Hello friends,

Congratulations on becoming part of the tutoring team at De Anza! The first thing that I want to let you all know is that if you are feeling a little anxious about this experience that you are about to embark upon, it is very normal. I am sure that most of you do not know what to expect (neither did I). But, let me assure you that within a few weeks of teaching, the anxiety will start to melt away; not because we become perfect tutors, but we begin to understand that we are not expected to become perfect by any means. We start to realize that we do not know a lot of things that we thought we knew very well. On the other hand, we also become aware that we possess a lot of skills that we never got an opportunity to put to use before!

One of the first things that I learnt from this class is that as tutors, our job is to not act as proofreaders. In our eagerness to help tutees, if we start to fix every single error in their writing and essentially take over the writing process, then we are doing a disservice to them. The class discussions led by Diana and Ken, “The Bedford Guide for writing tutors” (the red book that all of you will be given) and the articles in the handout packet all helped me to understand the concept of “minimalist tutoring”—a technique where most of the work is done by the tutees themselves while the tutor just acts as a guide asking relevant questions and helping tutees to arrive at answers by themselves. This technique is very effective because by following this, we are actually teaching students skills that they can use in the long term rather than just helping them get a good grade in a single assignment.

With regards to the beginning of a session, I found that it is extremely important to ask the tutee for a detailed description of the essay prompt so that we both know exactly what the teacher was expecting from the students. Then I focused on the organization and the content of the essay and tried to point out certain patterns of error rather than correcting each and every sentence. In this stage, I had a bit of difficulty since I had forgotten most of the grammar terms and hence, could not explain to my tutees why something was wrong. But, the grammar books in the WRC as well as certain online websites proved to be quite invaluable in helping me remember grammar terminology. I am sure that they will be helpful for you too. Planning ahead for the following session was another strategy which I found to be very productive becasue it helped both my tutee and I to come well prepared.

For any kind of tutoring technique to be effective, a warm and supportive environment is critical. My first quarter of tutoring taught me that when we show empathy towards our tutees, they start to trust us and they become more open to accepting our suggestions for improvement. During the quarter, I found myself taking on the role of a cheerleader, a friend and sometimes a counselor for the tutee, depending on the situation. At times when we have to be assertive, we will have to do that also; but, even then, it has to be done with professionalism and integrity. Tutoring also gave me ample opportunities to exercise my “patience muscles!” It was very rewarding for me to watch tutees come up with their own answers if I gave them sufficient time to think about it. It is possible that no matter how much we try, some tutees might remain aloof and act like they do not really want to be there. In these occasions, the wise course of action is to try to not take it personally and remain professional. Please communicate with the supervisors at the WRC or Diana and Ken if you have any issues.

Just like me, I am sure that all of you will get the opportunity to work with tutees who come from different parts of the world. I found this to be a very enjoyable part of tutoring. We were taught in class to be sensitive to the varied cultural and social backgrounds of our tutees so that we remain respectful at all times. We might not agree with a tutee’s perspective on certain issues, but that does not give us the right to impose our ideas on them. You will be surprised at how easily we can connect with our tutees by sharing unique aspects of our native languages, customs, and traditions.

Just as races and nationalities vary, so do the personalities and learning styles of our tutees. I do not think that there is a single strategy that is going to work for everyone. We will have to try out different methods and see what works. No amount of discussing or reading about techniques is actually going to give us the right idea for each person. We will have to just do it and figure it out. The skill level also varies widely amongst different levels of English classes. A tutee in one of the lower ESL classes might not be as skilled as a student in a LART class. Going through the binders in the WRC which contains writing samples from various writing classes enabled me to understand what students are taught at each level, so that I did not have unrealistically high or low expectations about their abilities.
This quarter is going to be very interesting for all of you. You might be a little overwhelmed at first, but then it gets very enjoyable. This class is very unique. Unlike a Chemistry or a History class, which teaches you a single subject, peer tutoring teaches a plethora of skills – professionalism, time management, cultural competence and so on. Most important of all, it helps us become better learners because it makes us more aware of our own strengths and weaknesses. Please do not miss the lectures by visiting professors. They are very inspiring! I hope that all of you will get as much joy and satisfaction from tutoring that I did.

Wish you all the very best.