Resources for Tutors

http://fbe.unimelb.edu.au/celt
Tutor Roles and Responsibilities

It is very important to know your roles and responsibilities before you begin teaching. It is essential that you meet with the subject coordinator prior to the beginning of semester to clarify the details of the subject, and to make sure you understand what is expected of you. You should also make sure your employment is finalised and you are aware of, and happy with, all the details of your employment contract.

Your key duties as a tutor are to:

- conduct tutorials
- mark assignments, exams and other student activities
- be available to students through consultation hours and ‘pit-stop’ tutorials as and when required by the subject coordinator (Bath, Smith and Steel, 2004)

Tutors are usually the first avenue for students with questions about subject matter and administration, as well as broader queries about Faculty administration and courses. While you cannot be expected to know everything, you should try to develop a good understanding of where students can find answers to their questions. For example, administrative questions about the subject should be directed to the subject coordinator or the Department office. Administrative questions about courses should be directed to:

The Commerce Student Centre
Upper Ground floor, ICT Building, (03) 8344 5317

1. Conducting tutorials

Subject coordinators will assign tutorials based upon your availability, experience, and the timetabling of the subject. To avoid any conflict with study, tutors who are undertaking full-time graduate studies will normally be assigned a maximum of four tutorials per week. You should make sure that, when you apply for tutorials, you are able to fit them into your own study schedule without adversely affecting your marks or your students’ progress and performance.

Tutorials are usually held in the same room each week for one hour. Students often have to get from one side of the university to the other very quickly, so where possible you may begin your main activities a little later than the scheduled time (ensure you still have some ‘warm-up’ activity for those students who do make it on time however).

2. Marking assignments, exams and other student activities

As part of your tutoring duties you will be required to mark assignments submitted by students in each of your tutorials. You should speak to the subject coordinator about the marking scheme for each piece of assessment and make sure you are comfortable with this process.
The subject coordinator is your supervisor and all requests for extensions or exemptions must be referred to him/her. Cases of plagiarism or other transgressions may occur which should also be discussed with the subject coordinator before any action is taken. Under no circumstances should they be discussed with anyone else, as it is important to keep student information confidential.

Students are entitled to request reconsideration of their grades. If they approach you first, you should discuss the issue with the subject coordinator before taking any action. Normally the first marker should re-read and reconsider, and then pass the essay on to the subject coordinator.

The marking of examination papers is not a requirement for casual tutors. However, you may be asked to do this as additional work. Any marking duties associated with final examinations are not covered by your tutoring contract and you will need to agree to this work separately. You will be paid at the normal university rate for any such marking.

It is a good idea to speak to your subject coordinator to determine whether you will be needed for exam marking and if you will be available at this time. If you are a current student, you may also have examinations at this time of year, so plan carefully to ensure you can help subject coordinators with exam marking without adversely affecting your own exam preparation.

3. Consultation hours

Many departments in the Faculty require tutors to be available for a consultation hour in addition to their particular tutorials. Students will usually use this consultation hour if they have questions about the material or their assignments.

You will be provided with an office location which will be advertised to students. However, the process varies between departments, so make sure that you check how this works in the department you are working in and speak to your subject coordinator should you have any further questions.

4. Other duties

Sometimes you might be required to attend lectures to ensure that you are adequately prepared for your tutorials. You should discuss this with your subject coordinator and decide together whether you would benefit from attending any of the lectures. If you have not heard the lectures before or are unfamiliar with the subject matter, you should definitely consider attending.

5. Tutor/student relationship

Tutoring is not just about intellectual exchange – it involves personal interaction too! Such interaction is integral to small-group teachings, it makes teaching more enjoyable and more effective - especially as you get to know your students and they get to know you.

There are several things that you should keep in mind about your conduct when tutoring which will help prevent any problems that may arise from the personal interaction involved in tutoring:
• Maintain a professional relationship. While friendliness is a key element to effective tutoring, it is also important to maintain a professional manner in all your dealings as a tutor within the Faculty of Business and Economics. You should also be careful not to make judgements or sweeping statements about your students.

• Treat all members of the tutorial group equally. Make a conscious effort to include all members of the group in discussions and questions. Also, be very aware of using gender-specific language and examples. Alert students to examples of material in their texts or articles that are not gender neutral.

• Being respectful and fair is an integral part of tutoring. If you are courteous, your students should behave likewise and create a positive learning environment for all.

For more information see the Reference Material at the end of this publication relating to the Equal Opportunity Unit.

**Difficult Situations**

Many tutors may never encounter a really difficult or uncomfortable situation in a tutorial. However, it is good to be prepared and there are several strategies that you can adopt to minimise or avoid difficult situations:

a. Establish students’ overall expectations of tutorials at the beginning of semester.

b. Go through the objectives of each tutorial at the beginning of the classes to help students align their expectations with what will actually take place.

c. Structure your tutorial to ensure that students understand the rationale of the task they are completing. If students understand why they are completing a task they are less likely to become distracted, off-track, uninterested or uncommunicative.

d. Pay attention to the dynamic of your student group to give you a good indication of whether students feel comfortable discussing the material together. You can then actively change the group dynamic by being flexible and adopting some of the good tutoring techniques outlined in the CELT Tutoring Guides.

**Dealing with difficult behaviour in tutorials**

At some point in your tutoring career you may need to stop a student from behaving in an aggressive or anti-social manner. You should remember that in the tutor/student relationship you are in a more powerful position and therefore should not overreact. Often you can change students’ behaviour just through words and glances. Conveying through body language that you are unhappy with a student’s behaviour or using a phrase such as “could we just stop here and focus on the topic” may be more useful than publicly reprimanding a student. Publically chastising may embarrass the student and cause further anti-social behaviour. Be firm but respectful. Remember to speak with your subject coordinator or head of Department if the behaviour persists or is problematic.
**Emotional attachment**

If you are finding a student is forming an emotional attachment to you, you should:

a. ensure that your behaviour is professional and respectful but not overly friendly  

b. speak with your subject coordinator or Head of Department if the behaviour persists

You should not behave in a way that might be seen as encouraging the attachment, but neither should you avoid the student. Treat each student equally both inside and outside tutorials. There are strict university regulations about relationships between students and tutors because you have a professional responsibility and are in a position of power. Remember too, that other students in a tutorial may feel uncomfortable or even disadvantaged if any favouritism is evident.

**Harassment**

Sexual harassment is serious. If a student comes to see you about a case of alleged or possible harassment by another person, you should refer the student to one of the University’s Sexual Harassment Advisers within the People and Fairness Unit on 8344 6078 or visit [http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/strategic/equity](http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/strategic/equity). Do not try to deal with the situation yourself. It is neither your role nor your responsibility. However do provide information and encourage a student to seek assistance. A traumatised student may need clear direction.

You should refer any student problems or concerns that you feel uncomfortable dealing with to the subject coordinator. Make a personal record of the problem and follow up to make sure that the subject coordinator has dealt with the situation.

Remember that all information about your students is confidential. Being a tutor requires your absolute discretion, not just about plagiarism or results, but also regarding medical conditions and other personal information provided by your students, as well as your own personal impressions of a student.

For more information see the Reference Material at the end of this publication relating to the Equal Opportunity Unit.

You should keep in mind and encourage students to use the university’s student services which are listed below for your reference (alternatively you can direct students to the Student Services Finder website: [http://cms.unimelb.edu.au/services-finder](http://cms.unimelb.edu.au/services-finder)).

**Counselling Service**: Level 2, 138 Cardigan St, 8344 6927  
**Academic Skills**: The Peter McPhee Centre, 272-278 Faraday St, 8344 0930  
**Health Service**: 138 Cardigan St, 8344 6904  
**Student Financial Aid**: Ground floor, Baldwin Spencer Building, 8344 6550  
**Student Housing Services**: First floor, Baldwin Spencer Building, 8344 6550  
**Careers and Employment**: First floor, Baldwin Spencer Building, 8344 0100  
**Student Union Legal Service**: Third floor, Union House, 8344 8687
6. Tutor and lecturer responsibilities

The professional relationship between tutors and lecturers can be very rewarding. Once again, this is a professional relationship, in which both tutors and lecturers have rights and responsibilities.

While the lecturer will determine the structure, content and assessment for the subject, the relationship between you, your fellow tutors and the subject coordinator should be a reciprocal one. The lecturer should guide you on the teaching and marking of the subject, but you should also feel able to offer suggestions and impressions to the lecturer. Remember, as a tutor you are likely to have far more direct contact with the students in the subject than the lecturer.

You may find that a combination of formal and informal communication between you and the subject coordinator is most effective. Subject coordinators generally arrange tutor meetings in order to discuss the distribution and marking of assessment, but you might also find the need to communicate with them more regularly.

In your first meeting with the subject coordinator try to cover the following areas:

• teaching schedule: make sure that you have the correct times and venues
• student tutorial lists: departmental professional staff are usually the best source for this information
• subject materials: you will need textbooks and other teaching materials, such as computer programs like e-views, in order to teach effectively
• subject outline: including all important dates for students and tutors
• questions and solutions: enough so that you are prepared for the first few weeks of teaching
• supplies for teaching: whiteboard markers, photocopies, etc., are best obtained from departmental staff

Do not feel uncomfortable about asking the subject coordinator about the subject-matter you are teaching. If there is material you are unclear about, it is much better to clarify it with the subject coordinator or another tutor before you begin tutoring rather than avoiding it during tutorials.

You should also feel free to ask for guidance from the subject coordinator about assessing oral and written work. She/he should make clear to you what you should be looking for in assessing student work, and provide some guidelines about the allocation of marks. It is also appropriate to ask for work to be re-assessed by the subject coordinator or by another tutor if the assessment submission is difficult to deal with.
An important note for PhD students

If the lecturer is also your supervisor you should both ensure that the two functions remain clearly separated. Separate meetings or portions of meetings should be scheduled for tutoring and for thesis discussion. It is important that both you and your supervisor have a clear notion of what the meeting is about. This will ensure that important information about tutoring, or your thesis, is not lost or forgotten during discussion.
References


A number of other sources were used in the development of this guide and the other guides in the series. Significant elements have been developed with the assistance of the *Department of History Tutors’ Guide* and John Fernald’s paper *Taking Economics Tutorials* from Harvard University.

The CELT would like to acknowledge the contribution of Carol Johnston to earlier versions of this series, and the author would also like to thank tutor Mike Pottenger for his input in this guide.
How to Plan, Structure and Facilitate a Tutorial

Tutoring is one of the most important aspects of the undergraduate teaching program within the Faculty of Business and Economics. Tutors play a central role in students’ academic success and their overall satisfaction with university life; they are the personal face of the University for undergraduate students. The main advantage of tutorials is they provide an opportunity for discussion and interaction between students and teachers.

1. What is the purpose of tutorials?

It might seem like a simplistic question to ask: what is the purpose of tutorials? However, it is worthwhile reflecting on this before you rush to teach others. A bad tutorial influences not only students’ perceptions of you as a tutor, but also their perceptions of the subject overall (including the lecturer, the course content, materials used and workload).

While lectures are the recognised means of covering content, tutorials have a special role in the academic system. It could be argued that it is much easier to give a lecture than to run a good tutorial.

This section will discuss:

- How does a tutorial differ from a lecture?
- What are the aims of a good tutorial?
- Are there different kinds of tutorials?
- What are the skills that a good tutor needs?

Lectures and tutorials

While lectures are an efficient way of content delivery, they may be an impractical way to discuss the material presented. Tutorials balance this by emphasising discussion. While lectures are by nature formal, tutorials offer the opportunity for informal discussion and scope to pursue students’ queries and concerns.

Importantly, tutor’s model the thinking process needed in a subject. A tutor should therefore ask questions that model the thinking required to question or problem.

The aims of a tutorial

Tutorials help students to link together what they have heard in lectures and what they have read in textbooks, and give them an opportunity to discuss these ideas. Discussion is critical; without it, it is not a tutorial. Mini-lectures are not tutorials (although a good tutorial may have a mini-lecture as part of a range of other well-planned activities).

A good tutorial is highly interactive, promotes opportunity for discussion, debate and critical reflection, and engages students in the subject content by analysing of the material being studied. Tutorials give students the opportunity to make mistakes (and learn from them) in a collegial and
supportive environment.

In addition tutorials:

- provide the opportunity for contact between students and with academic staff. (this is particularly important during the early years of a student’s degree when they can often feel lonely and overwhelmed)
- help students to review the material they have learned in lectures, develop ideas and implement their learning though questions and problem-solving
- give students a chance to ask questions, develop and voice opinions, formulate argument and clarify their understanding
- provide a way for students to receive immediate feedback on their understanding of the subject material
- encourage students to develop oral communication skills essential in their future work

Different kinds of tutorials

There are different types of tutorial, but all tutorials should exhibit the features mentioned above to a greater or lesser extent. Tutorials can be:

- **Problem-based**: focussed on a problem that requires working towards an answer, i.e., there are set questions to answer each week and the tutorial is based around these. Alternatively, the problem might be a case study in which students are required to identify issues and make practical recommendations.
- **Issue-based**: there may not be questions or even model answers, but instead, topics for general discussion. These might be based on the readings for each week, or the lecture material. It is important for students to have the confidence to be able to offer insight and opinions about these topics. Tutorials like these build critical skills in verbal fluency.
- **Activity-based**: requiring more than discussion and problem solving; they require active engagement. This can involve presentations, role plays, games, formal debates or other activities.
- **Mixed**: a combination of all the above types.

Tutorials should promote active learning. They should encourage student discussion and problem solving yet also provide tutors with an opportunity to give individual attention to students.

While it may sometimes be necessary for instruction and presentation of theory to be given during tutorials, for the most part, these sessions should be about encouraging students to actively participate and contribute, rather than passively absorbing a mini-lecture.

There is a certain amount of content to be covered in a tutorial but the way this content is covered is at your discretion. Consider the best way to:

- engage your audience of students
- make the subject interesting
- engage your students in thinking about the subject
The type of tutorial is dictated by the subject, the skills, objectives and imagination of the tutor, and the tutor’s willingness to be creative.

Some subjects in the Faculty employ the same kind of tutorial each week, while others vary tutorial types throughout the semester. You should make sure you consult your subject coordinator to clarify what kinds of tutorials may be appropriate to your subject.

Accounting for example tends to naturally favour problem-based tutorials. However, elements of other tutorial styles can be used as well. Some tutors use web-based activities in conjunction with discussion groups; others use computer-aided modelling of mock companies, and so on. Anything is possible if you think laterally.

**What are the skills that a good tutor needs?**

Based on the above points it should be clear that a good tutor needs a range of skills and attributes, including:

- a love of teaching and a desire to make your subject interesting to others
- patience and flexibility, i.e. if one idea isn’t working, use another
- an ability to think quickly - despite several dozen pairs of eyes watching what you say and do
- creativity and a willingness to try new teaching and learning methods
- the ability to allow students to work through a problem themselves (as opposed to telling them the answer)
- listening to students’ views and telling them that they may need to consider things differently in a diplomatic manner
- by careful planning, pre-empting problems that your students are having and then guiding them through these problems
- pitching your delivery to your audience’s needs and levels by modelling desired behaviour and grading the language accordingly (you should be able to simulate the desired thinking and speaking style in a subject in a way that students can understand, and raise the sophistication of this thinking/speaking style as appropriate)

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**The Zone of Proximal Development**

The Russian psychologist Vygotsky’s idea was the Zone of Proximal Development: pitch the material at an appropriate level for the listener (who usually know little or nothing about the material) or ideally just above their current level of development (i.e. their zone). When they ask a question, demonstrating understanding, introduce the technical issues/terms etc and drive the point deeper. When they respond appropriately, drive it deeper again, and so on. (See Kolar, S., and D’Ambrosio, 2002 and Riddle, 1999).

To be a good tutor it is important to allow students to grasp information in stages. Too much and you will lose them; too little and you will bore them. This skill in teaching comes with practise and experience.
2. Pointers for tutorials

Tutors develop a range of skills that are invaluable for different kinds of careers, such as presentation, people management and information management skills. It is therefore vital to take the experience seriously and do the best job you can.

Teaching small groups of students face-to-face is harder than you think. You must be able to:

- respond to student needs, answer their questions and think on your feet
- run a creative, interesting and engaging class
- inspire students, and make subject material both easy to understand and worthy of their further investigation
- act as a mentor (someone who has their confidence, trust and their respect as an academic)
- act as a model of desired behaviour and a representative of the discipline

Tutoring is therefore a very difficult balancing act. There is no one right way to run a tutorial, but there are definitely wrong ways to proceed. Tutorials should not:

- be highly directed by you (obviously there needs to be some guidance and facilitation, but mini-lectures are definitely counter-productive – remember the role of discussion)
- involve giving out answers when problems are gone through and solved – the point of a tutorial is to give students the skills and confidence to solve problems themselves, not to cover the answers
- be a talkfest i.e., talking without a clear aim because while tutorials should involve a lot of discussion, there should always be a clear reason and structure to it
- be solo events – meaning only one or two people in the group contribute and the rest sit passively which may mean:
  - they have been intimidated (by you or someone else in the class)
  - they are bored by your class or the subject
  - they may not have not done the required reading
- be unstructured as students need to feel that there is a tutorial travel plan and destination

In relation to the last point in particular, one simple way to give your tutorial structure is to outline it at the start. For example: “I’ll start each tute with a five-minute summary of the key points of the lecture, then we will break into groups to discuss various points and report back findings for 15 minutes. Then we will have a 15-minute presentation from someone in the class with time for discussion and debate. Finally, we will end with taking questions and answers from the whole class”. If this structure is adhered to then students can anticipate the class and prepare for it.
Choosing discussion points

There are many ways to choose an issue for discussion, limited only by your imagination:

- Show a segment of a relevant video (for a class in Risk Management, students watched a video of a disaster, and were asked to record and rate risk issues for later discussion).
- Divide students into groups (for and against) and begin the class with a formal/informal debate for a central claim. Students are required to muster arguments for their position. The debate must be completed by the end of the tutorial.
- Invite one student to prepare a presentation for the tutorial and use that as the basis for a discussion.
- Commence the class with a relevant reading. Make a copy for each student and give it to them to read the week before the discussion. The reading material could be derived from lecture material or an article in a newspaper or journal. When leading a discussion be aware of the following important points:
  - Introduce (or elicit) the topic and the key issues briefly but concisely to the group.
  - Make sure that everyone in the group contributes to the discussion (consider using a round robin strategy).
  - Remind the group that they need to be aware of their audience and so should make comments clearly and logically (in effect, you are training your students in teaching skills too).
  - The main aim of the task is to elicit comments on the following aspects of the reading:
    - What is the author's opinion of this issue?
    - What are their main arguments?
    - What evidence does the author give to support their contentions?
    - Is this evidence sound?
    - Is the article balanced in its presentation of the issue or does it use devices to persuade the reader unreasonably?
    - What are the group members' opinions of the issue?

Eliciting responses

Whatever method is used for creating discussion points, it is vital to have involvement from the entire class. This does not necessarily mean putting students on the spot by singling them out. It does mean though that the topic needs to be sufficiently clear for all students – even shy students – to have the confidence to contribute (most students will want to contribute if the topic is clear, challenging and interesting.) You need to foster an environment for these contributions to be heard, and importantly, questions to be asked. Some tips include:

- Don’t pretend to be an expert in everything. Students may need to hear that you too are still learning and may make mistakes in your responses. This will encourage students to be adventurous in their responses too.
- Don’t give the answer - encourage your students to think for themselves. Show them how to think. You can do this by thinking out loud with alternatives and objections to those alternatives, until you arrive at the right or most plausible solution/perspective. Ask them
to do the same with another similar problem and slowly build their confidence.

- Build up slowly. Even if the answer is clear – and students hit upon it early – it may help to consider alternatives and weigh these up in discussion. Usually the correct response is harder than it seems at first. Students need to get the right answer for the right reasons.
- Dwell on ambiguities. Often in academic work an issue can be complex or ambiguous. Remember that ambiguities can be instructive, so try to elicit them from your students.
- Elicit ideas. The use of language such as: “Can anyone help me with a solution to this issue/problem?” is important. Becoming a facilitator of ideas from others is critical. When students try to respond, be encouraging, assisting them and praising them for their contributions: “Mary, you have an answer?” (student answers) “Good point, but what do you mean by X?” (student responds with helpful prompts by tutor) “Excellent. Can anyone else think of an example for Mary’s point? Walter, what do you think?”
- Be friendly and accommodating. If you come across as haughty, aggressive or indifferent to students, they will likely say nothing.

Make sure that the comments given by all group members are understood by the whole class, and rephrase comments that are unclear to check for meaning.

**Maintaining a discussion**

Make sure the discussion keeps moving along and does not become repetitious or irrelevant. Some strategies:

- create a list of bullet points that need to be covered in case an idea or discussion dries up but do not be too prescriptive as a tutorial needs to cover a certain amount of material, but equally needs to be responsive to the needs of the students
- having too much content to cover means you will be tempted to cover the content as opposed to allowing students to fully explore issues for themselves – the emphasis should be on the latter, with an eye on the content as well
- make sure you finish the discussion within the agreed time limit as running overtime indicates a lack of organisational skills
- allow five minutes for a summary of the issues discussed, noting contributions from each of the members of the audience

**Fostering active learning**

Many students find it difficult to take an active part in tutorials and other group activities. However, contributions from the entire class are essential in a tutorial. Some students are either too shy or too nervous to say what they know, propose ideas or ask questions. Think about ways you can make such students feel comfortable.

**Working with international students**

Many English as a Second Language (ESL) students are often unfamiliar with argumentation in Western university culture and/or feel their English is not good enough. There are several ways to remedy these problems:
International students need to know the language of tutorials. Knowing what language to use when asking questions, agreeing, disagreeing or asking for further explanation can give students the confidence they need to say something and be understood (refer students to the CELT helpsheet Tutorials). It may help to use comments like: “I like the way you phrased that” to help alert students to appropriate language.

Remind them that communication is more than grammatical accuracy, and that often others in the group will not even notice grammatical mistakes if the message is clear.

Tutors need to be polite and positive without being too forceful or subjective. Tutors also need to monitor the contributions of other students in the group if they are dominating the conversation.

Students in a tutorial are expected to provide responses and listen. They should listen carefully to what is being said by others as well as giving their own opinions. In this way they play an active part in the discussion.

3. Six principles of effective teaching

There is a rich scholarship of teaching and learning that underpins much of the thinking, planning for, and facilitating tutorials in higher education contexts. The following six principles, while obviously not exhaustive, are an attempt to highlight some important elements of effective teaching as you start thinking about your first tutorial.

i. Interest and explanation

Where material is made interesting and engaging students will take pleasure in learning and thereby learn more effectively:

- Be creative. Think of the best teacher you ever had. What did they do that was so good? Try something similar in your class if possible.
- Think of ways to make the content interesting. Instead of asking students to read an article about Economic History for example, ask them to write and design a newspaper from the 18th century. What kind of information would it have in it related to economics?
- How can you run the class so that everyone is doing something? Mix up activities regularly.

ii. Concern and respect for students and their learning

Good teaching occurs when students are encouraged in their attempts to learn, where mistakes are genuinely seen as part of the learning process, and where students are given confidence that they can master the subject.

Staff accessibility is critical to student learning. Imagine that you have a class that is unresponsive and flat. They seem to lack confidence in completing the work. What would you do to engage and assist the students?
Some strategies:

- set simple in-class assignments that students can do with confidence, reward and praise their efforts, and then set the requirements a little higher
- find out from your students the best way for you to help them as they will appreciate your concern and respond accordingly
- make it clear making mistakes is part of learning (for example, you could start a tutorial by telling them you are going to make five mistakes in the next 40 minutes and get them to compete in groups to find what the mistakes are)
- set group work activities in which better students are matched with weaker students to initiate mentoring
- consider making yourself available for informal gatherings and social events to assist in galvanising group solidarity and support, but don’t go overboard – be sensitive to maintaining a professional relationship
- ask students to see you individually at a mutually agreeable time so you can talk to them in confidence and try to establish the problems they are having (this works well if you feel that certain students may be stressed or unengaged)
- go through model answers, reports, case studies and essays and discuss why they are good examples or bring in a range of examples from HD to Pass level models and ask students to rank them in groups, putting them in the position of examiner

iii. Appropriate assessment and feedback

While you do not have control over the assessment instruments which are used, you are able to provide genuinely helpful feedback on student work. This feedback can take many forms:

- written comments on essays or assignments
- tutorial review sessions
- a couple of minutes spent with each student in a tutorial while others are engaged in group work
- mid-semester informal teaching evaluation
- short interviews with students during the semester

iv. Clear goals and intellectual challenge

The intellectual challenge must be high enough to maintain students’ interest but not so high as to lose their interest altogether.

- encourage the weaker students to shine: praise their work when it is justified and use it as a model
- plan your sessions to include a variety of engaging activities which might include:
  - tasks that require more than just memorisation of subject content (for example, practical tasks such as fieldwork, summary and critiques of articles which are presented to the group, and formal debates)
  - making your class relevant to current issues and concerns (for example, regular discussions of articles from the *Australian Financial Review* and government
v. Independence, control and active engagement

Good teaching allows students a sense of control over their own learning. Clearly, there will be some limits to this in terms of course content and assessment requirements, but there should still be a degree of freedom.

- allow the class to function in small groups to achieve assessment aims, with elected roles such as spokesperson, scribe and researcher
- encourage students to think of creative ways of presenting assignments (where possible), for example, posters instead of essays, practical activities instead of reports or allowing them to find their own case studies in addition to the ones discussed in class
- encourage students to think of new topics to investigate (the main topic area could be interest rates, but students could be allowed to analyse the impact of this in relation to a company of their choosing)
- set up a competition in which students prepare a document which is peer reviewed by another group
- formal debates are good ways to learn from fellow students (see CELT student helpsheet Effective Debating)

vi. Learning from students

Knowledge about the students in your tutorials should be actively used to select and adapt teaching strategies. If students are not learning it is the teacher’s responsibility to do something about it. A good teacher is prepared to admit mistakes and then be willing to try something different.

- don’t be afraid to try new things but monitor them carefully (usually you can tell in an instant if the task or activity is not working so be prepared by having a ‘fall-back’ task)
- ask students what is working and what isn’t in class as a discussion or via a short anonymous written survey
- learn to read the body language and eyes of your students (obviously this involves practise and experience, but you need to be sensitive to these cues)

4. Other Strategies for successful tutorials

Make your own commitment and enthusiasm apparent from the start and assume that your students are also committed and excited about the subject. Thus, don’t enter a tutorial imagining students are there unwillingly. Here are some additional suggestions:

- Find a balance between clear structure and substance, coverage of the set materials, and the provision of a relaxed, informal and flexible discussion.
- Learn your students’ names. One way is to devise a mnemonic device to remember them. Another way is to put a folded A4 piece of paper in front of students and ask them to write down their names on it so that each student can see every other student’s name.
Collect this paper at the end of the tute and distribute them over the following week/s.

- At the start of a tutorial outline the direction you hope the tutorial will take. Note three or four main points to be covered in the tutorial on an overhead or on the board.
- Establish your expectation of the group in the first tutorial. If you intend there to be some small group discussion in most tutorials, make this clear at the start.
- Establish your expectations of student preparation (but do not overload students). Make it clear to students that regular tutorial attendance and preparation are a prerequisite for success.
- Divert attention away from you by thinking of strategies to start students talking. Ask students how they react to another student's response; listen to what they say and test other students' listening skills.
- Raise controversial issues and examples and relate the subject as far as possible to current events.
- Students too are responsible for the success of the tutorial. Your job is to provide support and direction. Though allowing silences to continue requires can be uncomfortable, it is a useful practice as silences point to the students’ responsibility and also provides feedback on their understanding.
- Seize ‘teachable moments’. If a relevant remark is made or a useful question raised, follow it up and stress its significance. Don't be wedded to a set of sequential points or set material that you must cover when there is a spontaneous opportunity for relevant and fertile discussion through which students can learn more effectively.
- Where a detailed set of tasks for each tutorial has been developed by the lecturer, ask students which aspects of the work they have found the most difficult and spend most of the time covering these.
- Students commonly complain about the difficulty of distinguishing the important from the unimportant. Therefore, make sure you demonstrate/elicit this, emphasising key ideas or concepts and cutting out unnecessary detail.
- Generate concept maps that demonstrate the interrelationship of key concepts displayed on an overhead. Alternatively, they can be produced through small group work and reviewed by you. Either way, they are extremely useful in establishing the relative importance of subject areas (see the CELT student helpsheet Concept Mapping for ideas).
- The use of assumptions is also of some concern to students who become dismissive of theory because the assumptions are seen to be unrealistic. Students need to understand the role of modelling and thus the need to make simplifying assumptions. It is important to address this issue early in the semester before an overwhelming degree of cynicism has time to develop.
- Economics involves learning techniques of analysis and ideas that are sometimes at odds with preconceived notions. These preconceptions are often difficult to change even in the face of substantial evidence. The key to achieving this change is to explicitly challenge these preconceptions. Two strategies which are often used are:
  i. ask the students if they agree with a particular theory/concept/policy prescription and/or ask them to criticise this theory/concept/policy
  ii. use syndicates or group learning to create situations where students must explain things to each other
5. A final word

Good tutoring is an art and the finer details are limitless in number. Hopefully you will have many years of successful tutoring experience to learn these skills. Use your first experience as a learning experience for you as much as the students.

Remember that while there are many variables involved in successful teaching you have a real opportunity to influence people in your class. Tutoring is in fact many ways more difficult than lecturing, but it can also be more rewarding. If you do a good job years from now students will remember you and the significant contribution you made to their lives.

References


A number of other sources were used in the development of this Tutor Training Guide series. Significant elements have been developed with the assistance of the Department of History Tutors’ Guide and John Fernald’s paper Taking Economics Tutorials from Harvard University. The CELT would like to acknowledge the contribution of Carol Johnston to earlier versions of this series.
How to Start Your First Tutorial

1. How to dress

New university tutors often wonder how to dress for work. The University of Melbourne does not have a specific policy or rule on how academic staff should dress. However, most people know that first impressions count and it would be a shame to get off on the wrong foot with students over a relatively minor issue such as appearance.

The most important advice about dress is to be yourself. For example, if you normally wear quite dressy clothes and feel comfortable doing so, there is no reason to change before you teach. You might feel more comfortable in smart casual clothes. This too is fine. The usual broad professional expectations apply in the Faculty – you should be clean, neat and generally well-presented.

2. How to prepare for the first class

New tutors are prone to over-preparation for their first class. This is not necessarily a bad thing. If you do this, it means you will have well and truly researched the material you will be teaching and have thought through many of the possible questions your students may ask. You might not need everything you have prepared for the first class but you may well be able to use it later.

Deciding what you should prepare depends on several factors. For example, what sort of tutorial are you teaching? Is it a collaborative problem solving one or another type? It can be helpful to look carefully at the subject outline and then put yourself in your students’ shoes. What will they be expecting in this context? Will they expect some activities followed by a Q&A session or to have some instruction followed by a few exercises? If you decide to do something other than what you think students will be expecting, then think about how you will explain this to students, and the reasons (usually educational) that you will give.

Try to remember not only to think about the material or content for the class but also the way in which you will teach that particular material. Will you use a group discussion? A small group activity and report back? A mini-lecture? A request for questions from students? Or something else? It might be helpful to speak to a senior staff member in your department about what usually happens in the sort of class you are teaching. Don’t be afraid to probe and ask lots of questions such as “What does ‘go over’ mean?” and “What do most tutors in this subject do in the first/second week?”.

As a new tutor, you should find notes a great help in your classes. It can be easy to get flustered and forget what you planned to do. Having some brief notes outlining your class plan can be helpful. See Appendix A for an example of a class plan proforma.

Below are some more detailed suggestions about the first class. In addition, you might like to consult other guides in the series.
3. Managing nerves

Nervousness, anxiety and worry are a common and perfectly healthy occurrence among new tutors. After all, you are doing something for the first time and while you are doing it, many people are going to be watching you – it would be unusual not to feel some trepidation about such a situation.

One of the best methods of managing nerves is adequate preparation. Ensuring you are fully prepared gives you a sense of confidence and back up. Even very experienced teachers and presenters ensure they prepare thoroughly. If you know the material and have thought about how you will share it with students, you are much less likely to feel nervous before or during your class.

Of course, adequate or even thorough preparation may not put you completely at ease. You may have to consciously manage your anxiety as the time for the first class approaches.

If you are feeling particularly anxious, before the class, take a minute or two to close your eyes and picture yourself out the front of the class you are about to teach. See yourself standing, relaxed and confident, in front of smiling students.

You might even like to visit the room where you will conduct your first class. Have a good look around, stand at the front and imagine the students in front of you, pace around, sit down – if the room is free for a while, do some reading or go over some of the notes you have prepared for the class. Relax, it is only a room. If you will be using overhead projectors or other technology, familiarise yourself with it before the class to reduce anxious fumbling in front of the class that will only make you more nervous.

Breathe deeply and slowly and carefully expel all the air from your lungs. This will provide much needed oxygen to your brain which you need to teach!

Finally, go to the bathroom before the class – you may not feel you need to but once the class starts, you may change your mind. This also gives you an opportunity to check your appearance and reassure yourself that you look fine.

Remind yourself that you were employed to tutor in this subject because somebody with authority thought you were good enough to do so. Remember when you were a student? You usually assumed that the person teaching had some idea of what they were doing; otherwise they wouldn’t have been employed.

Even if you feel temporarily that you do not know enough about the subject or topic, the students will have faith in you and your ability just because you are there. They will assume that you know what you are doing. Your students are unlikely to be watching you as closely as you are watching yourself so relax. If they are first year students, they may even be more nervous than you! Finally, remember to assure your students that you intend to have a great semester with them.
4. How to start the first class

Take introductions seriously

It might sound completely obvious but the first thing you should do in the first class is introduce yourself. Give students your full name – “Hello, I’m John Smith” – and indicate to them how you would like to be addressed, “Please call me John”. Write your full name on the whiteboard or on a blank overhead projector transparency and then underline the name by which you would like to be addressed:

John Smith

While you’re there, give them your office hours and your contact details and availability. For example:

John Smith.
Email: jsmith@unimelb.edu.au (allow 72 hours for reply)
Phone: (03) 8344 5555 (allow 72 hours for reply)
Office: Room 604, The Spot building (Mondays 3–5pm)

The second thing you should do is allow students the opportunity to introduce themselves to each other. Barrington (1998) suggests it is important to construct activities that help students to get to know each other and you so that they are not expected to work with or speak in front of strangers. He adds that an icebreaker can help create an atmosphere conducive to student involvement, activity and learning. An icebreaker is a gentle activity that can be used to help students to get to know each other and get to know you.

Such activities can also help lessen any tension or anxiety that may be present, especially in the first session. Your tutorial group can then begin its work for the semester with a friendly, positive tone. Some commonly used ones include:

Partner interview

Invite students to briefly interview the student next to them (one-two minutes only) and find out their name and something about them. A summary of this information can then be relayed back to the group by the interviewer (students are often keener to talk about a partner than about themselves).

Group bonding

Ask students to form groups of three or four and spend a few minutes finding out what they have in common with each other. At the end of the allocated time, they report to the other groups what they have discovered they have in common. This works extremely well in getting people relaxed and talking informally.
Talking about names

Ask everyone to introduce themselves and talk about their first name and how they view it; how their parents chose it; their feelings about it; abbreviations of it; and whether they would have preferred another name. Because of the time this takes, it works best for smaller groups.

Sticky labels

Give each student a sticky label and on it get them to write their name and three facts about themselves (e.g. birth month, favourite subject or hobby). After attaching the label to themselves they have to find someone in the room that has a label with some similarity to theirs. They can then tell each other a little about themselves, which may or may not be shared with the larger group.

Say something about assessment

Do you remember when you were a student? Do you remember what aspect of each subject was your primary interest? If you’re among the majority of undergraduate students, it was probably the assessment. Most students want to know fairly early on what the assessment tasks are and when they are due.

Acknowledge this by at least outlining the assessment tasks and asking them to note critical dates for assignments; the policy for extensions and/or special consideration and your availability outside the details given earlier (you may not be available outside these hours – make this clear to the students now). Encourage students to start preparation for assignments and exams now, ask questions and seek clarification early.

It is useful in the first session to briefly go over some of the essential assessment information that they need to know to successfully complete the subject. Specific aspects that are usually useful to discuss:

- the overall assessment schedule
- due dates for assignments
- issues around plagiarism
- departmental policy on, and process for getting extensions and/or special consideration
- weighting of assessment tasks
- how students can access past exam papers

Allow opportunities for students to ask questions about the assessment.

Set the ground rules

Most groups function better when there is a clear understanding of the rules. If this shared understanding is not established in a small group setting such as in a tutorial at university, students can become very confused and this can affect their decisions to participate.

Establishing clear ground rules or expectations for student behaviour for your small group is therefore
very important, and may prevent problems from developing. It might even be possible to negotiate the
ground rules with the group, although you may have some that are not negotiable. Discuss expectations
about what will go on in the class. It is a good idea to record the ground rules agreed on so they can be
referred to later, if necessary (Barrington, 1998).

Below are a few suggestions for ground rules/expectations – they are not exhaustive and you may
prefer to develop your own for a particular group and subject. It will probably be fruitful to spend a few
minutes discussing each with the students.

• do adequate preparation for each tutorial and be on time
• contribute by speaking, listening and encouraging others to speak
• be conscious that some of us have better English language skills than others and encourage each
  other to develop these skills
• don’t interrupt each other
• respect each other's points of view, even when we strongly disagree
• take risks and allow ourselves to be wrong at times
• no put-downs of others (even as a joke)

Students are able to access many specific student guides from the CELT. For example, the helpsheet
‘Tutorials’ explains how tutorials work, expectations of students and how students can get the best out
of their tutorials.

Ask for questions

Ask the students to share their concerns or questions at this point. See the guide *Tutorial Questioning
Technique* for more advice on asking questions and handling student responses.

Be enthusiastic

Research demonstrates that teachers who are enthusiastic about their subject matter can both enthuse
students about the material and leave a lasting impression on them. Think about your favourite
university teacher – did he or she drag themselves in and talk non-stop each week while staring at the
back wall, never making eye contact with students, never mind actively involving them in the classes?
Unlikely. More likely, the best teacher you had was motivated, energetic and passionate – use that
person as a role model for your tutoring.

5. Frequently Asked Questions

What if I don’t know the answer to a question?

Every tutor has been asked questions to which they do not know the answers. Try the following:

• acknowledge that the question is a good one: smile and say, “Great question”
• be honest – tell them that you do not know the answer: “I’m not sure about the answer to this
  one but will follow up for you next week” and ensure that you do what you have promised
• ask the other students for input: “Does anyone here know the answer?”
• suggest that both you and the students find the answer: “Let’s all find out the answer to that question and we’ll pool our answers next week and see what we come up with”
• make the point that many academic questions don’t have definitive answers and that this is what makes academic work interesting, important and challenging (and students can be part of this process of discovery)

What if no-one does any preparation?

Unfortunately, not every student will do all the required preparation every week but you can set an expectation that they will do, for example, some preparation most weeks.

Alternatively, you can explain that if some students choose to do little or no work between classes, they are likely to both learn less and do more poorly in assessments than their colleagues who have worked harder. Ask them to commit to undertaking one hour of reading/preparation between this week and next so that the class can discuss/work on that material.

Ultimately, the responsibility for student learning lies with your students – not you. A student’s responsibilities are to: prepare for classes; participate actively in them; and reflect on and study the material provided. As the tutor, your responsibilities are to: prepare and facilitate the best classes you possibly can; provide engaging and interesting activities in tutorials; answer questions; provide feedback; and point students to useful references and other resources.

Remember that you cannot make a student prepare – you can only do your best to encourage them to do so. Also, for those students who have not made the effort to do the preparation don’t simply go through the material again. This wastes the time of those who have prepared. Encourage students to use the services of Academic Skills if you feel they may have difficulties with their learning and study skills: http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills.

What if one student dominates?

Having one student who has an answer to nearly every question (even if it is not a very good answer) and who is keen to share their wisdom with others is sometimes a challenge for tutors. One subtle method of discouraging too many contributions from just one student is to stand, sit beside or behind the person, and thereby make it difficult for them to make eye contact with you or otherwise indicate they want to speak. Another method is to directly ask another student for a contribution when seeking student input.

Sometimes a more direct approach is needed:

“Thanks Derek, you’ve made a couple of very valuable contributions already, could we hear from someone we haven’t heard from yet?”

“Does anyone besides Melissa have a comment to make at this point?”
Ensure you are polite and respectful and do not embarrass the dominant student or react defensively as they are often unaware of their dominating behaviour.

Build on an aggressive student’s contribution where you can, so that you do not risk stifling discussion. You may ask other students to react to an assertion or criticism, for example.

If there is a small group that dominates in some way, seek to break this up, for example, by spending part of the tutorial in randomly assigned small group work. Try to involve the others in the discussion by putting value on their contributions.

**What if the students won’t participate?**

Student non-participation can turn the best-planned tutorial into a non-event. Preparation and setting expectations are important here. Ensure you have a balanced mix of activities so that a variety of learning styles are catered for and the tutorial does not become a mini-lecture where students adopt a passive approach. The issue of facilitating participation is covered in detail in the guide *Encouraging Student Participation*.

Many students are shy or passive. Try to pitch questions at a medium level so that all will be able to answer. Reassure the shy students that you value what they are saying by concentrating carefully on them, showing by your demeanour that you are listening, and using their ideas or phrases in the next question. Empower passive students by building their confidence: keep openings for them, use other people’s opinions to give a lead or ask an easy question to encourage them to continue once they have spoken.

You might use aids such as a quotation, or extract from an article or a text to help passive students contribute by having something in front of them. Or you might ask them to give a small summary of a text, which is less intimidating than requiring an opinion.

Very often students, particularly at first-year level, read passively and have difficulty translating their reading to more active situations. They have read the material but can not find the words to say something. Suggest that they jot a few headings down before each tutorial that will help their recall with the reading. Ask them to consider how they approach their reading. Do they approach it with a question? What were they looking for? Remind them to highlight key points and take notes. Suggest that they read twice, skimming the first time, and then concentrating more the second.

**What if international students do not contribute?**

Sometimes international students and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) students are reluctant to speak because they fear their language or accent will lead them to be misunderstood or laughed at. Encourage all students to contribute through the ground rules and expectations you set. Learn your students’ names and gently ask individual students for their opinion or contribution:
“Henry, what do you think of this issue?”
“Mai, what is your view on what Naomi has just said?”

Alternatively ask general questions to the group that the international students may be better able to answer:

“Can anyone give an example from another country or culture of where this concept applies?”
“Does anyone know of a country where this does not happen?”

Ensure you thank all students for their input. See the guide *Teaching International Students in Tutorials*.

**What if a student says something offensive?**

This is best avoided by including something in your ground rules or expectations that proactively discourage such contributions. However, if a student does say something offensive, the best thing to do in this situation is to immediately make a statement that indicates you will not tolerate such comments. You must ensure that you do not engage in a debate with the student who has been offensive or do anything that might further inflame the situation. Be polite but firm. Try something like:

“While you are entitled to your opinion, I cannot allow comments like that in this class as some people may find them offensive. Please respect the views of all students when you make a comment.”

Move on quickly. If the student protests, tell them that you are happy to discuss this situation further after class but that you do not want to take class time away from his/her fellow students. Generally, such occurrences are very rare but it is best to be prepared.

**How do I know the students are following what I am saying?**

The simple answer to this question is: ask the students if they understand. However, it is a little more complex than it seems. If you ask students bluntly, “Do you understand?”, you are likely to get polite nods, silence and averted eyes. Many students will not have the courage to tell you they have no idea what you have been talking about. Try these instead (and note that these all assume the students will not understand):

- “This is complex. What are your questions so far?”
- “OK, that’s enough from me for now. Tell me what you are unclear about and we’ll go over it before we move on.”
- “Most people find this concept difficult. Quickly write a question on a scrap of paper and throw it into this box. I’ll pick a few out and we’ll answer them together.”
- At the end of a class: “This was difficult material. Take a scrap of paper and write down the point you are most unclear about. We’ll deal with these in next week’s class”.
• Show that you too are struggling with an idea (even if it is, in reality, perfectly clear). Engage them in the process of assisting you. “I don’t get it! Why is this the right answer?” Feigning lack of understanding makes them see that tutors are learning too.

What if all the materials are covered and I have time to spare?

• ask the students whether they have any questions and if they do, seek answers from the class – do not feel that you have to answer.
• you might review a difficult part of the topic
• you could give them a quick quiz, for example going round the class asking each student to state one puzzle or question which they still have about the tutorial work (whatever you do, do not finish early!)

What if I run out of time for all the groups to report back?

With a bit of experience, this probably will not happen. Divide the tasks up between groups to ensure complex tasks are shared equally. It is important that all of the tasks given in a tutorial are covered.

Some general advice:

• Push the students to complete tasks: “You now have 10 minutes left”, “Five minutes to go”, Make sure that every question is answered, even if only in dot points. Walk around the room assisting and exerting subtle pressure.
• Set manageable tasks. It is important that students have a sense of accomplishment from each tutorial, and not a sense of being overwhelmed with the complexity of something. Bite-sized, incremental steps in their learning are critical. If you are finding that the task you set is proving too hard, change tack: “OK, I want everyone to concentrate only on problem three for now. We will do the rest later”.
• Ask them to divide up tasks within their groups: Person A answers the first part, Person B the second, etc.

6. A final word

First tutorials rarely go perfectly. More likely, your first tutoring experience will be a mixture of successes and imperfections that will help you improve with practice.

Becoming an excellent tutor takes time. It also takes an individual commitment to engage in a continuous process of reflection, refinement and improvement. Successful university teachers will tell you that the rewards of teaching make this commitment worthwhile.
References


Much of the material in this booklet has been adapted from:

Further reading


Appendix A: Lesson Plan

At the end of this tutorial students will be able to:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity and objectives</th>
<th>Tutor activities</th>
<th>Student activities</th>
<th>Evidence of objective met and tutor reflection</th>
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<td>Tutor reflection after the tutorial</td>
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<td>What went really well in this tutorial?</td>
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<td>What do you feel was a challenge with this tutorial and how would you improve next time?</td>
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Appendix B: Sample Lesson Plan

ECON10005 QM1 | Week: 1
--- | ---
At the end of this tutorial students will be able to:
1. discuss the nature of these tutorials, working with other students and the need to do the preparation questions
2. locate subject guide including the subject objectives, generic skills, and assessment details
3. state the purpose of the pink and blue sheets
4. describe the difference between descriptive and inferential statistics
5. calculate summation equations
6. identify sampling and population issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity and objectives</th>
<th>Tutor activities</th>
<th>Student activities</th>
<th>Evidence of objective met and tutor reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3.15 – 3.20 (5 mins) | Opening activity Obj 1 | • Put matching activity sheet on desk, one per group of 4/5 student  
• If desks need rearranging into groups ask students as they come in to do that  
• If students don’t start activity, may have to tell them about it  
• Some students may be late if they are First Years and get lost | • Students come in and work on matching activity with people they are sitting with  
• Students rearrange desks if needed | • Tutorial starts on time  
• Students sit and work in groups with other students |
| 3.20 – 3.30 (10 mins) | Introductions and room arrangement Obj 1 | • Ask students to stop activity now and formally start the tutorial  
• Introduce myself  
• Ask for answers to the matching activity  
• Introduce Sebastian Thrun and Salman Khan  
• Ask students to introduce themselves to each other in their group and to say one interesting thing about themselves, that groups nominate a spokesperson and that in 5 mins the spokesperson for each group will stand up and say one thing about themselves and one interesting thing about each person in the group | • Students offer answers to matching activity  
• Students introduce themselves to each other in their group and say one interesting thing about themselves  
• Students decide who will be the spokesperson  
• Spokesperson for each group to say one thing about themselves and about each member of their group | • Matching activity is completed  
• All students appear to be sharing about themselves to their group  
• Something is mentioned about each member of each group |
| 3.30 – 3.35 (5 mins) | Subject overview  
Obj 2 & 3 | Explain that in this subject tutorials are mostly discussion based and students work with other students on the tutorial material  
The preparation for tutorials in often used in the tutorial so it is important to come prepared to each tutorial | Show students a subject guide  
Present the subject objectives, generic skills and assessment on the o/head  
Explain the pink and blue sheets and ask students to hold up their blue sheet for tutorial 1  
Highlight (put on o/head) the objectives for today’s tutorial | Students take out their subject guide  
Students ask questions if they have any about the tutorials, the subject, the assessment | Students have subject guide with them  
Most students are able to hold up the blue sheet |
| 3.35 – 3.45 (10 mins) | Tutorial Q1 - prep  
Q2c  
Obj 1, 3 & 4 | Ask students to take out their preparation questions and to open at their answers to Q2c (some will not have done the preparation)  
Put the activity sheet up on o/head  
Hand out one activity sheet for prep Q2c to each group (one per group)  
Ask students to share their answers with each member of their group and then to make some dot point answers on the activity sheet (the scribe should be different to the earlier spokesperson)  
Walk around the groups listening to the discussion and looking at the dot points  
Ask a question or make a point to each group at least once, look for any misconceptions  
When each group seems to have a good set of dot point answers, list a few to the whole class | Students open their preparation answers  
Share answers with group members  
Nominate someone to write on the activity sheet  
Discuss the answers and decide on some dot point answer to write on the sheet  
Students ask tutor questions or for clarification on anything as tutor is wandering around the groups | Students have completed the preparation questions  
I notice that discussion in groups is on task with each member contributing | Students respond if I ask questions to individual groups |
| 3.45 – 3.51 (6 mins) | Tutorial Q2b  
Obj 1, 3 & 4 | Put up statements from Q2b on the o/head  
Ask students to discuss in their groups for 2 mins | Students discuss answers to Q2b  
Students respond to each question by raising a coloured card  
Students discuss when there is | I notice discussion in groups is on task with each member contributing  
Students are ready to respond to |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity Details</th>
<th>Disproportion of Answers by Perhaps Justifying Their Answers</th>
<th>Each Question by Raising a Card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.51 – 3.56</td>
<td><strong>Tutorial Q2a - prep Q5</strong>&lt;br&gt;Obj 1, 3 &amp; 6&lt;br&gt;<strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Students discuss where there are disagreements and justify their answer&lt;br&gt;Students pose alternative answers if appropriate</td>
<td>Students have done the preparation questions&lt;br&gt;Discussion is on track with each member contributing&lt;br&gt;Answer is written in full on activity sheet&lt;br&gt;Each member puts their name on the activity sheet&lt;br&gt;If questions are asked other students offer answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.56 – 4.08</td>
<td><strong>Tutorial Q3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Obj 4&lt;br&gt;<strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Students open their answers to prep Q5&lt;br&gt;Students share their answers with each other&lt;br&gt;Select a scribe&lt;br&gt;Write an agreed answer to their question which is circled&lt;br&gt;Students each put their name on the activity sheet&lt;br&gt;Students ask questions if they have any</td>
<td>Students are reading the activity statement and seem to be considering responses&lt;br&gt;All students have a response to share&lt;br&gt;Each group has 5 unique responses&lt;br&gt;A good list of responses is given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4.08 – 4.10 Summary | and to write them down, each group should have 5 responses  
- Groups to share responses to whole class till there are no new unique responses  
- Pose questions if any responses require it, ask for clarification from any group, probe if some responses not given  
- Have students put their names on the activity sheet and let them know it will be collected and handed back if not sure about a response  
- Ask questions of tutor if any  
- Groups hand in their activities and collect prep question for tutorial 2  
- Students ask questions if they have any  
- Completed activities are received from each group | if not sure about a response  
- Ask questions of tutor if any  
- by during the whole class sharing  
- Students ask good questions and others respond |
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Tutor reflection after the tutorial</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What went really well in this tutorial?</strong></td>
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Tutorial Questioning Techniques

A key component in the success of discussions in your tutorials lies in your ability as a tutor to ask and answer questions effectively. The questions you ask, the way you ask them, the people of whom you ask them, and the times you ask them, may open up or inhibit discussion. It is therefore a good idea to familiarise yourself with various questioning strategies and techniques.

Good questions generate good discussion. Questioning is a key facilitation skill for small group leaders. Lively and focussed discussions are more likely to take place if your questions are well planned and aligned with the purposes of the class.

1. Why is asking questions important?

To learn effectively students need to learn actively, and one way to encourage active learning is to ask questions. Good questioning skills are one of the most important yet also the most difficult teaching techniques to develop. Effective questioning will enable you to:

- gain an insight into your students’ level of understanding
- develop the communication skills of your students
- extend students’ analytical and critical thinking skills
- develop a relationship with your students
- provide recognition and reward to students

While questioning is one of the best ways to get discussion going, the most common error in questioning is not allowing students enough time to consider their responses. However, there are a number of ways that you can improve your questioning technique. Importantly, analyse the types of questions that you ask and think carefully about your own teaching. It can be helpful to have a critical friend, colleague or someone from the CELT observe your teaching and then provide constructive feedback, as it is easy to get absorbed in class and not really notice what you are doing.

You need to develop an environment in which students feel comfortable with questions and expect to be asked them. Asking “why?” or “how?” enables students to figure things out for themselves and so learn better. Asking good questions also puts the responsibility for learning back with the students, enhancing their autonomy and facilitating participation.

2. Planning ahead

Include the preparation of questions in your planning. Plan the questions for each section of the class well in advance. Think about the structure of your questions and their purpose. Is the aim of the question to:

- uncover misunderstandings?
• encourage further questions?
• enable students to think about a particular issue?
• display a right answer?

Think also about how you will word the question. Consider whether it is a question you will ask the whole class, pairs of students or named individuals.

3. Types of questions

Educationists have identified two main types of questions: closed/lower-order and open-ended/higher-order. Dawson (1998, p. 28) notes that:

lower-order questions ask students to recall, define and describe; that is, to provide facts. Higher-order questions require them to perform interpretive rather than descriptive tasks. They may be asked to analyse, compare, evaluate or synthesise; to rank, hypothesise, design or predict. Good questioning leans towards the open-ended and higher-order forms as much as possible.

Closed questions usually require only one possible answer such as “yes” or “no”.

Open questions often begin with the words “what”, “when”, “where”, “why” or “how”. They can ask for an explanation, an elaboration or an example. They can ask to explore strengths and weaknesses or possible problems. They can consider “what if…”.

The following list offers some examples of different types of questioning, from ones simply requiring answers to those demanding more thought. The list has been adapted from Davis (1993) and McKeachie (1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factual or exploratory</th>
<th>Probe facts and basic knowledge and allow little opportunity for dissent e.g. “what” questions or definitions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Examine assumptions, conclusions and interpretations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational or comparative</td>
<td>Ask for comparisons of themes, ideas or issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Probe motives or causes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Call for a conclusion or action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connective or causal effect</td>
<td>Ask for causal relationships between ideas, actions or events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>Expand the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical or problem-based</td>
<td>Pose a change in the facts or issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority or evaluative</td>
<td>Seek to identify the most important issue, or make a judgement on the relative value of two points being compared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Elicit syntheses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

asking open-ended questions like “what”, “when”, “where”, “why” and “how” questions can bring a range of responses which might not necessarily have been anticipated by yourself
• don’t rely solely on questions with yes/no or single word answers
• ask conceptual as well as factual questions
• ask probing questions:
  o “why are we doing it this way?”
  o “what would happen if...?”
  o “what does this mean?”
  o “what are some alternatives to this (or problems with this)?”
  o “what kind of evidence do you need to support that argument?”
• ask broad questions that encourage students to participate: “what do you think about this?” , “how do you think we might go about this?”
• a question like “how does the idea that _____ apply to _____?” is much more likely to stimulate discussion than “what is the answer to Question 16?”
• ask questions that check students’ understanding by requiring them to explain, recap or summarise
• use interpretive questions (connective, cause and effect or comparative questions) and evaluative or critical questions (requiring a judgement to be made)
• ask questions that identify what students know and how much preparation they have done so that they know you take an interest in their learning

Examples of levels of questioning

Questions can be asked at a number of levels and each is suitable for a different stage of learning.

• **Definitional**: definitions, concepts, principles, formulas, elicited by questions such as “what is the formula for...?”
• **Comprehension**: elicited by questions such as “what does...mean?” , “explain...”, “give an example of...”
• **Application**: using information in a new context to solve a problem or answer a question elicited by questions such as “how does the law of supply and demand explain the increase in the price of ... in this situation?”
• **Analysis**: breaking something into its constituent parts and explaining the relationship can be encouraged by questions such as “what factors have contributed to the falling Australian dollar?”
• **Synthesis**: putting parts together to form a new pattern, e.g. “how are long and short-term consumer loan interest rates related to the prime rate?”
• **Evaluation**: uses a set of specified criteria to arrive at a reasoned judgement. An example of this is “how successful will an income tax cut be in controlling inflation and decreasing unemployment?”

4. Questioning strategies

Physical setting

• It is much easier to ask and answer questions if students can hear and see each other and you. You may want to arrange the chairs into a circle or half circle. Alternatively, arrange
the furniture into small groups so students can see each other.
• In a large room, move about the space, and use a roving microphone if required. If you are stuck up the front of the room it is much more difficult to ask questions that will actually get a response.

Listening skills

Good questioning technique is as much about listening as it is about speaking:
• do not interrupt, even if a student is heading towards an incorrect answer as you want to create an atmosphere that encourages participation.
• ask the student for clarification if you do not understand
• clearly listen as the student is responding (sometimes tutors are confident that they know the answers themselves so they are not really interested in what students have to say)
• show that you are listening by maintaining eye contact and nodding

Wait-time

One factor that can have a powerful effect on student participation is the amount of time a tutor pauses between asking a question and doing something else (e.g. calling on a student or reworking the question). Research on classroom questioning and information processing indicates that students need at least three seconds to comprehend a question, consider the available information, formulate an answer, and begin to respond. In contrast, the same research established that on average a classroom teacher allows less than one second of wait-time.

• ask a question and then wait just slightly longer than feels comfortable before moving on to another student or giving a prompt
• waiting can increase the complexity of the answer, the number of unsolicited responses and the number of questions asked by students
• waiting should decrease the number of students who fail to respond when called upon

Handling student responses

An important aspect of classroom interaction is the manner in which you handle student responses. When you ask a question, students can either respond, ask a question or give no response. If the student responds or asks a question, you can use one of the following recommended questioning strategies: Reinforce, probe, refocus or redirect. If the student does not respond you can use either a rephrase or redirecting strategy.

• Positive reinforcement. Praise students for their responses and remember to smile and nod.
• Probe to gain an extended response.
• Redirect. When a student responds to a question or asks a question, you can ask another student to respond. One purpose of this is to enable more students to participate and remove reliance on you as the tutor. This strategy can also be used to allow a student to correct another student’s incorrect response.
Encouraging participation

- speak in a friendly tone of voice
- make sure that the question is at a level suitable for your class
- use student names so that you invite them to participate (ask the question first and then call the student’s name to avoid the rest of the class ‘tuning out’)
- avoid using a pattern when asking questions (i.e. the order of seating or the list of names on the attendance record) as students will then only listen when it is close to their turn to answer
- avoid repeating student responses too much because if you repeat what students have said all the time they will listen to you rather than to other students
- aim to ask questions of all students, not just the confident students or those sitting up the front of the class
- give students an opportunity to ask questions
- do not use “any questions?” as your only form of feedback from students as sometimes students are so confused they cannot even formulate a question (in addition, many students will not participate because they do not want to make mistakes in front of their peers)
- break questions into steps: “what are we going to do first?” or “what do we do next?” If a student struggles with an answer, break the question into simpler parts or give them suggestions rather than just giving up on them
- ask a question and allow students time to jot down and/or discuss the answers
- be prepared to investigate alternatives proposed by students – if they are wrong, explore why and how they are wrong and be interested in divergent views
- avoid display questions that give the message: “I know something that you don’t know and you’ll look stupid if you don’t guess right”.

References


Further reading


of Auckland, New Zealand.


A number of other sources were used in the development of the guide series. Significant elements have been developed with the assistance of the *Department of History Tutors’ Guide* and John Fernald’s paper *Taking Economics Tutorials* from Harvard University.

The CELT would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Carol Johnston to earlier versions of this series.
Encouraging Student Participation in Tutorials

1. What we know

Research in cognitive psychology suggests that memory is affected by how deeply we process new knowledge (McKeachie, 1999). Listening, repeating or copying is insufficient to store information in such a way that it can be retrieved. What we need to do is link a new idea to other concepts, to talk about it, explain, summarise, have a go ourselves and question information. In other words, to learn effectively, students need to think actively about information and situate it amongst their prior learning.

Participation in a tutorial is valuable because it helps students to:

- develop and test their own understanding
- clarify material presented in lectures
- discuss and analyse key texts, theories and/or concepts
- apply general concepts to the solution of specific problems
- think deeply about various aspects of a topic or problem
- define new problems and seek solutions to them
- develop communication skills – the ability to practice as a subject specialist and work with others
- develop a critical approach to inquiry, debate and discussion

2. Your role

It is up to you as the tutor to create an atmosphere in which students are able to participate. Many students expect to be passive. They may not join in for a number of reasons: they may be bored, have not done the work or be afraid of public embarrassment. There is no one strategy, rather, you should draw on a number of techniques to develop more active participation in your tutorials.

One possible strategy is to ask students to form small groups or pairs for part of the tutorial. This can help reduce students’ fear of making mistakes in front of all their peers. If students have had a chance to discuss a problem before they are required to answer a question to the whole group, the risk may be reduced. A friendlier, more trusting environment will therefore be created and students should feel more confident about the material they may be required to discuss.

3. Things that inhibit participation

- doing all the talking yourself (i.e. giving a ‘mini-lecture’)
- racing through problems at break-neck speed, leaving students just passively copying from the board
• asking a question and then giving the answer yourself
• making students feel stupid.

4. Encouraging participation (A 10-point plan)

i. Set up of the room

Feel free to move the furniture around prior to the start of the tutorial. Straight rows of chairs and tables do not facilitate participation, however having tables arranged in a circle or semi-circle can. Tables arranged into small groups also encourage students to talk to each other rather than always directing the conversation towards you. It’s also important to spend some time sitting down at the same level as your students and interacting with smaller groups.

ii. Introductions

The first tutorial is probably the most important as it establishes (a) relationships and (b) ground rules that are the basis for subsequent classes. Introduce yourself carefully, write your name on the board, tell students how you like to be addressed and write down your contact details and consultation times. This is particularly important for students whose first language is not English.

Let students know that you are pleased and excited to be teaching this subject (enthusiasm is an important aspect of successful teaching). Discuss expectations so that they are clear from the outset. If you explain how the tutorial will be run and your reasons for this, you will not have to put as much effort into managing expectations later in the semester.

iii. Icebreakers

Well constructed icebreakers help to lessen any tension that may be present in the first session, so the group can begin its work for the semester in a friendly, positive atmosphere. A quick search in Google will retrieve lots of ideas, however there are some commonly used icebreakers included in the guide *How to Start the First Tutorial*.

iv. Learn student names

This is a very useful skill and makes students feel valued. It is also very helpful when asking (and answering) questions to refer to students by name. If you have difficulty remembering names, provide name labels and ask students to wear sticky labels or use paper tents on the tables (a folded A4 piece of paper with the student’s name written on one side). You should collect the paper and redistribute before each class to help you to remember.
v. Ground rules

Most groups function better when there is a clear understanding of the rules. If this shared understanding is not established in a small group setting such as in a tutorial at university, students can become very confused and this can affect their participation.

Below are a few suggestions for ground rules/expectations – they are not exhaustive and you may prefer to develop your own for a particular group and subject. It will probably be fruitful to spend a few minutes discussing each with the students. Ideas for example ground rules are also included in the guide *How to Start the First Tutorial*.

vi. Orientating students to learning

Students attending small tutorials, labs and/or other small groups often arrive from different parts of the University, from home or, increasingly, work, and it is helpful for them to be oriented to the session or topic. Consider starting small group sessions with an orientation exercise to focus students on their learning. For example:

- ask students to reflect on the past couple of lectures and write down either a question that they would like answered or a comment about the content of these classes – these questions/comments could then be selected at random and discussed by the whole group
- ask students for an overview of what was covered in the last lecture
- ask each student to share one fact, idea, concept, question or anything at all related to the subject that they have learnt recently
- put an issue/item on an overhead transparency or on a handout with students in pairs or small groups either discussing key points, finding mistakes or identifying what information is needed to solve the problem – ensure the exercise is quick and useful
- raise a relevant issue that has recently been in the media and ask students for their views
- ask students if they have any concerns about the previous week’s material

vii. Small groups and pair work

Students often find it easier to speak to other students in small groups rather than in front of the whole class. They may also be more comfortable asking questions of peers in a small group setting. In a small group students are also more engaged with the material.

viii. Avoid the traditional model

The traditional model with the tutor or teacher at the front giving a mini-lecture is something we are all very familiar with, and for many students, it is what they expect. However, if you want to encourage participation and students to think, you need to use other modes of teaching. Group work, pair work, quizzes, games, students presenting answers, and student use of the whiteboard and overhead projector, are all ways of avoiding the traditional model. The aim is to take the focus away from you and direct it onto the students.
ix. Questioning technique

Effective and varied questioning techniques are central to facilitating participation. The guide *Tutorial Questioning Techniques* is devoted to this topic.

x. Reflect and evaluate

Reflect about the ways in which you have attempted to facilitate participation and act on your reflections. A key characteristic of effective teachers is their ability and willingness to continually evaluate how effectively their teaching enables student learning to occur and then to make adjustments where necessary.

5. Tutor attitude

- be polite, friendly and committed to the class
- demonstrate your interest in, and enthusiasm for, the material
- learn and use students’ names
- elicit what students already know
- clearly explain the organisation of your tutorial as students may have other expectations
- focus on guiding the processes and applying the theories rather than just giving answers, encouraging students to be part of the process
- find out where students’ problems and misconceptions lie and encourage them to ask questions
- create an atmosphere where students feel safe and interested enough to want to participate, take risks and learn from mistakes
- move around the room as students are working as staying stationary up the front can create a divide between you and the students
- as you move around the room, talk, sit down and get to know your students and encourage questions
- listen to what students say, praising, responding and taking their contributions seriously
- as tutors are the most common monopolisers of talking time in classrooms, aim to reduce your own talking time
- try to have every student participate at least once in every tutorial (even if it is only minimal) where reasonable.
- discuss your teaching with a colleague.

6. Student activities

- explain to students why participation is important to their learning and how it will help at the beginning of the semester and remind students throughout the semester
- use small group or pair work (even if it is not set out on the teaching plan) – get them to solve a problem or discuss an issue together
- divide questions between groups and ask students to present the answers to the rest of the class
• have students work on questions using overhead sheets so that their answers are easy to present
• organise activities so that students write the answers to a tutorial problem on the board (and then justify them) – this moves the focus away from you and onto the students, is more interesting and educationally valuable for them, and less exhausting for you!
• use group games or quick quizzes
• ask students to bring a written question to class or email you a question which you will address to encourage two-way dialogue between you and the students and without putting students on the spot

References


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Further reading


Teaching International Students

1. What is involved?

International students - like all students - value and appreciate tutors with a range of skills and attributes. In particular, they value tutors who are good communicators. They also appreciate tutors who are interested in them and concerned for their welfare. In what follows some key principles are outlined, that while having particular efficacy for international students, are also generally applicable to other students.

2. Delivery and informal English

Imagine yourself in a classroom where the instructor for the day – an Anglo-Saxon Australian – enters the room and, for the next 50 minutes, speaks only in an entirely new language to you – say, Swahili, Hebrew or Finnish. Not a single word of English is uttered.

Even if the instructor was being extremely helpful, the class would still feel lost and uncomfortable. They would grapple hopelessly with phrases to introduce themselves, terms for ‘big’, ‘small’, ‘thin’, ‘fat’, colours and basic number vocabulary. The self-confidence of the class participants would be dealt a blow, and their admiration for students from non-English speaking countries enhanced considerably.

Imagine further that you are fairly advanced in the language in question, but the instructor does not use terms and expressions that you learned at school. Instead, they use slang, technical phrases and idiomatic expressions. They speak very fast, despite your requests to slow down. You would probably be shocked. You studied this language hard at school and did well. You fully expected to begin your studies with a strong grounding in the language of study. You did not expect to face the problem of not being able to understand tutors.

International students do not want special treatment in terms of how you deliver your tutorials. Their English is already quite good. However, they do appreciate:

• avoidance (or at least minimised use) of slang, colloquial or idiomatic phrases, and where such language is used, explanations of its meaning
• explaining any relevance to local issues or concerns which could only be understood by residents, e.g., footy tipping
• avoiding a rambling, very fast or muffled delivery
• clear articulation of ideas and structure of presentation
• visual aids to reinforce material presented in class

Initially, it may take international students some time to understand your particular accent. You will need to be sensitive to this. The first few weeks are critical as students will form an impression of you quickly. In particular, try not to begin with a chatty, jokey, informal style or use local slang (you may be amazed how often you use slang or informal English when your attention is drawn to it).
Instead, use simple sentences and deliberate structuring devices to make it clear where you have been and where you are going. For example:

“Last time we met, we looked at X. (pause) Today’s lecture will be about Y. I want to outline three main things today. (pause) The first is.... (pause) Now let’s move on to the first point.”

This kind of language helps everyone in the audience understand you. It is particularly helpful for international students who often have to translate between languages, at least when they first arrive. Keep your sentences short and clear, pause a lot, and use deliberate transition signals:

“That’s point number two. (pause) Now let’s move on to the next point, number three.”

Remember to face the audience (not the whiteboard or your notes), use body language (such as gestures and facial expressions) and deliver your message in a well-structured manner (with a clear beginning, middle and end). It is just good teaching sense – and it works. Although these points may seem obvious, they are frequently ignored and can be a source of unnecessary anxiety among many international students.

3. Stereotyping

You may be tempted to culturally stereotype your students. This is natural but can be dangerous, and is best avoided. The cultural, linguistic and social differences between people from the Chinese Diaspora (the PRC, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan) are as vast as the differences between Australians, Scots, English, Irish, Americans and Canadians.

Malaysian and Indonesian students of Chinese descent, for example, are often English-educated and have no knowledge of languages such as Mandarin or Cantonese, whilst there are similarities amongst the cultures of these students too, they can be outweighed by the differences. Students from Hong Kong, India or Singapore, for example, are generally very comfortable in the Western academic environment in Australia (being former colonies, the academic expectations are largely the same). Students generally write well, and they understand conventions associated with referencing and attribution of scholarly ideas.

However, students from the PRC, Indonesia or Thailand are often completely unfamiliar with the emphasis we place on correct attribution of others’ ideas, critical thinking and the avoidance of plagiarism. Many have had half a lifetime of teachers encouraging unacknowledged repetition of the work of others. In these countries, a ‘good’ student is often one who can remember (‘parrot’) large amounts of information.

Hui (2005, p. 27) notes that, for mainland Chinese students, reading style is influenced by Confucianism which stresses the importance of reading and re-reading (not reading critically) as in the Chinese saying, “After reading a thousand books, your writing will be guided by inspiration”. Combined with Confucianist notions of diligence and persistence, this can result in the complete misinterpretation of the purpose of a list of recommended readings. For other international students, however, this is not the case at all.
When students come to Australia they learn these issues of academic appropriacy fast (issues of cultural appropriacy take many years’ experience). The Transition 2 Commerce (T2C) program (for undergraduates) offered by the CELT is there to speed up this adjustment. However, it does not help to make false assumptions about students at the outset. Treat your students as individuals first, and a member of a culture second. For more information: http://fbe.unimelb.edu.au/celt/undergraduate/t2c

4. “Tell me about your country”

You should not expect that students will want to speak freely or openly about what happens in their home country. In some cases students want to avoid sensitive issues in multicultural classrooms.

For example, mainland Chinese and Taiwanese students are often quite unwilling to broach regional political issues to prevent upsetting fellow students. If the issues being debated are politically or religiously neutral, it is easier for students to join the debate. If tutors open up it often encourages students to do the same. Making yourself seem genuinely uninformed but interested in students and their cultures will help them to open up too. Open questions such as these can help:

“This issue is done in this way here in Australia and the US, but what about other countries? Is it the same? I don’t have experience outside Western countries. Can anyone provide some ideas here to help me?”

5. Asian names

One of the best ways to impress people and appear friendly is to learn their names. A few general tips are worth mentioning:

Western names are normally structured: given name, then surname (unless on catalogues or databases where they are surname [comma] given name).

Many Asian names such as Chinese ones (but not Thai or Indian names) have the opposite configuration. Take for example the name:

Chen Ya-Hui

“Chen” is the surname and “Ya-Hui” is the given name. The surname is first as a matter of respect to the “family” group. They should ideally be addressed always as “Chen Ya-Hui”. Some Asian students will therefore address you wrongly as “Dr. John” because they are used to surnames in the first position. Likewise, they often get their reference lists all wrong and out of alphabetical order because they wrongly place the given name in the first position.

Obtaining a list of your students with a photo will help you to learn their names. Asking students to sit in the same place in a tutorial room, or placing a folded A4 piece of paper in front of them (with the name written down) also helps in the first few weeks. You should collect the paper and
redistribute before each class. This is a friendly gesture and interpreted as well-meaning by students (they will gladly help you when you get the names wrong for the first few weeks).

Asian students are often very uncomfortable addressing teachers by their given name – no matter what we say to the contrary. In their culture(s) it is rude. Despite wanting to be informal and friendly, we make them anxious. If possible, insist on being addressed by your given name. Tell them we are informal in Australia and it is OK to address you as “John” but don’t keep correcting them if they call you “Professor X”. They are just showing respect.

Many international students have adopted an English name as well as their own. These names are usually much shorter and easier to remember and pronounce. It is quite often an odd-sounding name like: Sapphire, Perfume or Kanna (actual examples) or it may be conventional like Shirley, Kevin or Bob. Usually these names are chosen because the anglicised name sounds like their equivalent name in their first language, or they may just like the symbolism or sound of the word (it may sound like an auspicious word in their language).

6. The use of group work

You will notice that students will spontaneously congregate in ethnically-similar groups. This is entirely natural, and if you were attempting studies in Shanghai, Jakarta or Bangkok you would probably do the same. Ethnic clustering also has its advantages. Students can translate for each other and the stronger students can help the weaker students with problems with English. They are also more comfortable in each other’s presence. Forcing students into groups in which they are uncomfortable is generally not a good idea. However, ethnic clustering can become a bad thing if it leads to a stifling of discussion or (worse still) discussions in the first language and avoidance of English entirely.

You can meet both needs by insisting on a mixture of ethnic groups but allowing students to join groups in pairs, i.e. two Chinese, two Indonesians, two Australians, and two Germans. This preserves the advantages of ethnic group clustering and minimises the disadvantages. Always insist that discussions are in English (international students are here partly to learn the language and will appreciate being made to do this) but allow students to translate difficult concepts and help each other.

When international students are in a group with local Australian students (or other Westerners) other issues may arise. The most serious is free-riding of the international students on the native English speakers, and the resulting effect whereby some students become determined not to be the object of free-riding and reduce their input accordingly.

There are a number of strategies you can use to avoid these problems including the following:

- keep group sizes as small as possible (three-four should be the upper limit)
- try to form groups early in the semester and allow them to last so that relationships form, good communication develops, and students get to know each other
- don’t be afraid as well however to sometimes ‘mix up’ groups so students get to know as many of their fellow tutorial members as possible
as much as possible, require that students need the research of all their group members to complete their part of the task (See also: Groupwork as a Form of Assessment.)

7. Speaking up

There are several reasons why many international students, especially those from Asia, have trouble contributing to class discussions:

• many are just not used to speaking up in class as in some countries, verbal contributions from students are actively discouraged and considered rude and ill-mannered
• students may feel they want to make a contribution but do not know how to interrupt politely so asking students to raise their hand slightly when they wish to speak may be helpful
• the language adjustments many students have to make are enormous such as a lack of confidence in speaking due to the fear of making grammatical mistakes (communication is more than just accuracy, but they often do not know this and need to be reassured)
• women from patriarchal societies (e.g., Muslim societies) are often less confident in contributing
• many students are intimidated by the native-speaking local students in the room who speak fast, and use local examples or colloquialisms

You can help students yourself by:

• directing them to the programs and resources available through the CELT
• providing an encouraging space in classes for casual conversation as simply being friendly and approachable makes a huge difference
• advertising regular consultancy times and encouraging students to approach you for help

8. Getting to know you

It is a truism that a group of mutually-supportive and friendly students will work better as a class than a group of bored, antagonistic, overly competitive or hostile students. The challenge is how to generate that togetherness. This is easier than you might think.

Start by giving all the students a short history of yourself and your career, education and interests in the first class. Also, smile occasionally in your tutorials. Enjoy the experience of teaching and show it. Smiles overcome hostility and shyness, and generate a sense of solidarity. They will find you more approachable if you appear friendly (again, an obvious point, but often neglected).

Further information on icebreakers and methods for getting to know your students is available from the guide How to Start your First Tutorial in the series.

9. Language issues
Unsurprisingly, international students often have problems with English. However, the nature and extent of these problems, and the reasons for them, are often not clear to teaching staff.

For example, many international students have difficulty with tenses. English has three main tenses (present, past and future), though these are made more complex by there being simple, perfect, continuous and passive forms. International students find English tenses hard to learn because often their languages do not use tenses. In fact, many Asian languages make the time of an event clear by the addition of adverbs like ‘today’ or ‘yesterday’.

Recognising that English does have a complex system of tenses that must be learned is very much appreciated by international students. Correcting a page or two of their essays is very helpful, as is directing them to Academic Skills for assistance with their assignments. Further information is also available in the CELT student helpsheet *Using English Tenses*.

**Articles**

Most Asian languages do not have articles. Articles are words such as: ‘the’, ‘a’ and ‘an’. International students generally have trouble using them (often omitting them altogether). The rules for the use of articles can be complex. Patience and understanding is helpful for students, as is the CELT student helpsheet *Using Articles*.

**Prepositional phrases**

Prepositions are words such as: ‘in’, ‘at’, ‘by’, ‘under’, ‘between’ and ‘through’. A prepositional phrase is a preposition particle followed by a noun phrase, e.g. “at the extremes of X”, “on the rise”, “by approaching the Y”, “under the influence of Z”. The use of prepositional phrases is exceptionally complex. Many phrases with prepositions are essential to academic writing but the rules are often inconsistent and counterintuitive so encourage your students to keep a list of any important in their discipline.

**Phrasal verbs**

Phrasal verbs are prepositional phrases conjoined with a verb in which the phrase carries a different meaning from the root verb in ordinary use. For example, “to come up with” (originate/invent), “to put down” (kill), “to get over”/“come to terms with”/“to move on from” (overcome). English has hundreds of these kinds of phrases, and unfortunately, for our students, the meanings cannot be obtained by looking up the verb in a dictionary (although there are specialist phrasal verb dictionaries).

Non-native speakers of English often understand the complexities of English well, especially the importance of learning the correct articles, prepositional phrases and phrasal verbs, but, again, they need your understanding and patience. For more information, see the CELT student helpsheet *ESL Suggestions for International Students*. International students know their weaknesses, but they sometimes need to be reminded. When this advice comes from their lecturer or tutor it has significant additional impact.
10. Approaches to learning

Approaches to learning will be as varied as the number of individuals you have in the class. Nonetheless, there are elements of the learning process that are common to all.

As noted in *Internationalising Teaching*, by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE): “be clear that one of your major educational aims is to encourage students to move from a reproductive style of learning (comprehending) through an analytical (questioning) approach to a speculative (modifying) learning approach. All students will be somewhere along this continuum, and you probably need to encourage all of them to develop their thinking and learning strategies in the right direction” (Beattie, 2006). See the diagram (Ballard and Clanchy, 1988) over for details of this learning schema.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes to knowledge:</th>
<th>conserving</th>
<th>extending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning approaches:</td>
<td>reproductive</td>
<td>analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning strategies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Memorization</th>
<th>Critical thinking</th>
<th>Deliberate search for new possibilities and explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities:</td>
<td>Summarising, describing, identifying and applying formulae and information</td>
<td>Questioning, judging and recombining ideas and information into an argument</td>
<td>Speculating and hypothesising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim:</td>
<td>Correctness</td>
<td>Simple originality, reshaping material into a different pattern</td>
<td>Creative originality, totally new approach/new knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You should discuss the aim(s) of learning in your tutorials. Spell out precisely what you expect of them, and where you will be taking them (in terms of learning outcomes). You could also consider showing them models of good work (essays, reports, case studies) to aid them with assignment work.

11. Cultural issues

There are well recognised cultural differences in relation to teaching and learning. These have been famously categorised in terms of the following:

1. Individualism versus collectivism.
2. Large versus small power distance.
3. High versus low uncertainty avoidance.
4. Masculinity versus femininity.

**Individualism versus Collectivism**

Australia is an individualist society. Like Westerners generally, Australians will tend to say what they think, and be quite forthright in their opinions and attitudes. They will be direct in asking questions of teachers in class and, in a business context, will usually raise issues and try to solve them directly and quickly with the people concerned.

Asians generally belong to more collectivist societies where face-saving and the harmony of the group is considered more important than individual expression or problem resolution. Hofstede, in his useful 4-D Model of cultural differences has identified the following attributes of Individualist versus Collectivist societies in relation to teaching and learning (Hofstede, 1986).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Individualism Versus Collectivism Dimension</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collectivist Societies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Individualist Societies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive association in society with whatever is traditional</td>
<td>Positive association in society with whatever is new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The young should learn; adults cannot accept student role</td>
<td>One is never too old to learn; 'life-long learning'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students expect to learn how to do</td>
<td>Students expect to learn how to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher</td>
<td>Individuals will speak up in class in response to a general invitation by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals will only speak up in small groups</td>
<td>Individuals will speak up in large groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large classes split socially into smaller, cohesive subgroups based on a particular criteria (e.g. ethnic affiliation)</td>
<td>Subgroups in class vary from one situation to the next based on universalist criteria (e.g. the next task)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained (conflict avoided)</td>
<td>Confrontation in learning situations can be salutary; conflicts can be brought into the open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers nor students should ever be made to lose face</td>
<td>Face-consciousness is weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education is a way of gaining prestige in one’s social environment and of joining a higher status group</td>
<td>Education is a way of improving one’s economic worth/self-respect based on ability and competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring certificates is more important than acquiring competence</td>
<td>Acquiring competence is more important than acquiring certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students</td>
<td>Teachers are expected to be strictly impartial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Large versus Small Power Distance**
Hofstede also identifies another key difference between Asians and Westerners called Power Distance. This is defined as how different societies treat the less powerful (e.g. the poor) in their society, and their attitude to power.

Western societies such as Australia are quite different in this dimension compared to most Asian societies. Australia is regarded as having a small power distance; that is, they do not accept a large difference in power between say teachers and students (or politicians and the public). Most Asian countries, by contrast, are regarded as having a large power distance. Applied to teaching and learning, the following differences are noted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Power Distance Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Large Power Distance Societies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress on personal wisdom which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher merits the respect of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centred education (premium on order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students expect teachers to initiate communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students may speak up in class only when invited to and teachers are never contradicted or publicly criticised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of learning related to the excellence of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for teachers is also shown outside class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older teachers are more respected than younger teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**High versus Low Uncertainty Avoidance**

Another dimension of difference in Hofstede’s analysis is Uncertainty Avoidance. This is defined as the extent to which cultures regard situations that are unstructured, unclear or unpredictable. Asian and Western societies are different in this respect too.

Australia, like most Western societies, is regarded as having weak uncertainty avoidance; that is, it regards uncertain situations as normal. This is different from many Asian countries which are usually characterised by strong uncertainty avoidance. Applied to the teaching and learning context, the differences are noted in the following table:
Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Societies</th>
<th>Weak Uncertainty Avoidance Societies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students feel comfortable in structured learning situations: precise objectives, detailed assignments, strict timetables</td>
<td>Students feel comfortable in unstructured learning situations: vague objectives, broad assignments, no timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are expected to have all the answers</td>
<td>Teachers are allowed to say “I don’t know”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good teacher uses academic language</td>
<td>A good teacher uses plain language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are rewarded for accuracy in problem solving</td>
<td>Students are rewarded for innovative approaches to problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/students are allowed to behave emotionally and interpret intellectual disagreements as personal disloyalty</td>
<td>Teachers/students are expected to suppress emotions and interpret intellectual disagreements as a stimulating exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers consider themselves experts who cannot learn anything from lay parents – and parents agree</td>
<td>Teachers seek parents’ ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Masculinity and Femininity

A final dimension of difference in Hofstede’s analysis is Masculinity and Femininity. This is defined as differences in the ways women and men are regarded in society and the roles they are expected to play. Australia is regarded more as a masculine society, as opposed to some Asian countries, which are defined as more feminine. Applied to the teaching and learning context, some key differences are noted below:

Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Masculinity Versus Femininity Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Societies</th>
<th>Masculine Societies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers avoid openly praising students</td>
<td>Teachers openly praise good students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use average students as the norm</td>
<td>Teachers use best students as the norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The system rewards student’s social adaptation</td>
<td>The system rewards academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student’s failure in school is a relatively minor accident</td>
<td>A student’s failure in school is a severe blow to their self-image and (in extreme cases) may lead to suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students admire friendliness in teachers</td>
<td>Students admire brilliance in teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students practice mutual solidarity</td>
<td>Students compete with each other in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students try to behave modestly</td>
<td>Students try to make themselves visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporal punishment is severely rejected</td>
<td>Corporal punishment is occasionally considered salutary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students choose academic subjects in view of intrinsic interest</td>
<td>Students choose academic subjects in view of career opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male students may choose traditionally feminine academic subjects</td>
<td>Male students avoid traditionally feminine subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to be aware of these important cultural differences when teaching international
students in tutorials. Just being aware of students’ backgrounds will enable you to better prepare for and deal with situations while teaching. The CELT provides a great deal of support in this area for both students and staff in the Faculty of Business and Economics, so if you have any questions or require further advice, contact the CELT.

More ideas and helpful advice are provided in the CSHE’s *Teaching International Students: Strategies to Enhance Learning* available at

**References**


**Further reading**


**Assessment and Marking**

1. Why is assessment important?

Student assessment is central to improving teaching and learning in the Faculty. Assessment is the most powerful element of the curriculum as far as students are concerned – it ensures that students have clear expectations of what is required of them, and is an important tool for teachers to use to stimulate the type of learning they want their students to achieve. Often assessment is the primary vehicle through which students are afforded an opportunity to develop and demonstrate key generic skills, such as critical thinking or teamwork. It follows that assessment practices are highly significant in improving teaching and learning.

Feedback is strongly tied to assessment. Students in focus group interviews with students have been asked what they mean by feedback. Their view is that feedback is only associated with assessment tasks. Verbal assistance given to them in tutorials is not feedback nor are written answers to their questions although both of these are seen as useful to their learning. While we can and should work to change this perception, it is important to provide students with appropriate feedback through the assessment process.

Tutors play an important role in the assessment of students’ work and in ensuring that students receive helpful feedback on their work. However, the extent of that role will be largely dependent upon the nature of the assessment tasks, and on your subject coordinator’s expectations of you in relation to assessment and marking. These expectations might be explicit where the subject coordinator clearly lays out expectations of you, provides examples of student work at different levels and delineates grading criteria.

In some subjects however the expectation may be that you formulate your own criteria and apply them to student work. It is important therefore that you seek guidance and direction from your subject coordinator or tutor-in-charge in all matters related to assessment and marking of student work.

2. Types of assessment

Assessment generally is characterised as either **formative** or **summative**. Formative assessment is used to establish where the students are at during the subject to inform them as to what the next stage in learning might be or where aspects of the subject need to be re-visited before progressing further. Summative assessment is given at the end of the subject and is to determine what details about the subject the student has understood and is able to use. Formative assessment is typically referred to as assessment for learning while summative assessment as assessment of learning (Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2010). A more complete description follows:
Formative

The purpose of formative assessment is to provide feedback during learning. Formative assessment is designed to gain an ongoing overview of a student’s progress. It evaluates the student’s increasing knowledge, skills and understanding and provides feedback to the student. This feedback ideally summarises the student’s progress while also focussing on any knowledge skills or gaps the student may need to address. Formative assessment is associated with deep approaches to learning.

Summative

Summative assessment provides an index of how successfully the student has learned when teaching has been completed. It is usually carried out at the end of the semester to gauge what the student has achieved at the end of the semester. Summative assessment is that form of assessment that is epitomised by the end of semester examination.

3. The marking process

There are a number of key issues related to marking: scales and standards; reducing variability; criteria and feedback.

Scales and standards

In the Faculty of Business and Economics the grades are N, Pass, H3, H2A, H2B, and H1. The real question is “what does each of these grades mean, in terms of the nature, quality, and maybe quantity of work?” In other words, what are the assessment criteria? There should be some published guidance on this given to tutors.

Reducing variability

When marking you want to ensure that, as much as possible only the student’s performance is reflected and that other extraneous factors have as minimal an effect as possible. For example, whether the student’s essay was first in the pile, or last and so forth. In other words another marker given the same assessment task should broadly be in agreement. There are a number of strategies that can minimise variability. For example:

- use previously established criteria (see three below) that are known to students and tutors at the outset
- use second markers where resources permit
- mark the first five then mark the rest, return to the first five and remark
- mark by question not by script if an examination
- another alternative is to skim read all then loosely, put them in pass, fail and honours piles (then go back and mark all scripts)
- in all of this, anonymity of writers is a requirement
Using criteria

Adopting a standard set of criteria is a significant strategy to improve objectivity of the marking process and hence minimize the variability. Generally your subject coordinator or tutor-in-charge will provide you with an established set of criteria from which to work from. Should criteria not be made available we strongly encourage you to formulate your own prior to marking. This can be done in conjunction with other tutors within the same subject, or you may wish to seek assistance directly from the Teaching and Learning Unit.

There are a number of reasons for using criteria:

- to clarify assignments for students and to help them internalise the grading criteria
- to clarify the assignment for yourself and to help you decide what writing features you most want to emphasise in the class
- as a teaching tool to help students evaluate their own work (before they start to work on the assignment, as they are working on the assignment, and/or after they've finished working on the assignment)
- to help students gain practice in using the criteria on someone else's paper

Some characteristics of clear criteria include:

- identification of the most important features of the assignment (as a whole) or of some portion of the assignment (e.g. introduction, conclusion, methods section, discussion section, problem statement, statement of purpose)
- clear specification on what the student needs to include to successfully meet expectations
- when appropriate, separate scores (or grades) for individual sections of the paper
- when appropriate, an overall score assigned to the assignment (to address issues of flow, consistency, overall cohesion)
- explicit ranking of the criteria from most important to lesser importance
- avoidance of qualitative words (such as ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘clear’) unless they are further tied to specific features or qualities that are more understandable to the student
- a point value for each criterion (to reinforce the importance of each section or feature)
- when appropriate, specific page lengths or recommendations (for instance, minimum and maximum length for introduction, number of references etc.)
- a clear differentiation between students' existing knowledge and your expectations (for instance, by explaining, for example, that the introduction required differs from other kinds of introductions in specific ways and then identifying those ways)
- ground rules for what all students must do (or they will be required to redo the assignment) as opposed to what they will be graded on
- explanation of the interactions between individual sections (for instance, the
conclusion must refer explicitly to the thesis statement and state your findings)

- words that students find understandable (that is, if "analysis" means something specific within your discipline, explain to students what you mean -- as opposed to what it may mean more generally)

See also: Using rubrics

**Assessing Learning in Australian Universities (2002).** A national study of assessment issues and practices including assessment of international students, the use of online assessment, and strategies for minimising plagiarism. Prepared for the Australian Universities Teaching Committee.


**References**

Evaluating your tutoring

An important aspect of developing as a teacher is evaluating your tutoring practice. Engaging in an ongoing process of evaluation improves the educational experiences you provide for your students, and can assist in identifying additional training or support you need to further develop your capacity to teach well. This can be done most effectively when you incorporate a range of perspectives – students, peers and, of course, yourself, and in this guide we help you to explore how.

1. Self-evaluation

One of the most neglected forms of evaluation is self-evaluation which should (ideally and logically) precede all other forms of evaluation. Self-evaluation is sometimes referred to as *reflective practice*. It is an active process of attending to your own experience in order to explore it in some depth. According to Schön (1987) reflective practice is a process through which we think critically and deeply about what we are doing. Reflection enables us to transform experience into knowledge, which can then be taken into the next tutorial.

There are many ways of incorporating reflective practice into your role as tutor. Recognising the role of reflection and familiarising yourself with the basic elements of reflective practice will assist you in the ongoing development of your skills. A useful starting point is drawing on a few simple strategies and techniques:

- make a conscious effort at the end of each tutorial to think about what happened. Get in the habit of setting aside a few minutes to do this kind of reflective thinking
- ask yourself a few questions:
  - What worked?
  - What didn’t work quite as well?
  - How did the tutorial feel?
  - What can I do differently next time?
- alternatively, you may want to ask a more refined number of questions:
  - Were the objectives of the tutorial made clear?
  - How well-structured and organised was the content?
  - How well did I engage and involve the students?
  - Was I encouraging, positive and helpful towards students?
- if you are conducting multiple tutorials within the same week, you may find it useful to jot down some of your thoughts or ideas (for example, if the timing for a particular task was misjudged, make a note of a revised time allocation for the next tutorial)
2. Getting student feedback

Self-reflection as suggested above can be deepened when you invite students to share their perspectives on your teaching practice. Many of us will face some sort of institutional evaluation of us by our students. In the Faculty of Business and Economics this takes the form of a Subject Experience Survey (SES) survey which is administered online at the end of the semester. While the SES or similar survey will provide you with direct feedback on your teaching and therefore raise issues you may wish to consider for next time, being summative it comes too late to make adjustments, at least for this cohort of students.

For new tutors, getting student feedback much earlier on in the semester is more useful as it allows you to respond and, where appropriate, make adjustments. Many subject coordinators already incorporate a standardised mid-semester feedback survey or have formal student consultative committees that meet throughout the semester. It is important therefore to find out what the culture of mid-semester feedback is in your subject. If there is none, why not take the initiative and devise some mechanism for hearing directly from your students?

Being open to feedback is important; it sends a signal to students that you care about them and are interested in ensuring a positive learning environment. However, simply inviting students to give feedback is no guarantee that they will be forthcoming. Students are far more likely to provide constructive feedback if they are given a structured opportunity that is anonymous. (See also: How to Structure and Teach a Tutorial.)

Two commonly adopted approaches are:

- **Mid-semester feedback**: this can take the form of a short survey administered for example in Week 5 or 6 of a 12-week semester. It can be as simple as two or three questions distributed on paper to students at the end of the tutorial.
- **Weekly**: very similar to the mid-semester feedback but where you ask the class to answer a few questions and write comments on a sheet of paper at the close of each class, or every second week.

You will find an example of a mid-semester feedback survey at the end of this guide (Appendix A), which can be customised for your particular use.

Whatever you decide to do, consider two key points. First, don’t actually use a survey or feedback forum unless you intend to act upon the results (Ramsden and Dodds, 1989). Therefore, it is important to select question items that are relevant to you and your students, and that are likely to provide you with useful information. Moreover, when you have the findings, ensure that they are fed back to your group – it is important that they hear not only a summary of any issues, but also importantly, your response to any of the issues raised.
3. **Peer observation**

The process of peer observation usually involves inviting a peer to review your teaching through classroom observation, but may extend to an examination of teaching materials and tutorial design. All new tutors to the Faculty will undergo an observation of their tutoring by an academic from the CELT. While this is a compulsory aspect of the professional development program, we would also encourage you in future semesters to invite a colleague from within your subject or discipline area to provide feedback on your teaching as part of an ongoing process.

Observations of your teaching and classroom interaction are intended to help you develop as a teacher. Often a peer or expert will be able to comment on specific aspects of your teaching style, for example, level of student engagement, student interaction, clarity of communication, pitch and pacing, and in doing so, offer some suggestions for further improvement. To get the most out of your observer here are a few simple ground rules that you might find helpful:

- prior to the observation, meet up with your peer observer to discuss the process (you may wish to guide or direct the observer to particular aspects of your tutoring that you want feedback on)
- on the day of the observation, it is a good idea to let your students know in an informal way that a colleague is visiting as many students will wonder who the new person is
- following the observation it is recommended that you meet with the observer to discuss the feedback

But peer observation does not have to be all one-way. Often there is much to be gained by having an opportunity to see a peer teach – ideally, a peer who has been identified as a successful teacher.

Observing another peer teach is like holding up a mirror where you have an opportunity to think about your own teaching. It may be simply to: affirm a strategy or approach you are already putting into use; provide an alternative technique; or it may even be that what you are seeing really challenges you to change your practice.

To get you started we have included the CELT observation checklist (Appendix B) which can be helpful in providing some structure. We have also provided a more detailed Teaching Evaluation Proforma (Appendix C) you may also wish to use. This can be used either as a general guide to the criteria relevant to good teaching, or more formally (ask a colleague, or even your students, to fill it in).
References


An earlier version of this was written as part of the Reflective Practice section of the Tutor Training: Online Professional Development project – a University of Melbourne and University of Sydney collaboration.
Appendix A

Mid-semester survey

1. What was the best aspect of this tutorial?
2. What one aspect of the tutorial would you like to see improved?
3. Other comments?
## Appendix B

### Observation Checklist

Tutor name:  
Subject:  
Date:  
Room:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction and engagement (including T/S and S/S*)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation/communication style (including explanations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of audio-visuals to support learning (where applicable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure (opening/closing and small group management where applicable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*‘Tutor-to-Student’ and ‘Student-to-Student’*
Appendix C

Teaching Evaluation Proforma

**Name:**
**Title:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear organisation, strong introduction, “attention-getter” and outline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length and timing, well-balanced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical and coherent development of ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectives used appropriately to link ideas between parts of speech</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical conclusion, sums up main points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear knowledge of content, terms defined</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective use of vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear examples given</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent and accurate grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate level of language used given audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate use of visual aids to support speech</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience focussed and interested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main message clear throughout and well-supported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Voice, hands, body, facial expressions appropriate</td>
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