



I became a math tutor seven years ago and I have loved the job from the beginning. What do I do on a typical day? Here is a description of a typical tutoring session.

A student arrives with her textbook. Her idea is that she is going to get me to do her homework for her. My idea is that I am going to get her to understand the concepts she has been learning in math class. This is a quiet, private time for her to think about how the pieces fit together. Educators know that it is important to have the time and space to make connections between the new concept and what you already know. This can't always happen during class time. Sometimes it doesn't happen when the student is just rushing through the homework assignment either. But I know what is important, and I can guide the student in our time together.

The student wants to start on the first problem. She can do it just fine, so I just kind of watch and ask her how she is figuring it out as she goes along. On the second problem, she gets stuck. My questions are geared to leading her to think about what she has been given, what she needs to finish the problem, and how she can get there. She succeeds.

After the third problem, I ask her what pattern she is seeing. How do all these different problems use the same principle? She expresses an idea, and I ask her more questions to get her to refine her ideas, add to them, and make a clear statement.

While she is doing the next problem, she makes a mistake that I recognize. I know what she was thinking, and I know that if she doesn't learn to catch herself she will continue to have trouble. I point out the last step that was right and then ask where she went wrong. She finds her mistake, and now, since she discovered it herself, she will remember it.

On the fifth problem, I notice something cool about the topic that is a little bit off the beaten path. There is extra information here, or an idea that we covered last week. I remind the student about that kind of problem and ask if she noticed the similarity. Well, she didn't before I brought it up, but now she does! She says, hmm, does that also work in this other case? Now she is interested and asking questions about the math material she used to not be interested in.

When she finishes the next problem, I say there is something new she is about to learn that will make more sense next week. I get her attention—what if you could use this to figure out that other thing? Now she is primed to go back to class and listen for the clue I gave her. She may even raise her hand and give an answer the teacher is looking for.

We also laugh a lot. Did I mention that? I really enjoy tutoring high school students, and I hope to give them a sense of how interesting, fun and creative math can be. If you know a high school student who could enjoy math more, call The Study Hall.