

## What does constructive self-assessment look like?

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### *It's forward-looking:*

- ★ There's a difference between rehearsing/reliving bad sessions, and reviewing/debriefing them so you can put them to rest and move on
  - ★ There's a difference between self-flagellation and making decisions about what you would like to do differently
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### *It recognizes and builds on strengths:*

- ★ Don't fixate on weaknesses
  - ★ Become aware of what you have to offer as a tutor
  - ★ Notice what you do well and ask how that strength can be cultivated and used more frequently
  - ★ Develop affirmations that are meaningful to you, i.e., not general purpose ones that make you feel like you're lying to yourself: "positive self-statements may benefit certain people, but backfire for the very people who 'need' them the most"  
(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19493324>)
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### *It's specific enough to be actionable:*

- ★ Destructive self-assessment is anything that feels like too big of a question, where you just want to throw up your hands and forget about it
  - ★ Identify improvements that are possible in the near future; envision yourself as *slightly different*
  - ★ Implicit in the word "constructive" is the notion of building and building up. You need to have a general sense of what 'up' is in order to be constructive. It's easy to bring large, unanswerable questions into sessions, and to feel paralyzed by them rather than empowered, hopeful, imbued with agency and confidence (when people think of the politics of tutoring, they can become scared). So a huge part of giving yourself constructive feedback in our context here is developing the ability to transform large questions about the politics of tutoring into small questions and actions that can be tackled in a session, over time.
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### *It's timely:*

- ★ It might not be helpful to try to self-assess right before a session; it might put you in a mindset where you're not focused on the writer, but are worrying about yourself
- ★ It might be helpful to self-assess after a session
- ★ It might be possible to self-assess during a session, but there is the possibility of a "compound car wreck" or "sneaky hate spiral" occurring
- ★ Self-assessment is good to have as a habit, not something induced only by crises

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***It's realistic:***

- ★ Don't exaggerate your responsibility as a tutor:
  - "Only 50% of this is my responsibility"
  - In sessions, writers are developing as collaborators, not just as writers; doing too much of the 'heavy lifting' in the conversation takes that from them
  - Be OK with silence; it gives the writer time to think, it gives you time to think
  
- ★ Be honest about what is in your control:
  - Some issues aren't a matter of thought, willpower or attitude, but have a physical basis that can be dealt with as such (e.g., an anxiety disorder)
  - The paper belongs to the writer, so don't judge yourself based on their paper
  - A conversation happens between two people (you don't *control* your conversation partner), so don't judge yourself based on the conversation
  - Acknowledge the context behind mistakes, the rationales and reasons for why they occur
  
- ★ Don't hold yourself to inflated standards:
  - Make realistic and helpful comparisons, not ridiculous ones
  - Give yourself time to improve; don't think in terms of immediate success
  
- ★ Don't exaggerate the costs of failure or the meaning of failure:
  - "Make mistakes merrily! ... there's no penalty"
  - Realize that things have gone worse here before ("the Mark Effect")
  - There's a difference between being a bad tutor and a bad person: bad sessions are an experience, not an identity
  - Realize that you get a second try at saying something; give yourself multiple chances
  - Realize that feeling successful/comfortable doesn't mean you're doing good tutoring; and feeling uncomfortable doesn't mean you're doing bad tutoring. 'Bad' feelings *could* be a good sign.