Article

Benefits and Challenges of Zoom Tutoring during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the benefits and challenges of remote/online tutoring using Zoom software/platform at a Canadian university's Writing Centre during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21. In addition to gathering data on the benefits and challenges of online tutoring, this study also provided work and research experience for a Work-Study student in the host department. The study adopted a mixed methods quantitative and qualitative approach where the employed tutors and tutees that came to the Writing Centre that term were invited to complete a survey asking them about their experience with remote/online tutoring on Zoom. The results indicated that tutors expressed a high rate of satisfaction and preference for Zoom tutoring. In contrast, tutees, although appreciative of the convenience of Zoom tutoring, demonstrated preference for an in-person face-to-face method of tutoring. Some of the benefits of Zoom tutoring for both tutors and tutees were flexibility, working from a comfortable setting like home, not having to secure childcare, and zero commute time. Some of the challenges of Zoom tutoring included technical glitches, isolation from peers and colleagues, lack of motivation, and time zone difference challenges. Besides providing valuable information for the future delivery of Writing Centre services, this study also gave the Work-Study student indispensable experience in conducting primary research. This study received ethics approval from the University Human Ethics Research Board.

Introduction

Like all university classes and activities, Writing Centres had to rewrite their game plan when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Zoom was the primary online platform the Writing Centre under study used

to offer tutoring during the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of this study was twofold: 1. to gauge the efficacy of Zoom tutoring at a Canadian university's Writing Centre, and 2. to provide practical work and research experience for a Work-Study student hired during the 2021 winter term. When the university discontinued in-person classes in March 2020, the Writing Centre moved from 100% in-person tutoring to 100% Zoom tutoring within a few weeks. Student tutors were assigned Zoom accounts, and the Writing Centre supervisor and coordinator moved to working remotely. The Writing Centre has now been operating online since the beginning of the pandemic with a brief in-person opening in the fall of 2021. In the winter of 2022, we went back to completely online functioning.

Context

This study was conducted in a medium-sized university with 9,396 undergraduate students and 295 graduate students, where 9.8% of the student body identify as Indigenous and 14.3% identify as International students (UW Fast Facts, 2020). The Writing Centre offers free tutoring to all university students, which they pay for through student fees. Paid peer tutors who provide writing tutor services are usually second-, third-, or fourth-year undergraduate students who completed a required Academic Writing class at the beginning of their university studies. A Writing Centre supervisor manages scheduling and day to day activities in the Writing Centre. The coordinator is responsible for training and evaluating the tutors, scheduling tutor visits to classes, promoting the Writing Centre across campus, hiring a Work-Study student to help with Writing Centre tasks, connecting with other faculty, and fielding problems that may arise. The administrative assistant in the department manages the payroll.

As Roger Graves (2016) notes, "Peer tutors need to be educated and mentored" (p. 7). Tutors who wish to work in the Writing Centre are required to take a three-credit hour Writing Tutor course where they learn about tutoring pedagogy and Writing Centre ideology. A few weeks into the course, students in the Writing Tutor class are invited to apply for a writing tutor position. Once hired, they are welcome to sign up to tutor up to 35 hours per week when it suits their schedule. Tutors do not need to be students in the host department; the Writing Centre welcomes tutors from all departments, in accordance with Graves' (2016) suggestion that "writing centre specialists have teaching expertise and knowledge of writing in a variety of disciplines" (p. 6). In addition to tutors, a Work-Study student is hired in the winter semester to cover the noon-hour shift in the Writing Centre when the supervisor takes a lunch break.

Before the pandemic, all the tutoring took place in the Writing Centre. Students came and went, tutors lingered for conversation before and after sessions, laughter echoed down the hallway, tutors and tutees huddled in front of computer screens working on assignments, and students/tutees entered to book appointments. The Writing Centre was a space full of activity; a space where many students from different departments found a temporary welcoming home. In March 2020, when the university closed in-person operations, the Writing Centre moved to a remote environment, and synchronous tutoring was offered using Zoom. With the university being closed, it was exceedingly important that the Writing Centre, in its remote form, remained open to foster student relationships and academic support. The university plans to reopen in-person operations, including Writing Centre services, in the spring of 2022.

This study discusses how tutors and tutees have experienced the shift from in-person face-to-face to online tutoring. In this article, the phrase 'face-to-face' refers to in-person tutoring. Since the effectiveness of different styles of tutoring varies depending on the participants in tutoring sessions (Denton, 2017), this paper examines the tutoring mode preferences of both tutor and tutee.

In addition to exploring data on the effectiveness of Zoom tutoring during the pandemic, another goal of the study was for the Work-Study student to acquire research experience. With no activity at the Writing Centre site, the Work-Study student's usual work of covering the noon-hour shift was no longer necessary. The time freed up was applied to this research project, which the Work-Study student (Cassidy Rempel) undertook, with the mentorship of the Coordinator of the Writing Centre (Helen Lepp Friesen).

Graves (2016) says, "While students who work as peer tutors can be effective, the quality of their work depends almost entirely upon the quality of mentoring they receive" (p. 7). This research project is the product of the Work-Study student working and conducting research under the mentorship of the Writing Centre coordinator. This article is the result of their collaborative research. The Work-Study student and the Writing Centre coordinator, who both live in the same city, have never met in-person. They have conducted all their work together via email, phone calls, and Zoom meetings. Now that restrictions have lifted, they hope to meet in-person soon.

Literature Review

Denton (2017) cites Nancy Grimm's description of how Writing Centre lore views tutors, summarizing the guiding ideas as follows: first, tutors must equip students to write their assignments themselves; second, the tutoring session's aim is to create independent writers; and third, the goal is

better writers rather than better writing (Denton, 2017). If a Writing Centre chooses to adhere to these three principles, it must allow tutors to easily apply them in practice. Face-to-face and online tutoring modes have the ability to fulfill these guiding principles, each in its own unique way.

According to Denton (2017), online writing tutoring is a necessary option for students who either prefer an online environment or face situational constraints. While this may be true, especially in times of crisis such as a pandemic, changing the tutoring environment abruptly from a face-to-face to an online environment has potential consequences. On the one hand, online tutoring could limit the sense of community previously felt in the Writing Centre, but on the other hand, online interactions could increase engagement because of increased accessibility and flexibility. Online tutoring does not need to adhere to a 9 to 5 schedule. Govender and Alcock (2018) argue that a collaborative social structure is a necessary part of tutoring. Online tutoring does not necessarily mean that the social interactions are completely absent, but rather that Writing Centre directors and staff need to think creatively in order to establish or substitute social interactions in a different way. In other words, tutoring online has both benefits and challenges, whether the tutoring environment is asynchronous or synchronous.

Asynchronous tutoring, where tutors respond to student papers in writing at a later time and are not simultaneously present with the student, may have some limitations because it lacks "traditional dialogue and real-time interaction that represent the opportunity to unfold an interaction that results in writerly insights" (Denton, 2017, p. 189). Collett and Dison (2019) add to the critique of online asynchronous tutoring, claiming that it limits tutors' ability to follow up on cues from a student; tutors may not gather whether their comments are too harsh or too soft, or even if they are clear. Furthermore, asynchronous online tutoring limits real-time conversation between tutor and tutee, which can hinder the tutee's access to immediate feedback and space to ask clarification questions. That said, asynchronous tutoring is a valuable method because it can accommodate for schedule and time zone differences. Communicating via a written medium can also be an effective mode of relating, especially for tutees who are learning English as an additional language or who live with social anxiety (Nurwahyuni, 2020).

Synchronous tutoring, where tutors and students work together simultaneously, tries to emulate the face-to-face human contact via an online format. Although Zoom allows for tutor and tutee to see each other and share a verbal dialogue, the dynamic is different from in-person face-to-face sessions; therefore, it is important to consider the differences between online and face-to-face writing centre environments. One important part of tutoring that synchronous tutoring strives for is relationship

building between the tutor and student. Synchronous tutoring, like face-to-face tutoring, allows tutors to engage students in a conversation. Archer and Parker (2016) argue that conversation is important so that tutors "can better understand [tutees'] errors" (pp. 47-48). This sounds like error-focused tutoring, which may not necessarily achieve desired results. Chen et al.'s (2013) research also shows the importance of conversation in a tutoring session. One interviewee in their study said that the communication is necessary to getting ideas across, especially in the face of cultural differences or when English is not the tutee's first language. Communication can happen verbally or through writing.

The conversational aspect of online synchronous tutoring can affect the type of relationship tutor and tutee have with each other. Establishing critical friendships is important in tutor/student relationships, whether tutoring takes place face-to-face or online. Carlse (2019) argues that tutors should aspire to be critical friends to their tutees; critical friends are people who help "create opportunities to make sense of complex ideas and construct their own understanding, as opposed to interactions where they are told what to do or how to think" (p. 187). The online format presents unique challenges, especially when students are hesitant to turn on their cameras, making visual cues more difficult to decipher. Both Carlse (2019) and Brummernhenrich and Jucks (2013), among many writing centre scholars, argue that writing tutors are most effective when they are politely direct. Zoom offers the possibility for critical friend relationships to develop where polite directness can be productive. Such relationships, however, may be difficult to foster on an asynchronous platform without visuals. Brummernhenrich and Jucks (2013) found that when tutors implemented blunt honesty in tutoring sessions, they mitigated the bluntness with polite communication. Honesty in online tutoring could make it easier for tutors to become critical friends of tutees when the online platform dissolves the uneven power relationships (Carlse, 2019). An online environment may be conducive to establishing friendship because some tutees may be more relaxed in their home environment than in the more formal atmosphere of the Writing Centre, and therefore more willing to see the tutor as a friend.

Online synchronous tutoring could also help a tutor release control of a tutoring session by inviting the tutee to lead the discussion. Despite the otherwise hierarchical nature of academia, tutoring can be effective when the tutee does more talking than the tutor (Govender and Alcock, 2018). An at-home environment may relax tutors and help them refrain from having answers to every question. This could result in the tutor talking less and providing the tutee with fewer answers, which Carlse (2019) and Brummernhenrich and Jucks (2013) say is necessary for being an effective

tutor. Govender and Alcock (2018) argue for a middle ground. Specifically, they argue that "a tutor is neither a lecturer with the role of evaluation, nor a friend with the possibility of familiarity . . ." (p. 21). A similar point is made by Hashlamon (2018) who writes that a tutee's role is to "emphasize active, participatory and collaborative perspectives" with the tutor (p. 7). The point here is that tutor and tutee should have a collaborative working relationship. This relationship may be easier to implement in online environments, since tutees cannot physically give tutors their paper and pencil with hopes that the tutor will make direct edits (Van Horne, 2012). An online environment may also create a more equal playing field than the physical writing centre for both the tutor and tutee. This could result in online environments allowing for an increase of familiarity, which could be a benefit as well as a shortcoming.

A challenge that arises in online synchronous tutoring, according to Sam Van Horne (2012) is that these "electronic conferences can end quickly once students have decided they have received the help they wanted" (p. 101). Because tutees are in the comfort of their home environment as opposed to a physical writing centre, they can leave a meeting once their questions have been addressed, and thus omit the customary useful conclusion where tutor and tutee summarize the session and create future goals (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2015). Writing and operating in physical isolation from others can hinder community-learning for some students, since they may not realize the value of lingering once their immediate questions are addressed. When students enter university, their knowledge of writing expectations in their discipline are limited and they learn the ways of thinking, doing, and writing in their discipline by participating in a community (Graves, 2016). Students may miss out on that community-learning aspect of the tutoring experience in an online environment. Therefore, it is incumbent on the online Writing Centre to make an effort to emulate a community-learning experience.

The online Writing Centre attempts to the best of its ability to provide a community for writers to learn. An advantage of face-to-face tutoring is that it is easy for the tutor to prompt the tutee into doing most of the work, according to Van Horne (2012). Van Horne (2012), therefore, advocates for synchronous text-only tutoring options where the tutor and tutee instant message each other. This way, Van Horne (2012) argues, the tutor can directly help the tutee create a plan for revision without the tutor even having to look at the tutee's paper (p. 95). A disadvantage of synchronous tutoring without visual contact is that the session can be very impersonal and highly contractual.

It is worth highlighting some of the drawbacks of face-to-face tutoring. Jones et al. (2006) found that face-to-face tutoring was less likely than text-based chat to focus on higher order concerns. This

idea is challenged by Wisniewski et al. (2021) who found that online and face-to-face tutors both focused mainly on higher order concerns. Brummernhenrich and Jucks (2013) critique face-to-face tutoring because tutors in face-to-face situations tend to avoid making critical comments, which can lead to ineffective tutoring. Their results show that "polite tutors" are more likely to compromise tutees' learning by giving them answers instead of teaching them how revise their own work (pp. 347-348). Brummernhenrich and Jucks (2013) also found that the students of honest tutors felt closer to their tutors than students of "polite tutors" (p. 348), and they felt they learned more from the "non-polite" honest tutors—even though the post-trial test results for students with "non-polite" and "polite tutors" were the same (p. 348). More research needs to be conducted to understand whether Brummernhenrich and Jucks' results remain true in the case of online synchronous tutoring. Online environments could potentially cause tutors to be more bluntly critical of students' work because the virtual disconnect may make honesty simpler since facial expressions and body language are more difficult to read.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a mixed method quantitative and qualitative design comprising a survey that asked ten questions of the tutee and tutor participants (see Appendix 1). Of the ten questions in the survey, five invited multiple-choice and rating scale answers where participants could choose a ranking ranging from very effective to not effective at all. The other five questions invited short answer responses to questions about the experience of Zoom tutoring which were then coded and organized into themes. An invitation to participate in the study was sent out via email during the 2021 winter term to all tutees and tutors that had accessed or tutored writing (not Math) in the Writing Centre during the pandemic (fall 2020 and winter 2021). The invitation included a summary about the research and consent to participate, which was provided once a participant clicked on the survey link. If invitees chose not to participate, they could exit the email without completing the survey. Survey Monkey was used to collect the data. Invitees were given two weeks to respond to the survey with one email reminder going out a week before the deadline. The University Human Ethics Research Board (UHREB) approved the study.

Results and Discussion

The aim of this research was to discover tutors and tutees' experiences – benefits and challenges – of Zoom tutoring at the university's Writing Centre. The response rate in this study was calculated by dividing the number of completed surveys by the number of tutees and tutors who were sent the survey. There was no confirmation that the emails had reached the recipient, except when emails were returned as not deliverable. The email invitation to participate in the study with the survey link was sent to 164 tutees; 45 responded with an overall response rate of 27%. The invitation was sent to 25 tutors; 14 responded with an overall response rate of 56%. The average amount of time the tutees spent on the survey was three minutes, and for tutors it was seven minutes. This section presents initial findings regarding general impression of Zoom tutoring and then discusses the results of the survey to explore the benefits and challenges of both Zoom tutoring from both tutor and tutee perspectives.

An initial finding was that both tutors and tutees found Zoom tutoring to be predominantly effective. Although all the tutors found Zoom tutoring to be effective, none of the tutors found it be extremely effective as indicated in Figure 1. On the other hand, 20% of the tutees found Zoom tutoring to be extremely effective, 38% found it to be very effective, and 27% found it to be moderately effective as noted in Figure 2. Only 2% of the tutees found Zoom tutoring to not be effective at all, but otherwise all tutors and tutees found some degree of effectiveness to the new mode of delivery.

## Q1 Overall, how would you rate your tutoring experience via Zoom?

Answered: 14   Skipped: 0
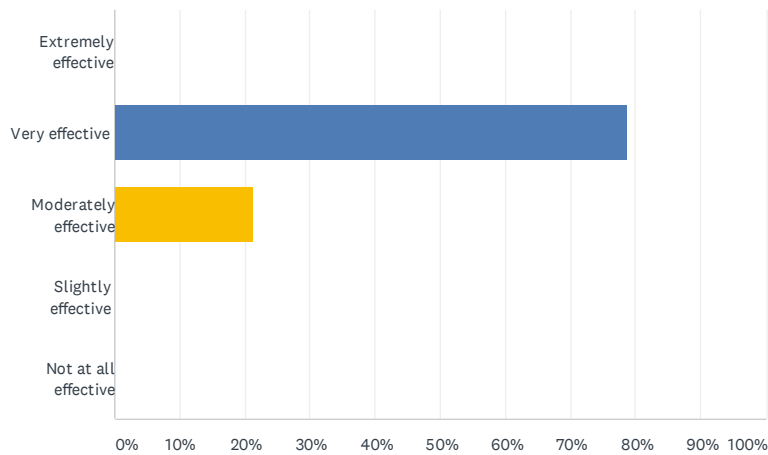
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely effective	0.00%	0
Very effective	78.57%	11
Moderately effective	21.43%	3
Slightly effective	0.00%	0
Not at all effective	0.00%	0
TOTAL		14

Figure 1. Tutors' Response to the Effectivenss of Zoom Tutoring

Q1 Overall, how would you rate your tutoring experience via Zoom?

Answered: 45   Skipped: 0
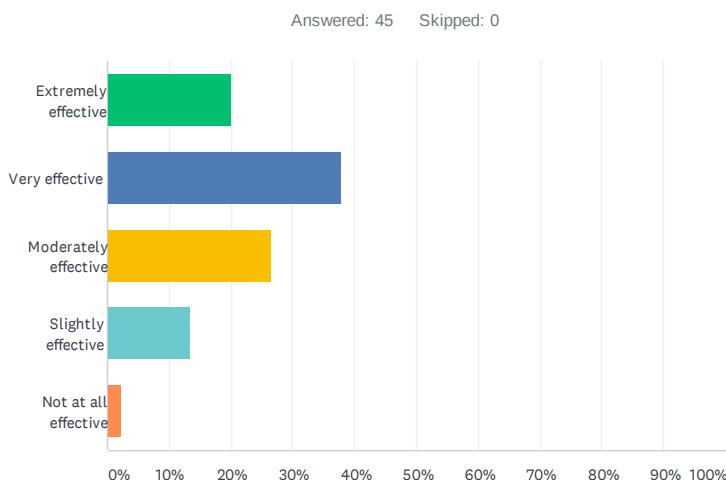
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely effective	20.00%	9
Very effective	37.78%	17
Moderately effective	26.67%	12
Slightly effective	13.33%	6
Not at all effective	2.22%	1
TOTAL		45

Figure 2. Tutees' Response to the Effectiveness of Zoom Tutoring

The most surprising finding of the study was participants' responses about their preferences for Zoom or face-to-face tutoring. Although no tutors thought Zoom tutoring was extremely effective, as shown in Figure 1, they still indicated a 65% preference for Zoom tutoring over face-to-face tutoring. We address the reasons for this choice in the Benefits of Zoom Tutoring section.

The tutees' responses were also surprising. Although tutees found Zoom tutoring moderately to very effective, with 20% indicating they found it extremely effective, when given a choice, most of them would choose face-to-face tutoring (73%) over Zoom tutoring, with the results almost a mirror image of the tutor response. This was a puzzling finding since overall, tutees found Zoom tutoring effective. Our results vary slightly from Wisniewski et al.'s (2021) findings where only 27% of participants (tutors and tutees) preferred online tutoring; however, only 20% preferred in-person tutoring and the remaining 51% had no preference (p. 280).

When asked about their stress level with remote learning during the pandemic, tutees expressed a higher level of stress than tutors. About 43% of the tutors indicated being somewhat stressed and 7% very stressed, whereas 33% of the tutees were somewhat stressed and 24% were very stressed with Zoom tutoring. More tutees experienced extreme levels of stress with remote learning compared to tutors, which may be the reason why tutees preferred face-to-face tutoring. Our data was collected almost a year after the university transitioned to remote/online learning and therefore, students had time to acclimate to the new mode of delivery. The response to this question may have garnered a different response at the beginning of the pandemic.

Benefits of Zoom Tutoring

Although tutees and tutors exhibited differences in terms of their preferences of tutoring modes, both groups found Zoom tutoring to be effective or ineffective for similar reasons. As indicated in Figures 3 and 4, flexibility with zero commute time, convenience, and a comfortable environment to work were the predominant benefits of Zoom tutoring for both tutors and tutees.


Q2 Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring worked well for you?

Answered: 14   Skipped: 0
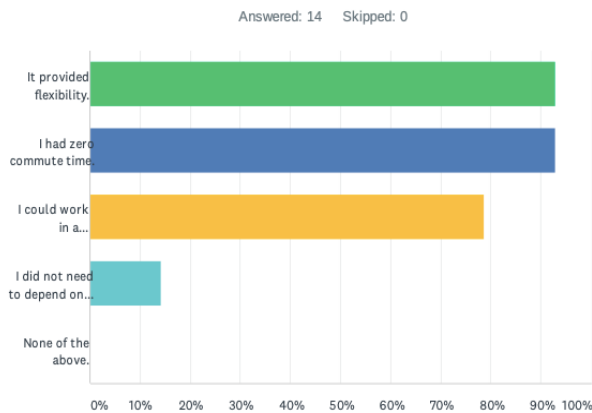
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
It provided flexibility.	92.86%	13
I had zero commute time.	92.86%	13
I could work in a comfortable environment.	78.57%	11
I did not need to depend on childcare.	14.29%	2
None of the above.	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 14		

Figure 3. Tutors' Reasons for the Effectiveness of Zoom Tutoring

Q2 Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring worked well for you?

Answered: 45   Skipped: 0
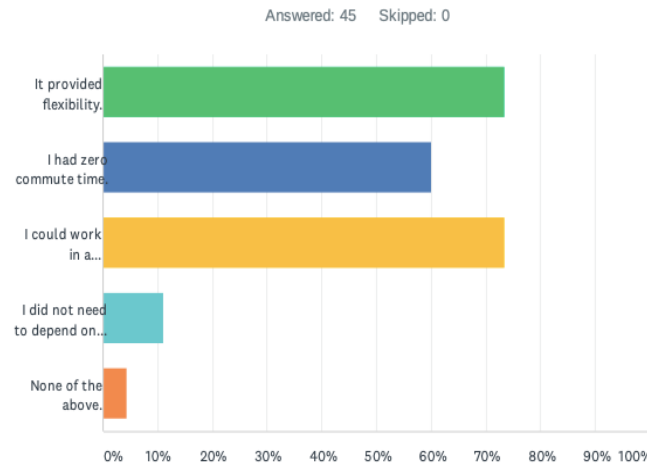
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
It provided flexibility.	73.33%	33
I had zero commute time.	60.00%	27
I could work in a comfortable environment.	73.33%	33
I did not need to depend on childcare.	11.11%	5
None of the above.	4.44%	2
Total Respondents: 45		

Figure 4. Tutees' Reasons for the Effectiveness of Zoom Tutoring

Flexibility

The predominant reason for the effectiveness of Zoom tutoring for both tutors and tutees was that it provided them with flexibility. Most of the responses pertained to flexibility and the convenience of flexibility. When asked about the benefits of Zoom tutoring, tutors wrote responses like the following:

I can have more availability. For in-person tutoring, my availability worked around when I was at the university for classes, now I have much more time because I'm always at home—my place of work. (Tutor 1)

It's flexible and no commuting time is great. (Tutor 2)

Most of the tutor responses related to the convenience of flexibility in terms of hours, ease of access, and time saved on commuting and finding parking near the university.

Tutees wrote the similar responses to the question regarding the benefits of Zoom tutoring. The word flexibility appeared consistently throughout the short answer responses:

> That I don't have to leave my house, that if I need to change the hours or when I need to do it that it can be flexible, that I can view their computer screen as we go over my assignment together, I honestly love everything about it. (Tutee 1)
>
> I am at home and don't have to spend money on travelling/bus fare to get to the university. Flexible schedule that works well. (Tutee 3)
>
> Screen share works well, very flexible times. (Tutee 5)

Both tutors and tutees appreciated the flexibility that Zoom tutoring provided. Although most of the research cited was from before the pandemic, the situational constraints that in our case prompted the shift to remote tutoring was a global pandemic that no one could foresee. Moving in-person face-to-face tutoring to a Zoom medium worked effectively, although not always smoothly, for most participants.

Convenience

The benefit of flexibility was closely related to convenience for both tutors and tutees. In the past, the Writing Centre's hours of operation on campus adhered to a strict 9am-5pm Monday to Friday schedule. Moving those hours to a more expanded schedule was convenient for negotiable work, class, and childcare hours. Tutors indicated their appreciation for this convenience:

> Being able to work with students at any time. students who were unable to use tutoring due to jobs or childcare issues now have more options for accessing assistance. (Tutor 1)
>
> Remote tutoring is very convenient (no commute). Working outside of normal hours is not a big deal when necessary. Students who are not on campus due to visa restrictions/COVID can still access the Tutoring Centre remotely. I have worked with more international students online than I did when I tutored in-person. (Tutor 2)

With the Zoom platform, tutors were able to offer tutoring at times when the Writing Centre was otherwise closed. Tutoring moved to evenings and weekends when it was convenient for tutees in other places other than Canada.

Tutees also found the convenience beneficial for reasons including, "I can stay at my desk where I have everything I need. (E.g., pens, paper, etc.)" (Tutee 4), "Saved gas and time by being in the comfort

of my home" (Tutee 7), and "It's easy to book an appointment as no one has to go anywhere to attend a session" (Tutee 6). These points reflect the ideas of Van Horne (2012) who recognizes the convenience of not having to make the trip to the writing center and the simple process for booking appointments as benefits of online tutoring.

Comfortable Environment

Most of the tutors and tutees found working from the comfort of home a favourable experience. For some tutors the home environment offered fewer distractions and less noise; it felt comfortable because it was familiar and personal. Casual attire was a perk, as was the zero-commute time for both tutors and tutees.

> I enjoy the fact that I am in a quiet environment when I tutor, and there is no activity or distractions around me, so I can focus completely on the task at hand. I have more clarity of thought when tutoring from home. (Tutor 3)

> One tutor even found interacting on Zoom preferable to a face-to-face interaction, "I'm more comfortable conversing with people through Zoom. (Tutor 5)

Tutor 6 stated, "Students seem more comfortable being in their homes, so I feel as though I have made more personal connections with students than I had at the Writing Centre, and I have more recurring students." This point contradicts Van Horne (2012) and Mackiewicz and Thompson's (2015) assertions that making connections in the online tutoring environment may be challenging.

> One tutor found that communicating with a hard of hearing student on Zoom worked very well:

> I have been working a student [sic] who speaks through sign language. With Zoom it is easier for us to communicate as their interpreter can see us both while we both can work. It has also pushed me to learn to sign so that I may speak with them while we wait. Because we can all view each other work is easier. (Tutor 7)

The comfortable home environment enabled tutors to develop critical friend relationships as Carlse (2019) suggests, despite their not sitting next to tutees in a bustling Writing Centre.

Challenges of Zoom Tutoring

Not all tutors and tutees recommended Zoom tutoring. Participants were honest in giving their candid feedback about the experience. As indicated in Figures 5 and 6, both tutors and tutees experienced technological glitches, communication barriers, and isolation. Although some tutors and tutees indicated less distraction as a benefit of Zoom tutoring, others found distractions at home

challenging and demotivating. Some participants found it difficult to find a quiet place to work at home. Some tutees found no benefit in Zoom tutoring at all, or found it boring and ineffective. Dealing with technological glitches was the biggest challenge for tutees, whereas missing the camaraderie of colleagues in the otherwise busy Writing Centre was the predominant challenge for tutors. The social structure of a Writing Centre that Govender and Alcock (2018) describe as a conducive place "to learn with and from each other" (p. 27) was suddenly no longer there and difficult to replicate in the online environment.
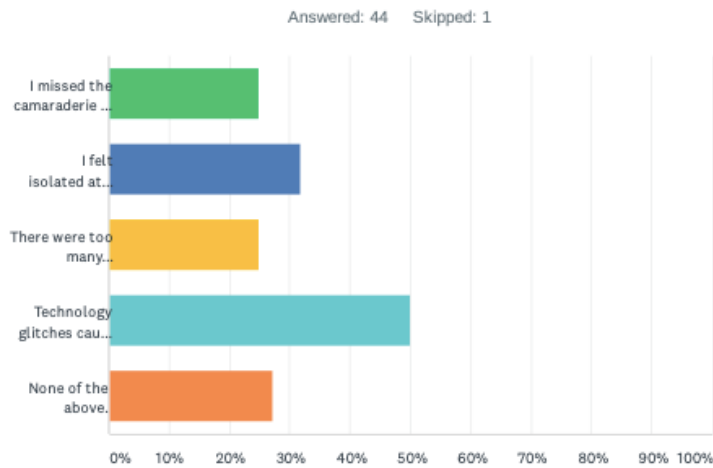

Q3 Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring did NOT work well for you?

Answered: 14   Skipped: 0
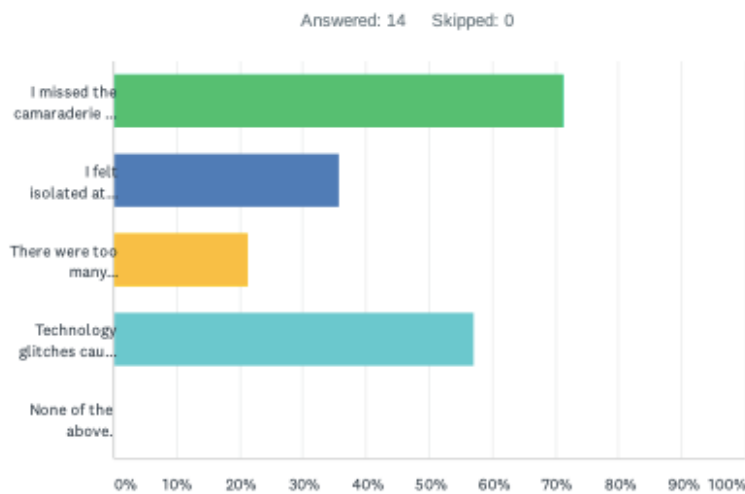
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I missed the camaraderie of the on campus Writing Centre.	71.43%	10
I felt isolated at home.	35.71%	5
There were too many distractions to concentrate at home.	21.43%	3
Technology glitches caused stress.	57.14%	8
None of the above.	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 14		

Figure 5. Challenges for Tutors

Figure 6. Challenges for Tutees

Technological Glitches

Although tutors found the isolation from their colleagues the most challenging aspect of online tutoring, technological glitches were a close second. The latter was the major challenge for tutees. Technological glitches that caused frustration included difficulties in screen sharing, audio malfunctions, difficulties with locating documents or locating sections in a document when working on a text together, lack of document transfers before the tutoring session started, time wasted due to technical problems, intermittent internet connectivity, WIFI glitches, and Zoom freezing. The following quotes illustrate the technological challenges both tutors and tutees experienced.

> The time wasted due to technical aspects are the most challenging, for example: difficulties with screen sharing, spending 10-15 minutes simply understanding the assignment together because of trouble locating documents, etc. (Tutor 9)

Tutor 10 talked about "technical problems, like accessing and reviewing the students' papers when they do not know how to screen share or can't upload their document." Technical issues like audio malfunction and interruptions were challenging for tutees:

> Tutor's computer malfunctioning and was making a distracting sound; their audio was dropping out during the meeting effecting comprehension. The tutor was not forwarded the work I had hoped to go through with them or had not looked at it until the session began, some of session was spent e-mailing it to them. (Tutee 15)

Technological issues are important to understand because they affect tutees' ability to learn and must therefore be overcome by sources outside the tutors' control if tutoring over Zoom is to be as beneficial as tutoring in physical Writing Centre environments. These findings align with Wisniewski et al.'s (2021) research, which noted that tutors reported "concerns about the technology" as a main problem area in online tutoring (p. 279).

Communication Barriers

Communicating via a screen came with challenges. Some of the challenges participants mentioned were: inability to adequately read body language or facial expressions, encountering misunderstandings and miscommunication, not being able to communicate with colleagues to solve problems together, not being able to study with peers to understand concepts together, difficulties with navigating dialogue, experiencing awkwardness over Zoom, experiencing a lack of connection, and difficulty in communicating ideas properly. Time zone differences added to communication barriers since at times tutees were accessing tutoring services late at night when tutors were available. At times tutors and tutees exchanged email addresses for quicker transfer of documents, but once tutees had access to a tutor's email address, tutors received unwanted emails. One tutor disclosed that "because writers have my email from sending papers they feel as if they can contact me at any time."

Tutor 13 wrote that their problem was "[n]ot being able to adequately read body language or facial expressions to gauge what the tutee is feeling about the session." Collett and Dison (2019) critiqued online asynchronous tutoring for the tutor's inability to follow up on cues from a student. Even in a synchronous online environment, tutors struggled to read body language, facial expressions, and

tone of voice. Clear communication remains an important tenet of all tutoring sessions (Archer & Parker, 2016; Chen, Chou, & Cowan, 2013).

Figuring out the body language of the tutee to see if something was or was not working out for them especially if the tutee had the camera off, finding a rhythm to speak in turn, securing a private space/area for one hour for both parties to work quietly, and not having anyone else in the tutoring space to ask for opinions/assistance if a tutor did not know how answer to the student's question were all communication challenges that came with Zoom tutoring: "Online tutoring does not create an environment for writing support; it creates an isolated one-on-one approach to writing improvement" (Tutor 14). Tutees concurred, "Tutees craved that human interaction of studying together. Not studying with peers to understand a concept further" was thus a shortfall (Tutee 24).

The online environment created additional communication barriers where tutors and tutees were sometimes literally not on the same page, and each could not see what the other person was seeing: "Sharing essays with the tutor over the internet and being able to go through it together is difficult. It's hard to know where they're looking or reading in the essay, and there are sometimes technical glitches" (Tutee 34).

Isolation

Although most participants enjoyed the flexibility and convenience of Zoom tutoring, the flexibility and convenience came with its costs, and one of those was isolation. Both tutors and tutees appreciated and missed the engaged interaction and opportunity to spontaneously discuss ideas and interact with others in a physical space. That spontaneity was difficult to replicate in an online environment. Even listening in on other tutoring sessions was an opportunity for tutors to vicariously learn from each other. Tutor 5 wrote,

> I also miss the opportunity to interact with other tutors at the writing center. I found the interactions extremely valuable, insofar as trouble shooting with tutees, tutoring techniques, and so on. I also found that overhearing other sessions gave me a lot of ideas for my own tutoring in a more casual and incidental kind of way.

Tutee 5 wrote, "There's a lack of connection/camaraderie between fellow students and professors. It honestly sucks :(" Participant responses indicated that both tutors and tutees missed the social interactions that accompany tutoring sessions. The educational benefit of social interactions is difficult to measure, but tutors and tutees expressed they missed the enjoyment of being together in

a space, even though everyone previously was working on their own projects with their tutor. Tutor 12 wrote,

> Not having anyone else in the tutoring space to ask for opinions/assistance if I don't have an answer to the student's question. Online tutoring does not create an environment for writing support; it creates an isolated one-on-one approach to writing improvement.

Although students enjoyed the flexibility and convenience of online conferences, the environment had its challenges. And yet, tutoring session participants discovered adaptive ways of redesigning their practice or of viewing such challenges. Tutor 11 indicated that it was exactly the sense of community they were able to establish that was enjoyable:

> Providing students with a sense of community has been the highlight of Zoom tutoring. It is a joy to provide students with feedback and tips in their paper writing journeys and to bring back that feeling of being students together. Another highlight has been working with international students (many of whom are in a completely different time zone) and providing some sense of university community life for them, as well as encouraging them on their academic journey.

Recommendations

The last question of the survey asked participants: Is there anything you would like to add? Tutees responded with gratitude for the Writing Centre services and an encouragement to continue Zoom tutoring. "Keep doing what you do." They appreciated the support, "Thanks for supporting us (your tutees) during this difficult time and Thanks to everyone who works at the Writing Centre and for continuing to help students and Thank you for all your help! In general, online tutoring is very similar to face-to-face tutoring." Tutees wanted to know whether Zoom tutoring would continue after the pandemic: "I hope you continue providing tutoring sessions online even after things go back to normal." The recommendation would be that we continue Zoom tutoring even if we are back on campus in the fall. Offering multiple modes of delivery can only be an asset to reach as many students as possible.

Since both tutors and tutees experienced isolation, it is important for the Writing Centre coordinator, working with the tutors, to establish an online community that can provide or substitute for the engaged learning environment of the on-site Writing Centre. Since Zoom tutoring continued the year after this research was conducted, during the next year we incorporated a regular Tutor Round Table which the Work-Study student organized. Community-building topics that were covered in the Round Table included: emotional health during the pandemic, sharing of Zoom

tutoring strategies and tips, and challenges that tutors had experienced. In addition to the Tutor Round Table, the Work-Study student also organized social events where we got together on Zoom to play games. Game times generated a lot of laughter and provided an opportunity for everyone to get to know each other better.

In the future, tips on establishing a community could be incorporated into the Writing Tutor class so that tutors would go into the tutoring sessions equipped with community-building strategies. More research would need to be conducted on how to build community both in the sessions and in the remote/online environment for everyone to feel that sense of belonging.

Limitations

Even though a high percentage of tutors and tutees from the Writing Centre responded to the survey, we realize that our sample size is relatively small and localized to a single university. Therefore, it is difficult to make generalizations from the results of this study. Future research could expand the scope of this survey to determine whether the results are similar in different universities. An additional limitation is that we do not fully know how tutors and tutees would comparatively assess face-to-face and Zoom tutoring, since not all tutors and tutees have experienced both types of tutoring. We also realize that we are attempting to understand Zoom tutoring during a pandemic. More research needs to be conducted once the pandemic is over to understand whether people find Zoom tutoring more useful when paired with in-person classes. Also, it is difficult to attribute the positive or negative comments to Zoom tutoring, since we do not necessarily know if the comments are specific to Zoom tutoring or if they are positive or negative about tutoring in general. Meeting everyone's tutoring needs is a difficult challenge. We also acknowledge our bias since both researchers worked in the Writing Centre as tutor and coordinator. We also recognise the limitation of our survey since it has not been tested elsewhere, and realize we may not have asked the right questions with an effective scale. We are grateful to all the tutors and tutees that took the time to complete the survey and gave us their perspective on Zoom tutoring during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Despite the difficulty in generalizing, and although this study was conducted at a Canadian university, its results are somewhat transferable to Writing Centres wherever they exist on university campuses because the experience with remote/online tutoring is a shared experience. Writing Centres operate

differently on different campuses, ranging from where some are staffed by volunteer faculty members to paid trained or nontrained student tutors housed in specific departments. With the shift to more online work and online classes in the future, it will be important to evaluate the benefits of remote learning and tutoring while also considering the implicit challenges that accompany the change.

There is no single method of tutoring that will work for everyone, but Zoom tutoring has been a good solution during the Covid-19 pandemic at our institution's Writing Centre. It has allowed our students to still receive tutoring and have peer interaction. Tutors were able to continue working, and they adjusted quickly to the online tutoring environment. Our results indicate that more tutors than tutees preferred Zoom tutoring and that more tutees than tutors were stressed by an online learning environment. Both tutors and tutees enjoyed the environment, and the flexibility and convenience associated with Zoom tutoring. Technological glitches, communication barriers, and lack of camaraderie were felt challenges of the new platform. Tutees also found that Zoom tutoring was not as enjoyable as tutoring in the Writing Centre, claiming that they felt isolated, bored, and unmotivated at home. Some tutees were also learning from outside of Canada and found the time changes to be a challenge. We hope that tutors will learn from our results and try to make Zoom tutoring a more enjoyable experience for tutees. We are excited for tutors to return to an in-person Writing Centre and are curious to see whether the Writing Centre will be different after the experiences on Zoom.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Title: The Effectiveness of Zoom Tutoring

Tutees
1. Overall, how would you rate your tutoring experience via Zoom?
   - Extremely effective
   - Very effective
   - Moderately effective
   - Slightly effective
   - Not at all effective

2. Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring worked well for you?
   - It provided flexibility.
   - I had zero commute time.
   - I could work in a comfortable environment.
   - I did not need to depend on childcare.

3. Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring did NOT work well for you?
- I missed the camaraderie of the on campus Writing Centre.
- I felt isolated at home.
- There were too many distractions to concentrate at home.
- Technology glitches caused stress.

4. How stressful do you find remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Not stressful at all
- Neutral
- Somewhat stressful
- Very stressful

5. What do you find the most challenging about remote tutoring?

6. What do you find the most beneficial about remote tutoring?

7. If given a choice in the future, which would you prefer: zoom or face to face?
- Zoom
- Face to face

8. Why?

9. What has been the highlight of Zoom tutoring? Did it get easier with time?

10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for taking this survey. Your response is very important.

Tutors
1. Overall, how would you rate your tutoring experience via Zoom?
- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not at all effective

2. Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring worked well for you?
- It provided flexibility.
- I had zero commute time.
- I could work in a comfortable environment.
- I did not need to depend on childcare.

3. Check all that apply. What about Zoom tutoring did NOT work well for you?
- I missed the camaraderie of the on campus Writing Centre.
- I felt isolated at home.
- There were too many distractions to concentrate at home.

- Technology glitches caused stress.

4. How stressful do you find remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Not stressful at all
- Neutral
- Somewhat stressful
- Very stressful

5. What do you find the most challenging about remote tutoring?

6. What do you find the most beneficial about remote tutoring?

7. If given a choice in the future, which would you prefer: zoom or face to face?
- Zoom
- Face to face

8. Why?

9. What has been the highlight of Zoom tutoring? Did it get easier with time?

10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for taking this survey. Your response is very important.

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