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How to Get Off Topic and Still Save Your Essay in One Tutoring Session or Less

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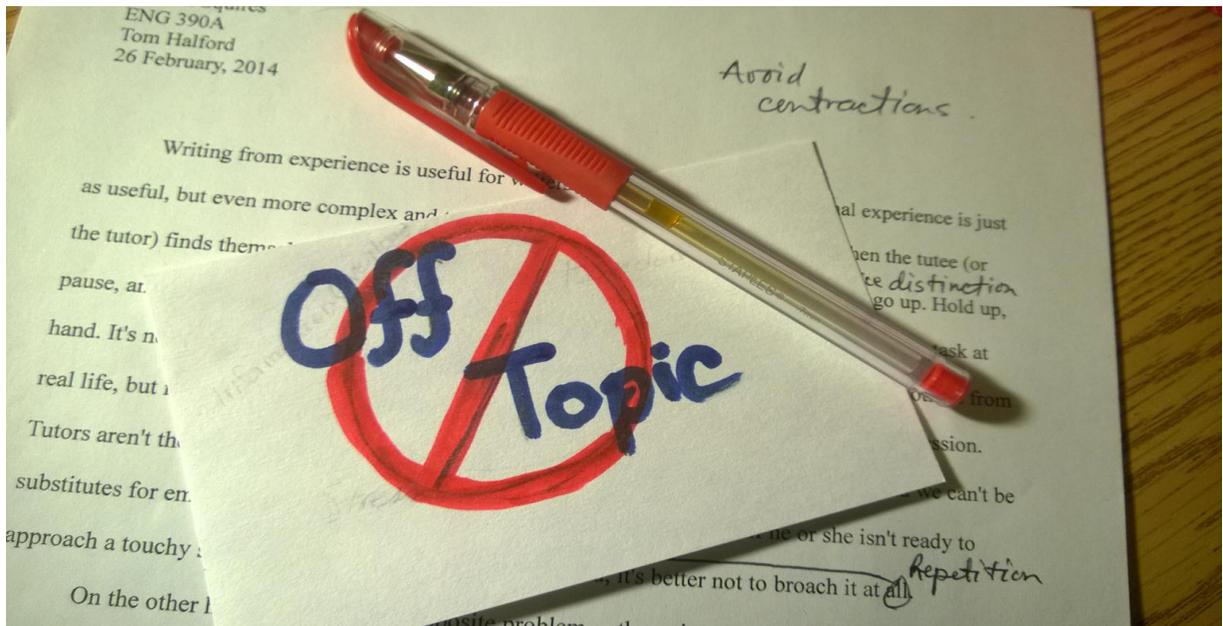
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How to Get Off Topic and Still Save Your Essay in One Tutoring Session or Less

Allison Squires

Calling all tutors! How many times have you been told “Don't get off topic”? How many pleasant conversations have you had to reluctantly interrupt because you had to get back to the essay? How does one deal with an overwhelmed, tired, bored, or nervous tutee quickly and painlessly?

I'm about to rock the boat here, and suggest something crazy: get off the topic of the essay.

Not to say that you should all of the sudden bring up the riveting episode of *The Walking Dead* you saw last night, and neither should you launch into a nostalgic story about how when you (like your tutee) were having a bit of a tight spot with an essay, you drank three Starbucks Frappuccinos and...

Okay, so maybe that's a funny story, but save it for later—you're still in a tutoring session and both of you need a minute to relax from pronouns and semicolons and *The Odyssey*.

Instead of soldiering on and deflating the fun in your session, (and simultaneously boring you and your tutee to death) circle cautiously around the topic of the essay. Mention that you took a Myth

class last semester and that “Daphne and Apollo” was your favorite story. Make a joke about Narcissus at your expense. Take a pause. Relax. Give your tutee a break—after all, she's not an information-eating machine, and she's got other classes to juggle on top of everything else. Besides, you'll remind her that you're not an authority figure or a grade-giver or even a really boring English major with a weird obsession with commas—you're a student and a writer, just like her.

So if you see a wavering writer in your tutoring session, remember: in a moment or two you'll go back to suggesting comma placement, but you probably have a minute or two to make your tutee happier to be there, and you'll probably benefit from a mini-break too. The tutor/tutee relationship doesn't have to be an arid desert; have some fun. You never know—maybe they'll be back with another essay sooner than you think.