

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL TUTOR?

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/what-makes-a-successful-tutor-seth-linden>

Several things become apparent after tutoring for 20 years. For one, the number of students working with tutors continues to grow. Two, working 1:1 with students is immensely gratifying, both for the tutor and tutee. And three, a few specific yet generalized characteristics become crystalized about all successful tutors.

Personalized tutoring fills a niche that can't be filled in today's schools alone. Tutoring is becoming more common in schools with blended learning programs. The Gates Foundation is giving grants to innovative online tutoring companies like Tutor.com and Khan Academy. More and more parents and educators are realizing that tutoring gets to the heart of learning, personalizing the meaning and instruction of the subject at hand. With all the distraction in today's hyper-technological world, some face-to-face interaction through mentoring, tutoring and coaching is exactly what students need most.

Defining Success

I have found several consistent factors that continuously make for successful tutors, who routinely improve student academic performance and increase students' self-efficacy.

1) Successful tutors build strong, personal relationships with their students.

Tutors fill a different role than teachers and parents, and that puts them in a unique position to support students. Personal relationships are foundational to student success -- the more connected a student feels to his or her tutor, the more the tutor creates trust and respect, essential ingredients for students to learn well. When a tutor listens and spends time building a relationship with his or her student, that tutor can:

- Truly personalize the learning;
- Incorporate connections to the student's interests;
- Teach to the student's strengths;
- Minimize the student's weaknesses.

We've found that 95 percent of our students were more likely to increase their homework completion and accuracy with a tutor who builds a strong, personal relationship with them. Also, our students were 86 percent more likely to set goals, use their weekly agenda, and improve their general study skills and organizational strategies.

2) Successful tutors listen and communicate early and often with parents and teachers.

Communication and collaboration with all stakeholders are key factors to student success. When tutors focus on goal setting, creating benchmarks and planning backwards, this sets students up for academic progress. Successful tutors co-create individualized learning plans with their students, in collaboration with parents and teachers, to leverage insight from key adults in students' lives and map a better plan for success and accountability. When tutors communicated with teachers, we found that students were 83 percent more likely to participate in class, and 72 percent more likely to engage with school.

3) Successful tutors have specific content expertise.

A truly successful tutor can make learning real, relevant and rigorous. Such tutors are experts in their academic content -- they know the subject's concepts, ideas and problems inside out. Even though most tutors may never get to facilitate a custom project-based learning session, they can discuss and introduce the rigor of real-life applications. Tutors engage students more fully if they can turn school assignments into project-based activities and provide opportunities for real, hands-on work instead of abstract assignments or rote worksheets. Tutors who can make learning relevant to students' interests create more students who actually care about what they are learning. And finally, tutors who make learning appropriately rigorous -- challenging enough, but not so tough that students get frustrated and stop trying -- show visible growth in their students' progress. We found that, with tutors who were content experts, 90 percent of our students improved their academic achievement as measured by grade improvement, and 71 percent improved their standardized test scores.

The Ideal Partnership

Tutoring is ubiquitous. Good tutors recognize the importance of aligning their instruction with what's going on in the classroom. Teachers see their students every day, as do parents, so a tutor who works 1:1 with a student even once per week for an hour needs to respect how much learning is being done when he or she is *not* around.

Teachers

It is a tremendous help for students when teachers leverage the tutoring around them. As a former high school math and science teacher, I didn't have time to personalize learning enough for my students. Teachers, make sure your student's tutor has your syllabus and is up to date with your student's grade. Even better, make a point to communicate on a regular basis with the tutor (weekly, monthly or whatever "regular" means to you) to check in and review

student strengths and weaknesses. For younger students, I'd recommend more frequent communication with tutors.

Parents

Parents often set the tone for the student's relationship with a tutor and have the opportunity to reinforce lessons. If you're a parent, make sure to check in with your child's tutor regularly as well. One parent told me that she learns so much from working with her child's tutor, helping her daughter prepare for each session and, in doing so, learning something new each week. The learning goes in both directions, from tutor to student, student to parent, and back again. Asking your child to teach you what you learned in school today (or what your tutor taught you) is a great way to increase understanding.

Tutors

The best tutors and educators remember the importance of being lifelong learners. Even expert tutors can always improve! Tutors, think of goals for yourself -- create key performance indicators (KPIs) that you can measure on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. Ask yourself:

- How often are you checking in with parents and teachers?
- How often are you checking on goals with your students?
- How do you measure student growth and progress?
- What professional development opportunities do you take advantage of?

Besides meeting and talking with other tutors to share best practices, check out Tutor.com and Khan Academy (both Gates Foundation grant recipients), and also see what Education Week has for teacher professional development. See what local schools and nonprofits are offering, ask teachers what books and articles they're reading, and stay up on various educator blogs, like Edutopia.

Happy tutoring!