What is a tutorial?

A tutorial is a meeting between a tutor and 10 to 30 students. All students are expected to attend and participate. The tutor may give a mini-lecture but most of the time is given to discussion or to problem solving based on lectures and readings. Tutorials are an essential aspect of almost all undergraduate courses in the Business School and most postgraduate courses. In some postgraduate courses where the student numbers are small the class combines aspects of a lecture and aspects of a tutorial in the same class.

What is the purpose of tutorials?

The purpose of tutorials is:

- to promote clearer and deeper understanding through dialogue
- to allow close contact between students and staff
- to provide students with a forum in which to improve communication skills
- to simulate workplace problem solving.

How can you make the most of your tutorials?

The success of tutorials depends on participation. Failure of some members to participate can undermine the effectiveness of the tutorial for everyone. Every tutorial member has a duty to make the tutorial an effective learning experience. To make the most of your tutorials, consider the following:

Before the tutorial

- review the relevant lecture
- do the required reading or work through the set problems
- establish for yourself what you do and do not understand about the topic
- clarify your views on the topic
- formulate questions on the topic.

During the tutorial

- listen closely to the discussion
- raise questions or seek clarification about points not understood
- make oral summaries of discussion so far
- commend other students' contributions
- encourage others to contribute.

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Communicating in Tutorials

Many of your course assessments include a mark for tutorial participation. This mark is a reflection of your tutorial participation and whether you were perceived as an active interested member of the group. To participate fully does not mean that you have to dominate discussion; however, it does mean that you need to be prepared for the tutorial and are able to contribute to what the class is discussing by answering questions, adding new ideas or confirming what is being said.

Try some simple active tactics such as: change where you sit in a tutorial, show interest though your body language about what is happening, answer a question asked by the tutor when asked directly or to the whole group (this may be difficult but shows your willingness to contribute) and ask for clarification about what you are unsure about.

You may be nervous; however, many students are nervous about speaking particularly for the first time and with time and practice this does go away. Set yourself achievable goals for communicating in a tutorial and your confidence will develop.

What you gain from participating in tutorials

When we speak we do a different kind of thinking than when we think silently, and we also remember what we have said for a longer time. This is why discussion is so valuable. Tutorials provide an opportunity to develop discussion skills in small and larger groups, which can be an important skill in future workplace interaction. Developing confidence in listening well and speaking clearly will enhance your abilities and tutorials provide an excellent opportunity.

You may also save study time by generating questions and having them answered. You can benefit from listening to other group members' ideas and develop respect for different interpretations of a topic or issue and enjoy the interaction and learning at university that comes from sharing opinions, theories and facts.

What language functions are involved in tutorial participation?

To participate effectively in tutorials you will need to be able to:

- clarify what others are saying
- get confirmation that you have understood what someone else has said
- encourage others to continue talking
- agree with or support someone else's opinion
- express partial agreement
- express a different point of view
- offer your opinion
- give evidence to support your opinion
- ask someone else what their opinion is

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Language strategies for communicating in tutorials

The following phrases may help you participate in tutorial discussion.

Clarifying what others are saying

> What did you mean when you said …?
> Could you give an example of that?
> Could you explain that in more detail?
> I'm sorry, I didn't catch what you said about …
> Could you say that again?
> What does … mean?

Getting confirmation

So, you mean that …?
So, what you're saying is that …?

Encouraging others to continue talking

> *Tag questions* e.g. It's … isn't it?
> *Short questions*, e.g. Really? In Australia?
> Listening sounds and words, e.g. Mmm, right, yes, uh uh
> Negative questions, e.g. Doesn't that…?
> Comments about what the speaker is saying, e.g. That's amazing! That's an interesting way of looking at it!

Agreeing/supporting someone else's opinion

> Yes, that's a really good point.
> Yes, that's the way I see it.
> Yes, that makes sense.
> That explains it really well.
> That's interesting!

Partly agreeing

> Yes, that's true, but don't you think …
> Maybe you're right, but
> You've got a point there, but …

Giving a different point of view

> But don't you think that …?
> I see what you mean, but …?
> But isn't it really a question of …?
> But surely …?

Offering an opinion

> Well, I think …
> I really haven't thought much about that before, but I suppose …
> The way I see it is …
> I think …

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Giving evidence to support an opinion
Let me give you an example….
I can explain why that is …
The reason I think this is …

Asking for someone else's opinion
What do you think, …
Do you agree with that?
What about you …, do you think that …?

Presenting in a tutorial

The following ideas may help you; however, the EDU handout on *Oral Presentations* provides additional information which is useful for any type of presentation.

- Do not prepare too much – There is a limit to how much you can say in a given time. If you are required to talk for five minutes, consider preparation to be equivalent to 120 words per minute by 5, in other words approximately 600 words.
- Think about the main points/reason for your presentation. Do provide a clear introduction, structured content with subtopics and relevant examples/models/theories and a conclusion which restates your main points so the audience will remember.
- Make sure you own presentation notes are neat and organized and do not distract you or the audience. Try not to read them but instead use your notes as reminders of the content you are so familiar with, so you can then concentrate on talking to the audience.
- Prepare handouts and audiovisuals but make sure that you make them relevant and that they do not distract too much from what you are saying. For example with a handout refer the audience to look at certain sections and explain them.
- Practice your talk preferably with peers or in private and out loud. You could use a tape or video recorder if you have the time to get more familiar with how you sound and look.
- Try out the physical environment and equipment. You can check that things work and you know how to use them. This helps you calm down because you become familiar with them.
- Try not to be too nervous. If you know your topic and really want to talk about it the audience will sense this and be involved. Observe those you consider to be good speakers and learn from them.