

Chapter Six

What Tutoring Is Models and Strategies

This chapter discusses responding to a writer's work in ways that address higher order concerns (HOCs), lower order concerns (LOCs), and the piece as a whole. The HOC and LOC sections model specific tutorials, while the section about addressing the piece as a whole presents feedback techniques and strategies.

Higher Order Concerns

Higher order concerns (HOCs), which are central to the meaning and communication of the piece, are matters of thesis and focus, development, structure and organization, and voice. These areas are important in the tutorial because they are central to the piece of writing. It makes sense for tutors and writers to begin with HOCs because improvements in these areas can dramatically change a piece. Even if writers may want to talk about other issues, tutors can honor the writer's desires and still move in the direction of these most important HOCs.

Thesis/Focus Tutorial

With sixty years of teaching and consulting experience between us, we have found certain problems to be common among English 101 writers. One of the most common is thesis/focus. (Another is development, discussed in the next section). Having a clear thesis and a precise focus is essential to good writing and helps the writer see what

is essential to include. Too often, writers, especially in early drafts, write down lots of information without considering how it is related to what they want to say. Other times, writers stick to only what is directly related to what they want to say, but what they want to say is too broad and panoramic in conception.

It is crucial that tutors be ready and able to work with writers on their thesis or focus. Whether the piece is an essay for English 101 or a seventh-grade history report, thesis/focus should be the first thing help writers clarify their thesis and sharpen their focus.

Tutor Questions

- What's the central issue of your piece?
- What's the one dominant impression you want your piece to make?
- When the reader is finished reading, what do you want him to walk away with?
- If your roommate, colleague, or sibling walked up to you and asked what you were writing about, what would you say?

Strategies

- *One-sentence summary.* One strategy that is both easy and useful is Elbow's (1973) "one-sentence summary." Ask the writer to make a one-sentence summary of the piece. Usually one of two things happens: If the writer has difficulty writing the summary, intervene to discuss the reasons for the difficulty. If he writes the summary easily, relying on what is in his head or what he thinks the piece is about, compare the summary directly to the actual paper, showing where each says things that are not in the other. Summarizing requires conceptualization and the concomitant distinguishing of major issues and minor ideas, essential to zeroing in on a clear thesis or precise focus.

- *Nutshelling and teaching.* Linda Flower's (1981) "nutshelling and teaching" activity also requires the writer to make decisions about major issues and minor ideas. Ask the writer to orally explain the essence of the piece while you take notes. Then, working from your notes, orally express that essence back to her. Discuss and negotiate the expression of the essence until the writer agrees that you have captured the essence, then ask her to role-play being a teacher who is trying to teach the essence to an audience that is like the writer's audience for the piece. This process of explaining, negotiating, and teaching requires the writer to sort through the major and minor levels of the piece.

▪ *Talk aloud.* Muriel Harris (1996) describes another oral exercise that can be used to help the writer see problems with a thesis or focus. (Oral exercises are particularly helpful with most writers since most people have far more oral language experience than written language experience.) Read the writer's paper silently, interrupting your reading to talk aloud about what you're seeing in the paper. Have the writer take notes. This process lets the writer see how the paper drifts from focus to focus. When you've finished reading, ask, "Okay, so what is the paper about?" In the process of answering, the writer notes the lack of precise focus. He not only decides what the focus of the paper is (probably by establishing a hierarchy to the points the focus drifts among), but often finds that this paper contains the seed for one or more future papers because some of the points deserve to be major issues in their own paper. Working on thesis/focus can sometimes be a heuristic for discovering future paper topics.

▪ *Make a promise.* Harris also describes a "promise" strategy. Explain that a thesis or focus is like a promise made to the reader. Ask the writer to complete this statement: "I promise that I will talk about _____ in this (or these) ways," listing the major ideas used in the draft and evaluating how well each helps the piece fulfill the promise. As in the "talk aloud" exercise, the writer has the opportunity to create an appropriate hierarchy for the ideas and their relationship to the central issue, and oral language is used to mediate both the revision of the current draft and, ultimately, the student's growth in writing. As with all the strategies described, it is not the procedure itself that powers the tutoring session, but rather the conversational interaction in which the strategy is set. The questions and comments the tutor makes are at the heart of the success of the tutoring session.

▪ *Create a headline or bumper sticker.* Ask the writer to give her piece a headline or to make up a bumper sticker based on the piece. Either of these requires that the writer find the one thing that is central to the piece and say something about it. A title can just be a subject ("Causes of the Civil War"), but a headline or bumper stickers has a subject and says something about it ("Deep Creek Lake Rated Best Vacation Spot"; "_____ Is Not a Family Value"). Identifying the subject helps the writer create the hierarchy necessary to nail down the focus by locating the single most essential issue; saying something about the subject lets her begin to understand what ideas might be included in the piece because they fit what she wants to say.

Example of Thesis/Focus Tutorial. Here's an example of how the thesis/focus strategies might work. A student wrote about a lacquered

wooden box that her grandfather had made for her grandmother. The piece opened with a detailed description of the box, talked about how her grandfather had made it, then described how much her grandfather and grandmother were in love. The piece finished with how her grandmother uses the box today.

The tutor drew her out to find which of the four issues she really wanted to foreground. She said that she wanted to show the box to the others in class; so, the opening description was the key part and the rest was added just to "fill it out." Once the tutor helped her clarify that showing the box was important, he moved on to development strategies to help the student develop her description of the box so that she would not feel the need to fill the piece out with unrelated information. If the student had said that she wanted two or more of the four main ideas as her focus, the tutor could work with her on creating first an introduction that would show how the ideas went together, then transitions to hold them together.

Effective tutorials on thesis/focus are a combination of using a strategy and conversing about the results of that strategy. The headline or bumper sticker strategy could be used for that same lacquer box paper. If the student wanted to show the box to the class, her headline might be "Beautiful Lacquer Box Created by Pittsburgh Man," or her bumper sticker might be "Lacquer Boxes Don't Lack Anything." Each of these suggests that the appearance of the box is the central issue, so the tutor could ask why the other three ideas were there. But if the headline was "Pittsburgh Man Makes Beautiful Lacquer Boxes," the part of the piece about how her grandfather made the box might be the central idea. Or if her bumper sticker said "Love Is a Lacquer Box," the student may see her grandparents' love as central.

Whatever the writer's central ideas, these strategies are a way to start discussing the necessity of clarifying the thesis/focus.

Development Tutorial

Development is a crucial feature of any piece of writing. Writers gain insight into what points to develop and how to develop them when they work on thesis/focus, and they gain even further insight when they work on organization/structure (discussed below). But often a piece has development as a primary problem. Its thesis is clear and its structure is reasonable, but it just doesn't say enough. First drafts often suffer from underdevelopment because the writer is laying out what he wants to say, scanning the topography of his ideas and sketching a map. Development problems also arise because many

writers rely on their oral language experience as a first guide for writing, not realizing that writing must be much more explicit and specific than speech because it has none of the tone of voice or contextual features of speech.

Whether students are laying out ideas in a cursory fashion or writing like speech, tutors will see many drafts that need to be developed. Tutors can use number of strategies and questions to help writers find and express ideas to fill out underdeveloped papers and to get the writer to start reflecting on development problems.

Tutor Questions

- Tell me more.
- Point to places where you think a reader might want you to tell more.
- If you read this aloud to a few readers, what do you think their first questions would be about?
- If black were the color of the parts with lots of information, gray the color of those with less information, and white those with even less information, what color would this part of the piece be?

Strategies

- *Focused free writing.* We train tutors to use an adaptation of Elbow's (1973) idea of free writing that we call "focused free writing." Ask the writer to focus on a portion of the draft that needs development, writing anything and everything he can remember—words, phrases, full sentences—not worrying about spelling or punctuation, just writing. If a writer has written about a football game and has said nothing about the fans in the stands, he may decide that details about them would add color and excitement to the description of the game. Ask the writer to free write for about five minutes on everything he can remember about the fans in the stands. Decide together where the new information might fit, then have the writer shape it into coherent sentences and insert it into the draft.
- *Oral composing.* Oral composing can help the writer develop a draft or part of a draft. Instruct the writer, "Tell—off the top of your head—what you think you might write. Speak as if you were talking to yourself." Take notes while the writer speaks. Like focused free writing, this exercise helps the writer shape relevant ideas, phrases, and sentences that can be incorporated into the draft where development is thin. If the paper needs further development after oral composing, do a second round of oral composing.

- *Mapping.* Emily Meyer and Louise Smith (1987) suggest using mapping to help writers develop a portion of the piece or the piece as a whole. You can do the mapping as you listen to the writer talk about her topic, or the writer can do it herself as a way of playing with the lay of the land of her ideas and issues. Mapping isn't just list making, which of the ideas in the piece are important and how they are related to each other. As the writer or tutor adds a word or phrase to the developing graphic, the relationship of that word or phrase to the entries must be considered. Lines are used to connect entries with each other, suggesting their relationships. Graphic devices such as thick, dotted, or double lines; circles and rectangles; arrows; and shading or colors can be added to say more about the relationships. Drawing a map can lead the writer to making real discoveries about the topic, including that the issues and ideas she originally thought important aren't any longer and may be deleted. Once all the entries and relationships have been stirred and restirred, you may want to redraw the map to make it more sensible. We discourage redrawing graphically (unless the mapping is being done using software that makes it easy), because clarity can be achieved by doing the redrawing in writing. Throughout the process, keep the door to exploration and discovery open by avoiding preconceived or canned visualizations and premature closure or editing.

- *Matrices.* Matrices are common devices in research and data analysis. For tutoring sessions, matrices are most often two-dimensional, with one axis listing important issues or ideas, the other listing what is known about them. One writing center used matrix "skeletons" that a tutor or writer could grab during a tutoring session and use to create a matrix specific to the piece of writing being discussed. You can create a matrix while the writer talks, or the writer can create one as a way to think about the topic. Matrices are powerful analytic tools since they require that major categories of issues be created and related. They are probably best to use when the writer knows a lot about the topic, so much so that his problem may be displaying all his knowledge at any given moment. Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman (1984), discussing matrices as research data analysis tools, suggest three matrices that are useful in getting a handle on understanding phenomena: *role matrices*, which lay out the roles people play along one axis; *time matrices*, which use a chronology style to show beginning, middle, and end or past, present, and future; and *effects matrices*, which display the major effects of a phenomenon. The three types can be combined (roles over time, effects by roles, etc.). Use matrices with caution: Making a good one requires that the writer

know a lot about the topic. If he doesn't, some of the other development strategies may be more useful and productive.

- *Playing your thoughts.* Linda Flower and John Hayes (1977) describe a number of strategies for generating ideas that they call "playing your thoughts." They include in this category a traditional favorite among creative thinkers—brainstorming, the oral and non-judgmental sharing of ideas, stimulated by the tutor's and writer's associative play off each other's ideas as they emerge. They also include staging a scenario (role-playing) as a way to develop ideas, especially narratives or descriptions of people's interactions. In role-playing, writer and tutor take on roles and invent dialogue as a way to explore the words, gestures, facial expressions, and positions likely to be used by the people in the writer's piece. Flower and Hayes also describe playing out an analogy ("This topic is like X"), in which tutor and writer extend the topic by working out one or more analogies to things the writer already knows well ("increasing sales is like playing the infield"). Flower and Hayes finish by reminding tutors that sometimes pieces are best developed by resting, getting away from the topic and doing something else.

Example of a Development Tutorial. A student came to the writing center with a paper about Raystown Lake, a large recreational lake in central Pennsylvania. The paper was short (less than a page), so the tutor was on the alert for development possibilities. The piece opened with a three-line description of the lake, then covered boating, swimming, fishing, hiking, bicycling, and camping. Only one of the topics received more than two sentences: Fishing stretched to five. The tutor noticed the imbalance and asked, "When you go to Raystown, what do you spend most of your time doing?" She received the expected answer: "Fishing, I suppose." The tutor thought that the problem with the piece was not with development but with thesis/focus—the writer wanted to write about fishing at Raystown but felt obligated to mention all the other activities too. But when the tutor said, "If you spend most of your time fishing, why did you include these other things that you don't do often?" the answer was quick and firm: "Because I want to talk about all the things you can do there." The tutor saw that the problem was with development after all—the writer really did want to describe all the activities a visitor could do.

The tutor decided to use oral composing to develop the thinnest elements. She said to the writer, "I've never been there. Why don't you tell me about boating, swimming, and all those things. I'll take notes in case we can use any of this stuff in the paper." After an almost twelve-minute monologue by the writer, the tutor had almost one

and a half pages of notes about all the activities. The student noticed this and said, "Whoa, your notes are longer than my paper. I guess I better make it longer." The tutor said, "Good idea. You can use all the stuff in these notes."

What if the tutor had used a different strategy? She probably chose the best one in oral composing. She could have had the student do focused free writing to develop each idea in turn, but doing focused free writing seven times in a row would have been burdensome. Mapping seems like a possibility, but it is best applied to situations where the tutor wants the writer to discover the relationships between major ideas and develop material about each. In this piece all the ideas are parallel—they are all activities at Raystown. A matrix would be necessary because careful analysis is not the issue, and a matrix with just one dimension turns out to be more like a list than a record for the writer to use during revision. Role-playing is best for pieces that are focused on human interaction. Completing the analogy might have yielded some insight but would be burdensome to do seven times. Resting is probably what the writer had done too much of already. This successful tutoring session was the result of the tutor's choosing the most appropriate strategy.

Structure/Organization Tutorial

Tutors will frequently work with a writer whose draft has a clear thesis/focus, is well developed, and has appropriate voice/tone, but that could be improved, sometimes dramatically, by restructuring or reorganizing. All the bricks are there; now they need to be made into a fireplace. Structure and organization problems often exist because the writer simply has not thought about the topic enough to see the connections. Sometimes the ideas aren't connected explicitly enough to the thesis/focus; or the logic of the connections between major subparts is fuzzy; or the internal structure/organization of the subparts or paragraphs lacks explicitness or logic. Structure and organization problems can be dealt with using any of the strategies below.

The overall goal of the tutoring for structure/organization is to have the writer become aware of the problems, so we recommend the tutor use strategies that will reveal the structure/organization separately from the actual language, which the writer has often not been able to see past. Once the structure/organization is more visible, the tutor can begin to question the writer about revising it, noting changes in order or hierarchy, repetitions, and deletions or additions. As Irene Clark (1985) reminds us, the final question for

the tutor is always "why?"—why did the writer choose this structure/organization. Structure and organization don't just happen as we write, certainly not in later drafts: they are a conscious and adaptable feature of written pieces that the writer can manipulate for her purposes.

Tutor Questions

- Tell me how you tied each part/subpart to the thesis/focus.
- What do you think a reader would see as the major parts of your piece?
- Do you think the piece could be significantly improved by reordering the major parts or the subparts of a specific section?
- Do you think the piece could be improved by making sure that the divisions between the parts are more noticeable to the reader?

Strategies

- *Just talk about it.* Often drafts that seem poorly organized are really just preliminary: the writer hasn't reflected carefully about the thesis/focus. Holding a simple conversation that asks for a statement of the thesis and the major issues within it may be enough to have the writer see the inadequacy of an early draft. Frequently, writers also refine their thesis/focus and develop their draft with issues that were missed in the work that lead to the present draft. What appear as structure/organization problems often disappear the first time the writer thinks through a piece fully.

- *Skeleton.* This strategy is a cousin to outlining, but we call it "making a skeleton" because so many students have had associations with outlining, which was over-stressed in English classes for years. The numbering of levels that is part of traditional outlining is discarded so that the result is a vertical, two-level list that makes the parts of the piece visible in a way that can be the basis of discussion. To make a skeleton, draw up, or have the writer draw up, a vertical list of the major ideas, including under each its minor supporting ideas. One of the advantages of the skeleton is that it can be sketched quickly and casually, so it need not overpower the rest of the tutorial.

- *Tree diagram.* Beverly Clark (1985) and others recommend creating a tree diagram to reveal the structure/organization of a piece. A tree is a kind of visual outline that combines the levels of a skeleton with the tangibility of mapping, producing a vertical diagram. Ask the writer to write the thesis/focus at the top center of a sheet of paper held sideways. One level below, the writer records the major issues or ideas of the piece, connecting each to the statement of thesis/focus

with a line. The writer adds a third level of minor and supporting ideas below the row of major ideas, drawing a line to connect each minor idea to the major idea it supports. Finally, the writer clusters the level and connects them to their related idea. The graphic and visual nature of the tree diagram makes it more acceptable to students who are burned out on outlining.

- *Coloring.* Irene Clark (1985) recommends coloring sentences that are related to the same major ideas and should, therefore, ultimately be grouped together. Using a supply of colored pens or highlighters, ask the writer to underline or highlight each sentence that contains ideas related to the different minor ideas. Then ask for a revision that groups the colors into sections. Use further conversation to deal with what the order or hierarchy among the different sections should be.

- *Outlining.* Traditional outlining has at least two advantages for tutors. First, almost everyone knows how to do it, so no time need be spent on teaching the strategy itself. Second, the numbering and lettering typical of outlining allow for a kind of shorthand to be used when discussing a piece: "Are 2c and 3b really the same thing?" "What about an order like 2, 4, 1, 3?" "Should 2 be under 1, not its equal?"

- *Transitions.* Upon closer examination, you may find that a piece that seems disorganized is really suffering from implied or idiosyncratic transitions between major ideas and the thesis/focus; between the minor ideas and their related major idea; or both. First ask the writer to use one of the strategies for making the structure/organization more visible. Then ask how and why the various major parts are connected, in each case calling for an explicit word or phrase to act as a transition. We supply our tutors with a short list of transitions (available in most writing handbooks) that the writer can choose from at each idea boundary.

Example of a Structure/Organization Tutorial. In a tutorial between a trained peer tutor (a college senior) and a freshman that took place at a university writing center, the writer brought in a draft of a summary of a magazine article about a small religious book publishing company. The writer expected to get quick proofreading advice from the tutor. But after the tutor listened to the author read the summary aloud, he immediately recognized that the draft lacked coherence. The facts from the original magazine article were there, apparently reproduced simply and dryly in the order in which they had appeared, so that the writer's summary had no sense of priori-

tizing or identifying the central point of the article, which was that the press had survived thirty years of adversity, including stiff competition and labor strife. So the tutor went to work, trying to help the writer reshape the summary into a format that emphasized the controlling point of the article and highlighted some of the other significant points.

The tutor started by asking the writer to reconsider the opening paragraph and to include in it some sense of the organization's history, the long fight between labor and management. The tutor asked, "How could you rearrange it chronologically?" The problem was, though, that the writer still felt married to the existing draft and at first seemed willing only to reshuffle its paragraphs. The tutor patiently suggested that the writer block off and number each paragraph so that some, renumbered with the publishing house's history as a driving force, would be repositioned toward the top of the summary. The writer did the renumbering, stopping occasionally to ask himself questions like, "I wonder if I should begin a new paragraph here." Painstakingly (the session lasted thirty-five minutes), tutor and writer hammered out a revised summary that began by stressing the article's main idea. To help the writer close out the summary in a logical, well-organized manner, the tutor suggested that he add a bridge sentence, which eventually began, "Looking back at the long struggle, Chief Executive Officer Bob Clemens said. . . ." For several painful minutes of interaction, the writer had resisted doing anything except simply plopping "In conclusion" in front of the line that began the final paragraph of his original draft.

Voice/Tone Tutorial

Tutors often have to deal with pieces that have inappropriate voice or tone. Voice and tone, and the persona they create in a piece of writing, is something that many writers have very narrow experience with. A writer in an office, for example, may know only the "voice from above" in the memo in which the boss tells underlings what to do. A high school student may know only the phony inflated "college" voice that one composition theorist calls "English" (Macrorie 1970). Inexperienced writers may know only the voices they have experience with, the casual voices of everyday life. Any writer with such narrow experience is likely to use an inappropriate voice as soon as the rhetorical situation calls for a voice that's a half-step beyond the ones they know.

We train tutors to help writers hear and correct inappropriate voice or tone by showing them two scholars' views of voice and four

strategies that can bring writers to a greater awareness of the voice in their piece. When they sense that voice/tone is the area most in need of improvement, the tutors can then quickly "teach" the nature of voice in writing using the two views and one of the four strategies to help the writer see what voice is dominant in the piece. The tutor then discusses the writer's audience and purpose for the piece.

Tutor Questions

- Is the voice you hear in the piece the one you expect to hear, given the audience and purpose of your piece?
- What kind of clothes is the person you created wearing, and do they seem appropriate?
- Is the piece the right mix of tough, sweet, and stuffy; formal, conversative, and casual?

Strategies

- *Voice: tough, sweet, and stuffy.* The first of the two ways we teach tutors to explain voice in writing uses Walker Gibson's (1966) studies of American prose style. He categorizes American prose as being a mixture of just three different types of styles—tough, sweet, and stuffy.

Tough style is the voice of a hard person who has been around, who is worldly-wise and experienced—a person like Hemingway, Bogart, or certain sports writers. The language is simple and direct. Strong feelings are concealed behind a manner that is curt, quick, and to the point.

Sweet style is the style of advertising. The persona speaks directly and informally to the reader as a particular person, often addressing the reader as "you." The intention is to secure intimacy, and the language is ingeniously contrived—sometimes to the point of stylized exaggeration—to build a bridge of warmth and closeness with the reader (for example, in Toyota's "I love what you do for me!" and Microsoft's "Where do you want to go today?").

Stuffy style is the language of bureaucracy, officialdom, and some professions, often written in the voice of the organization or group. It is inflated and refuses to assume a personal connection. Legislation, contracts, research proposals, and some scholarly journals are written in stuffy style.

These three—tough, sweet, and stuffy—are mixed to form the voice of contemporary American prose. Sometimes one is used exclusively or predominates, but more often all are present to varying degrees.

▪ *Voice: formal, consultative, and casual.* The second view of voice we teach tutors is Martin Joos' (1961) ideas about levels of formality in modern English. Joos lays out a five-part spectrum of levels. Tutors rarely encounter the levels at the two extremes—*frozen* language, the language of law and contracts; and *intimate* language, the language of love letters. We concentrate on the center three: formal, consultative, and casual.

Formal voice is the voice of a research report in a professional journal. Its purpose is to inform a distant audience about technical or specialized information.

Consultative voice is the level at which the work of the world gets done. Its purpose is to inform, but it distances the reader less than formal voice does, perhaps even helping the reader understand the general background of an issue. Consultative voice is the voice of the policy statement and the office memo.

Casual voice is the level for friends and insiders. It is the voice of a personal letter or an e-mail to an office buddy. It assumes that the writer and reader share much in the way of knowledge and experience.

Applying Joos' view lets tutors both see and describe the mixtures of voice that make up the level of formality in a specific piece. A mixture of two or even three levels is common.

Read aloud. Though they may not have experience with voice in writing, writers typically have an experienced—even sophisticated—ear for voice in speech. To help the writer "hear" the voice in a piece, ask her to read aloud at regular speaking volume. Then ask her to describe the voice heard and evaluate its appropriateness to the given audience and purpose. Some writers aren't comfortable reading aloud; if that seems to be the case with your writer, offer to read aloud yourself.

Audience and/or purpose analysis. To begin to deal indirectly with issue of voice, first deal with audience and purpose to get a sense of what voice would be appropriate for the piece. Many rhetoric handbooks describe sophisticated analysis schemes. Audience can be analyzed for such concerns as values, power relationship, personal closeness to the writer, current knowledge of the topic, and expectations for pieces like the present one. Purpose can be analyzed for such traditional rhetorical concerns as persuasion, explanation, reaction, justification, and personal connection. Once the writer understands the piece's audience and purpose, he can often describe what voice would be appropriate.

Metaphors and analogies. Ask the writer for metaphors or analogies for the voice or level of formality she thinks appropriate to the piece's audience and purpose. Use questions like these:

- If someone were speaking in this voice, how would they dress?
- What music would they listen to?
- What would their facial expression be like?
- What would they order for dinner?
- What car would they drive?

Ask the writer to draw a picture or find a photo that depicts the appropriate persona or the present voice in the piece.

Role-play. Many of the pieces you'll work with will have a defined and specific audience. Use role-playing to bring that audience to the foreground. Ask the writer about the audience to help him clarify its salient characteristics. Then ask the writer to role-play one member of the potential audience while you role-play another. For example, to role-play how a boss might react to a memo, ask the writer about the boss, then ask him to play the boss while you play a higher-level boss. This kind of role-playing often helps the writer discover the appropriate level of formality.

Example of voice/tone tutorial. In one tutorial, a first-year college student said flat out that he wrote a paper to show his English teacher what a good writer he was. He described a weekend at a state park with statements like these:

It permits the extasy of highly related emotions and values to be contemplated through your retrieval of mediated thought. . . . Given quietesome times, you seem to contemplate and interpret your own intuitions.

The tutor asked the student to read the piece aloud in a regular speaking voice. After about four sentences, the student chuckled and the tutor asked why. The student said, "Nobody writes like that . . . except in English class." With further discussion, the student reported that this was the type of writing that always got him an A in AP English in high school. The tutor then explained the two theories of voice and asked the student to decide which type of voice in each theory seemed best for the piece. The writer chose "tough with some sweet" and "consultative but on the casual side," shook his head with a chuckle, and set off to rewrite.

An art history major brought her first paper from the first course

she took for her major to a writing center tutor. She was concerned about whether or not "it sounded smart enough . . . like a major should write." The tutor explained the two theories of voice, and the student decided that the assignment, to analyze a painting, was best done "tough and stuffy about equal" and "consultative with a little formal." She had written sentences like these:

Penetrating from top to bottom, filling the picture to the middle, they [elements of perspective] create a recessional movement which affects even the placement of mass and color. . . . Contrast of color and recession of space, therefore, create the subject matter and the theme of the painting.

In the discussion that followed, tutor and writer agreed that the piece generally hit the appropriate tough/stuffy and consultative/formal balance. The writer left the tutorial feeling that she had indeed entered the discourse community of art history majors.

Lower Order Concerns

Lower order concerns (LOCs), which are vital to preparing any finished piece, are matters related to surface appearance, correctness, and standard rules of written English. It makes sense for tutors and writers to shift attention to these matters once HOCs have been addressed. Tutors must have a sense of what's important to work on, since it would be a disservice to simply help a writer clean up a handful of errors in a draft that is otherwise devoid of ideas, leaving a paper that is technically correct but lacking in substance.

When you judge that it is time to zero in on LOCs, usually later in the process of writing a piece, look at the sentence structure and mechanics of the draft. Pose these questions and recommend appropriate strategies:

Direct Statement Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Have you used the subject-verb-object (S-V-O) sentence where possible, thus avoiding the wordiness of passive voice and the sentence beginning "there is," "there are," and so on?

Strategy

- *Nouns into verbs.* Help the writer look for words that are in noun form but could be transformed into verb form. These words often end

in "-ment" or "-tion." By changing "reduction" to "reduce," for example, you can make a statement leaner and more direct.

Sentence Combining Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Are there sentences that can be combined?

Strategies

- *Key words.* If you notice that a writer has a tendency to string short, choppy sentences together in a way that creates an immature style, help him identify key words in each statement that can be incorporated into slightly longer, fuller sentences.
- *Reshuffle.* If a writer seems locked into a dominant sentence pattern (for example, sentences frequently begin with a dependent clause), suggest that she reshuffle the sentences. Options for combining sentences, embedding information, and achieving sentence pattern variety include using relative clauses, noun substitutes, subordination, coordination, appositives, participles, prepositional phrases, and absolutes.
- *Creative nonfiction.* Refer the student to a work of a creative nonfiction writer such as John McPhee, Joan Didion, or Frank McCourt. Virtually any page of such a writer's work will put the student in touch with artfully wrought sentences that vary in length and style. In a single page or even a paragraph, McPhee and others conduct a virtual clinic on how to skillfully employ the repertoire of sentence types available.

Wordiness Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Can you eliminate unnecessary words?

Strategies

- *Adverbs.* It is arbitrary, but rewarding, to recommend that the writer search for and delete all adverbs ("basically," "virtually," "surprisingly," "really"), then later restore the ones that are indispensable to enhancing description.
- *Fillers.* Help the writer weed out the extra words that are typically found in conversation ("you know," "well," "now").
- *Doubles.* Help the writer delete doubled words ("each and every," "first and foremost").

- *Redundant modifiers.* Help the writer drop redundant modifiers (“future plans,” “final outcome”).
- *Redundant categories.* Help the writer eliminate redundant categories (“period of time,” “large in size,” “pink in color”).

Cohesion Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Is the movement from sentence to sentence clear?

Strategy

- *Establish connections.* Help the writer determine if there is a sense of cohesion or connectedness as sentences are spun out one after the other. Look for verbal cues (transitional words) or graphic cues (headings, underlinings that reinforce points being made) that help build bridges and establish ties between the information in one sentence and the information introduced in the next one.

Spelling Tutorial

Tutor Question

- What types of spelling errors did you make?

Strategies

- *Reference tools.* Urge the writer to use spelling-checker software, which, although fallible, can be helpful and time-saving. Or show the writer how to use a spelling dictionary, which lets a reader locate the proper spelling of a word in seconds.
- *Word logs.* Recommend that the writer keep a personalized log of her most commonly misspelled words to refer to.
- *Simplified rules.* Look for common sources of spelling errors (such as diphthongs—“ie” and “ei”), then simplify which spelling rules the writer needs to memorize.
- *Pronunciation.* Help the writer with spelling errors that stem from pronunciation by alerting him to differences between his pronunciation and the pronunciation dictated by the standard spelling.

Fragments Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Are sentence boundaries correctly marked?

Strategies

- *Tag questions, yes-no questions, embedding.* Teach writers to use the *tag questions, yes-no questions, and embedding operations* invented by Rei Noguchi (1991) to detect and correct fragments. Here’s how each operation would use this sentence from Seymour Hersh’s “On the Nuclear Edge,” from the March 29, 1993, *New Yorker*:

Pakistan was rewarded for its support with large amounts of American military and economic aid.

The idea is to show the writer how to test a potentially problematic sentence to determine whether or not it has a subject (a sentence fragment lacks a subject).

Tag question: Pakistan was rewarded for its support by large amounts of American military and economic aid, weren’t they? (The pronoun at the end of the tag question refers to the subject of the sentence—or identifies the lack of a subject.)

Yes-no question: Was Pakistan rewarded for its support by large amounts of military and economic aid? (The “helping” verb has been moved; the subject is the first noun to the immediate right of the moved auxiliary verb.)

Embedding: They refused to believe that Pakistan was rewarded for its support by large amounts of military and economic aid. (Use embedding to identify sentences [or fragment errors] by opening the sentence with “They refused to believe the idea that.” Our example would pass this test as a sentence.)

- *“To” and “-ing” words.* When “to” or an “-ing” word appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment may result. For example: Larry walked all over the neighborhood yesterday. Trying to find his dog Bo.

At the expensive restaurant, John used his napkin. To impress his date.

An “-ing” or “to” fragment can often be corrected by attaching the fragment to the sentence that comes before or after it.

Comma Splice and Run-on Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Do some of the sentences seem to be fused or rushing forward?

Strategies

- *Pronouns.* A comma splice (improperly using a comma to connect sentences) or run-on sentence (fusing two sentences together with no

punctuation to signal the end of one and the beginning of the other) often occurs when the second independent clause begins with a pronoun. Teach the writer to look for such instances and change the punctuation to correct them.

Wrong: Mark McGwire is a power hitter, he set the major league record for home runs in one season.

Correct: Mark McGwire is a power hitter. He set the major league record for home runs in one season.

- *Transition words.* Another leading cause of comma splices and run-ons is when the second independent clause begins with a conjunctive adverb or other transition word.

Wrong: Mark McGwire is a power hitter, however, he had never come close to hitting seventy homers before.

Correct: Mark McGwire is a power hitter. However, he had never come close to hitting seventy homers before.

- *Misplaced examples.* Comma splices and run-ons often occur when the second independent clause explains or gives an example of the information in the first independent clause.

Wrong: Mark McGwire has had many productive baseball seasons, the summer of 1998 was his most spectacular so far.

Correct: Mark McGwire has had many productive baseball seasons. The summer of 1998 was his most spectacular so far.

Verb Agreement Tutorial

Tutor Question

- When your subject says "one," does your verb say "one" too?

Strategy

- *De Beaugrande's approach.* Muriel Harris (1986) summarizes Robert de Beaugrande's approach for helping writers first find the verb in a sentence this way:

1. Insert a "denial word" into a statement (doesn't/don't, didn't/won't).

2. The "agreeing verb" of the original statement is the one located after the denial word.

Example: Our boss wants to call a meeting.

Our boss doesn't want to call a meeting.

(This is especially helpful for students who wonder whether "want" or "call" may be the verb here.) (127)

Verb Tense Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Does your piece say "today," "yesterday," or "tomorrow" consistently throughout?

Strategy

- *Today, yesterday, tomorrow.* If a writer is bothered by inconsistent verb tense, ask him to read through his pieces and stop at each sentence boundary to check whether it is in present, past, or future tense, saying the word "today," "yesterday," or "tomorrow" aloud.

General Proofreading Tutorial

Tutor Question

- Have you tried other "finishing up" strategies?

Strategies

- *Online assistance.* Recommend that the writer consult online writing labs (OWLs) for online writing handbooks or grammar hotlines (see the "Electronic Resources" section at the back of the book).
- *Line screen.* A big challenge in helping writers proofread their own text is making sure they stay on task and don't get sidetracked by screen, or even just a ruler, to view only one line at a time. This makes reading tough, but improves proofreading.
- *Sentence sequence.* Tell the writer to read the piece backward, sentence by sentence, to catch spelling errors and omissions. Reading sentences out of sequence will let the writer concentrate on individual words.
- *Page sequence.* Encourage the writer to read pages out of order. This is another way of taking words and ideas out of their original context, which enables the writer/proofreader to review each page as a discrete unit.
- *Cluster.* Remind the writer that mistakes tend to cluster; if she finds one typographical error, she should look carefully nearby for others.
- *Read aloud.* Have the writer read the piece aloud to himself. Hearing his own words often lets a writer catch incongruous word combinations or words or word endings that he has inadvertently omitted.

- *Hard copy.* If you're tutoring a writer at a computer terminal, recommend that the writer print out a hard copy of the piece to proof-read, rather than proofreading on-screen.

Responding to the Whole Piece of Writing

Both when working face-to-face with a writer and when face-to-face interaction isn't an option, tutors sometimes need to step back from micromanaging HOCs and LOCs and respond to a piece of writing as a whole, first viewing it from an overall impressionistic perspective, then responding to the writing and the writer holistically.

Giving Feedback in Person

One simple holistic feedback technique is for the tutor to ask the writer to submit a draft along with a paragraph describing what she tried to accomplish (Wiggins 1993). After reading the draft, the tutor tells the writer whether the draft's effect matches the writer's intent, and points out one place in the draft where he lost interest in the piece.

Tom Romano (1987) outlines a three-step method for tutors to use when responding to the overall effectiveness of a piece. First the tutor reads the entire draft and describes two strong parts to the writer. Next the tutor quotes the most effective sentence in the piece. Then the tutor identifies one spot in the draft that needs to be clarified and poses one question about it to the writer.

Another method that allow tutors to focus on the whole draft is a "stuttered" response, which gives the writer information about how strongly the lead relates to the piece and if it reflects what she intended it to. The tutor reads only the lead (the first line, first paragraph, or first two paragraphs), then stops to let the writer know her reaction to these three questions:

- What words or phrases struck me the most?
- What has this section said so far?
- What do I now expect the rest of the paper to say?

The tutor then reads the remainder of the piece and gives the writer general responses about the whole text.

Giving Feedback on Paper

Tutors sometimes need to tend to a piece in a writer's absence, perhaps because a draft is available before a scheduled tutorial session. Tutors

can give feedback on paper by writing comments on the draft or by filling out a rating sheet.

Writing comments on the draft. Comments jotted on the draft can serve as guideposts for the tutorial conversation, if there will be one, and give the writer something to refer to later on. It is important that the tutor frame written comments in a way that lets the writer learn from them. There are both general and specific strategies for writing effective comments.

General Strategies for Writing Comments

1. Use the priority of concerns to guide your written response (HOCs to LOCs). Present comments so the writer knows which problems with text are most important and which are of lesser importance. Especially at first, refrain from checkmarking, circling, or underlining grammatical errors.
2. Use comments primarily to call attention to a particular strength or weakness in the piece—one that can be located precisely at the point where it occurs.
3. Studies reveal that hostile, mean-spirited written comments are counterproductive or go unread. Frame your comments so that you are not taking the writer's attention away from her purposes and focusing attention on your own thinking.
4. Don't feel obligated to do all the "fixing." If you notice one pervasive flaw, say with spelling, jot a note to the writer that you found six spelling miscues and let him identify and correct them.
5. Write comments that are text-specific, uniquely aimed at that writer and that paper, rather than vague, rubber-stamped remarks.

Specific Strategies for Writing Comments

1. Pose at least two questions that ask for clarification or that seek other possible views or more information on the subject.
2. Avoid using marginal shorthand like "?" and "What?" and "So what?" and "Be specific!" and "AWK." Don't leave the writer guessing. It's better to write a few fully explained comments than to flood a piece with cryptic jottings.
3. Let the writer know what specific lines, ideas, and stylistic touches you find pleasing or that you recognize as representing the writer's progress.
4. Make a personal connection at least once on every draft by using the writer's name or initials.

5. When you make a specific, concrete suggestion for improvement, try couching it in a qualifier: "You might try . . ." or "Why don't you add . . ." or "Another way of writing the lead might be . . ."
6. Use a pen or marker that stands out from the writer's printed text—and avoid red ink.
7. Phrase your comments in a way that invites the writer to write more. Don't be sarcastic or terse.
8. If you notice a pattern of errors or a problem area that emerges throughout the piece, comment on it in a global way at the end of the piece.

Using a rating sheet. Another way a tutor can provide written feedback about a draft is by filling out a sheet that rates the draft in several areas. (See Figure 6-1.) After reading the draft, circle the number that indicates the writer's level of performance in each area, pinpointing the draft's strengths and weak spots. Here is a rating sheet that covers nine areas of HOCs and LOCs. (This sheet is somewhat similar to the one recommended in Chapter 7 for peer writing teams to use when tutoring in the workplace—see Figure 7-1.)

Summary

We'll wrap up this chapter with a summary of our writing tutorial model, with scenarios, question sets, and strategies listed in a bare-bones way. This model is not intended to be a recipe for tutors to follow lockstep. In fact, we can't imagine a tutorial session that would require the tutor to adhere to the full model. Rather, we ask that tutors be mindful of the uniqueness of each tutorial encounter, keep to the basic situation (no topic, topic but no draft, draft), and work on a hierarchy of HOCs to LOCs by using the questions and strategies that seem most appropriate.

Our Tutoring Model

Every Session

Questions and Procedures

- Get acquainted
- Find out what the assignment is, whether the writer understands it fully, and when it is due. Determine what kind of writing it is

Figure 6-1
Rating Sheet for Responding to Drafts

	Writer	Tutor/Reader
Rating Sheet for Responding to Drafts		
	4 Distinguished; 3 Proficient; 2 Apprentice; 1 Novice	
1. Title.	4	3 2 1
Provides a forecasting or intriguing clue		
2. Lead.	4	3 2 1
First few lines capture the reader in three seconds, perhaps innovatively		
3. Focus.	4	3 2 1
The piece says just one thing		
4. Information.	4	3 2 1
Writer presents specific, accurate bits of information and details		
5. Order.	4	3 2 1
The piece has a shape that has bridges between paragraphs and that moves the piece forward		
6. Voice.	4	3 2 1
The piece shows evidence of a distinctive persona and/or appropriate tone		
7. Ending.	4	3 2 1
The piece offers a satisfying sense of closure		
8. Grammar/Usage/Mechanics.	4	3 2 1
The piece shows control over grammar, spelling, and punctuation		
9. Risk Taking.	4	3 2 1
The piece shows work beyond the writer's comfort level		

(explanatory, expressive, persuasive, an abstract, a resume, etc.), the intended audience, and the voice required by asking these questions:

What are you trying to do in this paper?

Are you writing to someone other than your instructor/supervisor/parent?

What kind of writer's voice do you think is most appropriate for the piece (friendly and intimate, distant and unsociable, etc.)?

Find out what approach the writer is already using or plans to use for the assignment.

When the Writer Needs Help Finding a Topic

Explore with the writer how to discover a worthwhile topic by asking these questions:

What have you been thinking or reading about lately?

What are you curious to know more about?

Use these strategies:

writing territories

free writing

rapid sketches

conversation

free talking

doodling

three-by-five card focusing drill

the alert writer

When the Writer Has a Topic, but No Draft

Explore with the writer how she might go about gathering or producing ideas and materials about the topic by asking these questions:

What do you know about the subject?

What don't you know about the subject?

How can you look for connections among the tidbits you already know that might suggest new directions?

Use these strategies:

cubing

twenty questions

particle/wave/field

pentad

looping

titles
clustering
point-of-view mapping

When the Writer Has a Rough Draft

Sit next to the writer and read aloud silently as he reads the page aloud. Encourage him to tell you what he wants the two of you to look and listen for. Ask the following questions:

What works best in your piece?

What do you like best or feel most satisfied about?

What works least in the piece?

Which parts did you have trouble writing?

Which parts don't feel right?

Stop whenever you wish to explore alternatives with the writer. Give him every chance to solve a problem before you offer specific solutions. Your task is to help the writer see the problem and solve it. Avoid jumping in and writing out the solution yourself. Ask questions and use strategies that let the writer do the writing:

For HOCs

Questions About Thesis/Focus

What's the central issue of the piece?

What's the dominant statement you want your piece to make?

When the reader is finished reading, what do you want him to walk away with?

If your roommate, colleague, or sibling walked up to you and said, "What are you writing about?" what would you say?

Strategies

one-sentence summary

nutshelling and teaching

talk aloud

make a promise

create a headline or bumper sticker

Questions About Development

Can you tell me more?

Point to places where you think a reader might want you to tell more.

If you read this aloud to a few readers, what do you think their first questions would be?

If black were the color of the parts with lots of information, gray the color of those with less information, and white those with even less information, what color would this part of your piece be?

Strategies

focused free writing
oral composition
mapping
matrices
playing your thoughts

Questions About Structure/Organization

How did you tie each part and subpart to the thesis/focus?

What do you think a reader would see as the major parts of your piece?

Do you think the piece could be significantly improved by reordering the major parts or the subparts in a specific section?

Do you think the piece could be improved by making the divisions between parts more noticeable to the reader?

Strategies

just talk about it
skeleton
tree diagram
coloring
outlining
transitions

Questions About Voice/Tone

Is the voice in the piece the one you expect to hear given the audience and purpose of the piece?

What kind of clothes is the persona you created wearing, and do they seem appropriate?

Is the piece the right mix of tough, sweet, stuffy, formal, consultative, and casual?

Strategies

tough/sweet/stuffy
formal/consultative/casual
read aloud
audience/purpose analysis

metaphors and analogies
role-play

For LOCs

Questions

Have you used the subject-verb-object sentence?

Are there sentences that can be combined?

Can you eliminate unnecessary words?

Is the movement from sentence to sentence clear?

What types of spelling errors did you make?

Are the sentence boundaries correctly marked?

Do some of the sentences seem to be fused or rushing forward?

When your subject says "one," does your verb say "one," too?

Does your piece say "today," "yesterday," and "tomorrow" consistently throughout?

Have you tried other "finishing up" strategies?

At the end of the tutorial session, if it seems appropriate, recommend self-help materials to the writer and invite her back for another visit soon. If the session took place in a writing center, do the necessary record keeping.