheerleader:** I do not break out pom-poms and pep at the end of a session, but I do emphasize encouragement. Positive reinforcement is beneficial to students. Many of

the students I have tutored are insecure writers; the last thing they need to leave with is what they did poorly. Saying “Your paper is written really well” not only has the potential to get the tutor in trouble, such a statement fails to show that the tutor really connected with or took anything away from the paper. “I really like how you describe your sister as jumping up and down like a gymnast,” will have a greater impact than, “The section about your sister was good.” Be specific. Ending in this way lets the student know that a part of his or her paper resonated with you; such comments reassure the writer that the tutor was an engaged reader.

When a session is at the end and the student is packing up his or her things, I like to use a tip from *The Penn State Undergraduate Writing Center Handbook for Peer Tutors in Writing*—“Thank the writer for coming in, or wish him or her luck on the paper” (Story 9). Let students know that you appreciate their coming to the meeting. Ending a session does not have to be hard as long as a tutor remembers to keep an eye on the clock, set goals, and provide a positive comment to end on. With three simple steps, tutoring sessions can end happily ever after.

Works Cited

Story, Julie A. *The Penn State Undergraduate Writing Center Handbook for Peer Tutors in Writing*. University Learning Centers and Center for Excellence in Writing, 2001. Web. 12 March 2010.