



Please use the *Volunteer-Teacher 1st Meeting Checklist* to check in with your supervising teacher regarding preferred tutoring and classroom management strategies and methods.

Adjusting to the School Environment:

Some volunteers may feel uncomfortable when they first enter the school environment, often because they've had little recent experience with young children or adolescents, or because they haven't been exposed to the culturally, academically, and socioeconomically diverse environment of Berkeley public schools. To prepare yourself to make a positive influence in your school environment, try to keep the following in mind:

- Have an *open mind* and a sense of respect and dignity for all students
- Appearance/Sensory input: *Use a breath mint!* Students are highly sensitive to appearance and odor.
- *Be honest* with students when you don't know something; use it as a "teaching moment".
- Always have an enthusiastic and *encouraging attitude*, even when you may be feeling discouraged.
- Approach situations with *patience* and a *sense of humor*; make learning fun.
- *Be aware of diversity* in the student body. Students come from many cultures with different values, behaviors, and expectations. Many speak a different language at home. A large percentage of students come from low-income families. Academically, many are struggling to get up to grade level. All of these factors can have an influence on how students respond to you and learn.

Supporting Academic Success:

As a volunteer, your role is to encourage and support student success. You can maximize your impact by:

- *Learning* about your students: Spend time getting to know the students, especially if you will be working with them on an ongoing basis. Have conversations about your passions/interests; play an icebreaker to get to know one another; help make connections between students' passions and projects.
- *Being Present*: ask how students are doing today and sincerely listen and respond before moving on to schoolwork. Model how to acknowledge life's distractions and help redirect focus to the assignment.
- Building *self-confidence*: Praise students honestly and frequently for their attentiveness and effort as well as performance; learn and use students' names to encourage trust and self-esteem.
- Focus on the *positive*: Remind students that making mistakes is part of learning and to try again; frame your directives in the positive; instead of "don't do that" *say what action you want the student to do* (ex: "If you want my help on this problem, I need your attention" instead of "stop talking".)
- Give *explicit instructions*: Include each step necessary for success—break a larger task into "chunks, if needed; don't expect students to just "get it" because culture/experience could prevent understanding.
- Setting *goals*: It is important you hold your students to *high expectations*. Outlining your objectives at the beginning and end of each session helps you both to stay on track, and allows you to monitor your student's progress in understanding the material.
- Encouraging *independence*: Your job is to help students *learn*. Instead of feeding them answers, give the student time to reason the problem out on their own. Ultimately, they should understand the material enough to be able to solve problems independently—and with confidence!

Working with Different Learners:

Different students may require different tutoring styles. Here are some strategies to help you adjust your learning approach where necessary:

Strategies for working with shy students:

- *Circulate* the room and get to know everyone in the class. Just because a student isn't vocal about needing help doesn't necessarily mean they understand the assignment. You should feel free to take initiative and offer every student help in a positive way.
- Spend some time establishing *trust* by sharing information about yourself. Discover your *similarities*.
- Ask *open-ended questions* to get a conversation going and encourage your student to open up.



Strategies for working with uncooperative students:

- *Articulate* the issue and a potential solution. For example: “I’m noticing that it takes you a while to settle down. Why don’t we spend a minute talking about something else, then get back to work?”
- Set a few *ground rules* to create a sense of structure and ensure that you both stay focused. Some examples of ground rules include, 1) use our time for learning, and 2) respect each other.
- If you feel the student isn’t responding to you even after frequent reminders, *get help* from your teacher, especially if this behavior is interfering with learning. A behavior contract may be useful.

Strategies for overcoming learning roadblocks:

- Think about how you can explain the material in a different way. Use *visual tools* like webs or T-charts. Draw on relevant *examples* from the student’s own interests or past experiences.
- Be *patient*. This is the first time most students are encountering the material. It may take some time before it clicks, so do your best to help them through it.
- *Ask for help* from another tutor, the teacher, or a fellow student.
- *Move on*. Often the more you stay on one point, the more anxious the student becomes. Revisit the problem once both of you has had time to think about something else.

Strategies for working with younger students:

- If you feel your student is losing focus, *redirect* them back to the task by drawing their attention to something they have already accomplished. For example: “Look, I really like the way you described your cat here. What happened after that?”
- Keep respectful *boundaries* by being conscious of the relationship that you are forming with the student. Young children especially can become very emotionally attached to their tutors. It is important to remember that your role is more as a teacher than a friend.

Strategies for working with older students:

- Speak to students on *their level*- never talk down to them. You want them to view you as a mentor and positive role model, not someone who will judge them.
- Older students often feel enormous *social pressure* from their peers to fit in, which can lead them to make risky choices. As a tutor and mentor, you can *listen*, remain *supportive*, and direct the student to a *counselor* or teacher if appropriate.
- Many adolescents may feel *conflicting emotions* about requiring a tutor. While they may appreciate the attention and support, some may feel unhappy or angry with themselves for needing the extra help, and lack confidence in their academic abilities. It is therefore critical that you immediately *establish your confidence in them*.
- You are not expected to solve all of a student’s problems. What you can do is to help students *focus* on their own learning, while *encouraging* them to feel good about their work and their worth.

Developing Your Skills

Volunteering is an active learning process for both you and your students. Doing the following can help you to actively improve yourself as a tutor:

- *Observe* the teacher while they give the lesson: Doing so will put you on the same page with the rest of the students, and be a good refresher course for you, too! Follow the *teacher’s* method and curriculum: You don’t want to confuse students further with new strategies, or teach them methods that their class has yet to cover.
- Actively ask for *feedback* from your teacher or supervisor: Being open to constructive comments can help you to improve your relationships with the students.
- Take *initiative*: Make the most of your volunteering time by proactively offering help where needed.

Want to learn more?

- Ask your teacher/staff supervisor for training or support specific to your volunteer placement!
- Visit our website to access more Volunteer Resources and links to suggested partners’ resources:
www.berkeleypublicschoolsfund.org/volunteer