

## **ARE YOU TALKING TO ME? PERSONAL PRONOUN USAGE IN TUTORING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES**

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Writing clinics, labs, and centers serve students by providing a place on campus where they can come to talk and learn about writing. For many years, writing tutors and those affiliated with writing centers have struggled to define our niche in the university community. We have studied the kinds of work and talk that tutors and tutees do, and we have created a community of scholars that discuss what our roles ought to be in relation to the writing classroom, to English departments, to the administration and, most importantly, to the students we tutor.

Stephen North's 1984 "The Idea of a Writing Center," which appeared in *College English*, publicly declared that writing centers strive "to produce better writers, not better writing" (438). Writing centers are not fix-it shops for documents. We are student-centered, so we use documents as a window to students' writing process, rather than treating a document as an end unto itself. The focus on the student's processes instead of the product led to arguments that writing tutors are not editors, a point that Jeff Brooks articulated in "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," an essay that marked the movement toward nondirective methods that became, in the words of Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns in "A Critique of Pure Tutoring," "orthodoxy" (225).

Many scholars before me have traced the development of the writing center from the workshop for remedial students to its self-envisioned collaborative, nonhierarchical, student-centered environment. Nondirective methods are in vogue at most writing centers, as is evident in both tutor training and center policies. For some time, however, a minority of tutors and center scholars have questioned if nondirective methods ought to be the only tools that peer tutors learn to use. In "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring" Peter Carino argues, "the watchword in tutor training should not be nondirective peership, but flexibility. Tutors should learn to shift between directive and nondirective methods as needed" (110). While nondirective methods are wonderful when they work, do they work in every situation? I could illustrate with center lore here, but instead I will ask you to think of your own writing centers and times when nondirective methods did not suffice.

For seven semesters, I worked in a multidisciplinary learning center at York College of Pennsylvania, where the writing center is integrated with tutoring from all disciplines. Undergraduate (peer) writing tutors take a course called Teaching and Tutoring Writing, in which they study mostly nondirective methods of tutoring, with the exception of modeling for

lower-order concerns. Our writing tutors are, by policy, forbidden to write on student papers, though we may write on scrap paper that we give to students at the end of a session. The training for tutors in other disciplines is less formal—at the time I became a chemistry tutor in 2003, it consisted of a conversation with the Learning Resource Center coordinator about the mission of the center and ethics. I tutored chemistry for a year before I enrolled in the course for writing tutors, so I developed directive habits that seemed effective to me. I modeled solutions; I asked leading questions along with open-ended ones. In the training class, I thought nondirective methods sounded wonderful for writing, but I wondered if what I learned about writing tutoring theory applied to other tutoring in practice and if I could fit the things I had learned in practice with my new understanding of theory.

From my experience as a chemistry tutor and my observations of math and science tutoring, directive methods are neither ineffective nor bad in math and chemistry. Balancing equations and factoring are performed according to established practices; asking a student to re-create disciplinary practices without a model or clear guidance would be difficult and frustrating. Open-ended questions and nondirective tutoring work in writing and in some other disciplines because they draw on information already known to the student. But if the student genuinely does not know how to balance an equation, more direct methods should not be scorned. In “domain-specific” contexts, like music (and chemistry and mathematics), directive methods of tutorial are more efficient (Shamoon and Burns 234). In addition, because those tutors are transmitting facts and processes rather than examining the student’s writing process, there is no text to appropriate. When tutoring students who are analyzing data in order to write lab reports, practices shift to more open-ended questions.

In this article, I argue that flexibility and student-centeredness make a writing tutoring session effective or ineffective more than dogmatic adherence to a directive or nondirective style of tutoring. I base my argument on a study of peer tutoring sessions in writing across the disciplines in which I observed uses of personal pronouns in order to pinpoint language that tutors and tutees use to represent and establish *ethos*, communicate their points of view on the power dynamics of the interaction, and direct the session. Close examination of the language of tutoring sessions reveals the presence and success of both directive and nondirective methods. While writing tutors use more nondirective methods and math/science tutors use more directive methods, both methods are employed, even in the same session. Regardless of discipline, this flexibility centers the session on the student and the student’s needs, as North called for in “The Idea of a Writing Center.”

## Methods

The pronoun uses that I identify in this essay are drawn from peer tutoring sessions in the York College of Pennsylvania Learning Resource Center in the fall semester of 2005. The Learning Resource Center (LRC) is a multidisciplinary space, where chemistry, biology, math-

ematics, psychology, accounting, and writing tutoring occur simultaneously. At the time of the study, I had worked at the LRC for two and a half years as a chemistry tutor and as a writing tutor for one year.

At the beginning of the semester, I obtained Institutional Review Board permission to observe tutoring sessions. Before observing a session, I introduced myself to the tutee and requested his or her permission to observe. If the peer tutor and the tutee granted permission on the day of observation, I sat in an unobtrusive place, out of the tutee's immediate line of sight, to take shorthand notes.

I discuss eight tutoring sessions in this essay: three in math or science and five writing sessions. The math session that I observed was arranged by appointment and limited to one tutor, Jorge, and one tutee, Jane. The two chemistry sessions that I observed were drop-in, so a single tutor, Ryan, served multiple tutees. Sessions lasted between one and three hours. In the first session, on October 6, 2005, Ryan tutored Karen and Ann. In the second session, on October 13, Ryan tutored Karen, Tori, Ann, Megan, and Jackie. The names of all tutors and tutees have been changed to protect the participants' privacy.

The writing sessions lasted thirty to sixty minutes and were always between one tutor and one tutee. Appointments were arranged in advance by tutees, who used an online appointment system. The tutors were peer tutors who work in York College's Learning Resource Center after completing a semester-long course. The writing tutors and their tutees were: Jan and Steve, Gina and Nick, June and Adam, Pete and Maria, and Mike and Nate.

### **Analysis of Tutoring Sessions**

Though the writing center strives to create an egalitarian, nonhierarchical environment, the role of a peer tutor is a complicated one. John Trimbur articulates the difficulties of negotiating the two roles: "How . . . can I be a peer and a tutor simultaneously? If I am qualified to tutor, then I am no longer a peer to those I tutor. On the other hand, if I am a peer to my tutees, how can I be qualified to tutor?" (290). Trimbur concludes that peer tutors balance the roles by learning how to collaborate and take responsibility for learning without direct faculty supervision (293). Jason Palmeri, a peer tutor, argues that tutees grant tutors authority because the tutors demonstrate that they are able to "reveal the ways in which [their] authority has been and continues to be constructed through the process of manipulating academic discourse" (10). However, authority can be lost if a tutor fails to answer a tutee's question or, in Palmeri's experience, fails to offer the same response as a professor.

As I describe in detail below, personal pronouns consistently reveal points of view in a tutoring session. As the speaker shifts his or her role (and point of view), the pronouns that he or she uses change. I identify pronouns that tutors and tutees employ to project *ethos*, or character, into a session. As a session progresses, tutors invent *ethos* by the way they speak and act. They choose to represent themselves as collaborators, veterans of a class, and experts. Each time

speakers use “I,” they project their point of view and character. “We,” the first-person plural pronoun, is a collaborative pronoun. “We” allows the “I” to position itself as a member of a group. “You” continues the trend of using pronouns to establish and reflect the relationship between the tutor and the tutee. Tutors and tutees use “you” to position the individual (expressed by I) and the group (indicated by we) in relation to the other person in the tutoring session. Second-person pronouns reflect a projection outward.

Specifically, I identify and categorize twelve uses of three pronouns. Of those twelve, I classify seven uses as nondirective and five as directive. I do not have quantitative data about which pronouns were used most, but this small study provides evidence that nondirective tutoring is not as dominant in practice in a multidisciplinary center as it is in theory. Directive tutoring in writing can be ethical; tutors can, and do, avoid appropriating student texts and inserting their own words and ideas. My data support the conclusion that tutors are most student-centered and effective in tutoring across the disciplines when they have the flexibility to use directive and nondirective methods of tutoring.

### **The Pronoun “I”**

I will discuss four uses of the singular, first-person pronoun: “I the subjective reader,” “I-messages,” “the expert I,” and a “rapport-building I.” The subjective reader is nondirective, I-messages are nondirective, the expert I is directive, and the rapport-building I is nondirective. In writing sessions, tutors use “I” to create a reader persona. For example, June, a writing tutor, used the reader persona effectively in a session with Adam, a first-year writing student. June paraphrased Adam’s thesis and supporting evidence. “As your reader, I thought you said ...” Her reader persona showed Adam the ideas he had expressed in the paper, and exposed a flaw in his argument. The technique was effective, since the response allowed Adam to evaluate if June, his reader, understood the argument he wanted to make. June’s summary of Adam’s point illustrated the gap between the resolution to the argument, which he had made mentally, and the conclusion he had failed to articulate in the draft. The pronoun use was nondirective; instead of telling Adam what the problem was, June showed him how a reader responded to his text. She did not substitute her words or conclusion for his; June collaborated with Adam to develop a conclusion.

A second example of the “I” used as reader persona occurred in Pete and Maria’s writing tutoring session. Pete, the tutor, responded as a reader to the tutee, Maria’s, paper. He said: “As a reader, my question will be, how did they [Baroque artists] do this [use genre details]?” Maria answered, “Showing real human size, and, uh, they did it by drawing what the eye sees.” Responding to the paper as a reader and clarifying “my question” enabled Pete to show Maria a point to develop, but he did not appropriate her text by telling her how to develop it.

The reader persona can also politely show gaps in understanding through a second use of the pronoun I, I-messages. I-messages, like “I don’t understand the point here,” are more pro-

ductive than accusatory statements like, “You’re unclear.” I-messages invite the other party to elaborate without asking a confrontational question. I-messages help to maintain a civil tone, but they are not merely a courtesy. Adhering only to nondirective methods sometimes reduces I-messages to a seemingly passive way of changing the subject. In Carino’s critique of a session that is “nondirective to a fault,” the tutor’s opening statement, “I am wondering,” calls attention to a feature in the text; however, since the tutor is driving at a revision that she knows will make the piece conform to the genre, the I-message is indirect to the point of being “coy” (105). Despite this ineffective use, I-messages help develop relationships because they reveal the speaker’s orientation in the interaction. They are integral in projecting *ethos* in the discourse.

Pete used I-messages and the reader persona to react to Maria’s paper. Pete observed, “That one sentence just jumps out of nowhere. Like, all this is good—but I don’t understand.” While Pete tried to elicit more information about the point of the sentence from Maria, she immediately criticized herself: “That was dumb. That doesn’t fit? Yeah, I need to replace that with something.” Pete did not argue with her, but after Maria’s self-critical response, he began to use direct questions rather than implying them with I-messages. I-messages are nondirective, because they imply gaps and invite answers, but they do not supply answers. Pete’s direct questions generally used second-person pronouns, like “How would you do that?” The direct question turned the preceding suggestion into a command, and it indicated the change more clearly, and more directly, than an I-message.

The use of I-messages in developing relationships can also be seen from students to tutors, primarily in math and chemistry sessions. The I-messages allow the speaker to show a communication failure without blaming the other person. Math and chemistry sessions tended to be more directive than writing sessions, with the result that the tutors spoke more than the tutees. When the tutees spoke, they often used I-messages to ask for clarifications. The pronoun “I” helps to establish a working relationship between tutor and tutee. It sets up boundaries for talk without blame. Accusations like “You’re not explaining it!” tend to evoke a defensive reaction that stalls the tutoring, while “I don’t get it” can evoke an alternative explanation.

In Ryan’s second organic chemistry tutoring session, three tutees used I-messages about their questions or understanding to guide the tutoring session in a direction that would be helpful to all five of them. It is possible that this session became directive because rather than being a dyadic encounter it was a small-group interaction, but without more data, I can only speculate. The priorities and goals were constantly being revised and renegotiated. A tutee, Megan, told Ryan, the tutor, “I don’t understand it.” Karen, another tutee, announced, “I wrote a big ‘T’ by that one, for tutor.” The third tutee, Tori, laughed, “So did I.”

When Megan introduced a new topic with her I-message, the other tutees participated in goal-setting, also using I-messages. The tutees used “I” to reflect a shared gap in understanding and to determine the direction of the session. The tutees agreed that they wanted Ryan’s help with the mechanism; “I” facilitated the working relationship of the participants. Unlike the writ-

ing tutors, who use I-messages to avoid inserting their own words into a student's paper, the tutees used I-messages to set the agenda. The tutees shared in this crucial part of tutoring, marking a decidedly collaborative and nondirective moment in the more directive environment of the small-group science session.

Conversely, there were directive moments in primarily nondirective sessions. In a writing session, Mike, the tutor, created an expert I persona. The expert I leads to directive moments—when the tutor has more knowledge, the expert persona can be appropriate and useful. However, when improperly assumed, the expert persona can mislead the tutee or erode the tutor's credibility.

Mike projected an "I" that was an experienced writer and therefore an authority. Mike observed, "You seem to be on a really good track with content." "Good," Nate nodded. Mike said, "I'm just going to read through now for grammar." Mike's "expert I" positions him as a student with superior knowledge of grammar, and thus (in the eyes of the student, who claimed "I'm really bad at grammar and stuff") an expert writer. This use of the "expert I" moved away from the nondirective ideal of peership, since it establishes Mike as the superior, at least in terms of grammar. Mike did not use his position as the expert to order Nate to change any of his sentences, nor did he substitute his words or phrases for Nate's. Thus, Mike did not appropriate the text. This moment in the tutoring session illustrates the point that even writing tutors who are well versed in nondirective tutoring do have directive moments.

In the chemistry session, Ryan used "I" to establish his position as an authority or an expert. He used his experience to establish credibility and to help his students when he told Karen and Ann, "The way I memorize mechanisms is, I look at the name and the kind of reactant and I see if I can follow the positive and negative charges. Then it's easy." Ryan first empathizes with his students and reveals that he has successfully completed a similar task. He narrates a solution so quickly that it seems to be second nature. Finishing with "Then it's easy" expresses Ryan's mastery of the material and underscores his expert I pronoun.

When all five tutees were working on the same concept, the session shifted from conversing to lecturing, which seemed to further heighten Ryan's expert persona. Shifting the dynamic made Ryan seem less like a peer and more like a teacher. Ryan accurately explained the mechanism to the group, proving that he could perform organic chemistry well. His success helped him move beyond situated *ethos* into invented *ethos*.

Ryan was not always an expert I; he also used "I" to build rapport. Four of the tutees accepted Ryan's authority role, but one subtly challenged him. After Ryan modeled a solution, Megan refused to attempt an example alone. Ryan tried to persuade her: "Why don't you just give it a shot? You can tell me your reasoning." Megan shook her head and said "No." Ryan teased lightly, "Come on, I'm not going to embarrass you." Megan responded, "Fine. I don't

know what this means.” Ryan evaluated the paper, “It looks like she [Professor B] wants you to know where the hydrogen goes.”

Ryan used “you” in an imperative fashion that Megan resisted. But when Ryan shifted to “I,” he was revealing his view of the power relationship between him and Megan. By promising not to embarrass her, even though he said it jokingly, he implied that he had the power to do so. By refraining from using that power, he established himself as a trustworthy or “nice” tutor. He paused from projecting an expert I into the session to project a rapport-building I. The empathic response builds the rapport between tutor and tutee.

Though Megan did not accept Ryan’s directions or solve the reaction individually at first, she accepted his authority to a degree. Megan acquiesced by saying “Fine,” but she directed the session with an I-message about her level of knowledge rather than asking a direct question. The I-message helped establish the working relationship; the session was less formal than a class lecture but more formal than a conversation with a peer.

Other tutors make sessions productive by building rapport through self-disclosure and personal narratives. The rapport-building I is nondirective; it fosters a mood of collaboration. The rapport-building I often appeared when a student was explaining to the tutor that the class or the material is extremely difficult and that she is working independently outside of class. The “I” built rapport by moving from a working relationship to a personal relationship. These disclosures often bordered talk about the professor and course expectations. In some cases, the tutee sought confirmation that the professor is unkind or that the material is difficult and that difficulty or failure is not the tutee’s fault.

In the first chemistry session I observed, Ryan asked tutees Karen and Ann, “How did you get the hydrogen over there?” Karen explained that this mechanism follows anti-Markovnikov’s rule, a concept she had been struggling with for about a week. Ryan nodded emphatically. “Perfect.” Karen laughed, “Yes! I got something right in my life today.” Karen explained that she had failed a calculus exam that day and had car problems. The self-disclosure moved the conversation away from tutoring and the “business” of the session into a rapport-building moment that revealed how learning how to perform organic chemistry impacts her outside of the LRC. Answering a problem correctly inspired her to say, “I’m going home to celebrate. Yes, I understood something!” The self-disclosure accompanied an assertion of Karen’s *ethos*; she expressed her growing confidence that she can accurately perform organic chemistry.

### **The Pronoun “We”**

I identify four uses of the plural first-person pronoun: the “class/peer we,” the “audience we,” the “directive we,” and the “collaborative we.” The class/peer we is nondirective, but the audience we is directive. The directive we is directive, while the collaborative we is nondirective. The class/peer we, like the rapport-building I, sometimes figures in narratives. Tori, one of the organic chemistry students who attended Ryan’s sessions, generalized her frustration by

expressing it as a collective problem. In the observed sessions, “we” was not typically associated with personal self-disclosures but to explain what the members of the class or the study group (a group of individuals including the student and others, but not the tutor) had attempted to do before consulting the tutor. Tori said, “The only thing that confuses me is she [Professor B] says we should do line angle drawings, but none of the notes ever are, so we don’t learn that way.” Tori immediately contextualizes her confusion by referring to the professor, but generalizes her problem by applying it to the class when she says “we should” and “we don’t learn.” The session involved one tutor and five tutees, so Tori’s “we” could have applied to the tutees present or to the class as a whole. Regardless, this use of we did not reflect a unity of tutor and tutees. This use of we was nondirective. The tutee used it to form a more collaborative relationship, almost an alliance, with the tutor.

We, like I, can be used to indicate an audience for a paper. The plural we implies that more than one person will read the paper. Using the I of a reader persona allows a tutor to show what confuses him or her, but using we shows a gap of understanding that affects more people. When the tutor speaks of the audience as though it comprises multiple readers, then the session is less teacher-dominant, because the student is not writing to one individual’s preferences and quirks. Using we to indicate a broad audience also allows the tutor to show a flaw in a paper that would confuse not only the tutor-reader, but all readers within a discipline. In the writing session between Pete and Maria, Pete told Maria, “Or you could say, ‘One example is’ and we’ll know that all these others are examples too.” As a reader, a phrase struck him as unclear so Pete generalized his perspective as a reader. The audience we is more directive than the reader persona I. If I do not understand, you can explain the idea to me; if none of us in the audience understand, then you must revise. I did not see any tutors use the audience we to appropriate a text, so it is not directive in a negative sense.

The tutor can also use a “directive we” to create a sense of group decision-making, while he or she is actually using first-person plural pronouns to issue directions. In Thomas Newkirk’s article “The First Five Minutes,” he quotes transcripts of conferences between first-year writing students and teaching assistants. The first T.A. he quotes uses “we” in the directive fashion when she says, “And then we’ll talk about it.” Her first direction, “Now let’s talk,” did not give the student a chance to disagree with her agenda, but the first-person plural pronoun created an impression of collaboration. I view this use of we as directive, because one person sets the agenda and uses language to imply that the other will follow that agenda. It is not a command, and from the outside, it often looks like a collaborative decision or a “collaborative we.” It sugarcoats the directions with the appearance of nondirective method, which may be why many writing tutors used the directive we to change the direction of a session.

In Pete and Maria’s session, Pete changed the direction of the session by issuing an indirect command using a first-person plural pronoun: “Let’s move on. I don’t want to just stare at this one sentence.” Maria used I-messages to express her confusion and to direct the session in



a way that would be helpful to her. “I just don’t think this sentence is right,” she declared. Although she continued using I-messages to invite Pete to solve the problem for her, he declined to solve her dilemma: “Let’s move on. I don’t want to just stare at this one sentence.”

“We” not only gives directions, but also creates a sense of collaboration between the tutor and the tutees. Tutors and tutees use the collaborative we to group the tutor and the tutee together in relation to a project or goal. Using we to foster a mood of collaboration or partnership sometimes reassures the tutee that he or she is not facing a difficult assignment or course alone. It also implies a less hierarchical relationship between tutor and tutee. The collaborative we is nondirective; it reflects partnership and negotiation of goals.

Jorge, a math tutor, began the session with the question, “What have you brought for us to look at?” The use of “you” gave Jane the power or responsibility to direct the session with the materials or questions she had brought, but “us” creates a collaborative mood that is strengthened by its placement at the end of the sentence. As the session progressed and the student and tutor worked on factoring, Jane became anxious about a specific problem. Jorge calmed her by saying, “Don’t worry! We’ll figure it out.” They worked together on the problems and concepts, but Jorge steadily tried to invest Jane with more authority over the learning and the direction of the session. He began by asking her to solve problems alone, though he stayed beside her. At first, he still used a collaborative we, as in “You solve this one, and then we’ll check it together.” The you in the sentence is directive, but the we is reassuringly collaborative. Jane successfully factored the equation alone, but expressed uncertainty about her abilities to perform the operations on an exam, without Jorge to sit with her or help her check her work. Jorge attempted to move her toward independence by replying, “But you can check it when you are by yourself, with the calculator and that equation.” Jorge’s use of pronouns indicates a systematic progress from dependence on the tutor to independent learning. Jane did not accept a movement from “we” to “you,” in that session, but the pronouns reflect the distribution of power in the relationship between tutor and tutee.

### **The Pronoun “You”**

I identify four uses of the second-person pronoun: the “invitation you,” the “evaluative you,” the “imperative you,” and the “idealized disciplinary you.” The invitation you is nondirective, while the evaluative you, the imperative you, and the disciplinary you are directive. Tutors and tutees can use “you” as a personal pronoun that invites self-disclosure, as when Ryan observed, “Megan, you’re deep in thought.” It was at a point in the session with five tutees when Tori, Karen, and Ann, three tutees who were participating verbally, had begun to work individually. It was part of the one-to-one conversation; Ryan was trying to build rapport by noticing the quiet tutees, Jackie and Megan, directly. Megan resisted, responding only, “I guess.”

At other times, the invitation you successfully stimulates a self-disclosing response, or an answer including a rapport-building I. The invitation you is nondirective; it fosters collaboration

and peership. In a writing session, the tutee, Nick, asked Gina, the tutor, “You’ve never had a paper like this [about constipation] before, have you?” The “you” invited Gina to tell Nick more about her tutoring experience, but it also carried an evaluative dimension that allowed Nick to gauge himself and the uniqueness of his topic against Gina’s other students and their writing.

Questions using the pronoun “you” frequently involve an element of evaluation, as it did in Mike and Nate’s writing session. The tutor, Mike, asked Nate, “Do you understand the difference between to, two, and too?” Mike intended to evaluate his tutee’s skill level, but Nate became defensive, though he had already insisted he was “bad at grammar.” He asserted control over the session by physically taking the papers away from Mike to write a correction. Nate verbally defended himself as well, “That’s a typo.” The question was not meant to insult Nate, but the abruptness of the evaluation created an unproductive moment.

Evaluation returns to hierarchy, and so I classify it as a directive use of the pronoun; the tutor assumes the role of expert, at least temporarily, to evaluate a tutee’s skills. Pete used an evaluative you in a session with Maria, when he asked, “Do you know how to use commas and semicolons?” The question is very similar to Mike’s question in form and purpose. The question and evaluation are tied to gauging a tutee’s knowledge or understanding of a lower-order concern. Yet asking the question implies that the tutee’s application of the grammatical concept is faulty. In some cases, the tutee reacts negatively to evaluation, while at other times, the tutee answers the question honestly, without offense. Maria answered, “No, I’m pretty ignorant about that.” Her I-message invited Pete to explain the rule to her, which he did.

The word “you” can become imperative, either directly or indirectly. Direct commands like “Look” and “Calm down” occurred in math, chemistry, and writing sessions. The direct commands with an understood you are directive, but they were not necessarily bad—direct commands caught the tutee’s attention immediately, especially in nondirective sessions. Indirect imperatives appeared more frequently in ostensibly nondirective writing tutoring sessions. During Pete and Maria’s session, he explained that commas separate items in a list or join independent clauses when accompanied by a conjunction, while semicolons join independent clauses. Maria listened, but had difficulty applying the concept to her writing. As the session progressed, Pete became more insistent when he suggested that sentences needed to be punctuated differently to make the meaning clear. Pete tried to refer back to the lesson to give Maria clues about which mark of punctuation she needed when he said: “Here, you have a list and you need to break it up. How would you do that?” By asking the question, he ostensibly put her in control of the session, but he was the one who spotted the errors and a solution, which he wanted her to articulate. Asking “How would you do that?” changes the previous suggestion into an indirect command. It indicates a transfer of responsibility.

Another indirect imperative use of “you” in a writing session happened when Jan tutored Steve. She suggested that he change a phrase to avoid repetition, and he responded with a non-committal, nonverbal “Hmm.” After a ten-second pause, Jan “asked,” “You wanna write that

down?" Her tone and intention turned the question into a politely phrased order. Steve answered, "No, see, I used that here." The session had been difficult as Steve was resistant to changing his writing or talking about it. Jan employed minimalist tutoring techniques as Jeff Brooks described; she sat beside the student and kept the paper in front of him. She abstained from writing on Steve's paper (221). Steve read the paper aloud, and Jan made a point to notice positive aspects of the paper, as when she said, "I think you have a good start here" and praised his diction: "Establish. That's a great word there" (Brooks 222).

Jan consistently asked questions and gave Steve time to consider. At one point, both were silent for two minutes, a lengthy pause in a thirty-minute tutoring session. Despite these efforts, Steve ceased participating in a meaningful way as soon as Jan became imperative. For the remainder of the session, he slouched back and put as much physical distance as possible between him, Jan, and the paper. Jan tried to compensate by moving the paper closer to Steve and by leaning toward him, but Steve rebuffed most of her efforts.

"You" can also refer to an idealized disciplinary expert, one who knows how to perform professionally in a field. Instead of using the impersonal "one," in conversation, tutors tended to use "you" to refer to an expert. Addressing a tutee with "you" while actually referring to how an expert would perform a task, the tutors were sometimes building confidence in their tutees. The tutor models the ethos of a disciplinary group for a student. Trimbur suggests that tutors are, as a rule, academically motivated and successful; tutors internalize the values of a university and pass along knowledge of how to succeed in the environment. In some sense, the tutor invites the tutee to learn how to become a writer or a chemist by learning how to assume the *ethos* of a discipline. The commands and the imaginary, ideal disciplinary you link the person who performs a task correctly with one who knows how to behave in a discipline.

Tutors issue instructions by narrating what the expert would do, a use closely connected to the imperative you. None of the five writing tutors I observed gave directions this explicit; it would probably cross ethical lines by appropriating the student's text or by coauthoring it. The math and science tutors forged verbal connections between experts and inexperienced students by giving directions. In Ryan's tutoring session with Karen and Ann, he said, "Breaking a carbon to carbon bond isn't an option. You can't do that, except under unusual circumstances, but you'll learn about those next semester in Organic II." The first "you" refers to one who knows how to do organic chemistry, but the negative verb reinforces that Karen and Ann are not the experts he means. The second "you" speaks to the tutees directly and casts them in a role of inexperienced students who will learn more as time passes. The close proximity of the disciplinary expert you and the inexperienced you creates a link between the two.

Later in the same session, Ryan said, "You are not moving the positive charges. You're moving the electrons, and then the positive shifts naturally. Show the electrons moving when you draw it." The first "you" is the inexperienced student, but the second refers to the expert. They are distinguished by context and by nonverbal communication cues. Ryan looked at Karen

and Ann when he addressed them directly, but when he spoke of the abstract disciplinary you, he looked at the paper on which he wrote.

When Karen asked for clarification, she adopted his use of the expert you, “Can you just move whatever electrons you want?” Karen used second-person pronouns when talking about actions that she would perform because she wanted to know how an expert would draw the carbocation shifts. She was not talking only to Ryan but to the discipline he represents.

Ryan shook his head and responded, “No. You can move a hydrogen or a methyl. If you have to pick, pick hydrogen. It’s smaller.” The you in “you can” and “you have to pick” means the expert or the person who understands the rules of the mechanism, but the implied you of the command “pick hydrogen” is the imperative you. The mix of disciplinary expert you and imperative you develops a connection between the inexperienced students and experienced organic chemists who can represent the outcome of a reaction.

The tutee also talks about the expert you, as Karen did in the quote above. But in some sessions, the tutee asked the tutor questions like “What would you do?” It was difficult to determine if the tutee was asking what the tutor would do, what an expert chemist or writer would do, or if the tutee was asking a conflation of tutor and expert for direction. In Pete and Maria’s session, when Maria wasn’t certain what punctuation was appropriate, she asked Pete, “So you would put a comma here?” That “you” could have addressed Pete directly, but it could have meant “a person who writes well.” Thus, while pronouns can be extremely revealing, they can rapidly become muddled. The conflation of disciplinary expert and expert tutor is a directive pronoun use. The tutee rejects the parity of peership and places herself below the tutor in a hierarchy. She asks the tutor to be an expert. Whether the session continues in the directive style after the tutee’s question depends on the tutor.

## Conclusion

I began this study out of curiosity; I wanted to find out if I could apply nondirective writing tutoring theory to my chemistry practice and practices from chemistry tutoring to my understanding of writing theory. I wanted to understand more about when directive tutoring might be effective and appropriate and when nondirective tutoring is most helpful. As I delved into the literature of the writing center, I was fascinated by the discussions of nondirective and directive methods. I wanted to know what works in theory, and what happens in practice? What is most helpful to students? What is ethical?

At the end of the study, I continue to wonder about the connections between theory and practice, about the ethics of collaboration, and about how to best help students. My observations evidence that directive tutoring is not as subordinate in practice as it is in theory. Directive and nondirective moments occur in a session, but it is a fallacy to claim that tutors use only one method to instruct students. Writing tutors can make directive moves ethically, though sessions do not divide cleanly into directive and nondirective categories. My data support the conclusion

that tutors are most student-centered and effective in tutoring across the disciplines when they have the flexibility to use directive and nondirective tutoring techniques.

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