Making the most of tutorials

What are tutorials?

Tutorials (tutes) are less formal classes than lectures and provide opportunities for students and their tutors to talk about or work through key topics, concepts and ideas in an interactive way. Tutorials are often referred to as 'tutes' and the size of the group may range from as few as 5 to large groups of more than 30. Tutorials enable you to make sense of what you are learning in the course by exchanging ideas with other students and the tutor.

Tutes can be led by a tutor or completed in study groups. Through the discussions in your tutorials, you will be introduced to a range of views among your group that are equally valid even if they challenge your own. In fact, lecturers encourage students to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills through discussion and expect students to contest different points of view. So, one of the best ways to get the most out of tutorials is to take an active part in them.

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Before the tutorial

You can prepare yourself to be an active participant in tutorials by:

- looking at the information provided in the course information or study guide for the topic to see what is expected
- working through any questions or problems that have been set or reading texts that have been set for the tutorial
- noting any areas of uncertainty you may have relating to the questions or texts and taking these to the tute for clarification
- anticipating any questions that might be asked and how you might answer them
- spending more time than usual in your preparation for the tutorial if you are going to lead the discussion in the tute.

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During the tutorial

You can be an active participant in tutorials by:

- working through the exercises that have been set, asking questions and discussing with other students some possible solutions or ideas
- asking the questions you brought with you to the tute and making sure you get answers before you leave—the question you ask is often one that several others in the group wanted to ask!
- getting to know a few students so that you can set up support networks
- arranging for your network to meet fortnightly outside of class time to discuss ideas, issues or problems
- taking part by exchanging your interpretations of the related concepts and ideas that have been presented in lectures and in your reading
- making an oral presentation to the group and inviting discussion based on what you have presented and what the group has read or learned in lectures
- asking for clarification from someone
- rephrasing what someone else has just said as a way of clarifying
- asking for repetition from someone in the group
- playing a leadership role like tute presenter, note-taker, chairperson, or by contributing to group maintenance—you might, for example, try including someone who is shy or reminding the group that they need to get back to the main topic.

After the tutorial

You can be an active learner after your tutorials by:

- organising and adding to your notes as you do after lectures
- making links for yourself between your tutorial notes and your lectures or pracs as well as other reading on related topics
- checking your understanding of concepts or your solutions to the set problems
- contacting your tutor or using your student networks to clarify information or problems
- converting your notes into a summary as a one-page diagram or flow-chart; you can use this to check your understanding now and later to revise for exams.

Like lectures, tutorials are central to your university learning and they provide opportunities for you to discuss different aspects of the course. You can check that you are on track with key topics and concepts. You have the opportunity to further develop your problem solving and critical thinking skills through engaging with a range of viewpoints. You have direct contact with staff who can support your learning and suggest answers to your questions.

You can get the most out of your tutorials by preparing for them, being an active participant during the tutorial and making good use of your notes afterwards.

Sources

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