



TUTORIALS

Use this sheet to help you:

- prepare for, participate in, and lead tutorials

5 minute self test

Before you read the Helpsheet, spend five minutes considering the following questions:

1. What are the aims of tutorials?
2. What are some different kinds of tutorials?
3. How can students be assessed in tutorials?
4. How can you improve your participation in tutorials?
5. How can you lead a tutorial?
6. What are some "ground rules" for tutorial conduct?

Read on for answers

What are tutorials for?

You might think you already know the answer to this question. However, it is worthwhile reflecting on it.

While lectures are the recognised means of transmitting content, it is tutorials that are the mainstay of the academic system. Lectures are often an impractical means to discuss the material presented. Tutorials balance this by emphasising discussion over delivery. Tutorials offer an opportunity to pursue one's queries and concerns. They are supportive places where you are free to ask questions, make mistakes and really learn.

Tutorials allow you to link together what you hear in lectures and read in textbooks and discuss these ideas. Discussion is critical; without it, a tutorial is not a tutorial. In a tutorial, you may be able to clarify problems and misunderstandings in your work, and you will have a great opportunity to improve your verbal communication skills.

Relationships are hard to build in a lecture theatre, but they are possible, even desirable, during a tutorial. You can make life-long friends during tutorials. To some extent, tutors themselves can be friends as well as academic mentors, though be aware that they are professionals and may choose to keep a professional distance from students.

Importantly, tutors model the thinking processes needed in a subject. Watching a tutor thinking out loud during a class when trying to answer a question or problem can be stimulating and instructive.

Note that at postgraduate level, there is often no separation between tutorials and lectures, but only a longer session which combines elements of both. This is often called a seminar.

Types of tutorials

In the Faculty of Business and Economics tutorials take a number of forms:

1. Collaborative problem-solving tutorials
2. Tutorials using a computer/laptop
3. Expository-type tutorials
4. Review tutorials
5. Pitstop tutorials
6. On-line tutor

1. Collaborative problem-solving tutorials

In these tutorials, students work together in groups to actively solve problems. Our research in Business and Economics has shown that students felt they had developed analytical and critical thinking as well as problem solving skills after participating in this type of tutorial.

Benefits to be gained from working in groups include:

- Sharing your knowledge with, and learning from the knowledge of others in, your group.
- Learning from explaining concepts and your ideas to you by your peers.
- Developing active listening skills.
- Developing a rapport with your fellow students.

Students learn in these tutorials by doing – by gaining an understanding of the application of theories and engaging actively with ideas. These skills will all be useful in the workplace – employers look for team skills in their graduates.

In order to prepare for these tutes:

- Do the work on the blue sheets – the reading and the problems.
- Come to the tute with a positive, active learning frame of mind, ready to tackle the pink sheets.
- Be prepared to:
 - work on the unseen task on the pink sheet
 - report on your answers and ideas
 - listen to others
 - work in a team
 - ask questions

2. Tutorials using a computer/laptop

These tutorials have been developed to help students work on economic and accounting problems using real data sets. They will also advance your computing skills. Once again, in order to get the most out of these tutes, you need to be prepared:

- Put some time into familiarising yourself with the programme and tools that are being used, for example Excel.
- Complete any set problems **before** the tutorials.
- When you share laptop take it in turns to manipulate the data.
- Explain to your colleagues what you are doing and how you arrived at a solution if they don't understand.
- Listen to the tutor and ask questions – if you are prepared for your tutorials then your questions are likely to be of value to others in the tute.

3. Expository type tutorials

In this type of tutorial you will be less active, although you should still be prepared to answer questions put to you by the tutor. The tutor will have prepared work to go through in the tutorial. He/She may put what is to be covered up on the board. Identify areas that you have found difficult and ask the tutor to go through these first. Feel free to interrupt the tutor as they go through the solution. Listen carefully to what other students have to say. Volunteer to answer questions – it is okay to be wrong.

4. Review tutorials

Review tutorials are held in various Business and Economics subjects to help students review and revise the critical subject material, as well as answer any student questions - particularly exam questions. These questions may be long or short essay-type questions and/or multiple-choice questions. Review tutes are like mini-lectures and are held in lecture theatres. As it is up to you whether you attend, you may find anywhere between 10-80 students present, depending on the time of the tute and the week in the semester – attendance tends to rise closer to the exam! Again, the motto (like the Scouts!) is 'be prepared':

- Prepare answers to the questions supplied to you in advance of the tute.
- Watch carefully as the tutor works through the answers to the questions.
- Always come to review tutes with questions raised through your own revision.
- Listen carefully while the tutor goes over past exam questions – this will help you to answer similar types of questions in the exam.
- Listen to the questions raised by other students in your review tute – they may point to an aspect of the subject you might have overlooked.
- If you still don't understand, ask for help.

5. Pitstop tutorials

Pitstop tutorials are provided in many subjects in addition to your regular tutorial. The objective of the pitstop tutorial is to provide students with the opportunity to ask a question on an individual or very small group basis. Times and locations of pitstop tutes will be announced in lectures. When you go to a pitstop tute you also need to be prepared. Be very clear in your mind exactly what you would like the tutor to explain to you before you go. It is not helpful if you simply say that you 'don't understand anything!' The time you spend with your pitstop tutor is up to you. Once your problem/question has been answered you may leave.

6. On-line tutor

This is a tutorial service available via the Internet. The benefits of this service are:

- You can ask questions any time, day or night, and do not have to come into University.
- All questions and answers are posted to a subject bulletin board for all students to see. This allows all students to have access to the information, not just the student who posed the question.
- Questions are sorted by topic as that students can refer to the on-line bulletin board when revising for examinations or completing assignments.
- The On-line tutor can post messages to individual students as well as to all students in the subject.
- Test and assignment results are sent to each individual student via this system so that students receive feedback on how well they are performing.
- File attachments can be sent between students and tutors or between students, facilitating assignment submission and group work.

Assessment in tutorials

It is important to note that in tutorials you are being assessed on your participation. This may be clearly explained at the start of tutorials, or it may not be. In either case, you will receive some kind of mark for your tutorial contributions. This mark will be in addition to your other assessed work.

How tutorial assessment is done can depend on the tutor or the type of tutorial. Some tutors keep a log book with each student's name and allocate points for "good comments", "excellent comments", or (a zero mark) for "no comments" at each tutorial. They then add the marks at the end of semester. Other tutors form a global judgement of your contribution only at the end of semester.

Be aware that it is very easy to lose significant marks from poor or insufficient tutorial participation.

Many students from non-English speaking backgrounds are too worried or shy about their English to contribute in tutorials. This problem usually gets worse during the semester. In the first tutorial, students might be too scared or intimidated to say anything. As the semester goes by, it becomes harder and harder to contribute. Fairly soon, the entire semester has passed and the student has not contributed anything! This naturally results in a fail for tutorial contributions. One solution is this:

Force yourself to:

- Ask a simple question in Week 1
- Ask a more complex question in Week 2
- Make a comment on an idea in Week 3
- Argue against an idea in Week 4...

In this way, confidence builds quickly.

Preparing for tutorials

Tutorials are part of your assessed work for a subject. Attendance is not optional. However, that said, it is important to do more than simply attend. As noted above, you need to speak, argue and critique (both criticise and agree with) the information discussed in the tutorial. To do this, it is important to do the reading assigned for each week. If you don't do the pre-tutorial reading, you will not be able to understand the conversation or participate in it.

To prepare for your tutorial, two hours is recommended to ensure you understand the texts, have completed any activities and have something to say!

Tutorial Discussions

Discussion is useful because it stimulates active learning by allowing you to practice integrating, elaborating and applying knowledge.

Discussion:

- Allows you to see your misunderstandings as well as the areas in which you are confident.
- Stimulates you to think like an economist or an accountant (or whatever you are studying).
- Allows you to evaluate the logic or evidence for your own and others points of view
- Lets you apply the knowledge and principles you are learning.
- Allows you to share your understanding – and misunderstanding - and to compare progress with others. This means that you will obtain feedback on your learning.

Communication skills can be developed in the secure environment of a tutorial. Students can be a source of support for one another.

Tutorials allow you to ask your tutor questions about the material that you have been reading or covering in Business and Economics lectures. Your tutor is the first point of contact with the academic staff of the faculty and it is helpful if you get to know him or her.

Here are some expressions that may help you participate in tutorials:

Introducing ideas

- "I'd like to start/begin by saying that ..."
- "First of all, I'd like to talk about ..."
- "By way of an introduction, I'd like to define the topic ..."
- "I want to cover the following points ..."
- "This is how I intend to approach the topic: firstly ... etc"
- "What I want to suggest is ..."
- "My main point is that ..."
- "I want to claim that ..."
- "I suggest the following ..."
- "I think ..."

Asking for clarification

- "Am I right in thinking that you ...?"
- "Sorry to interrupt, but did you just say that ...?"
- "Is what you are saying...?"
- "Would you mind repeating...?"
- "I am a little unclear about the point made by X. Is it being suggested that ...?"
- "I'm not clear what you meant /by... / when you said ...?"
- "Am I right in thinking that you / believe.../ consider...?"
- "I'm not sure I understand (correctly) what you said about...?"
- "Could you please explain what you meant by... when you said...?"
- "I don't understand what you mean / by .../ when you say ...?"
- "Did you mean that...?"
- "Do you mean that...?"

Giving clarification

- "The point I'm / making is that ...
/ trying to make is that ..."
- "What I'm / saying
/ trying to say / is..."
- "All I'm / saying
/ trying to say / is..."
- "What I / mean is...
/ meant was ..."
- "What I was / driving at ...
/ getting at is ..."
- "What I said was ..."

Concluding ideas

- "To sum up, ..."
- "In conclusion ..."
- "My final point is that ..."
- "That is all I have to say for the moment, but I would welcome your comments in the group discussion."

Presenting a tutorial

You may be asked to prepare something for a tutorial or to run a tutorial. This could involve a formal presentation by you (see the **Study and Research Helpsheet: Giving Presentations**). Alternatively, it might involve leading a discussion. A good way to do this is to base your discussion on an appropriate reading. It is suggested that this involves the following stages:

1. First choose a topic for discussion that the rest of the group is likely to have an interest in. You might assess their interest in various topics first. Alternatively, your tutor might allocate a topic for you.
2. Second, choose a reading. The reading material could be an article in a newspaper or a journal. (It is a good idea that it is not too long and not too complex!) Alternatively, it might not be a reading but a segment of video. Whatever the medium, it is important to have a focus for the discussion to follow.
3. If it is a reading, make a copy for each of the group members and give it to them to read at least a day or more before the discussion is to take place. Ideally, it is best to give it to students at the previous tutorial, and then remind them to read it a few days before.
4. Consider some kind of active learning method to engage the tutorial audience in the topic, for example, a class debate (see **Study and Research Helpsheet: Debating**). There are many different methods you could use here, limited only by your imagination.
5. Begin the session by summarising the key points of the article, or, even better, eliciting the key points from the audience.
6. Sum up the evidence or arguments for the key points with diagrams, graphs, flowcharts and/or tables.
7. Ask for comments and criticism on the information provided from your audience. Ideally, you will have pre-prepared responses to typical questions in advance.

When leading a discussion or “running a tute” be aware of the following points:

- Make sure you cover everything in the reading or material under discussion. You are being assessed on your contribution to the class (whether this has been mentioned or not). Therefore, if you miss something crucial it reflects badly on you, and it is, after all, your tutorial.
- Don't think of the opportunity as “something you have to do”. Think of it as an opportunity to become the “class expert” on a particular topic. Be adventurous in your preparation for your class. This preparation will be reflected in your class grade later on. Sometimes other students in the class will not prepare well. Don't be tempted to follow suit (to avoid being “different”); do something highly professional. Your audience, and your tutor, will appreciate it. Set the gold standard for the class.
- Make sure that everyone in the group contributes to the discussion.

- The main aim of the task of running a tutorial is to elicit comments on the following aspects of the reading/subject matter of the class:

- What is the author's opinion of this issue?
- What are her/his main arguments?
- What evidence does the author give to support her/his contentions?
- Is this evidence sound? Are there flaws in the data presented?
- Is the article balanced in its presentation of the issue or does it use unreasonable devices to persuade the reader?
- What are the group members' opinions of the issue?

- Make sure that the comments made in the discussion are understood by all group members and rephrase comments that are unclear to check for meaning.
- Keep the discussion moving. Do not let it become irrelevant or repetitious. Finish the discussion within the agreed time limit.
- Be aware of your audience and make clear, unbiased and logical comments. Some students in the class come from non-western and non-English speaking backgrounds, therefore local issues and concerns should be clearly explained, and local slang avoided.
- Make notes during the discussion in order to provide a written summary of the main ideas discussed at the end of the class for later distribution to your tutor and other students.
- Given a written record of the material presented in class to your tutor. This will impress them greatly. They will use this to remind them of your tutorial presentation when they assess your contributions in class.

Getting The Most Out Of Tutorials

Academic staff notice the difference between prepared, enthusiastic students and the others – this is important in subjects where your preparation and participation in tutorials forms part of the assessment in the subject.

What do lecturers want students to do for tutorials? When academics were asked this question they came up with the following list:

- Be prepared
- Be enthusiastic
- Ask when you don't understand
- Contribute/discuss/interact
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Develop appropriate skills
- Be punctual (Race, 1999).

Although these points can be addressed in turn, they are interlinked.

Being prepared. Preparing for a tutorial means completing the required work, reading the recommended texts and working on set problems as required. If you have done the required work then you can contribute much more during the tutorial. You will have a greater understanding of the concepts being discussed and of your level of understanding. Preparing for tutorials allows you to ask questions in the tutorial on any issues that are unclear to you. It will also reveal areas where you may need more information from the tutor. The greater the amount of preparation, the greater the return in terms of your learning.

Your **enthusiasm** for each tutorial can be affected by many things, among them an interest in the subject material. Even if this particular topic is not your favourite topic, you will get a lot more out of it by being positive and enthusiastic. It is easier to be motivated for tutorials if you have prepared. Set yourself some targeted questions to ask. Regard the tutorial as an active learning opportunity rather than 50 minutes to get through. Reward yourself afterwards!

Ask questions that you have prepared in advance. Don't worry if another student asks 'your' question, you can still benefit from the answer. Asking questions is not an admission of failure, rather it is a good way to raise important issues and gives other students the opportunity for discussion. When you don't understand, it is important to say so. Try not to nod just to please the tutor if he or she says 'do you all understand?' if you don't. Tutors would much prefer to clear up any misunderstandings along the way rather than try and correct them much later on and you won't cause offence. Also, it may be that the point you have pretended to understand is crucial to the next problem, which will leave you even more confused. You are probably not the only person in the room who would prefer the tutor to go over the point again.

Contribute. This is the biggest difficulty in tutorials for many students, especially at the beginning of the year. Don't be afraid! Tutorials are an opportunity to learn and practise your communication skills. Don't worry that you are going to say something wrong or stupid. Other students in the tutorial have probably been waiting for that question to be asked! If you feel you are talking too much, check that you are still on the point, or ask for other points of view. Try and distinguish between facts and opinions. If English is not your first language, set yourself weekly goals in tutorials, for example; speak to one other student, ask a question, be prepared to answer. If you have problems talk to your tutor, ask the online tutor or visit the CELT). It's worth remembering that learning in tutorials can occur as a result of interaction with your tutor, your peers and/or the required reading.

Maintaining a **positive attitude** is a valuable tool. If you act positively towards your peers and your tutor in tutorials then they will respond in the same way. By being positive you will be more likely to get the information and explanation you need.

Tutorials can be a great way to develop **interpersonal, communication** and **presentation skills**. In the tutorial:

- Try and remember the names of your fellow students.
- Make sure you know how your tutor likes to be addressed.
- Make an attempt to take turns in speaking and listen respectfully to the opinions of others. If you don't agree with them, you will get the opportunity to say so.

- Critically analyse ideas, which is an important part of the Western academic tradition. In some cultures it is considered disrespectful to disagree, especially with teachers. However, this is not the case here. You are expected to think and to question.
- Be prepared to have your ideas or opinions evaluated and commented upon.
- Practice your presentation skills if you have to give a paper or overview of a point.

Being **punctual**. Although this may seem trivial to some students and obvious to others, being punctual is important. It helps you to manage your time effectively. Being punctual allows your tutor to manage the tutorial effectively and maximise the learning. Being punctual will not annoy your punctual colleagues!

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