

Some General Rules and Pointers

Your support here at 826 Boston is important. Just by sitting down with a student and taking an interest in their work, you are providing a valuable service. The goal for every session isn't a perfect end product, but to support the student in developing an increased sense of confidence in their abilities and strengthen their affinity toward writing.

There are many opportunities and ways to work with students at 826 Boston. While each volunteer may take a different approach, it's important that every volunteer abide by some basic guidelines. All volunteers should model behavior they wish to see in students; being friendly, flexible, patient, as well as engaged in the learning process and asking for help when needed.

Remember the staff is here to support you. If you have a question, don't understand something, could use support managing students, or need advice, just ask!

RESPECT

The student's teacher(s) should be respected.

We support the trust and respect between student and teacher. By respecting the strategies and assignments provided by a student's teacher, you're supporting a pathway of learning. Listen to a student with empathy rather than escalating any challenges.

If you encounter a situation that sounds unfair, please talk to our staff privately.

Example: You are working with a student who complains about their amount of homework and says that they don't like their teacher. You think the amount and level of homework they have seems unfair due to their age/grade. Spend a few minutes talking with the student about the assignments they are most overwhelmed by and create a plan of action for you to complete together. Explain that, while it might seem like a lot of work, the assignments are meant to help them practice their awesome [fill in the blank] skills and that you are there to help them through it.

Our families are our partners.

Building strong communities begins with the one-on-one interactions we have with students and their families. The best outcome for a student occurs when 826, their educators, and their families work together. Families should feel welcome and respected.

If a student is struggling with a family situation, please talk to a staff member.

Example: You and a student have worked together on homework for an entire session. At the end, the student hasn't completed a homework assignment and will be taking it home. When the family member comes to pick up the student, sit down to talk about what still needs to be done, and help the student talk about the progress they made on the homework during the session. Explain how hard the student worked, but there just wasn't enough time to get all of it done and offer any tips that were helpful for the portions you did get through.

Support multiple identities.

We aim to help students feel comfortable in our space and confident in themselves. Students bring their unique assets, backgrounds, interests, and life experiences into every interaction. Remember to respect all aspects of someone's identity and consider this intersectionality in your interactions with students (and everyone else at 826).

Example: A student shares a piece with you that is highly personal and reflects on their experience as a person of color. Rather than trying to relate to their experience, seek to *understand*. Demonstrate active listening and validate the student's self-expression by pointing out something in their piece that clearly demonstrates their voice. We encourage you to think as critically about your own identities as our students are. Be mindful of your own identities and any biases you may reflect in your tone and rhetoric.

Honor potential and effort.

Our philosophy is that a student's hard work, not innate talent or input from an adult, makes good writing. Every paper — even drafts — will improve with editing and rewriting. Notice what a student has done well and provide specific encouragement and feedback.

Example: You're working with a student who declares their piece is "done" without considering a revision or a rewrite. This is a great opportunity to ask the student to read their piece out loud. Ask them to identify or highlight parts of the draft that communicate the "heart" of their piece and then follow-up with questions you have as a reader that might provide clarity to their intended message. Explore other ways to make a draft more colorful like adding imagery, or action, or dialogue, or interesting facts.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

Establish rapport.

Sitting down with an adult can be intimidating. Show students you are eager to support their work by checking in. Even a minute of conversation helps to build trust. Your positive and consistent presence will be the best antidote to a shy or seemingly resistant student.

Example: You have worked with a student a few times, but you don't feel like they are comfortable with you. Pay attention to how they speak to their friends and what they seem to be interested in, even if it is unrelated to the task at hand. Be present, enthusiastic, and share a bit about yourself, even if it feels like you're talking to an empty room. You can joke about yourself or be a little silly to help the student open up. Students will recognize your consistency and desire to be there with them.

Break assignments down.

As you approach an assignment, help students comprehend what they're being asked to do. Then work together to prioritize and break it down into manageable tasks, giving the student the feeling that together, you'll tackle their workload.

Example: You are helping a student who just can't seem to get started. Try easing them into the project by asking what they know about the assignment. Create an outline together, brainstorm, or narrow down some topics that are exciting to them. By doing so, you will help to set the student up for a successful working session. Cheer them on as they work through the process. As students begin to tackle steps, they tend to perk up and pick up momentum as they work to complete the newly de-mystified project.

Make it fun.

Many students think completing an assignment is boring, so it's our job to make it fun, or at least seem like a worthwhile endeavor! If a student is having a difficult time focusing, offer a structured break (a few minutes to stretch, chat, or draw) before diving back in.

Example: You are helping a student with a math worksheet and the student is distracted and tired. Suggest that if they get through five more math problems, you can take a break to play a game of tic tac toe. Then get through five more questions, have a rematch, then get a drink of water. Shaking things up a bit can make mundane tasks a little more interesting.

Encourage all things 826.

Because we love what we do, we encourage cross-program participation. We would love your help in telling students about other 826 programs and encouraging them to get involved. For instance, we want our in-schools students to know that we offer after-school tutoring, and our tutoring students to try out our workshops.

Example:

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

Use the Socratic method.

Make suggestions and corrections by asking questions instead of giving directions. Students will learn more if they come to realizations for themselves.

Example: It's revision week and you are working with a student who has written a story about chihuahuas. When it's time to edit their story, they say they don't feel like writing today. Instead of telling them what you think needs to be fixed in their story, spend a few minutes asking them questions about chihuahuas, getting them excited to show off their ideas to an engaged adult. Once they answer your questions, mention how these additions could add to their story and help them transfer them to onto the page.

Use all resources.

If you don't know an answer to a question, that's *okay!* Use all of the resources in the lab (internet, dictionaries, etc), and try asking volunteers, students, and staff for resources they've used in the past for similar assignments.

Example: You're working with a student who stumps you by asking you how to spell "ophthalmology." Say, "I actually have no clue how to spell that! Nor do I know what it means. Maybe we can try spelling the word by sounding it out, then we can find a dictionary to check it?" Students are often comforted by the fact that their tutor may not know everything. Role model the strategies you use to solve a problem and take students through that process so that they can apply it themselves next time.

Broad strokes first.

Start off by making sure the student understands overarching concepts before addressing more detailed needs. For instance, when working on an essay, make sure the content correctly addresses the prompt before starting line-by-line edits.

Example: You are working with a student on a "how-to" piece about taking care of a puppy. The student is fixated on spelling, and isn't making much progress as they ask you for help to spell every word correctly. Remind the student this is a first draft and explain that there will be time to go back and fix spelling during revisions. Encourage the student to be a courageous speller by trying to sound out words the best they can. Then help the student to write about the bigger concepts that they want to be sure to include.

Offer strategies and be flexible.

We all retain knowledge in different ways. Adapting to meet your student's learning style (visual, aural, physical, verbal, etc.) will create a more effective learning session. Ask about their teacher's strategies, their own strategies, and offer your own advice, but be flexible.

Example: A student is studying for a test on parts of a cell. You ask how they've been preparing for the test and they share the flashcards they made, but they're still having trouble remembering the terms. Help them think of alternative study devices. Suggest finding blank cell diagrams online, printing them, coloring and labeling them.

Ask students to explain.

When a student is given a chance to explain their thought process it can help to reinforce their learnings or help them discover why they are struggling. Finding out *why* they are getting the wrong answer is more helpful to a student than just knowing that it is wrong.

Example: A student is working on adding fractions, but is getting wrong answers. Ask the student to explain their reasoning for $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = \frac{2}{4}$. The student explains that they added the top and the bottom numbers. You note that does *seem* like that would be good strategy but since the answers aren't coming out right something must be off. Try to help them think about it in a different way by creating a story problem using slices of pizza to help illustrate how the answer is 1, not $\frac{2}{4}$. Seeing it in a new light may help them realize their missteps.

Manage small groups.

At times you'll find yourself working with small groups of students. Do your best to set students up to be independent, then rotate around the group, checking in individually as often as possible. If they are working on the same project, encourage collaboration. If managing your group of students becomes difficult, staff members are here to help.

Example: You find yourself working with three students. Start by introducing yourself and check in with each student to assess their needs. It may become evident which student(s) will need more of your attention, pair these students on one side of the table to coach them on as a mini-group. Your other student(s) may be farther ahead on their assignment, and you can encourage them to continue to push their writing forward independently, perhaps by helping them set a personal goal of how much they'll write.

WRITING-SPECIFIC TIPS

Empower students' voices to shine.

The big picture goal of our work is to help our students' voices become clear and most effective. Even with a set framework for a project, you can help find space for them to make their own choices about content and style.

Example: When responding to a prompt or assignment, the student you are working with ignores the directions and makes an unconventional choice with style, grammar, etc. Engage with the student and share what is strong about the voice/message of that writing. Then, if needed, return to the assignment and say, "Do you have any ideas on how we can take the message you created in this poem, and use it in the genre your assignment asks for."

Focus on patterns.

When editing, focus on issues that appear repeatedly (punctuation, spelling, or the organization of the piece). Let the student find where they can make a correction. Don't overwhelm students, and if they don't know how to fix something, teach them.

Example: When reviewing a student's piece, you find that there are spelling issues that need to be addressed. Comment on the student's magic touch with dialogue. Then ask the student, "Do you mind circling any words that you are not totally sure are spelled correctly?" Then work together to sound out and spell the words correctly. You might even share a mini lesson on a common spelling pattern for the student, like "I before E, except after C."

Ask questions to encourage revision

Remember ARMS:

Add: What can you add to this piece to make it better or add more detail?

Remove: What can you remove that's unnecessary or repetitive?

Move: What can you move around so that the piece makes more sense?

Substitute: What can you substitute that will make the piece richer or more interesting?

Example: You are working with a student to revise a bedtime story that has a gruesome ending. Ask about the purpose of bedtime stories, reminding them how they help younger children fall asleep. Then ask, "How can we make this ending more calming for your audience?" Point at something that stands out, and use that to guide them to replicating it somewhere else.

Support English Language Learners.

Like with all of our students, we intend to foster writing, reading, and speaking skills, as well as confidence, in our English Language Learners. If a student feels more comfortable expressing an idea, word, or phrase in a language other than English, that's fine!

If you need translation support, bilingual tutors and students can help.

Example: You're working with an English Language Learner who doesn't respond verbally. Children exposed to a new language may go through a "silent period" where they actively listen and process the language but may not have enough

language to comfortably express themselves. Support them by simplifying your language without dumbing it down; repeat yourself, ask yes/no questions, and use images to communicate. And offer lots of encouraging smiles.

If there's a red (or yellow) flag, tell us.

Sometimes students will share very personal things. Listen and encourage them to write, while respecting the emotions and truths revealed. Acknowledge the courage it took them to share. At the end of the session, talk to a staff member.

Example: In working on a piece about family, a teenage student reveals that they are having trouble with their mom and just moved in with their aunt. Be empathetic to how they are processing this change, but keep in mind that there may be complicated underlying issues. Explain how writing can be a tool to work through and process things in our lives. Post session, share what you learned with staff, the team may or may not know what's going on, and can take things from there.