



# **Useful tutoring tips for STAR homework club volunteers 2010-11**

*The national network of student groups working to improve the lives of refugees in the UK*

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## Introduction

Welcome to useful tutoring tips for STAR homework club volunteers 2010-11!



This aim of this guide is to give you some helpful pointers on how to effectively tutor children and young people in a homework club setting. However, the bulk of your learning as a tutor should be provided by the school/organisation and the rest with experience! The kind of tutoring you are doing will depend on the age of the children and the subject you are helping them with. How the session works will depend on how you and the student interact so it is important to use appropriate and varied techniques.

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## 1.1 Explaining and lecturing in tutoring

You may have to explain a topic if there are gaps in your student's knowledge which stops them understanding a key concept. Remember who you are talking to e.g. the age of the child, their level of English and your time limits. Keep your explanations simple, clear and concise.

Lecturing should be rare and only when necessary. It is not your job to lecture but to help your student to use the available resources to find a solution to the task. These resources could be things like textbooks, notes, past tests, previous examples and so on rather than you the tutor! This will encourage your student to be a more independent learner. Ask the school/organisation for these resources if they are not readily available.

## 1.2 Questions and listening in tutoring

It is just as important (if not more important) for you to guide your student in doing most of the explaining. This will reinforce learning for her/him and help you to identify problem areas.

Two of the key ingredients needed to encourage your student to give explanations are:

### 1. Posing questions

#### Ask open-ended questions

By posing open questions that require more than a yes or no response, you encourage your student to start thinking.

- ★ "Where do you think we should start?"
- ★ "What are the steps involved in working this problem?"
- ★ "What is the definition?"

#### Ask probing questions

Probing questions follow up on your student's contribution.

- ★ "What will happen if what you said is true?"
- ★ "What made you think that?"
- ★ "What is the opposite of this position?"
- ★ "You're right. The answer to this question is false. What would be needed to make it true?"

#### Rephrase questions

- ★ Try repeating your question in a slightly different manner.
- ★ Reword your original question.
- ★ Break your original question into smaller parts.
- ★ Change the tone in your voice when repeating the original question – emphasise key words.

### 2. Active listening

This is to actually listen to your student's responses. This sounds easy, but it is harder than you may think. *Listening is an acquired skill.* In normal conversation, we often don't really listen to others! We hear what they say but don't listen carefully enough to

"read between the lines". In order to be an effective tutor, you have to slow down and concentrate on what your student is saying.

- ★ Is she/he grasping the concept?
- ★ Can she/he explain it easily or does it take some effort?
- ★ Is her/his body language saying anything?

Ask yourself such questions as you listen carefully and observe your student's behaviour.

### **1.3 Getting your student to summarise her/his learning**

It is very important to encourage your student to give a summary of what has been covered in the session. If steps are involved in finding the solution, make sure she/he includes all the steps (in the right order) when summarising. Try to encourage more than just reciting of the steps, the student should go over the steps and concepts in his/her own words to prevent this.

A student's summary also helps you decide whether you can move on to another topic or need to do some more work on the current topic. If the summary is difficult for your student, don't move on until she/he can repeat it with ease. Use the questioning technique to guide your student to the correct answer if she/he has gotten some of the steps out of order.

### **1.4 Coping with silence**

*A common misconception of new tutors is that your student should ALWAYS feel comfortable.* Sometimes, "comfortable" is not the best solution. For example, you ask your student a question, eight to ten seconds pass with no response. You start to feel awkward. Should you say something? Perhaps another question will spur a response. Another question or even a clarification might help, but sometimes, just being patient while waiting for a response will get results. Because you as the tutor understand the information, you are much quicker in coming up with a response so it is often difficult for you to anticipate the amount of time your student needs to process the information. Remember this during the uncomfortable silences. This technique is often uncomfortable for both the tutor and student but if it is used sparingly and appropriately, your student learns to think critically and becomes more independent.

### **1.5 Finding out what your student understands**

It is very important to continuously gauge your student's level of understanding. Don't assume knowledge. For example if a session begins with the student asking for help with one question. This question asks the student to diagram a hyperbola. The tutor asks, "Where would you start?" Although this is a good question to evaluate whether or not the student knows the steps to apply in order to diagram the problem, a more appropriate question would have been, "Can you tell me what a hyperbola is?" *Remember, don't assume knowledge - start with the basics FIRST.* Here are some ways to gauge your student's understanding:

- ★ Start with vocabulary

- ★ Make sure your student understands all associated terminology
- ★ Have your student summarise what you have said
- ★ Quiz your student on information you have covered together
- ★ Have your student explain the topic to you as if she/he were the tutor
- ★ Ask the student if she/he understands
- ★ Ask probing questions
- ★ Have your student draw a diagram of the topic(s) covered (if appropriate).

## **1.6 Using drawings and diagrams**

For a visual learner, kinaesthetic (learns by doing) learner, or for certain subjects like science, you may find that a drawing or diagram is the best way to get information across to the student. It is much easier to understand a drawing of carbon dioxide than an explanation of carbon dioxide. Visual learners will need to see, usually on paper, what you are describing. If your student is a kinaesthetic learner, ask your student to build the model or diagram himself/herself. The act of building the model will reinforce learning. Again there should be help available from school/organisation with this.

## **1.7 Using positive reinforcement**

Students need tutors to notice their successes as well as their mistakes. That's where reinforcements come in. When using reinforcements, be sure to reinforce improvement without over-exaggerating your student's progress. The more specific you are about their progress, the better. Here are some examples of reinforcement:

### **Verbal**

- ★ "You are really doing much better with \_\_\_\_\_!"
- ★ "I like the way you did \_\_\_!"
- ★ "This looks better than the last time."
- ★ "You have really been working hard at this. I am proud of your effort."

### **Nonverbal (body language)**

- ★ Use facial expressions--smile, look surprised.
- ★ Nod your head.
- ★ High-five or give the thumbs up sign.

Reinforcements help your student have a sense of accomplishment, provide a reward, and give students an incentive to do more. After all, you noticed!

## **1.8 Letting your student do the work**

If a student can only do his/her work with your help, what happens when you are no longer there to explain, in the classroom or taking exams? Aid your student in finding other resources and developing appropriate study strategies. With these tools, they can succeed academically without you. Your student should be working his/her way out of a problem or task. By allowing your student to have control of the process, you

encourage independent learning and help her/him gain confidence in their own ability and an awareness of their learning styles. So how do you do this?

- ★ Let your student have the pencil.
- ★ Let your student look up the information in the book.
- ★ Let your student draw the diagram.
- ★ Let your student have control of the mouse/keyboard.

*Part of the learning process is frustrating.*

*Part of the learning process is getting things wrong.*

*Part of the learning process is slow.*

If you do everything for your student, any successes you experience are yours only - not your student's. Guide the direction of your students thinking. Don't do the thinking for them.

*The more independent they become, the better tutor you are.*

**Remember to ask for more help as and when you need it from the school/organisation you volunteer with and of course the STAR national team.**

**Happy tutoring!**