

To put a client at ease and show respect for their work, all you really have to do is be patient, tactful, and respectful.

Beginning

Many first-time clients will be shy. It's your job to be at ease. If you're comfortable in the situation, they'll be more comfortable as well.

- Ask about their day. If you find something in common with them (same professor, class, etc.) go with it.
- Jokes. People have said that this tool works wonders. Tell them about what a mess your first college paper was; admit that you've waited to the last minute to do work, too.

Down to Business

Sometimes the client doesn't feel more comfortable after chatting, so the best option might be to just jump straight into talking about the paper. These are tactics to use during the session with or without the opening chat.

- Favor *open questions*, whose answers require an explanation (How does this conclusion better explain your argument's implications?). These engage the client into a discussion with the tutor. They may be:
 - **Compare/contrast questions** (How does what we generated in our session compare to what you brought in? What is the difference between the model essay's conclusion and your own?)
 - **Options-based questions** (When you say "culture," are you referring to anything in particular, like politics? Economics? Social life?)
 - **Location questions** (Where in this body paragraph do you make the strongest claim about "x"?)
 - **Pointing questions:** How is X related to Y? How is this point related to this overall point?
- Avoid *closed questions*, whose answers only require a "yes," "no," or other one-word responses (Does this conclusion answer the "so what" question?)
- Ask questions whose answers provide you with information about either the paper or the writer's process (How did you create this thesis statement?).
- Avoid too many questions that ask how the client feels too early or often in the session ("How do you feel about your argument? Are you confident in your argument?") or may cause them to infer a judgment upon their writing ("Is this a good thesis, now?"). This type of judgment discussion can shut down exploration of ideas or generative language.
- Always make suggestions. Don't tell the clients what you think they should do. Suggest something to them and be sure to provide a decent explanation for why you suggested it.
- Use reflective listening, which is a way of phrasing statements and questions while maintaining an air of respect and tact. Here are some examples:
 - Say "It seems to me that..." or "It might be helpful if..." When suggesting corrections or ideas, or any variation thereof.
 - When asking for clarification on what a client is telling you, phrases such as "It appears you..." and "I'm not certain I understand, but are you saying/thinking/feeling..." etc.

Reflective Listening: Suggested Phrases

To exercise reflective listening, learn some of these suggested sample phrases, which are broken into three categories:

- 1) Phrases to use when you think your perceptions are correct.
 - I'm sensing...
 - I wonder if...
 - I get the impression that...
 - As I hear it, you...
 - From your point of view...
 - In your experience...
 - As you see it...
 - I'm picking up that you...
 - Could it be that...
 - Correct me if I'm wrong...
 - What I hear you saying...

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2) Phrases to use when you have difficulty understanding

- Could it be...
- I'm not sure if I'm with you, but...
- Is it possible that...
- This is what I think I hear you saying.
- Could this be what's going on, you...
- Maybe this is a long shot, but...
- I'm not certain I understand; you're feeling...
- As I hear it, you...
- Would you buy this idea...
- Correct me if I'm wrong, but...
- Does it sound reasonable that you...
- Is there a chance that you...
- ...is that the way it is?
- As a reader, I am confused about...

3) Phrases to use when you disagree with the client...

- I hear what you're saying, but you may want to consider...
- That's a valid point, but in my experience, professors typically care more about...
- Maybe we can put this on hold for now and come back to it later if we have time.
- You know, I might suggest you do "x" differently, but if you feel strongly about it, then that is your call.
- I understand why you wrote it this way, but as a reader, I stopped here because X/I did not quite understand because X/I am still wondering about X.

Explanations: Transparency—Why you are doing what you are doing....

As the tutor, it is important to take charge in a session. However, you cannot leave your client behind in the dark; as you work through a session, it's important that the client understands what you're doing and why you're doing what you are. You should also keep in mind what they came in for and tailor your explanations to their needs. You need to provide brief, to the point explanations for your choices/alternatives/suggestions in a session.

For example, a client may not understand why a backwards outline will help or how an adjective phrase differs from an adverb phrase, and, even more importantly, why this matters to the quality of their writing. It's important to keep your explanations natural and comprehensible and to the point; using complex language or explaining too much may only confuse and discourage the client further. Use the following exercise to practice communication techniques.

Module Comprehension Check:

1. List two strategies that help put a client at ease.
2. Explain two ways that asking questions beginning with "how" or "why" allow tutors to best serve their clients.
3. In your own words, define "reflective listening."
4. Why is reflective listening a particularly important skill for a Writing Center tutor?
5. How might transparency engage—possibly even motivate—clients?