



# Tutoring is like...charcuterie-ing

By: **Maddie Reiser**

Tutoring and charcuterie boards. That seems like an unlikely pairing, doesn't it? Ordinarily, I would agree, but throughout the semester, I have learned that tutoring can be reasonably compared to any number of things. Whether it be making a pumpkin pie, tie-dying a t-shirt, or making a charcuterie board, many aspects of tutoring are comparable to everyday tasks, tips, and tricks. I think tutoring can be related to a specific charcuterie board tip, especially regarding addressing analysis concerns, the directive versus non-directive battle, and Online Writery responses, or "TONY" responses. This tip is titled "Fill Bare Spots" and reads as follows:

*It occurred to me recently, after scrolling through my charcuterie and cheese Pinterest board, that I prefer the visual look of tightly packed boards. This means filling bare spots with goodness people can eat.*

*It's also where a bag of arugula or similar small loose-leaf lettuce comes in handy. Use it to fill in spaces by tucking it under items that won't be affected by its presence. Plus, it adds a nice pop of green color to the board. Be mindful that you probably won't want to cover the entire board with arugula, unless you're positive that your guests love its peppery flavor. Catching a leaf on a slice of cheese though is a heavenly pairing.*

Starting with the tip's title, "fill bare spots," brings to mind things that are lacking in a piece of writing. Whether that be a personal touch, a part of a student's argument, or addressing a counterargument, we want to minimize bare spots as much as possible. As it happens, the next piece of advice agrees, saying that we must "[fill] bare spots with goodness people can eat." Immediately, this recommendation suggested analysis within a paper. Throughout this class, I have realized that one of a tutor's primary tasks is helping students deepen their arguments, which often requires additional analysis. In this situation, the "bare spots" are areas where a tutor may have a question or where they wish there was some evidence or analysis. In this case, the "goodness" is the analysis because we want to fill up those empty or confusing spaces with ideas to support the student's thesis. I especially like the use of the word "goodness," which means "beneficial or nourishing" (Oxford Dictionary), because that is exactly what good analysis does for an essay. Analysis is supposed to build up, or nourish, a student's argument and writing.



## About the Author



*Maddie Reiser*

Hi! My name is Maddie, and I am a junior studying political science and business. I am from Pleasant Plains, Illinois, but I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. I am currently a tour guide at Mizzou and will be starting as a tutor at the Writing Center when I return from my semester study abroad. I am currently studying international law and business in Rome, Italy. Outside of school, I love to read, play volleyball, hang out with friends, and spend too much time and money at Shortwave. After graduation, I plan to take a gap year before, hopefully, attending law school.

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Analysis lies at the heart of most writing, whether it be a rhetorical analysis paper that uses outside sources or a personal statement that requires the student to dive deep into their past experiences. The need to buildup analysis was especially evident in my ninth observation. The student came to Elise, the tutor, for help on a scholarship personal statement. The student discussed many personal topics, but Elise felt that they had only reached a surface-level analysis; Elise noticed a lot of bare spots. Since this was a scholarship essay, we know that whoever reads it is looking for the personality and drive of the applicant and might be put off by these so-called bare spots. Elise used leading questions and conversations to draw out the analysis and add goodness to the student's essay. When a tutor notices a bare spot, as Elise had, it is their job to help the student figure out how to inject more of that "goodness" to ensure that piece of writing is sufficiently nourished--much like we would want to prevent empty spaces in our charcuterie board.

Elise favored leading questions as a tutoring strategy, relying more on non-directive tutoring, but there are also other methods. This charcuterie board tip also brings the push and pull between directive and non-directive tutoring to the forefront. The sentence, "It occurred to me recently, after scrolling through my charcuterie and cheese Pinterest board, that I prefer the visual look of tightly packed boards," can be compared to this debate. Specifically, the phrase "I prefer" stuck out to me here. In terms of balancing directive and non-directive strategies, it's important for tutors to acknowledge that what they want (or "prefer") is not necessarily the best option for the writer. The student may prefer something else. We all have our own metaphorical writing Pinterest Board. Every student and tutor has different writing preferences that require individual choices about creative and practical elements, much like cultivating the perfect Pinterest Board. The heart of tutoring is to help a student express their thoughts, in their own voice, through their writing. As such, figuring out the appropriate balance between directive and non-directive tutoring is one of the most important roles of a tutor.

Throughout the semester, I observed multiple tutors attempting to, and succeeding in, finding this balance. Almost every single one of my observations, excepting my sixth observation, answers the Tutor Strategies box in the same way: leading questions. In my opinion, finding a solid balance between directive and non-directive tutoring is also one of the most difficult parts of tutoring. As tutors, we want to ensure that the writing stays true to the student and their voice, but they come to us for our opinion as well. How do we find a balance? My fourth observation, which was a face-to-face rhetorical analysis session with Anna, gave me the best example of striking this balance. Anna asked a lot of leading questions--a non-directive tool--making the student do the work on the analysis, but she also gave direct advice. Anna said, "I think you should delete this sentence," or told the student what structure she thought would work best. Out of all my observations, this session also felt like one of the most successful, with both tutor and student feeling accomplished, with both tutor and student feeling accomplished at the end. So, while a tutor might prefer their own idea over a student's, they must always be aware of the so-called directive/non-directive see-saw.



*Maddie and her friend Gabby, a fellow writing tutor-in-training at the time and now a full-fledged tutor, preparing for a visual outlining/brainstorming activity in class and laughing with their instructors.*

Finally, the tip's suggestion to "Be mindful that you probably won't want to cover the entire board with arugula, unless you're positive that your guests love its peppery flavor" reminded me of TONY (Online Writery) responses. The Online Writery is a virtual platform where students can submit their work and receive feedback--not edits--from a tutor, and the Writing Center gave it a name: TONY. TONY responses are emails sent to students that include an attachment of their Online Writery submissions, along with comments, suggestions, and thoughts from real tutors. I have found that



it's easy to just keep adding revisions, or “arugula,” when writing a TONY response, since there is no student in front of you. Because of this, we need to be mindful of the length of our TONY responses so as not to overwhelm our tutees.

To avoid a panicked student, tutors must prioritize feedback—we are not positive the student loves the peppery flavor of revision arugula. To me, “peppery” has a negative connotation, much like how an overwhelming TONY response may leave a bad taste in the student’s mouth. Specifically, “your guests love [of] its peppery flavor” plays into these student preferences. I often put in the comments of my TONY submissions, “please give me as many revisions/comments as you can,” so the tutor knows I’m looking for a long, detailed response. In this case, I express that I do love the peppery flavor. However, in the absence of such certainty, it’s best to avoid an overwhelming response and, therefore, a distressed college kid. In my eighth observation, I sat in on Elise doing a TONY response. While her response wasn’t so longwinded as to be considered overwhelming, I observed that I would have approached the reverse outline differently. Elise chose to leave a paragraph-long comment for every paragraph in the reverse outline, commenting on what she liked, disliked, and would change. When we first did our Privacy and 1984 TONY response, I did something similar. However, after I met with Aaron, we decided that it wasn’t the best approach to a reverse outline. Our primary reasoning was that having a set of paragraphs at the top of a TONY response (the reverse outline) followed by another set of paragraphs would be entirely too much for a student to calmly comprehend. In this case, the student probably wouldn’t love the peppery flavor of the tutor’s revision arugula. Therefore, tutors must be conscious of and intentional with their responses and be mindful of not overcrowding the board.

While this tip certainly relates to many aspects of tutoring, it also presents a counterintuitive suggestion. The phrase, “use [arugula] to fill in spaces by tucking it under items that won’t be affected by its presence,” presents advice that I, as a tutor, would not give. In this sense, “arugula” could be outside sources, analyses, or even actual tutor suggestions. Regardless of what the metaphorical arugula is, all parts of a paper or a tutoring session should at least attempt to benefit the writing or the student. For example, during my eighth observation, Elise attempted a TONY response to a metaphysics paper. Due to the nature of the subject matter, she had no idea what the student was trying to argue or what the assignment was saying. While she was stumped on how to approach the TONY response, Elise certainly did not attempt to “fill in the space” with useless suggestions. Instead, she worked incredibly hard to give the student actionable revisions and questions to answer—the goal was to affect the student’s writing and revisions. Admittedly, tutors will likely run into a situation where the student and the tutor feel unsatisfied, but nonetheless, both parties will have attempted to improve the paper. Ultimately, every step in the writing process should seek to better the writing or the writer; nothing should be “tucked under” or away as means to avoid impacting the paper. We want tutoring to be impactful.

The past semester has enabled me to see connections between tutoring and other things that hadn’t been apparent before. In one way or another, tutoring is similar to many aspects of life. I have made countless charcuterie boards, yet I had never associated it with any part of my writing experience, let alone helping other students write. I can now see those connections. Whether it’s the quality of analysis, revision “arugula,” or understanding that tutoring is meant to be impactful, tutoring fills in the bare spots.

Full List of Tips:<https://lajollamom.com/how-to-make-charcuterie-cheese-board/>