

## And It's Gonna Be Totally Awesome!

Grace Firari

Yes, I did just title my piece with *A Very Potter Musical* lyric and yes, I did listen to this song on the day of my first '57 tutorial. Is this nerdy? The answer again is yes, but what better way to get pumped up for what could be a very scary experience? For those of you poor, deprived individuals who've not yet had the pleasure of experiencing *A Very Potter Musical*, the song referenced in the paper opens the show. Harry Potter is singing about how excited he is for the new school year back at Hogwarts and how it's going to be "totally awesome." The upbeat tempo and hilarious lyrics ("No way this year anyone's gonna die and it's gonna be totally awesome!") perfectly captured my mood for that day.

I was feeling fairly confident in my ability to help my learner because I'd been helping my friends with their writing assignments all throughout high school. But we had barely started talking about what we were supposed to do in the booth during class, and now we were expected to jump right in. I was most nervous about forgetting to fill out certain paperwork or unknowingly giving the wrong information to my learner; in short, anything that would make me appear as though I wasn't prepared or capable of handling the job.

My '57 learner, Nancy, was very quiet during our first couple of tutorials. She was writing about the Easter Islands because her geography professor had been talking about them during the first week and the topic had caught her interest. While she was more than happy to put in the research time and came to each session with new writing and legitimate revisions, she never really wanted to discuss her writing. Our first three sessions had a very stop-and-go feel to them. I'd get maybe two or three sentences out of Nancy about a phrase she had used in her paper and then silence. There was no flow to the conversation about her paper and I was getting the sense that she wasn't invested in the piece.

During our third session, we seemed to hit a wall: she couldn't think of any other way to improve the paper, but she also didn't feel like it was good enough to turn in as a completed product. We sat in one of our typical silent periods for a few minutes while I frantically tried to come up with a leading question that might help her get out of her rut.

Nothing came to mind. As far as I could tell, the piece could be a finished product: it had been revised, it was of substantial length, and it made sense to the reader. I couldn't come up with any new ways to approach the piece or help Nancy feel like the piece was finished. Finally, I asked, "Do you like this piece? Do you enjoy working on it?"

She immediately answered, "No. I totally hate it. I just wanted to have something for the session and then I felt stuck." Then she let out a huge sigh of relief at her confession and we both started laughing.

"What are we doing still talking about it then?" I asked, "Let's move on to something you actually want to write about."

I asked her what sort of topics she would be interested in writing about and she said she didn't have any ideas. Again, we were stuck. I started talking about how inspiration for writing can be found in anything: the books we read, the food served for dinner, the conversations overheard in the hallways, and even the music we listen to on our way to class. I told her about how I'd been listening to the *A Very Potter Musical* soundtrack prior to our session and she burst out laughing. "You've seen that too? I love that show!" She exclaimed. This revelation of course took us in a completely unrelated direction for about five minutes as we discussed Darren Criss's lyrical genius and Lauren Lopez's perfect comedic timing, but when we came back to the topic of finding inspiration for writing, our conversation took a whole new turn. We started talking about how she could write about Harry Potter; it was something with which she was familiar and about which she was excited to share her ideas. It was a total turnaround from the beginning of our session when we just sat and stared at her paper with no idea how to move forward. There were noticeable differences in her posture and demeanor. She was much more relaxed, as well as really excited to start working on this new piece of writing.

When Nancy came back for our next session, she had the first couple of paragraphs done for an essay detailing her arguments for why Severus Snape should be named the most complex Harry Potter character in the entire series.

The change from our first couple of tutorials to this one was amazing. We laughed and joked around a lot more with this piece and Nancy really opened up about her writing. She was excited to keep working on the piece and seemed to be enjoying our sessions a lot more. Nancy and I have continued to bond over our almost freakish love for all things Harry Potter and she has produced some fantastic writing over the course of the semester.

So my first piece of advice is that you immediately go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and watch the entire *A Very Potter Musical*. Will this help you become a better tutor? Maybe not, but it's probably one of the funniest shows you will ever see and it might spark a conversation with a learner someday. My second piece of advice is that you make an effort to acquaint yourself with your '57 learner early on in your sessions. It may save you some very painful and awkward silences. My third and final piece of advice is that you listen completely to your learner. Listen to what they're saying, but also listen to what they're not saying. Sometimes a difficult session with a learner can be more revealing about their writing style than a productive session.

Have fun with your '57 tutorials, and just remember that you're not alone and this semester is gonna be totally awesome.