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## Suggestions on consulting

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Suggestions on Consulting

David Thomas

A. Face-to-face counseling.

1. At the first meeting with the consultee, decide together on the goals or on the subject, and then guess at a tentative outline according to what would seem to be the logical steps or subdivision of the subject. It is sometimes good to have a list of topic suggestions ready beforehand in case the consultee hasn't decided on a subject yet.
2. Meet regularly (scheduled) at least once a week, to ensure that the consultee keeps moving.
3. Shift the topic or the outline in any way that may seem advisable as the work progresses, but keep the material from straying beyond the bounds of the topic of the outline.
4. Continually praise and encourage. There is never anything so bad that nothing good can be said of it. Praise breeds confidence, which breeds success.
5. Have the consultee start writing up his findings in an orderly fashion almost right from the start. It will help him think and work in a straight line, and he can revise it as he goes.
6. Never speak disparagingly of yourself, as it effectively destroys any help that you might have been able to be to the consultee. A gentle confident manner breeds confidence and cooperative progress.
7. Give the consultee only as many suggestions as he needs or can stand at the moment. Better to save some for a later session than to overload him into discouragement.

B. Looking over a consultee's data.

1. Sometimes a good introduction to a new subject is to look at the data while the consultee explains it. Three-fourths of the explanation may be over your head, but it will at least give you a little idea of what he is doing and how, and at the same time the consultee may be discovering new things as he verbalizes it to you.
2. It is often helpful to comment aloud on any recurring items you notice (morphemes, sounds, patterns). Sometimes

the consultee may have missed them or not considered them in that light.

3. Similarly, comment on anything irregular that you notice. He may not have noticed it, or he may have an explanation that should be inserted.
4. Feel free to hazard wild guesses about the subject or about specific problems (the more and wilder the guesses the better). One of them may spark the eventual solution.
5. A relaxed and friendly consultant helps to make a relaxed consultee, which helps communication.
6. Each consulting session is a new adventure into a new and unknown situation, and each session develops differently. But some useful hints for getting the ball rolling are; see that the outline is not at cross-purposes with itself; see that the contents match the outline; see that all irregularities are brought out into the open and discussed; see that all regularities in the data are identified; see that the formulas represent only and all the facts.

#### C. Reading manuscripts.

1. Check for the points mentioned in B6 above.
2. Check the antecedents of all pronouns. Sometimes fuzzy thinking hides itself behind antecedentless pronouns.
3. Unless you can restate the author's point in other words, you probably haven't thoroughly understood it. Unless the author can restate it in other words, he himself probably doesn't thoroughly know what he means either.
4. Put yourself in the place of the reading public, and try to clarify and simplify the write-up. Unless an article is simple, most linguists won't understand it without several rereadings.
5. All comments on the paper should be positive. Comments such as Fuzzy, Not clear, Rewrite, Unacceptable, ??, !!, etc., should never be used, as these tell the student only that you are displeased with him, but they don't tell him what he has done wrong nor how to correct it. Comments need not always say specifically what is wrong, but they must always contain specific suggestions on rewording or rewriting. It is better not to say anything if you don't have a specific alternative to suggest. Sometimes I have suggested two or three alternate wordings. Other times I have completely rewritten whole paragraphs.
6. Check the format so that the outline and contents are as clear, logical, and obvious as possible.
7. Check some handbook, like Strunk and White, for suggestions on improving conciseness and style.