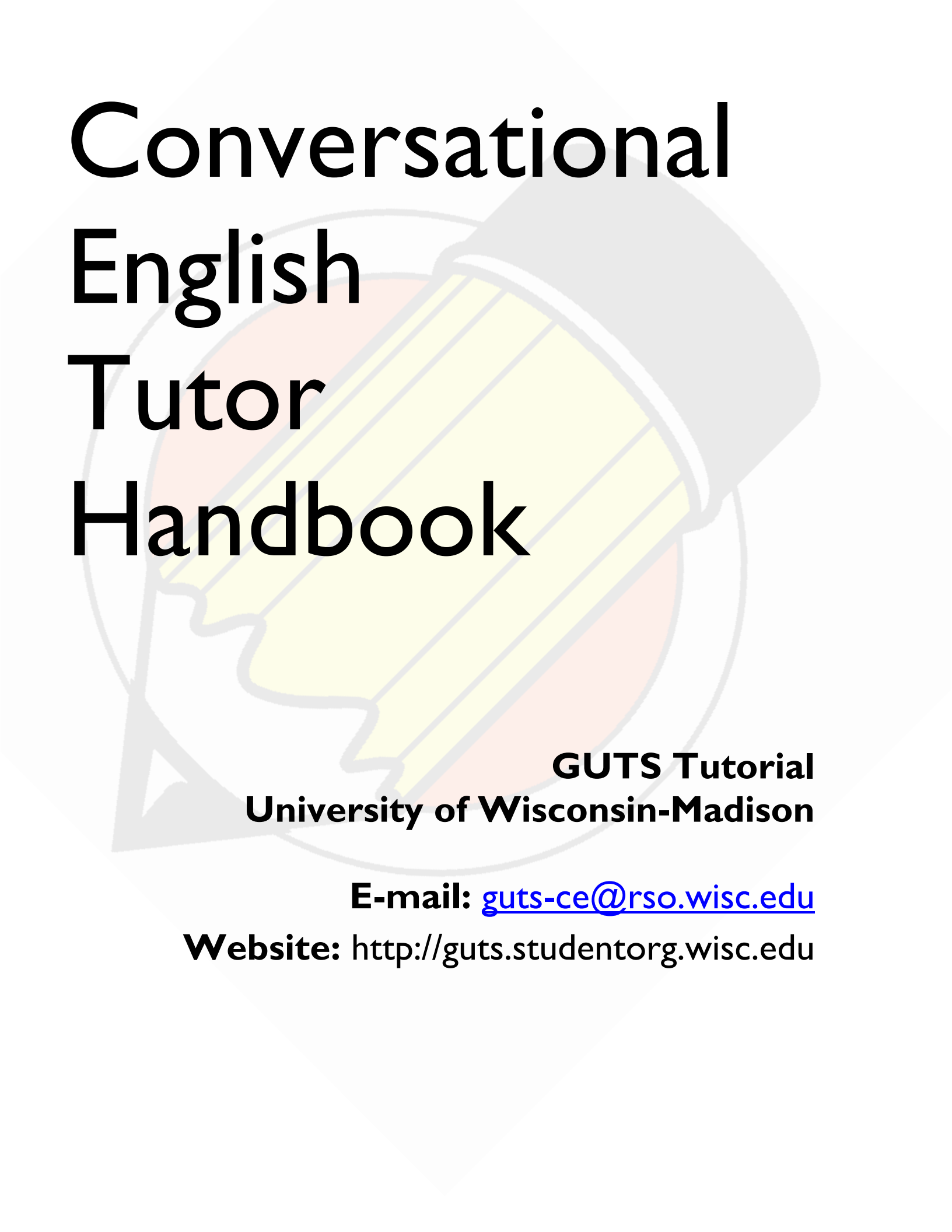


Conversational English Tutor Handbook



GUTS Tutorial
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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About GUTS Tutorial

The Greater University Tutoring Service (GUTS) is a Registered Student Organization run by students and supported by segregated fees.

GUTS is dedicated to connecting UW students with volunteer tutors for assistance with academic courses, study skills, and conversational English.

About the Conversational English (CE) Program

- CE matches UW student volunteers who are native or high-level English speakers with international students or university affiliates for whom English is a second language.
- The tutor's main role is to facilitate conversation practice. They are not expected to function as an ESL teacher.
- The tutors assist their partners by providing them with ample English speaking practice and helping them build confidence in expressing their own thoughts, as well as increasing the partner's understanding of American culture.
- Matched pairs are expected to meet for **two hours weekly** until the end of the current term.
- The international participants in the program are diverse in age, educational backgrounds, and cultures. Some are students at Madison, others are visiting scholars, professors, or spouses of professors. Many participants are graduate students from East Asia.

Program Expectations for Tutors

- **Maintain as close as possible the time requirement of two hours each week.**
- Please let us know immediately if you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in the CE Program.
- It is not necessary to prepare a lesson plan for each meeting, just be prepared to talk and interact with your partner. It is often helpful to prepare a list of questions or conversation ideas. Shy students may need more ideas than talkative students. Ask your partner what kind of topics they are interested in talking about.
- If you can not make a meeting call or e-mail your partner right away.

Meeting with Your Tutee for the First Time

- When you have been matched with a conversation partner, you will receive an e-mail from CE staff with your partner's name, contact information, and a common time when you are able to meet.
- Make contact with your partner through e-mail and set up a time and place to meet. It is a good idea to meet in a laid-back, public area for your first meeting. We suggest the student Unions or a library.
- The following are important issues to discuss at your first meeting:
 - Find out your partner's goals and expectations for the CE program. Find out what your partner is interested in working on, for example, pronunciation, vocabulary, idioms, slang.
 - Discuss your own goals and expectations for the CE program.
 - Ask your conversation partner if and how they would like to be corrected if they make syntactical or pronunciation errors when speaking English. Some tutees may prefer not being corrected and may be offended if they are.
 - Confirm an agreed upon meeting time and location.

Cultural Awareness

Remember that your partner has a different cultural history, customs, and values than you have as an American student. It is important for both you and the international students you're working with to recognize and respect the differences between you and your cultures.

Some things may be shocking to an international student new to Madison such as the casualness of students in regard to social situations, personal questions, first name use, and direct/blunt comments and conversations.

- **It is important to pronounce names correctly. If you don't know how to pronounce your partner's name, just ask.**

Overcoming Language Barriers

When speaking with your conversation partner, it is inevitable that there will be miscommunication.

Here are some tips to overcoming language barriers and dealing with the situation at large:

- **Use visual aids or body language**

Explain your message by employing visual aides; draw a picture or use physical objects. Always bring paper and pencil along. Writing or drawing what you mean can clarify things quickly.

- **Be persistent.**

Do not give up on the situation; rather try to explain it in a different way.

- **Remain patient**

If you are being misunderstood or are misunderstanding a point, try again. If you are having a hard time understanding your partner or they are having trouble communicating to you, be mindful of your facial expression. Try to look encouraging and not impatient or angry.

- **Check Comprehension**

Sometimes your partner will nod as you speak even though they don't understand what you're saying. They may be hoping that you will eventually say something that connects the bits and pieces they have managed to absorb, or they may be signaling that they heard your voice. If your partner nods a lot, gets a blank look, or becomes silent, directly ask whether he or she understands.

- **Speak at a Natural Pace**

Slow down only when absolutely necessary. Your conversation partner will probably not understand everything, which provides an opportunity for the tutee to practice asking for clarification. If you are asked to repeat something, repeat your exact words. Then you can offer a paraphrase if there is still misunderstanding.

- **Elaborate Topics**

Stay on one topic as long as you can. This helps your partner learn to carry a conversation rather than just answering a series of unrelated questions. Encourage he or she to ask you questions about the topic, too.

- **Bring Objects to Stimulate Conversation**

Try family or vacation photos, cookbooks with pictures, board games, library books about your student's country or other topics with lots of pictures, and short, current newspaper or magazine articles.

- **Avoid Correcting Homework**

Your partner may bring their homework and ask you to check the answers. Not only does this

take away time from developing conversation skills, it can potentially force you into the role of a teacher explaining why an answer is right or wrong.

- **Minimize Error Correction**

Constant correction slows down conversation and hinders the development of fluency. Correct only those errors that block communication. Take note of consistent errors that your tutee makes and point it out as a generality.

- **Vary the Scenery**

Unless you must meet at a fixed location, occasionally vary your meeting place. Try a park, library, home, coffee shop, nature walk, etc.

- **Clarify Expectations**

Recognize that some students may come from cultures where education is very formal and classes don't include discussion groups. They may be uncomfortable with the casual American style and need help to adjust. Explain your expectations about your seating arrangement, starting on time or chatting first, who can speak and when, and in what circumstances students may speak their native language.

Resources for CE Tutors

In the GUTS office available for 2 week check out:

- Board games
- Books(see the CE Library Bibliography)

Online:

- GUTS CE Learn@UW Site
- Conversation Questions for ESL

Many categorized lists of questions to facilitate conversation. <http://iteslj.org/questions/>

- About.com Teaching Resources

Many lesson plans and activities for all levels; designed for classes but adaptable for individual tutoring.

<http://esl.about.com/?once=true&>

- DiscoverySchool.com

Not an ESL site but contains useful teaching resources such as a puzzle generator (make your own crosswords, word searches, and other puzzles), an online quiz creator, clipart, and 'brain booster' exercises in critical thinking.

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/>

Activity Ideas

Visit a museum and take a tour:

- Wisconsin Veterans Museum
<http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/>
- The State Historical Museum
<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/sitesmuseum.asp>
- State Capitol Building
http://www.wisconsin.gov/state/capfacts/tour_select.html
- The Governor's Mansion
http://www.doa.state.wi.us/pagesubtext_detail.asp?linksubcatid=328
- Chazen Museum of Art
<http://www.chazen.wisc.edu/home.htm>
- Geology Museum
<http://www.geology.wisc.edu/~museum/>

Go out to eat:

- Madison is full of restaurants that cook authentic foods from all around the world—take your conversation partner to one of your favorite restaurants and have he or she take you to one of his or hers.

Enjoy the outdoors:

- Olbrich Botanical Gardens and Conservatory
<http://www.olbrich.org/>
- Allen Centennial Gardens
<http://www.horticulture.wisc.edu/allencentennialgardens/>
- Henry Vilas Zoo
<http://www.vilaszoo.org/>
- Arboretum
<http://uwarboretum.org/>

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