Tutoring Through the Interface

Thinking Towards Synchronous Online Tutoring

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Center Moves, Vol. 1

Session Overview

- quick tips for before the session and setup

- focus on communicating through interfaces

- reminders for after your appointments

Pre-Session Emails

Before Your Session (1/3)

- establish tone and friendly rapport

- create a blurb you could copy and paste/modify

- consider including instructions to navigate new software

Example pre-session email:

Dear ___,

I'm looking forward to meeting with you in your Writing Center appointment at (time), on (date). Remember to log in to WCOnline ten minutes beforehand.

I enjoyed learning about ___ in the draft you submitted. Hopefully we can address your goals of __ and __ (if mentioned in appointment booking).

See you soon—
Laura

Set-up
Before Your Session (3/3)

- angle: not too high; not too low

- lighting: not directly in back of your head.

  - face a window!

- ask: what else is in the frame?

- grab your power cord (Barchas)

What is an interface?

interface: a shared boundary across which you may communicate with someone or something.

Big Ideas:

1. focus on better writers
2. set agendas; prioritize students' goals

Negotiating The Frame
1/3

- keep gestures within the frame

  "I tend to talk with my hands a lot, so I sit back from the screen."

- work with your angles

- we tend to keep ourselves centered in the frame (but feel free to experiment!)

- video tutoring tends to bring primacy to your face

Negotiating the Frame
2/3

- "...we don't have the back-and-forth of a greeting that feels natural."

- online sessions seem to just "hit the track running"

(Interview quotes from Feibush 2018)

Negotiating the Frame - Overcoming Issues
(3/3)

- the face doesn't always tell the "whole truth"

  - consider having the tutee do something in front of you

- VCS is good at faces, but less good at other kinds of gesturing

  - we need to find other ways to do this (to be continued!)

Thinking About Screens
1/3

In synchronous tutoring, sharing a screen = sharing a space

"Students reported liking the convenience and time-saving aspects of online conferencing, as well as being able to make immediate changes to their papers during the tutoring sessions. Students especially liked sharing a screen and the audio aspect of some online conferencing" (Martinez and Olson 191).

Thinking About Screens
2/3

- the screen can be a window, but also a barrier

- keep tutees involved by:

  - explaining silences

  - being more explicit about roles and actions

Thinking About Screens
3/3

"...the expectation [. . .] is even higher electronically than it is in person that a tutor is going to write things on the document [. . .] so being explicit about those roles."

"Then there are times when the writer seems to go missing or be quiet—we don't know if connection—you know what it's like with Skype sometimes [. . .] it just cuts out or you can't hear something for a while or you're not sure—did the writer step out of the room? Did they go get something to eat, are they watching a movie? Who knows how people are multitasking—I hear this from TAs on our staff [. . .] there are some things they have to get used to."

(Interview quotes from Feibush 2018)

Special Interface Features
1/6

"Identify the strength of the tools."

—Beth Hewett

think: what do they do well and less well?

Special Interface Features - Whiteboard Strengths

"The whiteboard resembles the physical space of a familiar teaching tool—the chalkboard—enabling familiar kinds of shared space instruction.

In some whiteboards and LMSs, an entire essay can be shared and discussed collaboratively …which can enable either a broadly or narrowly focused interaction about the text.

The whiteboard space can be used in developing various types of lessons where students can participate instantly and learning can be corrected and solidified immediately.

In some whiteboard settings and file-sharing software…letters appear as they are typed and in different colored fonts, offering students the opportunity to watch the instructor's own writing process (which often includes mistypes beneficial to understanding a mature writer's writing process)" (Hewett 46).

Special Interface Features - Whiteboard Challenges

"There is potential for some students to freeze or feel uncomfortable with their typing skills or writing ability due to the immediate view of typed letters.

Some software may not archive the interaction automatically, requiring that one or both parties save and archive it for future use.

Online instructors need to think especially quickly to use the platform's full capabilities beyond that of simple chat" (Hewett 46).

How might you think through other interface features in the same way?

Chat, screen-share, video, etc.?

Interface Features: do's and don'ts

5/6

- take initiative to use new functions first

    "Some of the participants' feedback contradicted our assumptions that students in this digital age could or would easily and quickly begin using new software with just a brief overview and with little or no assistance from tutors" (Conard-Salvo and Spartz 45).

- retain Writing Center practices/values: use commenting or highlighting tools, allowing the writer to make changes to the text itself (Griffin and Wolf)

- avoid "editing mode" (Griffin and Wolf)

- don't get derailed by spelling/grammar checkers (Griffin and Wolf)

Unusual Interface Affordances

6/6

- it's okay for a tutee to fall into "writing mode"

- observe what the student is doing during this time. What seems to be easier for them, and what seems to be harder? (Summers)

After Your Appointment
1/1

- survey or outtake form

- follow up email to recap session takeaways or share resources

Summary
1/2

An awareness of interface can help you...

1. connect aspects of face-to-face tutoring to online, synchronous tutoring
2. enable you to skillfully adapt to a range of online tutoring scenarios

Summary

2/2

Before	During	After
• make use of the preliminary email • consider your setup	• negotiate the frame • don't skip rapport building • explain silences • be explicit about roles and actions • consider strengths and weaknesses of special features • take initiative to use features first	• don't forget any follow-up procedures

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