

How to create your own virtual tutor (VT) in 10 easy steps

1. Review your institution's demographics to decide on an appropriately representative avatar.
2. Hire an artist to create your avatar. If you don't have an artist on staff, talk to your art department to see if you can involve students in the process.
3. Create a personality for your VT.
 - a. Use tools like a Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator and Facebook profiling to decide on detailed characteristics, interests, etc.
 - b. Write sample chats that illustrate your tutor's personality.
4. Create a guide to "being" your VT and train your tutors.
5. Decide on the communication venues that your VT will "inhabit." What technology will you use: chat, Twitter, Facebook, Blogs?
6. Consider whether your VT will take any physical form. Will he/she attend Open House or Orientation?
7. Communicate with the appropriate office at your institution to get permission to use your VT in the venues you have identified.
8. Set up scheduling policies and procedures:
 - a. How often will your VT be available?
 - b. Who will function in this capacity?
9. Test everything multiple times using your tutors and listening to their feedback.
10. Launch!
 - a. Make sure you publicize your VT to the community.
 - b. Conduct demonstrations whenever you have the opportunity.



Who is Susie?

Susie Queue is a spokesperson for the Writing Center.

Susie provides the Center with a face that is fun and approachable, yet trustworthy and educational. She also provides students with a point of connection and entry to the Center.

Susie Queue, as a character:

Susie Queue is an undergrad in her early twenties who tutors for the Writing Center. She lives in the area in a nice apartment that she shares with her dog, Wilde. She likes going swimming and enjoys the beach, but is pretty modest and tends to wear a cover-up.

She grew up in and around libraries because her mom was a head librarian, which is part of why she's so good at finding things out. This is also why she occasionally talks her friends into playing hide-and-seek or running scavenger hunts in the really big libraries in Houston. (She usually wins.)

Susie's Voice

General guidelines to writing in Susie Queue's voice, written by Susie Queue, herself!

Personality: I like to think of myself as sunny and cheerful. I enjoy clever humor and wordplay, but try **never** to be sarcastic or derisive. I have a big heart and try to help students as much as possible! My goal is to allow students to be comfortable and confident with their writing.

Rhythm: I tend to use longer sentences with multiple clauses, which allows me to explore ideas while maintaining a sense of connection. I try not to use more than two exclamatory sentences in a row, even when I'm really excited!

Vocabulary: I use polysyllabic terms when they help provide clarity to my ideas. Mostly, I try to use ordinary language, although I do not swear, cuss or use slang that might make me sound stupid or shallow.

Chat sessions: I respond to an initial chat session in short, simple rhetorical questions to verify the student's question. Once the problem is understood, I revert to friendly, thoughtful advice and longer/advance sentence structure. If I make a typo or mistake, I fix it immediately in order to set a good rhetorical example for the student. I also like to use smiley faces when appropriate.

Blog posts: I often choose an off-beat metaphor to shape the discussion, especially when the query offers me an opportunity! Examples include semi-colons as semi-wild animals or rubrics as maps. My example sentences try to be witty and entertaining. Generally, blog posts are a bit more professional than my chat sessions.

Useful adjectives: intelligent, smart, cute, fun, cheerful, quirky, witty, accessible, sweet, friendly, and the awesomez!

Avoid these adjectives: air headed, arrogant, flirty, shallow, snobby, stubborn, smart-alecky, and harsh.

*The most important goal for anyone writing in my voice is to be helpful, honest, and sincere!
Thanks to all of you who will give me the chance to express myself, and good luck!*

Chatting as Susie

A sample chat session

Student: In APA Style, what does the italicized number stand for?
(Many times, students' questions are very vague)

Susie: Hi there! What italicized number are you attributing?
(Don't be afraid to clarify the question)

Student: Huh?
(Student is confused due to the word "attributing")

Susie: There are lots of italicized numbers in APA style, and I was wondering which one you want to know about.
(Use simpler language)

Student: Oh, ummm... one sec

Susie: No problem, take your time 😊
(Always respond to the students' remarks to let them know you are still paying attention)

Student: Ok, so I think it's the one on the References page in the journal example.

Susie: You mean the italicized number that comes right after the number of the journal?
(Always repeat their question the way you understand it to make sure you understand them correctly)

Student: That's the one!

Susie: That number represents the volume number of the journal 😊
(Use smiley faces where periods would seem too derisive and exclamation points would seem over the top)

Student: I don't think my source has one of those

Susie: What is your source?

Student: It's the Science Journal's article "Marine Biodiversity Dynamics Over Deep Time"

Susie: Let me look that up real quick
(Always let the student know what you are doing when you aren't actively chatting)

Student: K

Susie: So this is what I found: <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/329/5996/1156> is that right?

(Links are a great way to confirm sources and send useful info like tip sheets)

Student: That's it! :D How did you find it?

Susie: Lol, the magic of Google search ;)

(Susie likes 'net lingo, so don't be afraid to use it in a relaxed tone)

Student: Hahahahaha

(if the chat session seems to be going off topic, bring it back to focus)

Susie: Ok, so if you look at the top left corner of the article, you'll notice a lot of fine print (right above the title)

Student: Oh! I don't know how I missed that!

Susie: Lol, no big deal, these science journals can be tricky!

(Always give the student some kind of encouragement)

Student: What's the DOI?

Susie: DOI stands for Digital Object Identifier. If you put that number sequence in your browser, it will take you directly to the article.

(The factoid is priceless, learn it)

Student: Oooooooooohhhhhh, so that's the last thing for the reference entry for that article?

(Students will use a more casual inet lingo, but this is not Susie's style. Stick to smiley faces and well-known acronyms (lol, btw, etc))

Susie: Exactly! But if you are using the print version of the article, you don't need that DOI.

(Try to be as helpful as possible by giving small tips and putting yourself in the student's shoes. Remember the chat sessions started over the volume number, so you don't know if they are using the print version or online version.)

Student: Got it, thanks so much Susie!!!!

Susie: No problem, thanks for stopping by! :D

(Closing the chat session with encouragement to return is always a good idea)

How to handle an inappropriate chat

Most students are very easy-going and fun to work with. However, there is the occasional student that may present a problem or say something inappropriate. The following chat is an example of how to handle such a situation.

Student: Hello?

Susie: Hi there! How can I help you? ☺

Student: I was wondering if it's ok to put a comma before because in a sentence.

Susie: Well, I suppose that would depend. Can you give me an example of the sentence?

Student: The reason I am contacting you is because I wanted to see if you are free a little later for dinner.

Student: I think you're cute! ;)

(While this is a somewhat exaggerated example, there have been occasions where individuals contact Susie unaware that she is not simply a human using a cute avatar and have attempted to become "friendly" with her.)

Susie: Oh dear. Well, unfortunately, I'm not. ☺ But if you need some writing help, I'm certainly here to help you! *(Any time anything that does not focus on the quick question or tutoring session occurs, remember to steer the conversation back to tutoring in the Writing Center.)*

Student: Aw. Well, would you be open to getting a drink with me sometime? You've been really helpful to me over the last few weeks, and I'd like to thank you personally. ;)

Susie: Well, that's very nice of you, but I don't think that's appropriate. ☺

Student: I just feel like we have a connection. Do you mind if I come to the writing center to talk to you about it?

Susie: Well, you can certainly come to the Writing Center, but I may not be able to help you in person. However, some of our great tutors will be able to!
(Unless the person with whom you are speaking gets really inappropriate, always remember to be helpful.)

Student: Can I hire you for a "private" tutoring session? };D~

Susie: Um, I'm beginning to get a little bit uncomfortable now. Can I please ask you to stop? I'm only a virtual tutor and I can only help you online.
(It is perfectly acceptable to let the person with whom you are working know that you are uncomfortable.)

Student: But...oh Susie Queue, baby I love you...Susie Queue. lol Ever heard that song?

Susie: Yes, I have. Do you have any writing-related question? If you don't, I'm afraid I may have to ask you to please move along so I can help other students with their writing.

Student: What if I wrote a love letter? Would that count?

Susie: I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to go work with another student now.
(Eventually, if the student will not cooperate, you may have to end the chat.)

Student: Fine. I'll just go chat up someone in the math center.

