

## Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist – Lessons No One Can Teach

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- ***Artist vs. Artisan***

The artist is “one to whom the words ‘inspiration, imagination, freedom, and genius’ might apply.”

Vs.

The artisan is “one to whom the words ‘skill, rules, imitation, and service’ might apply.”

Thus, if the artisan repetitively perfects the rules, the artist breaks them.

- ***The Work of the Tutor as an Artisan Involves...***

... an almost formulaic (but still significant and useful) approach to appointments, frequently in the form given below.

1. Small talk and greeting the student
2. Discussing the work assigned and instructions
3. Setting expectations and goals for the session
4. Going through the work
5. Examining the work and assessing strengths and weaknesses
6. Suggestions for revising the work
7. Closing the session

*So why reinvent the wheel (or in this case, the artisanal work of the tutor)?*

If we consider each session to be “a potentially unique event”, tutors must approach these as artists because of the unpredictability of both clients and their needs – there will never be a single formula to fit all the possible situations which could arise. Like a pianist improvising jazz or a basketball player with a single chance at a shot, tutors need to think on their feet like an artist!

- ***The Work of the Tutor as an Artist Involves...***

1. Surprise – Embrace the unexpected, haphazard, chaotic messes of conversations that can happen at the Writing Center! Like with humour, their chaos can sometimes turn into writing inspiration.

2. Circumstance – Be prepared for anything by developing your *Kairos* (“fitness for the occasion”). This means being keenly sensitive to social situations at hand, and being improvisational and spontaneous in the face of unexpected situations. In the case of more routinely difficult issues, the solution is often to “walk a line between honesty and diplomacy.”

3. Improvisation –Remember that nearly every situation at the Writing Center (not just the absurd and shocking ones) requires some level of improvisation – even amending the formulaic approach of the artisan tutor is a type of improvisation. Embrace the moment!

Most importantly, “to improvise, it is essential that we use the present moment efficiently. A moment of distraction – searching for a witty line, for example, robs us of our investment in what is actually happening. We need to know everything about the moment.”

4. Flow – Become so engaged in the flow of the Writing Center that you become fully absorbed by your tasks.

Not only can writers take advantage of “flow experiences”, but tutors can have transformative sessions with writers when they become fully absorbed in a person or text. This is a space where transformative connections can be fostered through the works students have created!

- ***Challenges to Tutoring***

While this guide has hopefully given you some insight on how to better position yourself as a tutor and an artist, there are always challenges that come with such attempts.

It can be challenging, draining, and often end in unfulfilling sessions. Remember that we learn by trying and failing over and over again. Moreover, remember that failure is inevitable – the work of a tutor is inherently improvisational due to all the unfamiliar ground sessions traverse. We are all in the “process of becoming” and aside from various natural aptitudes, what’s most important is that we develop Isocratic “ability to learn from experience.”

