

TUTORING TIPS AND TRICKS

BEST PRACTICE TIPS FOR EFFICIENT ONLINE TUTORING: Reviewing the Academic Research



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INTRODUCTION

As of March 2021, the UK marked one year since the beginning of the national lockdown. Many countries in Europe and around the world are in a similar position.

For the past year, COVID-19 has caused every single person's life to change drastically. One of the areas most affected is education. Since the beginning of the pandemic, almost all education and tutoring have happened exclusively online.

Currently, online education and online tutoring platforms are currently a necessity. Nevertheless, many users have been swayed and suggest they will continue using the tool once face-to-face tutoring can resume.

Online tutoring has also been proven to be effective. A self-reporting study conducted by Bramble found that 75% of Parents, Tutors, and Students reported that online tutoring is at least as effective as its face-to-face equivalent. Nevertheless, like with any tool, there are certain practices and frameworks that can make them more effective.

In this article, we wanted to explore existing knowledge and studies surrounding online tutoring to really answer the question: **What makes online tutoring effective?**

Examining academic knowledge and general research surrounding online tutoring best practice, we wanted to identify key factors and practices which contribute to efficiency and effectiveness.



STUDY #1- BRAMBLE: GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ONLINE TUTORING

The first study surrounding the effectiveness and best practice recommendations of online tutoring was conducted by Bramble.

The survey examined a variety of variables surrounding online tutoring including:

- The online tutoring demographic
- The shift to online tutoring during 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic
- The effectiveness of online tutoring and the factors which influence it.
- The benefits and challenges of online tutoring.

Based on self-reported data, Bramble created a number of recommendations to help tutors and students make online education more efficient.

Collection of Data

Bramble's survey used self-reporting to gather information from 2,063 participants over a three-week period in June of 2020.

The Findings

The study found a variety of insightful information surrounding online tutoring. These findings are broken down into topics below:

The Online Tutor Profile

The research results show that online tutoring is conducted by lots of different educators. The survey's respondents were:

- 33% of tutors were university students
- 28% were part-time tutors



- 17% were teachers who also tutors
- 13% were full-time tutors
- 5% were retirees.

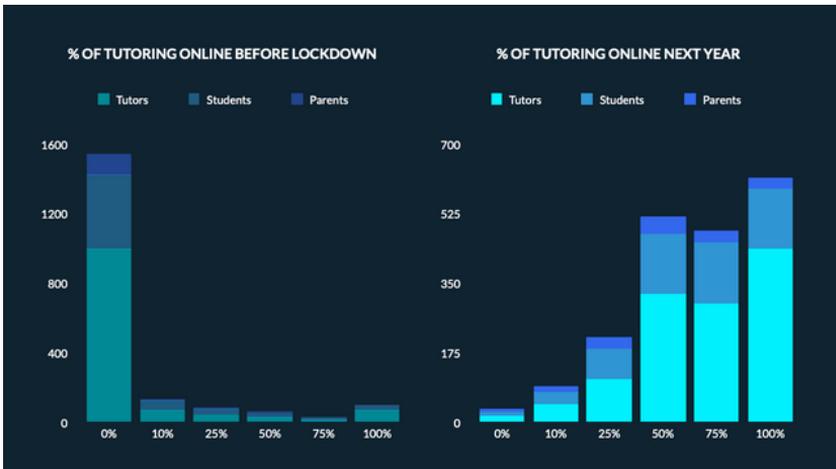
The most popular subjects for online tuition were: Maths, English, and Sciences.

THE FINDINGS

Switching from Offline to Online Tutoring

The study revealed that most tutors and students had little to no experience with online tutoring. Nevertheless, the majority of participants indicated that they will likely focus mostly on online tutoring in the coming 12 months.

Disclaimer: It is important to note that COVID-19 likely plays a large role in people's outlook on future online tutoring and therefore on the result of these findings.

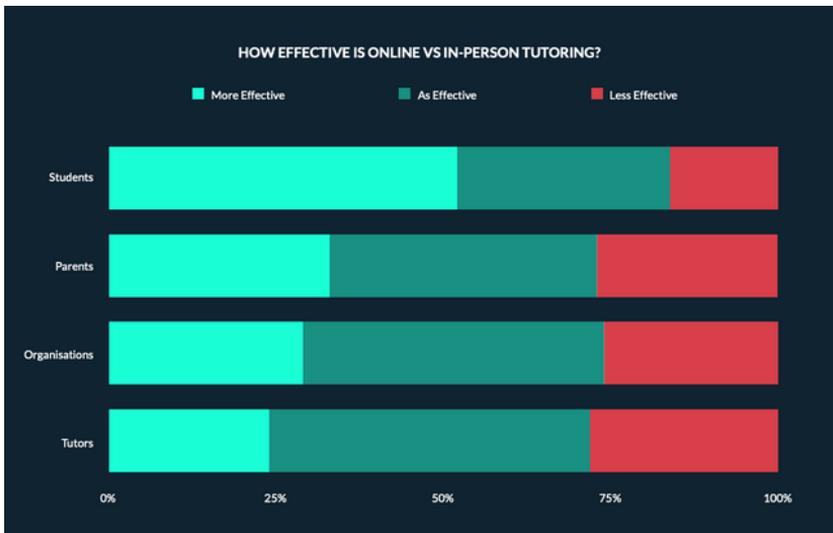


The Perceived Efficiency of Online Tutoring

Aside from key demographics surrounding the only tutoring market, the research also looked to shed light on user perception of online tutoring effectiveness. Since the status quo for tutoring has been in-person until 2020, there is little research surrounding this topic.

Bramble's findings show that all users found online tutoring at least as effective as the in-person alternative. Students were the most positive about this new tutoring method, with 84% indicating that they find online tutoring more or equally as effective as face-to-face.

Parents, tutors, and organizations also showed positive results overall, with around 75% of them indicating tutoring was at least as effective online as it is in person.



Factors Which Effect Online Tutoring Efficiency

Perhaps the most eye-opening part of Bramble's research is the area focused on identifying factors that affect efficiency perception.

Past experience - The research suggested that the strongest predictor of efficiency was past experience with online tutoring. The more online tutoring an educator delivered online the more efficient they perceived the method. There are a number of potential explanations for this finding such as comfort with the teaching tools and preconceived perceptions about tutoring online. However, it is difficult to isolate one specific reason.

Technical Difficulties - Another key factor found by Bramble was an internet connection and access to technology. Unsurprisingly, those who experienced technological difficulties found tutoring 1.6x less effective.

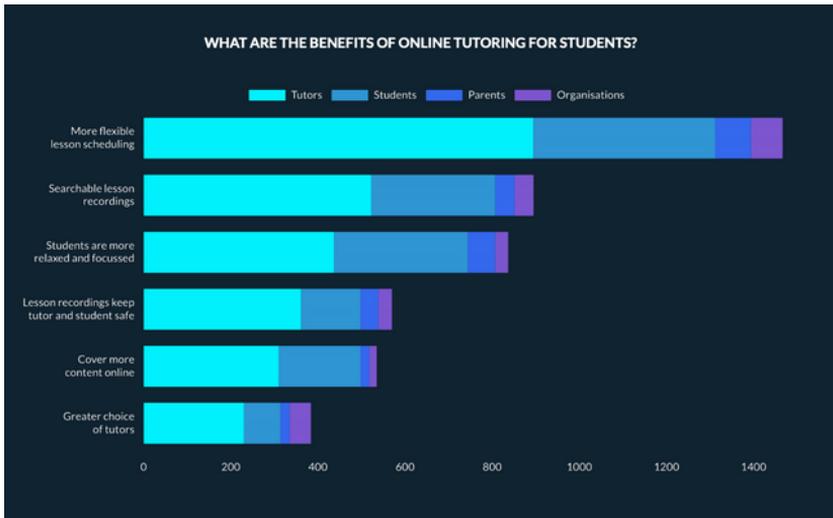
The device used by tutors - The study found that tutors who used a laptop or desktop felt less positive about online tutoring. On the other hand, devices that made drawing on-screen easy saw an increase in efficiency rating. Tablets were seen to be the most successful - with 80% of tablet users indicating they found online tutoring effective.



The Benefits and Challenges of Online Tutoring

The research found that the differences between online and offline tutoring brought with it unique benefits and challenges. Three key factors were identified by students and clients as the most beneficial part of online tutoring, these were:

- More flexible lesson scheduling
- Searchable lesson recordings
- Increased focus and relaxation for students



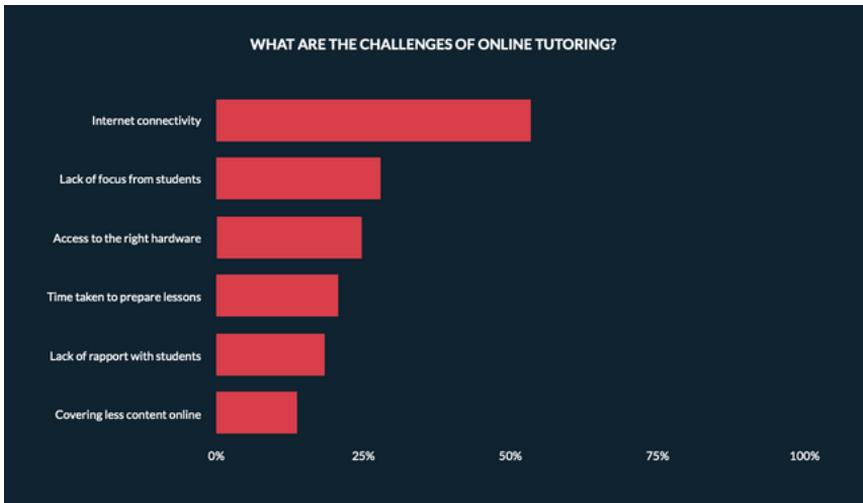
Tutors identified their own benefits of online tutoring, and found the three most popular responses to be:

- Location independence
- Flexible lesson scheduling
- Reduction in travel costs



There were also some interesting findings surrounding the challenges of online tutoring. The biggest problems identified by tutors were:

- Internet connection issues
- Lack of focus from student
- Access to the right hardware to facilitate tutoring



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey, researchers concluded that there are a number of key steps which can help make tutoring more efficient.

The most important predictor of online tutoring efficiency was past experience. This finding suggests that familiarity with online tutoring systems and practices can greatly help users adjust to the experience. An effective substitute for past experience may be effective training. It can be suggested that users will be more comfortable with tools following training and therefore deliver more effective online tutoring sessions.

A second important factor that affects online tutoring efficiency is technology and internet connection. Bramble's study notes that it is important to separate connectivity issues from devices used. From the findings, it can be suggested that using a touch screen for easy drawing and collaboration helps increase online tutoring effectiveness.

Furthermore, the survey suggests a stable internet connection is a key to efficient online tutoring.



STUDY #2 - ONLINE MATHEMATICS TUTORING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

The second study examined in this article is also a self-reporting study conducted by Carolyn Johns. Johns focused her research on university students during the Spring Semester of 2020. She wanted to compare the efficiency of on-and-offline tutoring and understand whether there is a real substitute to face-to-face learning. Furthermore, she looked to identify key factors which might increase online tutoring efficiency.

Unlike Bramble's study, Johns examined a wider range of online learning tools. While part of the study does focus on video chat tutoring, the research also looks into more low-tech alternatives such as forums and email support.

Collection of Data

Johns gathered information from 28 mathematical learning centers within universities using self-reporting surveys. Of the 28 centers, only 3 had any prior experience with online tutoring. This is an important factor to note, as it shows most systems had to adapt to tutoring online very quickly. Furthermore, it indicates that for most students and tutoring involved in the study, online tutoring was a completely new experience.

The research examines a variety of factors surrounding online learning, including:

- Tools and platforms used

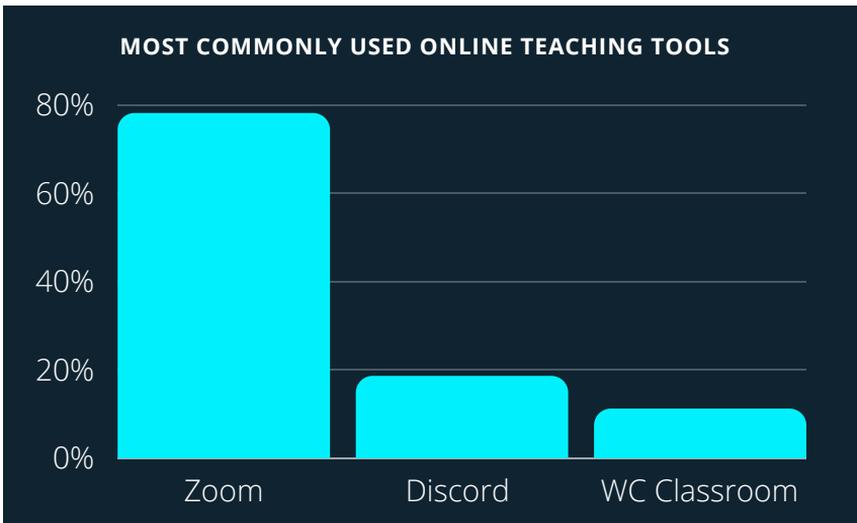


- Different methods to facilitate online tutoring
- Student perceptions of online tutoring

THE FINDINGS

Tools Used

Johns' findings show that the most common online learning method utilized was via video chat. This method was often also aided by an online whiteboard and screen sharing. The majority of tutors used Zoom, Discord, and WC Online.



Most centers also offered asynchronistic tutoring. This was primarily conducted through forums and email.

The study also found that while the changes to online learning were sudden for many, only 13% of centers reported that they would discontinue their online services post-covid.



The Biggest Challenges

Similar to Bramble's finding, one of the biggest challenges faced by the participants within the study were technical difficulties. Confusing set-up of meeting rooms and hours meant students regularly couldn't locate their tutoring session.

The second challenge faced by learning centers was a drop in attendance. Of the 28 learning centers surveyed, only 3 reported no change in attendance. Students indicated that the primary reason for this was due to technical difficulties on their end.

Finally, Johns identified that lack of training and supervision caused issues with online tutoring. Since 25 out of the 28 centers surveyed had no prior experience with online tutoring, many experienced a very steep and sudden learning curve.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unsurprisingly, Johns' research found that tutoring through video chat provided the most similar experience to face-to-face tutoring. However, the research also acknowledged due to access to technology, or lack thereof tuition centers need to offer more low-tech alternatives. Johns highlights that asynchronous tutoring, facilitated via email and forums is a valid alternative.

Based on the study's findings, Johns identified a number of best practices, which can increase online tutoring effectiveness. The recommendations focus both on low-tech and high-tech tutoring solutions.

For low-tech, asynchronous tutoring, Johns recommends the following:

Be clear about what help is provided - To save time, students should be made aware of the rules and boundaries of helping the learning center or tutor provides. For example, if applicable, tutors should declare on their tuition forum that they do not provide direct answers for quiz questions. This will reduce the workload for tutors.

Have specific opening hours - Having explicit opening hours will help asynchronous tutoring feel more like dialogue. The research suggests that having clear times when tutors can write in and expect a response will allow students to get the most out of tutoring.



Separate topics and subjects - For centers utilizing the forum method, separating subjects and topics are recommended. Since all past questions will be available to any student looking for guidance, an easily navigable site will reduce tutor workload overtime. This is due to students being able to find solutions without ever needing to directly contact a tutor.

For high-tech video call tutoring, Johns recommends the following:

Keep tuition location easily accessible - Having one single link for all tutor access will help reduce the difficulty of finding the correct video call.

Make the service friendly and approachable - Creating a friendly tuition atmosphere, even through a video call, will help increase student attendance. To achieve this Johns recommends hiring an administrator who can 'check-in' students via video call, take any necessary information, and guide them toward the correct video call.

Use video whenever possible - Video calling has been shown to make information sharing easier and more effective. Therefore, whenever possible tutors should utilize both video and voice chat.

The research also concluded with some general recommendations for all online tutoring services.

- The frequency of lessons and drop-in sessions should increase near exam times and assignment submission deadlines. This is to combat the general increase in demand for help.



- In order to make tuition effective, tutors should try to become familiar with students as much as possible. This will help students progress faster.



STUDY #3 - CARIE MAZER: BEST PRACTICE IN ONLINE TUTORING

The final study examined within this article was conducted by tutor.com and Carie Mazer. Published as a whitepaper in 2014, the study examined how online tutoring affected 3 core subjects.

The study was conducted by Cherie Mazer, who examined 100s of student comments regarding online tutoring for English, Maths, and Science.

The study aimed to pinpoint a structural framework or checklist which could ensure maximum online tutoring success. Furthermore, it aimed to identify any key differences between face-to-face and online tutoring, specifically looking to find reasons why one might be superior to the other.

Collection of the Data

To collect information Mazer used self-reporting surveys. Here focus on the 3 core subjects (English, Maths, Science) was broken down into specific, measurable factors.

These included the following:

- Scope of English: Focus on the composition and writing process of students. This was chosen as both of these have been shown to be common problem areas of US students. The study specifically examines students' creative writing skills, spelling, grammar, structuring, and formatting.



- **Scope of Mathematics:** Mazer examined 3 different topics of mathematics within her research
- **Scope of Science:** For science, the research examined students' performance in Organic Chemistry, Physics, Biology, and Natural Sciences.

In order to make sure results were concise, and reflected the general tutoring market, Mazer only included vetted tutoring within her research. Since this is seen as industry best practice, the research was conducted with tutors who were:

- Background checked
- Had regular testing of their own knowledge
- Received regular monitoring and feedback

The Findings

The results of the study show a key correlation between certain practices and successful tutoring sessions.

The strongest indicator of tutoring efficiency was the regular monitoring of tutoring activity. Mazer's findings suggest that regular monitoring helps keep up morale and guides tutors towards more success.

The study also found that online tutoring can deliver a very similar experience to face-to-face tutoring. In order to make online tutoring effective, tutors need to ensure they focus on key areas of support. These are:

Cognitive support - The providing of active learning through the nurturing of key cognitive skills such as memory, attention, perception, etc.



- **Socio-affective support** - Offering help in a friendly way and monitoring the growth of students closely within sessions.
- **Motivational support** - Creating a sense of motivation for students which can help them grow and solve problems more effectively.
- **Metacognitive support** - Ensuring that along with basic help, tutors teach new skills and tools that can help with learning strategies in the future.

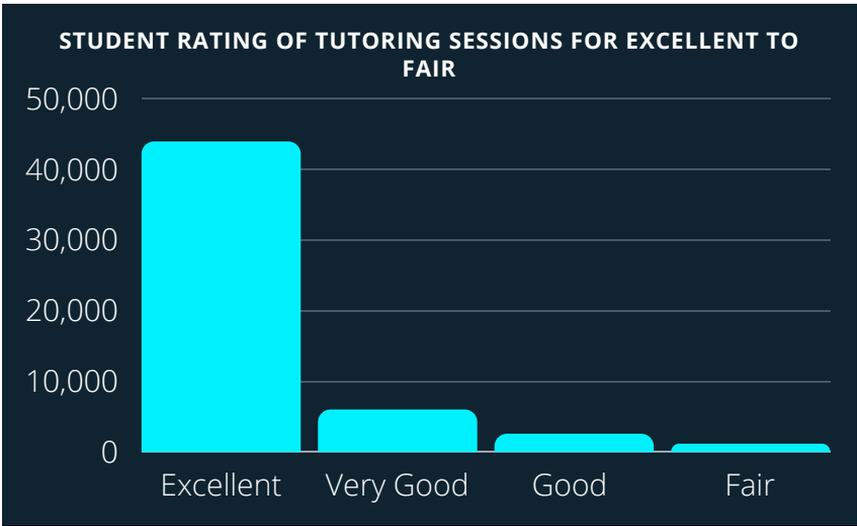
Aside from monitoring the effectiveness of tutoring frameworks, Mazer's study also asked for feedback regarding how beneficial students found each session.

The results were as follows:

- 18,455 students said they used tutoring services to help with homework- 96% said they felt the online tutoring provided beneficial help with homework.
- 17,970 students responded to a question about the service helping them with grade improvement - 96% felt tutoring helped with their grade. (Please note: The lower response rate to this question may indicate that some students don't yet know whether tutoring has helped with grades.)
- 18,075 students answered the section of the questionnaire inquiring about tutoring and confidence - 97% indicated that they felt an increase in confidence when completing homework.

Students were also asked general questions about how they would rate their tutoring session on a scale of 'Fair' to 'Excellent'.





Please note: The questionnaires were given to students directly after an online tutoring session. It can be assumed that students with great sessions were more likely to answer the questionnaire which will affect the overall rating.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the survey results, Mazer was able to draw a number of conclusions and recommendations regarding online tutoring.

The research was concluded with the following recommendations:

- To increase online tutoring effectiveness, agencies and tutoring centers should have a framework of tutor accountability. This will ensure better performance for tutors and therefore a better experience for students.
- Tutors should be monitored regularly to keep up morale. This process will help tutors stay as effective and possible.
- Online tutors should regularly be tested on knowledge of their own subjects

Overall the study concludes that when compared to in-person tutoring, online learning provides a similarly effective experience for tutors and students. From student feedback, it is also clear that tutoring via video call gives the tutors the support and tools they need. This suggests that online tutoring is an accessible and reliable alternative to face-to-face tutoring.



WHAT CAN YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THE RESEARCH?

While it is great to have knowledge about academic research within your industry, it is also important to take away actionable information from it. The three studies above all outline best practices and tips to help increase your online tutoring efficiency.

To make life easier for you we have created a quick checklist of all the conclusions these three studies present.

The Online Tutoring Best Practice Checklist:

- Provide training for all tutors and students, with any only tool you use.
- Ensure that all users, using high-tech video tutoring, have access to a good internet connection.
- Emphasise the importance of appropriate tools to make tutoring online easier, such as tables or drawing pads.
- Ensure your tuition location is accessible to students, to minimize confusion about what link users will meet on.
- Create a friendly environment for all students from the moment they get in contact with your team.
- Use video calling technology whenever possible.
- Increase tutor availability when demand increases, such as around exam times or university submission deadlines.
- Familiarize tutors and students as much as possible to build a trusting and effective relationship.



- Create a framework of accountability for all your tutors to increase efficiency, including - regular monitoring of lessons and frequent testing of tutor knowledge.
- Ensure that online tutoring goes further than basic homework help and nurtures students' skills, learning tools, and more.

Additionally for low-tech online tutoring:

- Be clear about the rules and limitations of the help provided by tutors.
- Provide concise and explicit times when tutors can be reached.
- Create separate forum threads for specific subjects to create a knowledge base students can search through.



SOURCES

- Study #1:
<https://about.bramble.io/downloads/Getting-the-most-out-of-live-online-tutoring-Bramble.pdf>
- Study #2:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10511970.2020.1818336>
- Study #3: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/online-tutoring-found-to-be-consistent-with-best-practices-of-in-person-tutoring-252881821.html>

