SESSION 3 OF 5

Hand the Thinking Back: Talk Moves for the AI Era

When an AI can explain anything, the tutor's job is getting students to do the thinking. Practice four talk moves and a student-first session routine, and measure who's doing the talking.

TIME	WHO IT'S FOR	YOU'LL NEED
60 minutes	Tutors and SI leaders with at least a few weeks of sessions	This guide, plus one tutor handout per person (separate file on the session page)

By the end, participants can

- Use four talk moves: ask for reasoning, revoice, wait, and press for more
- Explain the difference between talk moves and talk balance
- Run a session where the student tries or explains before the tutor teaches
- Estimate talk balance with a simple tally

Agenda at a glance

1	Warm-up	**5 min**
2	Moves versus balance	**5 min**
3	Four talk moves	**15 min**
4	Student-first routine	**15 min**
5	Tally and debrief	**10 min**
6	Close	**10 min**
	Total	**60 min**

Before you start

- ☐ Read AI Coached the Tutors. The Tutors Still Did Most of the Talking. for the research behind this session.
- ☐ Print the handout and a few copies of the tally sheet (it's part of the handout).
- ☐ Choose two problems or prompts from courses you support, one easy and one harder.

Session plan

1 Warm-up 5 min

Ask: “In your last session, who talked more, you or the student?” Most tutors guess the student did. Share the research: in one large study of online peer tutoring, tutors did more than 90% of the talking.

2 Moves versus balance 5 min

Talk moves are what the tutor says to get students thinking. Talk balance is who does the talking. The study found AI feedback improved tutors’ moves but didn’t change the balance. Balance comes from how the session is set up, so this session works on both.

3 Four talk moves 15 min

Model each one, then have pairs practice with the easy problem.

- **Ask for reasoning.** “How did you get that?” “Why does that step work?”
- **Revoice.** “So you’re saying the slope stays the same because… Did I get that right?”
- **Wait.** Count to five in your head after a question. Silence is the student thinking.
- **Press for more.** “Say more about that.” “What would happen if the number were negative?”

4 Student-first routine 15 min

Teach this order for any problem:

1. Student tries first, out loud, before the tutor says anything about content.
2. Tutor asks one question about where the student got stuck.
3. Student explains the setup in their own words.
4. Tutor gives the smallest hint that gets them moving.
5. Student does the next problem while the tutor stays quiet.

Practice in threes with the harder problem: tutor, student and observer. The observer runs the tally.

5 Tally and debrief 10 min

Observers share their tallies. Ask: what made the student talk more? What made the tutor take over? Connect it to AI: if a session is the tutor explaining, a chatbot can do that. What a chatbot can’t do is make the student do the thinking with someone who’s paying attention.

6 Close 10 min

Each tutor picks one move to practice for two weeks. Plan a quick check-in where they report what happened.

Role plays

The silent student

A student answers every question with “I don’t know.”

Tutor’s goal: lower the stakes (“What’s one thing you notice?”), wait, and build on anything the student offers.

Debrief: How long did the tutor wait before helping?

The AI explainer

A student has already read the chatbot’s explanation and wants the tutor to “explain it better.”

Tutor’s goal: ask the student to explain what they read first, then fill only the gap.

Debrief: Who did more of the explaining?

Check for understanding: answer key

Ask these out loud or use them as a short quiz at the end.

1. What’s the difference between talk moves and talk balance?
   ANSWER Moves are what the tutor says; balance is who does the talking.
2. Why didn’t better questions fix talk balance in the study?
   ANSWER Balance comes from how the session is structured.
3. What’s the first step of the student-first routine?
   ANSWER The student tries first, out loud.
4. Why does waiting count as a talk move?
   ANSWER Silence gives the student time to think and answer.

From the Learning Center AI Tutor Training Kit. Free to copy and adapt for your center. More sessions at learningcenterai.org/tutor-training.