

Behavior Characteristics of Difficult Tutoring Situations

Blocking

Students typically withhold or avoid communication. When questioned they may say, “I don’t know,” and then remain silent. Blocking students typically have a low tolerance for frustration and become agitated, saying, “I’ll never get it.” They may respond emotionally to frustration or become uncomfortably quiet.

Confusion

Confusion is a variation of blocking; however, instead of withholding communication, students try to focus the content of the session on their own frustrations. They say they do not know what the professor wants or where they should start. They may question the value of course content asking, “Why do we have to know this, anyways?”

Miracle Seeking

Students expect tutors to take control of the tutoring transaction. They believe that their tutors are the solution to their problems; they have unrealistically high expectations for the tutors. Students may flatter tutors or compliment their skill often, and although tutors may feel good about the compliments, tutors may find themselves enabling students and doing too much of the work.

Over-Enthusiasm

This situation is a variation of miracle-seeking, but students want to complete all the work. Students have inflated goals and expect tutors to devote themselves to the cause. Students may request additional tutoring hours beyond the limit set by policy, offer to pay for additional tutoring sessions, or contact tutors after hours for additional help. Students want tutors to devote extra time and resources to assist them.

Resisting

Students directly or indirectly oppose changing their behaviors. They fail to implement agreed-upon strategies or complete work prior to sessions. Students may directly refute tutors’ use of strategies during a session or question tutors’ credibility in the subject area. Students may appear confrontational or hostile towards tutors. Tutors may interpret resistance as lack of interest in the course or in college.

Passivity

Students care more about seeking approval, pleasing others, avoiding conflict, and maintaining relationships than about expressing genuine concerns. They may therefore prefer less challenging assignments and courses. Students may not believe that their thoughts and ideas are as important as the tutors’. Students may also be anxious and overly concerned about being critiqued.

Evasion

Students may or may not consciously realize that they are avoiding the content of tutoring sessions by discussing topics unrelated to the tutoring sessions, such as social or current events, and changing the topic of conversation several times throughout the sessions. Students who are more aware of their evasion may provide vaguely worded responses or provide several plausible answers without choosing one particular answer, in an attempt to manipulate tutors to provide answers.

