Dear To-Be-Tutors,

As a tutor who has almost completed the training class, I am sharing with you what I have learned. You would begin the training as a nervous, overwhelmed tutor and eventually become comfortable with your class and job. You may worry about teaching grammar rules that you don’t know how to explain. But at the end of the course, you will learn a lot like I did, including reading skills, common errors of ESL students and “generation 1.5”, grammar rules and last but not least, professionalism.

I had no idea on how should I tutor students in reading class. I always thought that reading is an individual process that involves only the student’s effort. I didn’t know what I can do else to help. Then, I had Sara Lisha, a reading instructor in De Anza, to lecture on reading skills. She shared with us the KWL+ reading strategy that we can use to train our tutees. She also designed a reading activity to demonstrate the struggle faced by reading students. Other than the guest lecture, I discovered many useful resources in the WRC that inspire me to tutor reading. I looked over the cabinet of DLA handouts and I saw titles like “main ideas” and “thesis”. I then developed a set of reading tutoring strategies which are quite universal and versatile that I become a good reading tutor – at least a satisfying one.

Most tutees I had in the quarter are in ESL courses or developmental reading and writing courses. I discovered that ESL students are generally good at generalizing ideas and presenting logically because they have already mastered another language. They have mature thought processes and clear organizations that are reflected on their essays. Their major struggle is grammar. I read through Michelle DuBarry’s notes on ESL errors and tried to apply the tips to my tutoring. Before the training class, what I would probably do with ESL students was going through the papers without identifying the “nature” of the errors – whether they belong to the “global” level or the “local” level. The categorizing is important as we want to help them avoid the same mistakes. The global level errors usually come with a pattern and appear repetitively. I have prioritized the global level errors in my tutoring so ESL students can improve more efficiently. The generation 1.5, though speaks English fluently, encounters more problems in writing. Since they have not mastered either English or their home language, those students have a hard time on presenting and organizing ideas as well as dealing with grammar. So don’t mistake fluent speakers – some of them need even more help than ESL students.
To me, the most challenging part in the first tutoring quarter is to learn to be a tutor. Most of us new tutors have encountered various setbacks – no shows, rescheduling and disorganized sessions. I would conclude that there are three most important skills that you may want to learn, namely time management, expectation statement and professionalism. Time management refers to the way you spend the 50 minutes on the session. Tutees usually come with more than assignments, or one assignment with several struggles. Their essay may have problems in both organizations and grammar and you probably don’t want to miss one of them. So, get to know your tutee’s assignment and distribute the 50 minutes wisely. Otherwise, you may have to rush in the last few minutes or your session may have to overrun, which is not preferable.

Expectation statement is what I missed at the beginning of the quarter and I am really regretful about that. What I mean by expectation statement is that tutor should let his or her tutees know the tutees’ responsibilities, including showing up on time, informing the tutor in advance of no shows, bringing assignments or books to sessions and so on. I did not formally talk about my expectations in my first session and so I had to make much more effort later in the quarter to deal with these issues. It is not the English writing knowledge that challenges me in my tutoring, but the way of how to be a tutor. Don’t fear that they will be frightened by your statement because it is what should be done, and you can always rephrase that in a really friendly tone.

Being professional is to show your respect to the job. Even you are not happy with the grades in your own courses, or something happens in your family that really depresses you, or your tutees have a really bad attitude, be a professional tutor! Your principal role is to provide academic assistance to your tutees in a friendly manner. Even though I often got no shows from my tutees, I am still willing to help them. I do not blame them and will try to reach them and see what happened. Nevertheless, being professional doesn’t mean that you have to know everything. In fact, sometimes I come across questions that I don’t know how to answer (or explain) from my tutees. Don’t panic. You can always look up the answers in dictionary, WRC resources or from the entire tutor team in the WRC. You are a good tutor as long as you are active to find out the answer.

Do expect to have a great experience both from the training class and your job as a WRC tutor throughout the quarter. My fellow tutors are great people and we become good friends. They will support you whenever you need help, no matter personal problems or work problems. The training class is the most enjoyable one I have ever had in De Anza. While I feel
like it is my obligation to attend all my other classes, the tutor training is just what I look forward every week. In the past, I didn’t often stay in De Anza after class, but now I would spend my time in WRC simply because of the great atmosphere. The supporting staff members – Diana, Sandy, Renato, Kanako, Victoria and Pat are so nice that you can always seek for help from them. Count on them and your fellow tutors and enjoy your job as a tutor! It should be the most rewarding job you can find on campus, especially when you see your tutees grow and improve in their class together with your development as a tutor.

Good luck!

Best wishes,