Dear Future Writing Tutors,

As your senior writing tutor, I feel honored to be able to sit here and write this letter to you. Tutoring is not just something you do for fun, but a noble deed that you are committed to. Think about it, how many of your tutees will be helped through the tutoring sessions? How many of their grades will be pulled up, simply because you tutored them? Therefore, I would like to commend all of you for your courage and kindness to acknowledge your expertise and provide assistance to those who need it.

Rather than just helping others, tutoring has taught me many lessons as well. In fact, I feel that I learnt more than I taught my tutees during the past two months that I have been a tutor. I remember how some of my tutees were not as motivated to learn as they should be. Sure, during the first meeting, they claimed to be very interested in the subject and are determined to improve their English skills. As a matter of fact, I faced many obstacles in trying to get my tutees committed to their set timings. Many of them would not reply to my reminders regarding future meetings and call me on the day to cancel it. Indeed, this annoyed me to some extent. However, I know that it is not their personality that is the issue, but rather their lack of motivation. I tried various methods to contact them: call, messages, emails, voicemails, and they still ignore me. Despite all these unfortunate happenings, I tried my best to remain professional and thought of them as notifications to me that I would need to work even harder to motivate my tutees. When I revealed this problem in class, my fellow tutors and instructors encouraged me to keep holding on, and persist in tutoring them. In addition, there are also many times that my tutees try to persuade me to write their essays for them. Technically, we know that this is not part of our jobs and we should not do it; but sometimes, it is just very hard to refuse these kinds of requests. In order to resolve this, I tend to make it part of my introductory message to my tutee that my part as a tutor is to simply assist in the formation of an essay, and not form it myself. I must say, this has created boundaries and allowed the tutee to understand the expectations they should have of us as tutors.

Now, many of you probably know that De Anza is a college swarmed by international students. In fact, some of you might be international students yourself. I know I am. Well, this can be seen as a blessing, as well as a challenge. The good thing is that international students tend to have many different insights regarding their topics. I am always amazed by their ideas and train of thought in response to their prompts. Perhaps we can attribute it to their unique cultural backgrounds that they can think in ways we would never think of. On the other hand, there were also many challenges in tutoring international students with different backgrounds. I have a tutee, an international student, who is an older and apparently did not like the fact that someone younger than her is her tutor. When I speak, she rebuts and when I suggest she alter her ideas, she complains. This might be discouraging to most of you, but like what I learnt in class, culture is a big part of being an individual. It is important to keep in mind that even if what the tutee is doing seem unfriendly or hurtful, it might have been part of their culture to react that way. The only we can handle this is to simply accept and embrace it. Another challenge in tutoring international students is that they tend to be ashamed of their English, or simply do not know how to express themselves in English. I found it to be very hard to try to get them to speak up. However, it is always important that we, as tutors, praise and encourage them to give them the confidence to talk and voice out their opinions and ideas.

There are many different types of tutees I tutored. Some are hardworking and eager to learn, while others are more relaxed and take things as it comes. As tutors, we need to constantly be on the go, and be motivating to our tutees, regardless of their attitudes. I have many different tutees, from different countries, age, gender and personalities. They act differently to the things I do or say, and it is difficult to expect their reaction. This can be challenging at times, because you need to figure out what to say after their reaction. The important key here is just simply be adaptive of whatever their responses might be, and always keep it professional.

Sentence-level tutoring is one of the most common mistakes that tutees, at least in my case, make. Grammar is a major issue for most of the students that seek tutoring help from the WRC. We all might think that we are already proficient in English, but wait till you see what happens when you get a tutee that asks you a variety of grammar questions. At first, I came into the WRC thinking I was a good writer who knew the rules well. However, after several tutees asked me grammar questions I cannot answer, I started to doubt myself. Tenses, subject-verb agreements and even vocabulary will come as a shock at this point of
time. Hence, I took to the senior tutors for help. In fact, I went to Eric several times, so that he could review the rules with me.

At one point in your EWRT 97 class, you should be introduced to a teaching technique called the “Minimalist Tutoring.” To me, this is a very useful tool in which the tutor emphasizes that the tutee does most of the work, while the tutor simply assists from the side. I feel that this technique has helped build boundaries so that the tutee does not expect anything more that assistance in writing the essay. I also think that by asking the tutee to read her essay aloud, it helps the articulation problems that the tutee might be facing and increases her confidence in her writing.

Everything needs to be planned beforehand, including a tutoring session. This is something you should remember, especially as a weekly-individual tutor. You only get 50 minutes per week to see your tutee and you need to plan ahead, so that you do not waste both your time. You should put planning before everything else. Firstly, set an agenda. What are you going to do for the next session? What topics are you going to cover? Next, you should also allocate time to set up the agenda for the next session. Sometimes, tutees come in without any work for you to help on and that can sometimes be bothersome. Hence, it is very important to set an agenda for a tutoring session.

Now that I have covered some of the things I encountered with and learnt throughout the time that I have been tutoring, I would like to tell you about the things you should be expecting. Well, to tell the truth, all I can say is: Expect the unexpected. Tutees can come in different forms and it is almost impossible to tell how to deal with them until you actually meet them.

First and foremost, remain calm. Even if it is your first time meeting with the tutee, always be sure that you are professional and confident. There is nothing more important than being self-assured of your own abilities. There will be a time when you doubt yourself, thinking that your tutee does not write badly, so are you eligible to be his tutor? And that is normal, but the truth is, you are already a tutor! So quit doubting and start tutoring!

I cannot stress enough how important confidence is in this job. When a time comes that your tutee asks you on a topic you are particularly unsure about, do not hesitate to approach the senior tutors for help. They are more than happy to teach you these concepts. They will always be there for you at times of need and will never refuse your plea for support. In fact, it does not even have to be English-related questions. When you face technical difficulties with the computers in the WRC, be sure to approach them as well. If at that time, they are busy, always make use of the internet for primary research.

Another thing to note is that some of the tutees are totally new to the whole tutoring concept. When you come in, be sure to remind them to check in at both the form and the computers. If it is their first time, be sure to explain the steps to them. As they leave after the session, make sure to also remind them to check out. Speaking of administrative matters, one of the most hectic tasks is the online timesheet filing. Here, you have to input all your working hours into the timesheet on myportal. Although it might sound easy now, discrepancies tend to occur and it is really stressful as it needs to be fixed within a given period of time – before the deadline.

Lastly, I would like to advise you regarding the matter of principles. Just because you are a tutor, you do not have to feel obliged to do unrelated works for your tutees. As a matter of fact, you do not have to do any of your tutee’s works. All you are there for is to simply assist them and show them to the right path. Whether or not they continue their journey depends on their own will entirely. Hence, do not feel as though it is part of your responsibility to help out with works, especially to a point of doing them for your tutees.

Alright, seems like I have covered most of the things I want to say to you. You have made a great and truly rewarding decision of being a tutor at the WRC. Wait and see, you will definitely enjoy your time there. I hope you can remember that nothing is more important than being confident and sticking to your
principles. I do not know how these points will help you, but I am sure you will do very well as you embark on this new journey as the face of De Anza WRC. Good luck!

Yours Sincerely