



Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices for Quality Online Tutoring April 2019

ACTLA: Introduction and Brief History

The Association of Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance is a professional, non-profit organization consisting of tutoring, learning assistance, and learning center professionals in higher education. ACTLA's objective is to build communities of learners focused on the efforts of college and university Tutoring and Learning Centers through research-driven practices and innovations that bridge student learning and classroom instruction. Organized in 1973 within the California Community College system, ACTLA's first conference was held at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria on May 2, 1974. Through 1983 the organization was called the California Community College Tutorial Association (CCCTA). Beginning in 1984 and expanding to all segments of higher education in California, the name changed to the Association of California Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACCTLA). Lastly, in 2002, a strategic planning committee approved a final name change to the Association of Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACTLA) and began a broader outreach nationally. ACTLA became a member of the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) in 2012.

The Contributors to the Standards

From the outset, The California Community College Success Network (3CSN) and ACTLA set out to be inclusive, transparent, strategic, and nationally focused. The goal was to gather a wide range of feedback and input from CLADEA association members and, uniquely and importantly, from for-profit online tutoring company representatives. These associations included National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA), College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), NADE, now National Organization for Student Success (NOSS), Association for the Coaching & Tutoring Profession (ACTP), National Center for Developmental Education (NCDC), Pearson-Smarthinking, Link-Systems International, Inc. - NetTutor®, Tutor.com, Brainfuse, Upswing, and TutorMe.

Throughout the process of working with these organizations and companies at various conferences around the country, ACTLA has come to be seen as an association dedicated to the improvement of diverse college and university tutoring and learning assistance services and the champion of standards for the burgeoning online tutoring field.

Development and Focus of the Standards

Representatives from the ACTLA Board of Directors and 3CSN met in 2017 to develop a plan and strategy for the creation of standards. A year-long design and rollout was implemented and



by April 2018, a diverse group of thought leaders convened at the 45th Annual ACTLA conference in San Diego.

The half-day working meeting focused on five “standards” initially established through a survey sent to the field in October 2017: accessibility, delivery, evaluation, interaction, and training. Additional standards from the survey included marketing, convenience, integrity, and support. The following is a visual diagram of the inclusive, strategic, and nationally-focused development of the standards.

Event	Date	Progress and Process
ACTLA Conference	April 2018	Initial meeting with 40+ participants. Representatives from every CLADEA member association were invited and present including for-profit tutoring companies. Participants produced a comprehensive draft.
ACTLA Summer Retreat	June 2018	The ACTLA Board digested the extensive input from the ACTLA conference and revised the standards from nine to five categories: Training, Interaction, Accessibility, Evaluation, and Delivery.
NCLCA Conference	October 2018	Additional and extensive ideas were made to add and/or modify standards and effective practices
CRLA Conference	November 2018	Additional and extensive ideas were made to add and/or modify standards and effective practices building on the work at the NCLCA conference.
SI Regional Conference	November 2018	Student input was received by having students brainstorm what a good tutoring session was like, and then discuss how to adapt that to the online environment. Ideas were generated for each category of the standards.
ACTLA Winter Retreat	January 2019	The ACTLA Board again examined the extensive input from each fall meeting and significantly revised the approach to include: Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices. Four Standards were finalized: Infrastructure, Meaningful Engagement, Training, and Evaluation and Investigation (later to become Assessment and Evaluation).
NADE (NOSS) Conference	March 2019	A working draft was presented for input. Revisions were made from participant feedback.
ACTP Conference	March 2019	The next working draft was presented with a final opportunity for input.
ACTLA Conference	April 2019	Final Standards are presented to the field.



The Need for Online Tutoring Standards

College and university Tutoring and Learning Centers and for-profit tutoring companies alike should strive to adhere to proven, expert-identified effective practices to maximize student engagement and success in distance education. As distance education continues to grow and technology continues to improve, the need for online tutoring effective practices and standards has become critical if not long overdue. ACTLA, then, is leading the effort to provide clear guidelines for the field by drawing on input from practitioners around the country and for-profit online tutoring companies who themselves have provided, in some cases, decades of online tutoring options and services to college and university students.

The need is clear. First, students taking online courses at a distance cannot come in person to tutoring sessions. There is an obligation to provide access to tutoring services to our online students as we do our on-campus students. Second, online tutoring is growing. Online tutoring is becoming more prevalent as distance education courses increase in popularity or increase by institutional discretion. Third, online tutoring is needed for online courses/students but also for students who meet face-to-face. Traditional and non-traditional college students appreciate that online tutoring is convenient and flexible. Finally, online tutoring is for all students.

How to Apply the Standards

Effective online tutoring involves the act and process of virtual tutoring as well as the combination of programmatic and practical considerations, not the least of which are the personnel, facilities, and fiscal resources that are applied. The Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices take a broad view of the whole function and create necessary measures to make the online tutoring session impactful and beneficial to students and instructors.

The following Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices (including the checklist which follows) articulate the importance of this document's holistic approach to online tutoring: design, tutoring methodology, technological innovation, software and hardware matters, institutional and programmatic considerations, and more.



Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices

	Principles	Standards	Effective Practices
Infrastructure	<p>A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment involves convenient access, accessible technology, multi-functional delivery, and media-rich resources.</p>	<p>Institutions, Providers, and Programs should continually assess and improve the functionality and performance of the delivery system, learning platform, etc. for optimal systems and functional performance.</p>	<p>The provider should establish practices to ensure the consistent delivery and access to online tutoring for all student participants.</p>
Meaningful Engagement	<p>A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment Builds on student knowledge, ability, and addresses gaps in student understanding while providing students with opportunities to express and demonstrate their learning.</p>	<p>The online tutor incorporates strategies to foster participation and active learning--including both one-on-one and group formats. This interaction should be between tutor and students as well as among the students themselves</p>	<p>To ensure quality interaction between tutor and students, tutors should apply active online learning strategies that increase collaboration and participation.</p>
Training	<p>A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment requires tutors that are trained in research-based tutoring practices, explicit online tutoring practices, using the learning platform, and other online tools and resources.</p>	<p>Institutions, providers, and programs should ensure that online tutors are trained appropriately to conduct tutoring in an online environment to ensure a quality tutoring experience.</p>	<p>Training includes best practices for meaningful engagement of students in online tutoring sessions, specific recommendations to promote active, collaborative learning/participation in an online setting, and how to use online technology.</p>
Assessment and Evaluation	<p>A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment involves effective coordination and evaluation of services, tutors, training, and technology.</p>	<p>Evaluation includes a review of online tutors' competencies and performance, a protocol for collecting information on the online tutoring program, and an analysis of the effectiveness of the program including its use of technology and its training.</p>	<p>Evaluation includes an ongoing commitment to investigating the processes and outcomes of student online engagement from all stakeholders within empirical, theoretical, and practical contexts.</p>



Infrastructure

The provider should establish practices to ensure the consistent delivery and access to online tutoring for all student participants.

Integrity

- The online tutoring program ensures there is alignment between online tutoring and the college and/or department mission and goals.
- The online tutoring program adheres to campus guidelines such as consent rules for recording, institutional rights and rules, and FERPA confidentiality laws.
- The online tutoring program is adequately budgeted for staff, equipment, and space.
- The online tutoring program is intentional about the diversity of its tutor pool relative to its student demographics.
- The online tutoring program ensures tutor qualifications based on GPA (student) or credentials (professional), subject knowledge, and general online technology familiarity.
- The online tutoring program has a process for tutors to report any issues that occur in a session.
- The online tutoring program has guidelines for providing safe practices and protection of its tutors and the online tutoring session.

Delivery

- The online tutoring program ensures that delivery of the service is reliable and easy to use for all students.
- The online tutoring program will develop, maintain, and enhance an organizational structure for tutor employees to include employee expectations, tutoring procedure, training, evaluation, and data collection.
- The online tutoring program works closely with online tutoring vendors to provide a quality service to students and ensure that program needs are being met (if applicable).

Technology

- The online tutoring program uses a platform or delivery system that includes tools such as whiteboard, chat, audio, video, and file sharing.
- The online tutoring program provides an archive of all tutoring interactions.
- The online tutoring program provides resources and/or assistance for students to utilize the technology.
- The online tutoring program ensures that online tutoring is accessible to all participants using technologies such as PC, Mac, and Chromebook.



Marketing and Communication Protocols

- The online tutoring program ensures that services are promoted across campuses or colleges and that students understand how to access and find supporting resources to utilize online tutoring.
- The online tutoring program develops and makes available an online tutorial and/or an online orientation addressing the structure of online tutoring, how to access and use the technological system, online tutoring expectations, and how it can benefit students.
- The online tutoring program ensures that a helpline support system is available.

Accessibility

- The online tutoring program partners with departments that have purview over ADA compliance to meet the needs of all students.

Meaningful Engagement

To ensure quality interaction between tutor and students, tutors should apply active learning strategies that increase collaboration and participation.

- The online tutoring program ensures that tutors incorporate strategies that foster active learning, collaboration, and rapport building.
- The online tutoring program adheres to a tutoring process and/or tutoring cycle.
- The online tutoring program promotes critical thinking by using open-ended questions and Socratic Dialogue in its methodology.
- The online tutoring program provides learning resources and referrals to extended resources and activities.
- The online tutoring program provides video and audio capabilities, shared live feedback on document work, and whiteboard capability to replicate face-to-face communication.

Training

Training includes best practices for meaningful engagement of students in online tutoring sessions, specific recommendations to promote active, collaborative learning/participation in an online setting, and how to use online technology.

Online Tutor Training Program

- The online tutor training program uses the online tutoring platform to provide necessary and sufficient hands-on experience and practice for tutors to learn applicable online tutoring training topics.



- ❑ The online tutoring program develops a code of conduct for tutors and students and student user expectations ensuring confidentiality, professionalism, and ethics.
- ❑ The online tutor training program ensures that tutors are appropriately trained using ACTLA's Online Tutoring Standards:
 - ❑ Technology- knowing, demonstrating, and explaining use of system/platform features (e.g., whiteboard, chat, screen sharing, writing/drawing, equation generator, etc.)
 - ❑ Troubleshooting- knowing, demonstrating, and explaining platform basics
 - ❑ Communication- describing and demonstrating active listening, paraphrasing, and establishing rapport
 - ❑ Group Tutoring- describing the specific methods of tutoring groups online and demonstrating how to engage students in an online group setting
 - ❑ Students with Disabilities- describing strategies for working with students with specific disabilities and demonstrating how to work with them online
 - ❑ Pedagogy/Interactivity- describing and demonstrating active learning techniques for engaging online students in synchronous online tutoring
 - ❑ Ethics & Copyright- knowing, explaining, and demonstrating tutoring ethics and copyright in an online environment

Training Outcomes for Online Tutors

- ❑ The online tutor knows and can demonstrate effective strategies and techniques that actively engage students in the online tutoring learning process.
- ❑ The online tutors exhibit a high level of tutoring pedagogy by understanding and successfully completing all training modules and assessments.
- ❑ The online tutor can identify, articulate, and troubleshoot technology issues.
- ❑ The online tutor understands and can adhere to institutional and federal rights to privacy and confidentiality and can protect their own privacy in an online environment.
- ❑ The online tutor can prescribe, locate, and describe the use of supplemental internet resources.



Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluation includes a review of online tutors' competencies and processes, a protocol for collecting information, the usage of the online tutoring program, and an analysis of the effectiveness of the program.

Online Tutoring Program

- The online tutoring program ensures an organized system for collecting data about student utilization and the effectiveness of the online tutoring program.
- The online tutoring program is evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative measures.
- The online tutoring program develops an assessment of the online student tutoring needs.

Effectiveness of the Tutor Training Program

- The online tutoring program assesses its online tutor training program to meet standards of best pedagogical practices.
- The online tutoring training program adequately and appropriately assesses the tutors' content knowledge of tutoring pedagogy.
- The online tutor training program uses surveys, pre-testing, and/or post-testing throughout the training activities.

Tutor Performance

- The online tutoring program provides ongoing evaluation and assessment of tutors' performance.
- The online tutoring program utilizes tutee feedback to improve online tutors' performance.
- The online tutoring program uses live observations and/or observations of tutoring session archives to evaluate tutors' performance.
- The online tutoring program provides opportunities for tutor peer reviews and self-evaluations to improve online tutoring practice.