

“I am the Doorman”

I see myself as a doorman, well doorman, whose job it is to help students gain entry into the world of academia. As a doorman at a fancy restaurant might lend a patron a tie or a sport coat and give him advice about the decorum of the restaurant, I see my position as writing tutor serving the same function. I am more experienced in the academic community than many students are, and I offer both an outsider and an insider opinion on the assignment at hand and the discourse community in general. With my assistance and encouragement, students can feel more confident when they submit their work to the scrutiny of the academic community.

To help each student, I try to approach each tutoring session with an open mind. Each student may need a different metaphorical tie or coat to match his metaphorical outfit, and I want to be ready to assess each situation individually. Some sessions require a very hands-on directive approach while others require a less structured non-directive approach. In my experience, the best place to make a decision about what approach to take is after reading the paper aloud. This is also the time in the session where I feel it is generally best to set an agenda. The tutoring style that works best for the session and the aspects of the student's work that are most important to him or her are linked and should be considered together.

The student's concerns about his or her assignment should be considered in addition to the issues that I see or hear as the paper is read aloud and will certainly inform my tutoring approach as well as the agenda. It takes a good deal of practice to balance the student's concerns with your own and possibly the instructor's. If any of the parties involved have identified specific, generally lower order, issues that need addressing, then I feel comfortable assuming a more directive approach as a tutor. The student and I would then need to collaborate to sort the issues at hand and set the agenda. Once we identify specific issues to examine within the text, I feel that it is most valuable to use the student's own work as a model and present possible corrections to some of the issues found there. After pointing out and possibly correcting these issues, I am ready to assume a more non-directive role and have the student use his or her new knowledge to cement a feeling of agency with respect to the work. If the student is less sure about concerns or goals for the assignment or we primarily identify higher order concerns, then I am more comfortable beginning the session with a non-directive tutoring approach in which we discuss the student's difficulties and areas of concern without giving any rigid suggestion about how the student should proceed. It is not my goal to appropriate the student's work; it is my goal help the student access and participate in the discourse community of the university. Each student has his or her own set of needs and distinct style, and I want to respect and encourage those while offering my experience and advice.

Just like the doorman may present a patron with two different ties to choose from, I try to let the student's style and needs dictate the help I offer. I also think it is important to keep in mind that, though, like a borrowed tie, a partially edited paper may not seem to be of long-term value, it is exposing the individual to the expectations of the discourse community in which he or she is attempting to operate. I strive for my tutoring to make the student better at communicating his or her ideas while being mindful of the expectations of the audience. If my student leaves with a better understanding of his or her assignment, a more developed draft of his or her work, a handout that addresses a discreet issue that the student has, or the ability to better identify expectations of audience in addition to an increased confidence in his or her ability, then I feel like I have done my job as a doorman, and they are one step closer to fitting in the bustling restaurant that is academia.