



# Tutorials

## Student Learning Skills Worksheet 3 / Student Support

January 2008

### So... why have tutorials?

The tutorial is a learning environment commonly used throughout tertiary education. It relies on students taking a responsible attitude towards their role as independent learners.

#### The goals of the tutorial include:

- adding to and clarifying material presented in lectures;
- developing practical skills associated with lecture material;
- solving problems and clearing up misunderstandings;
- discussing and exploring ideas and viewpoints based upon lecture material;
- observing the level of understanding and skill possessed by students; and
- improving students' verbal communication skills.

### Types of tutorials

The tutorial may be conducted in a variety of formats that typically reflect its specific purpose. Some styles of tutorial and their purpose are:

**Discussion groups** allow exploration of issues by guided interaction through class discussion.

**Problem-solving** is the undertaking of examples and exercises to reinforce techniques and principles.

**Mini-lectures** expand material covered in lectures and provide additional content.

**Cooperative learning** extends students' capacity to operate in a team. Students are often required to present to their fellow students either individually, as a pair, or as a small group. Flexible roles of a cooperative learning group may be that of Project Manager, Recorder, Presenter and Wildcard (see SLS Worksheet 5 Presentations & Group Work).

**Open format** allows student queries that result from lectures and private study to be addressed.

**E-Learning tutorials** provide an opportunity for all students to have computer access for specific tasks in tutorial time.

With the introduction of new learning technologies such as Elluminate and Skype, you may find your lecture group interacting with an expert in your field who is not physically present, rather, who communicates via audio and video conferencing. A number of students may be in remote locations but still be a part of your group. In some Schools, podcasts and video clips may be placed on **Blackboard**. Lecturers and students may also set up contact points on **Elgg**, a social network site with other students enrolled in your unit.

**Optional tutorials:** The **UB Mentor Program** aims to ease the transition to university life by assigning first-year students a Mentor. Mentors are senior students, trained to assist students in a non-academic capacity. First-year students are encouraged to attend meetings with their Mentor for the first six weeks of the teaching period.

All students may book into the **Library Skills Program** via the Library Home Page <[www.ballarat.edu.au/library](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/library)>. Numerous classes offer introductions to programs that help with your academic research, such as Refworks (software that automatically inserts references at the end of essays) and NaviGatePlus (search databases for journal articles).

Staff in **Student Learning Skills** provide personal and group assistance with essay writing, referencing and other study skills. Offices are located in the Mt Helen Library, the SMB Library and by appointment at the reception desk in Horsham.

**International Student Programs** also provides individual academic assistance to international students, and one-to-one English language support. Group tutorials can also be arranged on request at the International Office.

### Preparation for tutorials

Undertaking some preparation is advisable – you will get a great deal more out of them. Tasks vary, and need not be arduous. Preparation could include:

- doing sample problems or working through examples;
- re-reading lecture notes to refresh the main points;
- pre-reading references to determine the main points;
- generating a list of questions or ideas to contribute to the session.

Major preparation will be needed if you are the (or one of) the main presenter/s!

### Expressing your view

You are unlikely to gain maximum benefit from listening passively to the ideas of others without making some contribution of your own. Likewise, you will not gain much by repeatedly bludgeoning others with your own point of view.

Instead, try to improve your critical thinking by arguing the case for something you don't believe. The real value of discussion groups comes from remaining receptive to other opinions whilst confidently stating your own point of view. There is a need for politeness and respect for the opinions of others, regardless of whether you disagree with them!

Need some strategies for becoming more involved in tutorial discussions?

# Tutorials

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## Tutorial tips

### Do some pre-reading for tutorials

Preparation on the topic will get you 'on track' in your thinking. You don't have to be an expert, but you will be ready to contribute to the discussion intelligently. You will also remember more of the discussion.

An appropriate amount of study time for your tutorials might be an hour of private study per hour of tutorial.

### Learn people's names

Saying someone's name when you speak to them is a good way to engage with them. Communication is usually improved by using eye-contact at the same time.

### Remember: You are all in the same boat

Most people are nervous about speaking in public despite feeling quite confident speaking to others in private. If you recognise that others probably feel the same as you at the start, it's easier to get through. Humour is often a good way for people to relax, but make sure your idea of humour is not offensive to others.

### Contribute a little at a time

Often, asking a question will indicate that you have engaged with the discussion (eg. "when you said... what did you mean?"). If you are unsure about contributing, a good starting point is a statement of agreement another person's position (be genuine!). As you feel more comfortable, you may find you will want to contribute more.

### Discuss the topic before the tutorial

Discussing your thoughts on the topic with someone privately before expressing them in public will give you the chance to rehearse your ideas and increase your confidence.

### Write down what you want to say

Writing down notes or questions you would like to pose gives you a safety net, because you can then simply read from your notes. Not being able to speak publicly does not imply you don't know how to think!

### Say your piece with confidence

Try to avoid the "ums'n'arrs". Say what you want to say concisely and allow others to respond or comment. Listen carefully to what others have to say.

### Silence

Remember that the tutorial is also a place for thinking as well as speaking. Sometimes a silence is welcome as it can allow participants to think about a problem.

## A parting word

Attendance at tutorials is usually compulsory and an attendance roll is kept. It is important to recognise that tutorials represent a large proportion of your total assigned class commitment.

Regardless of the type of tutorial or the style in which it is presented, ensure you get good value from your participation - try out the tutorial tips. The real benefit of tutorials is derived from the active participation of all students.

As with most things in life, you will only get out as much as you are prepared to put in!