

Northfield Reads & Counts Tutor Manual

St. Olaf College and Carleton College
Northfield Public Schools

Section 4: Tutoring Tips

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Tips for Successful Tutoring

1. Your student may have mixed feelings about being tutored and may need a lot of reassurance and encouragement. Create a supportive, safe and non-judgmental situation for tutoring.
1. Sit next to, rather than across from, your student. You want to work with, not teach at, your student.
2. Always be prepared and have your materials ready. Your student may think that you are not interested if you are not prepared.
3. Be honest, be open and be yourself at all times. Do not be afraid to say you do not know the answer to a certain question.
4. In speaking with a student, do not correct incorrect grammar or usage. Instead, model correct speech at all times.
5. Praise your student frequently, but only for genuine success. Build the student's confidence by letting him/her know you expect and believe he/she will do well, as well as by breaking difficult problems or concepts into smaller units.
6. Build on what the student knows, keeping in mind that everyone learns in different ways and at different speeds. Encourage your student to think independently by giving him/her strategies for figuring things out on his/her own.
7. Expect that your student will experience setbacks and bad days. Try to keep yourself and your student from becoming discouraged.
8. Keep lessons moving. When you notice your student is losing interest, change activities.
9. Give clear directions and make sure they are understood. Be careful not to overwhelm or overburden your student.
10. Make all tasks appear challenging. Do not tell students, "This is easy," or they will feel defeated if they fail in the task.
11. If students do not know the answer, make sure they have time to think. However, arrange a signal that can be used by the student to communicate a need for help, this way the student does not need to feel uncomfortable by asking for help.
12. Ask questions that require more than a one-word answer.
13. Remember that the teacher is the expert; never treat the teacher, his/her teaching methods or assignments with sarcasm or disdain.
14. Be patient and relaxed. Progress can be very slow. Your interest and enthusiasm may make the single most important contribution to your student's success and attitudes about learning. Remember that tutoring relationships are long distance efforts, not a sprint. Genuine interest in your student may not be a "magic bullet" but will be helpful to your student in the long run.



A Typical Tutoring Session

1. Get reacquainted
Spend the first few minutes catching up, talk about what you have been doing lately.
2. Assess progress
Discuss what you worked on during your last session, and what you will be doing this session. Set a realistic goal for the day's session.
3. Review
Briefly review the material from the last session. Working on a skill the student understands well can help to build confidence.
4. Introduce the skill or concept to be worked on during the current session
5. Explain each new activity
Work in short meaningful units, but make sure the student understands the purpose and instructions of each new activity. Always begin working at a level in which the student can experience some success and then provide support to progress to more difficult material.
6. Closure
Always end on a positive note. If the student is having difficulty on a new skill or concept then make sure to review an activity or subject that the student has already mastered; then have the student summarize what he/she has accomplished.

Establishing and Maintaining Attention

1. Work in an area as free from distractions as possible.
If there is noise and activity around your tutoring site it may be difficult for your student to focus.
2. Excite the student about learning.
Be excited about learning, make activities fun and explain them enthusiastically.
3. Explain to your student the objective of an activity.
4. Use positive reinforcement.
Using positive reinforcement will create motivation to learn. Avoid comments that could embarrass or discourage a student from asking questions.
5. Ask teachers what techniques they use to establish and maintain attention.
6. Discourage inappropriate questions.
Handling questions aimed at drawing attention or sidetracking work presents a dilemma. If you treat them like other questions you may encourage the student to ask more of the same, but if you turn that student down abruptly you may discourage all questions. It is usually best, to tactfully indicate what it was that made the question inappropriate.

Always remember that some days are better than others for learning. Events in school, at home or with friends may affect a student's ability to pay attention.

Different Learning Styles

Every person responds to some methods of teaching better than others. In order to tutor most effectively, it is important to tailor your activities to the different learning style(s) of your student. The following are some examples of the different kinds of learning styles and some hints on how best to work with those kinds of individuals.

Visual Learner

1. Needs to see the subject to understand it.
2. Likes stories and descriptions.
3. Uses mental pictures of events.
4. Usually is a quiet person who becomes impatient when lengthy listening is required.
5. Concentrates on details such as color, order, size and location.

Teaching tips:

Use graphics, charts and diagrams.
Provide written instructions.
Use color for emphasis.
Use matching games and flash cards.
Use pictures to represent words to enhance vocabulary.



Auditory Learner

1. Needs to hear the subject to understand it.
2. May have trouble reading and/or writing.
3. Likes to talk more than listen.
4. Thinks in sounds.
5. Is easily distracted by sounds.
6. Easily remembers words to songs and poems.
7. May need to talk while doing non-verbal tasks.

Teaching Tips:

Give instructions orally.
Have discussions or interviews.
Read and spell aloud.
Play rhyming and phonics games.
Use tapes for reading and class notes.



Kinesthetic Learner

1. Prefers hands-on learning.
2. Has difficulty sitting still, fidgets.
3. Remembers things that were done, not what he/she saw or heard.
4. Learns better when physical activity is involved.
5. Needs routine and organization.

Teaching Tips:

Use a chalkboard.
Make models.
Do lab work or role-playing.
Use computers.
Take breaks.
Allow student to handle materials.



What To Do If...

The following are some suggestions on how to handle common situations that do not warrant disciplinary action.

- Your student says that he/she has no homework.
 1. Go to his/her classroom and ask the teacher for homework or an activity.
 2. Go to the Media Center, find a book and have the student read aloud to you.
 3. If your student repeatedly comes to sessions without homework, speak to the teacher or Tutoring Coordinator for guidance.
- Your student tries to talk to other students during your session.
 1. Have your student sit away from other students, with his/her back to them.
 2. Try to keep your tutee on track by being creative.
 3. Talk to the teacher if the behavior persists.
- Your student seems to be angry or upset when you first meet.
 1. Ask questions to try to find out what is going on.
 2. Let the student talk. Find out something good that happened that day and also some of the bad events, classes or feelings.
 3. Talk to the teacher. Usually there is an explanation for the behavior.
- Your student asks you for a date.
 1. If the student is a second grader, smile and move on.
 2. If the student is older, let him/her know that this is an inappropriate question.
 3. Talk to the teacher if the problem persists.
 4. Remember that you should not meet your student outside of the tutoring session.
- Your student says that he/she feels sick.
 1. Ask your student to describe how he/she feels.
 2. If you have doubts, continue working for a few minutes to see if the symptoms will go away.
 3. If the student is truly ill, take him/her to the teacher who will help to call the student's parents.
- Your student seems unable to learn the material on which you are working.
 1. Do not blame yourself. The student's struggle could be the result of his/her lack of interest in school, low self-esteem or trouble with learning that has developed over time.
 2. Refer to the different tutoring and motivating strategies. Think of creative ways to discuss the material.
 3. Ask the student's teacher for advice.
- You are placed with a student who does not really need your help.
 1. Contact the teacher with your concerns. It is important that your time and skills are best utilized in the interests of the students. Ask the teacher why you have been placed with this student and what are his/her goals for your tutoring sessions with this student.
 2. Contact the Tutoring Coordinator if you do not feel like the teacher is listening to your concerns.

- Your student's behavior and attitude swings dramatically.
 1. It is possible that an event at home or at school has influenced your student's behavior at school and attitude towards you. Make sure that your student knows you are always willing to listen.
 2. Be consistent and wait to see if the situation changes.
 3. If the situation does not change over a period of weeks, talk with the teacher regarding your observations and concerns.
- The teacher is unorganized or unprepared for you on a consistent basis.
 1. Teachers agree that your help will be needed every week when making a request for a Northfield Reads and Counts Tutor, as well being prepared with clear instructions for you for each tutoring session. If you feel this is not the case, speak with the teacher. Ask about his or her goals for your time working with the students and how to best accomplish those goals.
 2. Contact the Tutoring Coordinator if you do not feel the teacher is listening to your concerns.
- You feel uncomfortable with the student, teacher or school in which you are working.
 1. Try to identify what it is that is making you uncomfortable.
 2. Discuss your concerns with the Tutoring Coordinator.
- You feel the teacher with whom you are working should find a new career.
 1. Unless the teacher is not properly utilizing your skills and time working with students, it is really not the business of the Northfield Reads and Counts Tutoring Program.
 2. Consider that teachers are generally overworked and underpaid, asked by society to take on increasing amounts of parenting responsibility of students, and may be extremely frustrated by the politics and red tape in the school system.
 3. In addition, teachers are with their students for seven hours a day, five days a week. It is inappropriate for you to make judgments based on your one or two hours per week in the classroom.
 4. However, the Tutoring Coordinator is always available to hear and/or discuss your concerns or frustrations.
- Your student is sharing his/her problems with you.
 1. As a tutor, you will also act in part as a mentor to your student. It is important to be a good listener to your student so that your tutoring relationship is based on trust.
 2. If a student shares information that he/she is being harmed or neglected in some way, speak with the teacher and Tutoring Coordinator immediately.
 3. Ensure that the expectation is laid down that your sessions will be focused upon academic work. Also, set goals for each tutoring session and after the work has been completed, conversation is definitely appropriate.
 4. Contact the teacher if you have further questions or concerns.



Using Questions to Encourage Questions

By using varied question tactics you can elicit the information you need to incite participation and model different question techniques for your student. Asking questions is an important part of being a good listener, but it is important to remember that there are several different types of questions and different kinds of questions should be asked in different situations. The following are some types of questions you might use when tutoring.

Engaging questions demonstrate respect for your student's thinking.

- “Why do you think...?”
- “What do you mean by...?”

Clarifying questions require students to make their thoughts and meaning explicit, do not assume—ask for clarification and explanation.

- “How should I write that?”
- “What was there?”

Shared questions encourage students to safely enter the conversation and discuss a variety of unique ideas.

- “What is a different example...?”

Focusing questions help students identify the characteristics and definitions of the “big ideas;” focus students on naming and describing what they know, identifying concrete examples, and categorizing information.

- “What are some of the things that happen when...?”
- “Remembering the reasons why we put together these items, what title or label would you give this group?”
- “What are some of the things that happen when...?”

Organizing questions help students to determine outcomes, sequences, similarities, and differences, and causes and effects.

- “Suppose...what would you expect to happen next?”
- “What do you think is similar between...and...?”

Contextualizing questions help students to situate their understandings, identify the conditions under which they exist, determine cultural factors that affect their meaning, and cite the assumptions upon which they are based.

- “What would have to happen in order for...to happen?”
- “Why is that okay?”
- “How is that valued?”

Extending questions require students to draw conclusions, make generalizations and provide reasoning for what they believe or know to be true.

- “What do you think is the most important?”
- “Rewrite that statement so that it makes sense and is true for you.”
- “Why do you think...?”

When discussing a specific reading assignment, you can ask factual questions (which require repeating facts stated in the text) or inference questions (which require your student to use the information from the text to draw specific conclusions) depending on your student’s familiarity with the topic. Try to draw connections between your student’s background knowledge and the subject at hand.

It is also important to realize that open-ended questions that inquire about personal feelings support the flow of conversations more than do simple, closed informational questions. Open-ended questions allow the speaker to give more expanded answers and personal/feeling questions allow the speaker to give his/her unique opinion on the topic. For example, the question “what did you enjoy most about your field-trip” provides more opportunity for response and conversation than does “how many years have you played trumpet?”



How to Handle Silence

- ❑ Let the student know it is all right to try even if he/she is unsure of the answer.
- ❑ Calmly ask the question again, give a hint, ask another question that might elicit the same answer and be encouraging.
- ❑ Sound pleased when you get an answer, praise the student’s effort to engage.
- ❑ Do not make an issue of the resistance (if needed, ask open ended questions to get to the root of the problem).
- ❑ Once the student has discovered the right answer, review the question and answer. Be sure to help the student through any misunderstanding, but do not do the work for him/her.

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening is a method of listening to understand both what person says and what a person feels, the listener then responds by relaying this understanding back to the speaker in his/her own words.

The Purpose of Reflective Listening

Reflective listening allows you to better understand what a student has shared with you in order to better respond and interact with your student.

For example, imagine a student tells you about a difficult event with a classmate and you reply by simply stating—not questioning: “So you were really feeling angry with him.” This summary communicates what you have understood from the story, then leaves the opportunity for the student to clarify further. This clarification can come in one of three ways:

1. Refining Meaning: “No. Not angry, just upset.”
If your summary is inaccurate, your student has the opportunity to clarify what he/she actually means.
2. Building Self-Awareness: “Yeah, I guess I was.”
By repeating the person’s own logic and feelings, the listener provides the person with a new perspective which can increase his/her understanding of his/her own feelings or thoughts.
3. Acknowledging or Validating: “I sure was.”
In correctly summarizing your student’s feelings, you provide a sense of validation for your student that you have understood his/her point of view.

Guidelines for Reflective Listening

Do:

1. Give your attention to the person who is speaking.
2. Maintain eye contact.
3. Show that you understand by the occasional nod or smile.
4. Observe non-verbal as well as verbal cues from the person.
5. Hear the needs and feelings behind what the person says.
6. Make responses that will encourage the person to clarify his or her thoughts.
7. Summarize the main points from time to time.

Do Not:

1. Do not interrupt the person who is speaking.
2. Do not start to tell your own stories, changing the focus to yourself.
3. Do not give advice, try to cheer the person up, judge, or divert the topic.
4. Do not look out the window or wave to others while the person is sharing his or her feelings with you.

Examples of Listening Responses

Questioning	“How did you feel afterwards? “Could you tell me a little more about what happened?”
Clarifying	“It sounds like you’re not sure why your classmates treated you that way. Am I right?”
Understanding	“It must be very hard to have two such wonderful opportunities to choose between.”
Summarizing	“It sounds like you find him frustrating, yet you like him a lot.”



Working With Teachers

Northfield Reads and Counts Tutors are guests in the classrooms of the Northfield Public Schools. Tutors are in partnership with teachers. The teacher sees the student everyday and will know his/her level and progress best. As a result, he/she will be able to provide information about the student’s strengths and weaknesses and make suggestions about how to work with the student. Tutors are able to work much more closely with the student than teachers are able to do. Thus Tutors can work to address (as well as observe) specific problem areas. As a result, it is vital for teacher and Tutor to communicate in order to best serve the student and improve his/her educational experience. Tutors should let teachers know what they have been seeing and ask them if it seems consistent with their observations. These communications may not be able to occur at the time of the tutoring session, but Tutors should work to communicate with teachers through email after the fact.

In addition, it is important for Tutors to remember that they will be the strangers in the teachers’ classroom. Teachers may feel uncomfortable, may feel vulnerable to being judged or may have little trust in Tutors’ reliability. Tutors should work to earn a teacher’s trust by being a positive and consistent partner in the classroom. Tutors may not always agree with a teacher’s decisions or pedagogy, but it is important to remember that Tutors act as a guest. Tutors should be patient, observe a teacher’s strategies, express their observations of the student and make polite suggestions where appropriate. Tutors should not express distain or criticism of a teacher to teachers, students or other Tutors.

Cultural Sensitivity

You and your student may come from very different backgrounds. Although it is beneficial to try to remember what it was like to be your student's age, it is important not to make assumptions about your student. It is better to get to know your student by listening to him/her and learning about him/her. The following are some suggestions to keep in mind while tutoring.

- ✓ Always listen, learn and ask. It is important to have respect for another person's differences. If you have a question about a particular saying or behavior, ask the student to clarify it for you. However, if you think what you are about to say is inappropriate, it is better to not say it.
- ✓ Avoid making generalizations about someone because the person is of a particular racial, ethnic or socio-economic group. Every individual is unique.
- ✓ Try to be aware of your own prejudices and how they affect your interactions with your student.
- ✓ Recognize that all cultural groups have values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that are as valid as your own.
- ✓ Do not attribute your student's actions to his/her ethnic, racial or socioeconomic group. Remember that you are working with kids/teens. Youth may make inappropriate, even offensive, remarks towards other students or you at some point. They may be testing you, or they may be acting the way they have observed others acting at school, at home or in the media. Do not take such remarks personally and be clear with students that they will not be tolerated in tutoring sessions.

Avoid the "savior syndrome." Do not assume that a student from a different cultural or economic group is disadvantaged.



Youth Characteristics

The following is some information on general child development; however, it is important to consider that youth come from a variety of different backgrounds and mature at different rates.



Characteristics of Students in Grades K-3 (Ages 5-8)

Interest in Learning

- * Acquire basic skills in reading, counting, and writing
- * Learn the most from working imaginatively and creatively on something they enjoy
- * Begin to sort out real from the unreal on the basis of practical experience
- * Eager to learn; deserve honest answers to questions
- * Developing ability to reason, to talk things over and to adjust plans
- * Excited about going to school; fearful of not knowing as much as they should
- * Eager to try new activities, but frustrated by attempting tasks beyond their capabilities
- * Investigate, experiment, explore, and collect anything and everything
- * Live primarily in “the now;” have relatively little sense of time
- * Still have private worlds of fantasy
- * Although errors may be made, they can mentally review a sequence of actions and see some probable results
- * Want to be involved with group planning
- * May surprise adults with their insight, but may have different conclusions in different situations

Self-Image

- * Self-image based primarily on what they think others think of them
- * Proud of their own accomplishments
- * Eager to please adults they admire
- * Have established some self-identity
- * Become more independent of home and parents
- * Need security without being smothered
- * Able to adapt in new situations with some degree of self-confidence
- * Usually definite in their likes and dislikes; what they want and do not want

Relationship With Others

- * Try out new ways to get along with others
- * Imitate adults in attitudes and actions
- * Dependence and loyalty shifting from parent to teachers
- * Begin to develop a sense of right and wrong in attitudes and actions toward others
- * Feel hurt but dismiss quarrels rather quickly
- * Want a best friend though relationships may shift frequently
- * Aware of individual differences in physical appearance
- * Still seek acceptance and encouragement primarily from parents and teachers
- * Enjoy team games, but like to argue about the rules; persistent in “my way is right”
- * Belonging to a group becomes increasingly important

Physical Development

- * Active, full of energy, find it difficult to sit still
- * Slow physical growth; tire easily
- * Loss of baby teeth to permanent teeth
- * Aware of physical limitations to what they can do
- * Try hard to acquire skills in coordination
- * Proud of what they can do physically

Characteristics of Students in Grades 4-6 (Ages 9-12)

Interest in Learning

- * Have a much longer attention span and can concentrate longer
- * Increased ability to make decisions and take initiative
- * Increased skills in reading and expressing ideas in writing
- * Learn to think abstractly
- * Begin to challenge adult thinking; aware that adults are not always correct or right
- * Neglect activities that bore them; devote time and effort passionately and exclusively to activities that interest them
- * Can reason deductively by accepting an event as being the effect of a law or circumstance
- * Tend to be perfectionists, often resulting in frustration
- * Are disturbed by differing opinions and standards among people they value

Self-Image/Identity Formation

- * Become more independent from adults
- * Experience periods of moodiness
- * Often frustrated with themselves when they do not measure up to their own expectations or those of others
- * Concerned about how they measure up to peer group “standard”
- * Want to make decisions for themselves
- * New awareness of personal appearance
- * Want hard tasks to perform; want to be useful
- * Are fairly responsible and dependable
- * Development of strong idealism

Relationship With Others

- * Continue to experiment with ways of relating to others, especially peers of both sexes
- * Have increased concern about right and wrong, such as lying and cheating
- * Develop more responsibility for forming and keeping friendships
- * Interested and informed about people from around the world
- * Feel strongly about unfairness, injustice, and social evils
- * Consider belonging to a peer group a high priority
- * Values of peer group generally accepted over those of adults

Physical Development

- * Growing steadily and physically active
- * Differ widely in physical maturity
- * May be maturing sexually and may have questions about their bodies
- * May be aware of the other sex but uncertain of relationship, teasing may indicate attraction
- * Becoming increasingly interested in improving personal appearance

Characteristics of Students in Grades 6-12 (Ages 12-18)

Learning Abilities

- * Increased ability to use logical thought processes
- * Increased capacity to reason
- * Ability to deal with hypothetical and abstract thought
- * Able to solve abstract problems through systematic experimentation
- * Thinking becomes more scientific

Self-Image/ Identity Formation

- * A time of trying and experimenting with new and different roles
- * A greater concern about who they are and who they are becoming
- * Struggle with sexual identity, which can cause much insecurity
- * Try to integrate roles from their many different experiences in order to develop an identity
- * Development of strong idealism

Relationship With Others

- * Subject to peer pressure; concerned with “fitting in”
- * Seek acceptance from classmates rather than parents or teachers

Physical Development

- * Undergoing puberty, development into adulthood (girls often mature quicker than boys)
- * Maturing sexually and may have questions about their bodies or emotional urges related to sexual development
- * Interest in improving their physical development