Tutoring “Don’ts”

1. Don’t proofread or edit, no matter how much the student begs.

2. Don’t interpret texts for their students or suggest connections.

3. Don’t provide a thesis, rearrange paragraphs, or otherwise do the work of interpretation or revision for a student.

4. Don’t master a few “generic exercises” that they use in the same way for many students.

5. Don’t assign “inauthentic tasks” – tasks that won’t help a student write a better paper – nor do they assign tasks the tutee could easily do at home: look up fifteen vocabulary words (one might be relevant to the task at hand), answer the questions at the end of the selection; answer all the teacher’s “corollary questions” following the assignment question. (Conversation might, however, point to one or two that deserve your time.)

6. Don’t speculate about the grade a paper will receive or should have received. When you want to praise a student, focus on how hard the student has worked on the specific task the session focused on.

7. Don’t join students in “teacher bashing,” no matter what we think of the question, the comments, or the grade. If you have real concerns, try to get a chance to photocopy the paper during the session and bring it to the coordinator.

8. Don’t leave them alone for too long. This means that whenever you assign a tutee to do something, you will always come back and revisit what she has done, mining it for 12 writing wisdom and material. This means you will have to budget your time, especially at the end of the session, so you can “decompress” with each of your students. Freewriting, for example, needs to be revisited with a highlighter, to select ideas that the student can develop into paragraphs. Ask questions about what the student has accomplished, what kinds of obstacles she encountered, and how she would describe the skill she just used in her own words. Similarly, never set a student to reading for more than 20 minutes. If a student (alas!) comes in without having read the text, assign it a couple of pages at a time, and have the student write about key terms, ideas, positions, etc., or identify and write about significant quotes in the section she has just read.

9. Don’t abandon one of your students. Ideally, you are working toward 20 minute independent work periods for each student, but in the beginning, you will want to assign smaller tasks, and you will always want to check in every five or ten minutes – even if only visually – to make sure the student knows what to do and is using the time fruitfully. Although DCWC is crowded, it is often good to keep within “spying distance” of your students while they are working. If you can’t, then circulate.

10. Don’t expect downtime during your sessions. We enjoy “the tutors’ lounge,” and socializing with one another, between periods also. But stay focused on the task at hand in the hours for which you are paid. During the 90 minute tutoring session, you should be working with one student or the other, reading papers, thinking up (or looking up) new tasks, or (ah the luxury!) reading the assigned essays. And remember: computers are for students and for work related tasks during paid time. You may use them to check e-mail and find information, but only between periods please, and only when the computers are not needed by students.