Dear prospective tutors,

First of all, congratulations on your decision to become a tutor! You are about to embark on an unforgettable journey of tutoring. But I'm pretty sure you must have been quizzed to find out what a tutoring experience is like. Don't worry, several months ago, I felt the same way as you do now, feeling completely blank and clueless about tutoring. But as I walked into the EWRT 97, for a moment there I felt no longer lost. There were materials to support you, classmates to motivate you, and not to mention instructors as well as resources to guide you to the professional tutoring process. As a senior tutor, I'd be more than willing to share some of the things I have gained from tutoring for the past quarter. There's definitely a lot to say about tutoring, but don't be afraid. Keep in mind that tutoring is not a scary job. As long as you stay committed to it, feel comfortable at your position and your workplace, you will find this experience very rewarding.

Personally, I find tutoring not only as a whole new experience, but as well as an opportunity to grow, expand my network, make more friends, and gain more knowledge. Prior to tutoring at the WRC, I have enriched my tutoring skills amateurishly by helping my friends brainstorming and proofreading their essays. However, the tutor training class has helped me develop my tutoring skills to further level. It generally proves that tutoring isn't merely sharing knowledge, proofreading, and that's it, but exhibit particular techniques would be necessary especially in dealing with tutees coming from different background.

Through simulations and discussions conducted in the class, I gained an idea what a professional tutoring would be like. My classmates have been really helpful in implementing more knowledge and notions towards tutoring through their opinions. I find it most helpful to learn about “Readerly Responses”: sort of expressions and comments you should convey to your tutees. In this particular exercise, you, as a professional tutor, are expected to explore the perspective of a reader. While in the tutoring process, you would want to act more as a reader rather than a teacher or someone with authority over the tutee. Roleplaying as a reader will allow tutees to understand what readers in general would respond to his/her essay.

Before enrolling in this class, I normally dropped blunt, subjective comments towards mistakes my friends made on their essay, which of course, I believed wouldn't help them to comprehend their mistakes better. But after going over the “Readerly Responses”, I became aware of how crucial it is to choose wise words to say to my tutees when it comes to correcting their essays. Generally, the past ten weeks of attending this course have elevated my skills in tutoring to greater heights. I came to be grow more confident in providing resources for my tutees and exhibiting my professionalism in tutoring. My another suggestion is, try looking up to the Bedford Guide for Writing Tutor and the handout, as they provide rich information, useful tips, and techniques to professional tutors. Try going over them and see what you can gain from them.

Although it sounds like a job with so much pressure, being a tutor is not as horrifying or demanding as it may sound. Tutor very much differs from a teacher, where tutor shares authority with the tutee meanwhile teacher holds stronger authority in the classroom. What I mean with dividing the authority with the tutees is, you don't technically lead the entire tutoring process. You don't necessarily direct the tutees on what to do every week in the tutoring session. From my experience over the past quarter, I would normally greet my tutee at the beginning of the session, ask what I could do to him/her that day, and the tutee would normally explain what sort of assignments they worked on in that particularly week.

Fortunately for me, most of my tutees always prepared the materials they would like to ask me in advance. They basically just laid their essays and provided the prompt on the desk, even they occasionally handed me a list of questions for me to answer regarding the difficulty they encountered in their assignments. It sounds nice, doesn't it? However, never forget to always expect the worst. In my case, a particularly tutee of mine rarely came up and once he did, he looked unprepared for the session.
When I asked him if he had any assignments to work on or if there were any difficulties he was still having, he simply said no and ended up asking me: “I understand everything. So what do we do now?”. I was on the verge of despair before I came up with an idea, and that was to review his materials discussed in the class to make sure he would gain better understanding towards them. Unfortunately, he poorly demonstrated his ability in comprehending the materials, in contrast to what he said to me earlier. Therefore, it is important for you to always come up with plan B if something doesn't work out during your tutoring session.

As a weekly-individual, you will most likely to encounter ESL level students. These students usually have common problems. Their issues basically revolve around grammar mistakes that include the use of tenses, choice of words, and sentence structures. ESL students often find it hard to distinguish uses of tense and when to use some particular tenses. One of my tutees, at one time, was confused in differentiating the present perfect tense and the present perfect progressive. This issue instinctively sparked my describing skills. I honestly felt a bit pressured with the feeling that I had to demonstrate two contrasting yet realistic examples that I hoped the tutee would be able to relate him or herself to them. This is where the challenge in the tutoring emerges. As a writer, I am able to instinctively aware of tenses’ difference. If I apply that in my own essay, I am completely confident that I would use the appropriate, fitting tenses there. However, it's a different story when it comes to being asked to explain the difference between those two.

It is not impossible for you to be assigned with EWRT level students, such as EWRT 200 and 211. Their assignments are slightly different than those who are in ESL levels. EWRT students tend to have more essay-related issues, by any means, we – as tutors – should assist them in detecting global/local errors. Global errors involve mistakes relating to the essay content, paragraph organization, the use of thesis statement and topic sentences and how they relate with the remaining content. You would want to focus on the essay content, pay more attention on the global elements of an essay I mentioned. I know that sometimes it's easier for us tutors to detect grammatical errors (local errors/sentence-level errors) rather than looking up for glitches in essay’s organization. But the more advanced a tutee’s level is, the more challenge you are likely to encounter.

Anyway, another way of solving this problem would be providing the tutee with exercise handouts or online exercises to help boost their ability to apply these tenses to daily life. Aside from dealing with tenses, vocabulary is clearly a crucial element often encountered in every English classes, let alone the levels. All of my tutees have the willing to expand their vocabularies. Every after the tutoring session, they would ask me the same question: “Do you have any tips for me to know more vocabularies?”. I always recommend my tutees to read English text as often as possible, especially books. Reading books allow the tutee to look up on the dictionary whenever they bump into a specific word they don't know, and later figure out the meaning.

There's nothing wrong with being fidgety on your first day of tutoring. Surely you must be wondering what kind of people you would encounter, whether they would be demanding or nice and calm. My message for you is, again, prepare for the worst. You should always be ready in dealing with any kinds of tutor that would be assigned to you in advance. Following this, anticipating to encounter the worst tutee you would ever encounter is recommended. Before I met my tutee on the scheduled day, I would anticipate some actions I would take IF my tutee turned out to be a spoiled brat who just wanted to drop by, hand in his/her essay, and have me proofread it. What I should do if my tutee was Mr. Complaints, what kind of action I should take if my tutee is like this, and that. Keep that 'what ifs' in mind. However, don't use these 'what ifs' too much otherwise you will end up being devoured by all negative thoughts!

As we all know, De Anza College is a community formed by students coming from different cultural backgrounds. So, there's a high possible chance that you will
encounter tutees that come from different backgrounds, especially you will be dealing with ESL level students first. Following that, you should be ready to embrace that difference as well. I find tutoring to be a good chance to make some friends and learn new things, especially regarding your tutee's backgrounds and culture. But try to keep your distance when it comes to the tutees' personal space. After the tutoring session is over, try to have some warm talk from the simplest topic such as what classes your tutees are taking, to asking them where they are from.

Tutees would usually feel more than glad if you mentioned about their cultural backgrounds as that's an indication that you're interested to learn things related to them. What I would normally do after the first meeting is, I would ask my tutee where he or she was from. Then I would show how I was also interested to learn about his or her origin. The simple example is, if your tutee comes from China and you happened to have a background in Mandarin, then you might want to greet her in Mandarin. If it's possible, asking about the tutee's background will help the conversation and the rest of tutoring processes flow better. It proves that tutoring session is not just about one way communication (you deposit knowledge to your tutees), but also conducting two ways communication. Your tutee surely gain a lot of knowledge in English from you, but on the other hand, you might want to learn more about your tutee. That way, your tutee will feel much more appreciated. Getting to know your tutees better will establish comfort and maintain relationship with your tutees.

Apart from all things I have written to you about tutoring, be sure to remember one vital thing: maintain good relationship with your team. In this case, engaging with the support specialist team, maintaining good relationship with fellow peer tutors as well as senior tutors are strongly important. If you have questions, problems, or anything regarding your tutoring sessions, the WRC staff and team will always be there to assist you. So don't be hesitate to ask them questions. The convenient environment at the WRC also to motivate you in your tutoring process as well as boost your confidence.

All in all, the basic key of tutoring is simply just enjoy it! I believe you will learn to grow into a better person as well as writer along the time. Before I started tutoring at the WRC, my community was still limited to fellow Indonesians. The tutoring experience has aided me to step out of the boundary by encountering tutees from different backgrounds as well as widening my perspectives towards many aspects. You might find tutoring hard at first but that's okay. Just consider tutoring as a hobby. If you have a passion in drawing, then you should treat tutoring as a hobby as well, not merely as a job that becomes your source of money. Indeed that you need to take it seriously, but at the same time, just enjoy and have fun with it!

Good luck!

Sincerely,