

# **McElroy Tutoring - Tips for Tutors**

by Brian McElroy, President and Founder

**MATERIALS:** Every tutor should have the following materials ready to go at each lesson-- never count on your student to remember his/her materials! Always assume that the student will forget everything and have done no homework, but prepare in the hopes that they will have remembered everything and completed all assignments. Here is a checklist of things that you might want to bring:

- Paper
- Pens
- Pencils
- Calculators
- Rulers
- Paperback Dictionary
- Any relevant manuals or textbooks for the subject(s) you teach.

If you are teaching a particular subject for the first time and have a question about what the best materials are, feel free to give us a call. Remember that we are happy to reimburse you for any materials you provide to the student, so long as receipts are provided to our staff. (Please indicate any expenses on your Billing Chart). Tutors can also purchase books for their own use from the company at a 50% discount off the Book's List Price. We will even have the books delivered directly to your home, at no extra cost, within two business days!

**BOOKS:** As a general philosophy, we allow our tutors to use whatever books or manuals they deem appropriate. Although we will share many copyrighted, in-house academic and test-prep materials/informational documents with you, we also allow our tutors to utilize other materials as well. In general, we recommend that you 1) either use the book(s) the student is already using in class or 2) develop your own curriculum and reading list and buy the books online or at your local bookstore. We will be happy to recommend books for you.

**STAYING IN TOUCH WITH STUDENTS AND PARENTS:** Before you leave your house, make sure you have printed directions to the student's home or your agreed meeting location. I suggest printing out the directions on Google Maps, and giving yourself 10-15 more minutes than the estimated travel time on the directions, in case you get lost. It's usually a better idea to park in the street rather than the driveway, because that way you don't have to worry about blocking anyone's parking spot. Some of our clients live in gated communities or have gates on their driveways; we will give you the gate codes in advance.

-When we give you the student's or parent's contact information, please enter the numbers into your cell phone immediately. If you are lost and need directions, or are going to be a few minutes late, don't be afraid to give them a call. Conversely, if you are meeting at a library or coffeehouse and the student is more than 10 minutes late, give their cell phone a call to make sure they are on their way.

**DURING THE LESSON:** Sometimes parents will want to sit down to talk with you and/or the student at the start of the first few lessons, to try to get a feel for you, your qualifications, and what type of instruction you can best offer the student. This is fine--remember, the parents are the ones who are paying for the lessons, and parents often know their children's personalities better than anyone else. For in-home students, we also recommend ending the lesson 5 minutes early so that you can briefly chat with the parent(s) in order to inform them of the student's progress. Remember that parents usually act as the "enforcers" in a household, so if you give the student an important homework assignment or if he/she needs to study harder, it's always a good idea to tell the parents so that the entire family can be on the same page.

It's perfectly natural to be nervous during your first lesson with a student--after all, if you are nervous, it means that you care! Just remember that the student is likely as nervous and/or apprehensive as you are. Don't jump into the material right away--take 5 to 10 minutes to

introduce yourself, "break the ice" and ask the student a few questions so that you can get to know him/her better.

Remember that tutoring is not really about *telling students how to do something*. It's about *asking your students plenty of questions* and customizing your explanation based on their responses. Don't just *tell* them why an answer is correct; *ask* them about the incorrect choices as well. Talk about the problem--really discuss it. Ask them to reconstruct how they approached the problem, and ask them to write down as much as possible, because not only does it help their score, but it also helps you teach them more effectively. And always make sure your student fully understands your explanation before you move on to the next question.

Some questions you might want to ask your student:

- *Have you worked with a private tutor before? How are your previous grades / test scores?*
- *What are you looking to gain from these tutoring sessions? What are your score goals?*
- *What is your learning style?*
- *Do you participate in class?*
- *What is your teacher like?*
- *Do you take a lot of notes, or are you more of an auditory learner?* (For the vast majority of my students, I make sure to take my own notes during the tutoring session. I also encourage my students to take their own notes, but because they know I am writing the most important things down for them, it takes the pressure off them and allows them to concentrate more fully on what I am saying.)
- *What are your interests outside of school?* (This will help you relate your lessons to their personal experiences. If a student plays piano, for example, I know that I can relate the process of studying for the SAT to the process of learning a piano sonata--in both disciplines you have to start slowly and speed up as you gain knowledge and familiarity. )

While you may feel pressured to cover as much material as possible during your lesson, remember that a tutoring session is not a race! The best tutors know how to pace themselves, and when to give the student a mental break by telling a joke or making casual conversation. Let them know that you don't have to be working 100% of the time, and that the 1.5 hours isn't going to go by any faster if they go over their homework in a rush. Take your time.

Sometimes your student will arrive at your lesson feeling hyper or nervous, and will want to work at 100 miles per hour. If so, your job is to serve as a calming influence and try to slow them down. Other times, your student will arrive at the lesson tired or disinterested. If so, your job is to keep them awake and try to motivate them to concentrate harder.

Every once in a while, your student will present you with a question or a problem that you do not know how to answer. This can often be a source of great embarrassment for tutors, because tutors sometimes feel pressured to know everything. If you don't know the answer to a question, just be honest about it--you shouldn't be afraid to make mistakes! First of all, students normally don't mind if their tutor makes the occasional mistake, so long as they admit it--students usually get a kick out of the fact that you are human too. Furthermore, making a few mistakes can actually turn you into a better tutor. If you take the time to understand why you made a certain error, this will help you explain to your students how to avoid making that same mistake in the future.

Remember that a good tutor is a mentor, role model and confidant, not just an instructor. Once you establish a good working relationship with your student, you may find that the student or parent starts to welcome you into the family and ask you if you are willing to tutor in other subjects as well. If you are qualified to teach these additional subjects, feel free to do so. However, if you do not feel prepared to teach that subject, simply contact our office and we will find another tutor who can help your student in that particular subject area. We may also put you in touch with that tutor so that the two of you can share information about the student.

**HOMEWORK:** We suggest no more than one hour of homework per session for test-prep students, and periodic practice tests on Saturdays.

**CANCELLATIONS AND PAYMENT ISSUES:** If you arrive at a student's house and no one is there, then you should try calling the client on the phone to let them know you are there. If they do not answer the phone, then make sure to leave a voicemail (when possible--if not, send a text message or email) and mention the time that you are calling. If they do not arrive within 20 minutes, then feel free to leave--we will consider this a cancellation.

If you have arranged to meet a student at a public location such as a coffeehouse or library, and they are late showing up, then we suggest the following:

- 10 minutes late: Call the student's cell phone to make sure he/she is on his way.
- 15 minutes late: Call the parent's phone (if applicable)
- 30 minutes late: If the student still has not arrived, we will consider this a cancellation. Feel free to leave at this point.

Remember that all lessons that are canceled with less than 24-hours notice to the tutor are considered full lessons and will be charged for, in full, by our office staff. You should still report this as a lesson on your calendar and Billing Chart, and you will still be paid in full. However, please make sure to note that it was a cancellation or a no-show so that we can discuss this with your client.

Anyway, that's all. Good luck and we're happy to represent you!

Regards,  
Brian