Overcoming Challenges in Online Peer Tutoring

Stephanie Gotti, Audra Dull, Matthew York, Dr. Ana Wetzl
The Learning Center at Kent State University at Trumbull

Abstract

This project examines types of comments which tutees using the Trumbull Online Writing Lab (OWL) are receiving from tutors and why tutors are providing these types of comments. Two tutors analyzed 10 submissions to create an instrument which is used to examine the entire data set consisting of 20 OWL submissions. The majority of comments focus on mechanical errors. This finding suggests two things: Firstly, tutors frequently focus on mechanical mistakes; and secondly, tutors are failing to provide comments regarding content. This second finding is problematic because content is critical to the production of an effective paper. This project postulates that the lack of content-related comments is due to the format available for online tutoring. A possible solution to this issue is to offer synchronous chats which would allow tutors and tutees to interact instantaneously. This type of communication may encourage tutors to take on the task of explaining content via online tutoring.

Materials & Methods

Data Set
- 440 comments from 20 OWL submissions collected during the Fall 2015 semester

Instrument
- Created by one female and one male tutor who counted each type of comment to create the following categories:
  - APA/MLA
  - Essay Structure
  - Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling
  - Plagiarism
  - Clarity
  - Miscellaneous

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APA/MLA</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay Structure</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction

Trumbull OWL
- Receives approximately 50 submissions each semester
- Tutees must inform tutors of main concerns
- Tutors provide feedback within 2 business days

Mechanics
- Errors related to writing style and grammar
- Mistakes easily pointed out by tutors
- Requires little communication to inform tutees of mistakes

Content
- The argument made in the paper and the extent to which the tutee supports this argument with relevant details or evidence
- Requires in-depth communication to explain mistakes

Discussion

Trumbull OWL Online Tutoring
- Limits use of Socratic method
- Does not allow for synchronous communication

Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling
- The majority of comments focus on mechanics
- Likely due to the email-facilitated tutoring

Content
- Content is a critical part of all academic papers
- Few, if any, comments provided by tutors regard content
- Possible solution: incorporate synchronous chats

Conclusion

The lack of content-related comments is likely due to the format available for online tutoring. A possible solution to this issue is to offer synchronous chats which would allow tutors and tutees to interact instantaneously. This type of communication may encourage tutors to take on the task of explaining content via online tutoring.

Limitations

Of the seven English tutors who work at the Learning Center, only two contributed OWL submissions; therefore, our knowledge of the exact type and number of comments for all submissions during the Fall 2015 semester was limited. Further studies of all submissions in future semesters could be conducted to determine exact percentages.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Ana Wetzl - Advisor

Contact Information
Stephanie Gotti – sgotti@kent.edu
Audra Dull – adull1@kent.edu
Matthew York – myork2@kent.edu
Dr. Ana Wetzl – awetzl@kent.edu