

Participating in Tutorials

Introduction

University study offers students diverse opportunities to work in a team, contribute to a group, and take responsibility for the smooth running of an activity. If you contribute to the success of a tutorial or any other type of discussion, you are refining your communication skills. The ability to interact in appropriate ways can be enhanced by participating in the various in class and online discussions that are a part of university life. The skills developed in these settings are highly regarded both within and outside the university.

Preparation

It is an old cliché that the more you put into a tutorial (or 'tute'), the more you will get out of it, but it's true! If you prepare for the tutorial by reading all required material thoroughly and thoughtfully, you will have a better understanding of people's comments and be able to take an active part in the seminar or discussion group. By preparing thoroughly for various kinds of discussions, including online tutorials, you will be able to contribute your own comments, questions, and critiques to those that have already been put forward by other students.

The following suggestions address common problems that are often raised by students who lack confidence when participating in tutorial discussions.

- **"I don't know anyone in the tutorial and so don't feel like speaking."**
Introduce yourself to one other person rather than the whole tutorial. Even knowing one person will help you feel more integrated into the larger group and therefore more confident.
- **"I am not sure if the points I want to make will be serious or insightful enough."**
Write down the points you would like to make about the reading or the topic under discussion. Wait until the discussion seems to be approaching a point that is close to your area of interest. Make a short comment. It will quickly become part of the ongoing discussion.
- **"I am very nervous. I don't want to say anything at all."**
In either the first or the second tutorial, ask a question about some aspect of the reading that you have found stimulating or new. A thoughtful question is a useful contribution to any tutorial or discussion.
- **"I find the tutorials confusing. When I leave, I wonder if I have remembered anything."**
Discussions in tutorials often leap from point to point. If you jot down some ideas as people talk and then read these points again after the class, you will see that there have been some interesting comments made. You will also be able to see that certain points can be grouped with other comments that were made and that the tutorial has highlighted significant themes or issues.

Three final tips

- Make at least one comment in the first tutorial or seminar. If you begin by being silent, it can be quite hard to change!
- Prepare any tutorial presentation well, even if it is not an assessment task. People will see that you are interested in the topic and you will find it easier to become an active member of the group.
- Welcome opportunities to interact with people in diverse ways. In a globalised world, universities offer many opportunities for intercultural communication.

For further information:

- Contact the Academic Skills Adviser on your campus
- Visit our web pages on myACU.

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