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How an AI tutor should *explain and ask*: a plain guide for training companies

FREE. NO SIGN-UP.

What a good answer looks like, how a tutor should check understanding, and how to prepare your course material so both work.

What is in this guide

- 1 **Explain.** The four parts of a good answer, and when the tutor should say "I don't know".
- 2 **Ask.** How the tutor checks understanding with practice questions from your material.
- 3 **Prepare your material.** What to write down so both work.
- 4 **Good and bad examples.** Neutral subjects, side by side.
- 5 **A one-page checklist,** then the next step.

By Northstr · northstrdata.com. A general method for training and exam-prep companies. Examples use neutral subjects: electrical trade, HVAC, IT certifications and workplace safety.

A good answer has *four parts*.

A learner asks a question. The tutor answers from your course material, in a shape that is easy to check and easy to trust.

1 OF 4

Short answer

One or two lines. The learner gets the point straight away.

2 OF 4

The rule

Quoted exactly from the course material, word for word. Not reworded, not from memory.

3 OF 4

Watch out for

A common mistake, or a trap that tests like to use.

4 OF 4

Where it's from

The lesson and page, so the learner can open it and read more.

Why these four

- The **short answer** respects the learner's time. The **rule** shows the answer is not made up.
- **Watch out for** turns a plain answer into teaching. It is where a good instructor adds the most.
- **Where it's from** lets a person check in seconds. If the source does not back the answer, you have found a problem.

A worked example

LEARNER ASKS • ELECTRICAL TRADE

why do i need to prove a circuit is dead before i work on it

GOOD ANSWER

Short answer. A circuit that looks switched off may still be live, so you check before you touch it.

The rule. "[Exact wording of the safe-isolation rule, copied from your lesson.]"

Watch out for. Assuming a switch in the off position means the circuit is dead. Test questions often ask for the steps in order.

Where it's from. [Lesson 4, page 12]

Examples in this guide are illustrative. Text in [square brackets] stands for the exact wording and page from *your* course material. Use your own, not ours.

When the material does not cover it: *say so.*

A tutor that always has an answer is a risk. A tutor that knows where its material ends is useful.

If the question is not in the course material, the right reply is **"I don't know"**, followed by a person to ask: the instructor or the support team. No guess, no answer from general knowledge dressed up as course content.

LEARNER ASKS • IT CERTIFICATIONS

will this be on my exam next week

GOOD ANSWER

I don't know. That is not covered in the course material I have. Please ask your instructor, or contact support at [your support contact].

BAD ANSWER

Yes, that topic comes up in most exams, so make sure you revise it.

Why it is bad: nothing in the material says this. It sounds helpful and it is a guess.

Good and bad, side by side

LEARNER ASKS • HVAC

what does superheat mean

GOOD ANSWER

Short answer. A short plain-words definition taken from your glossary.

The rule. "[Glossary definition of superheat, quoted word for word.]"

Watch out for. [A common mix-up your instructors see, written in your materials.]

Where it's from. [Glossary, page 3]

BAD ANSWER

A long, confident explanation that uses different words from your course, gives no quote, and names no lesson or page.

Why it is bad: the learner cannot tell whether it matches what they will be tested on, and nobody can check it.

The test of a good tutor: ask it something your material does not cover. It should decline and point to a person.

A good tutor also *asks*.

Reading an answer is not the same as knowing it. Practice questions show the learner, and you, what has stuck. They are especially useful for exam prep.

When a learner wants to practise, the tutor should:

- **Ask practice questions drawn from the course material.** Not invented ones. Each question comes from your own set, with its answer.
- **Explain why a wrong answer is wrong.** "Not quite" is not enough. The learner should see what the mistake was.
- **Point back to the lesson.** Name the lesson and page to read again.

A worked example

TUTOR ASKS • IT CERTIFICATIONS

Which of these adds a second check when someone signs in?

A. A longer username B. Two-factor authentication C. A bigger screen D. A faster connection

LEARNER ANSWERS

A

GOOD REPLY

Not quite. A longer username does not add a second check. A second check needs something different from the password, such as a code sent to a phone. The right answer is B.

Read it again: [Lesson 6, page 3]. Want to try another one?

BAD REPLY

Wrong! The answer is B.

Why it is bad: the learner learns the letter, not the reason, and has nowhere to go to understand it.

What to avoid

- Practice questions that are not in your material, so nobody can check the "right" answer.
- Telling the learner they are right when they are not, to be encouraging.
- Marking a learner wrong when the question was unclear. Fix the question in your material.

Explain and ask work together. Explain answers the learner's question. Ask checks they have understood. Both rest on the same thing: your course material.

Get your material ready so *both* work.

A tutor can only be as clear as the material behind it. Five things make the biggest difference.

PREPARE	WHY IT MATTERS
Clear lessons	One topic per lesson, with a clear title and page numbers, so “Where it’s from” can point somewhere real.
Key terms	A glossary in your own wording. The tutor then uses the same words your learners will meet in the test.
The exact rules	Write each rule once, in the words you want quoted. This is what “The rule” is taken from.
Worked examples	Show the steps in the right order. They give “Watch out for” something real to draw on.
Practice questions with answers	Each one with the right answer, a reason for it, and the lesson it belongs to. This is what the tutor asks from.

Small habits that help

- Add a “common mistakes” note to each lesson. Instructors already know these.
- Keep one current version of each document. Remove old versions, or label them clearly.
- Decide who a learner is sent to when the tutor does not know, and put that name or address in writing.
- Put the real questions learners ask, typed the way they type them, into a list. Use them to test.

Do not have the material yet? Start with the rules and the practice questions. Those two give the tutor the most to work with.

EXAMPLES

More good and bad, *side by side.*

Neutral subjects. Brackets stand for your own wording and pages.

LEARNER ASKS · WORKPLACE SAFETY

what is a near miss

GOOD ANSWER

Short answer. An event that could have caused harm but did not.

The rule. “[Definition of near miss, quoted word for word from your lesson.]”

Watch out for. Thinking it only counts if someone was hurt. Test questions often use an example where nobody was.

Where it's from. [Lesson 2, page 5]

BAD ANSWER

Gives a definition from general knowledge, adds a rule of thumb that is not in your course, and cites nothing.

LEARNER ASKS · ELECTRICAL TRADE, PRACTICE

quiz me on isolating a circuit safely

GOOD

Asks a question from your practice set, waits for the answer, explains any mistake in your wording, and says “review [Lesson 4, page 12]”.

BAD

Makes up a new question on the spot, with an answer nobody on your team has checked.

LEARNER ASKS · HVAC, MAY BE OUTSIDE THE MATERIAL

can I skip that step on a quick job

GOOD

Gives the rule exactly as your material states it, with the lesson and page. If the material does not address shortcuts, says “I don't know” and points to the instructor.

BAD

“It depends, but usually it is fine.” Nothing in the material says that.

Tick these off *before launch.*

Your material

- ☐ Each lesson has a clear title and page numbers.
- ☐ Key terms are in a glossary, in your own wording.
- ☐ The exact rules are written once, in the words you want quoted.
- ☐ Worked examples show the steps in the right order.
- ☐ Practice questions have answers, reasons and a lesson reference.
- ☐ Old or duplicate versions are removed or clearly labelled.

Explain

- ☐ Every answer has a short answer, the rule, a watch-out and a source.
- ☐ The rule is quoted exactly from the course material.
- ☐ When the material does not cover a question, the tutor says "I don't know".
- ☐ It then points to a named person: the instructor or support.

Ask

- ☐ Practice questions come only from your own material.
- ☐ A wrong answer gets a reason, not just "wrong".
- ☐ The tutor points back to the lesson and page.

Test it

- ☐ You have real learner questions, typed as learners type them.
- ☐ Some of the questions are not covered by your material, on purpose.
- ☐ A person who knows the subject reads every answer. Not another AI.
- ☐ You agreed what counts as a pass before you started.

Want someone else to run the test?

Northstr runs this kind of test on your own documents as the **Hundred Questions**: \$750, one week. We ask 100 questions, a person reads every answer, and you get a plain report.

<https://northstrdata.com/hundred-questions>

Questions? info@northstrdata.com

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