

Getting the most out of lectures, seminars and tutorials

Seminars

A seminar is a teaching session for a group of approximately ten to twenty five students who meet weekly to follow a structured course of study. The session is planned and led by the lecturer and may include mini-lectures, group discussions, analysis of visual and aural materials, exercises, student presentations and other activities. Seminars provide students with an opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of their subject and to practise a variety of academic skills. The success of the session depends upon the willingness of students to contribute their own ideas.

Working in a group is valuable because it allows you to:

- share the work of developing your ideas on a topic
- practise using specialist academic language
- obtain social support for your studies.

Advice

- Try to do any recommended preparation beforehand.
- Don't worry about what other students will think of your ideas and how you express them.
- Don't be afraid to ask simple questions or to provide obvious answers.
- Self-help groups of two or more students can be a useful aid to study but require organisation and planning.

Lectures

A lecture is a structured talk on a given subject. In Continuing or Higher Education, its function is to provide an introduction to a subject which can be expanded through reading, class discussion and essay writing. Lectures are often delivered as a weekly series designed to provide the basic framework for a course. Although the lecture has been criticised as a teaching method (for being a passive learning experience, where students are presented with information and remember little afterwards) it remains an important and valuable educational tool.

A skilled lecturer is able to:

- express ideas and arguments in a direct and lively manner
- demonstrate skills and techniques, for example, critical analysis
- summarise research and explore controversies
- encourage independent thinking by posing questions.

In order to get the most out of a lecture you need to:

- follow the development of the lecturer's argument
- think critically about the ideas expressed
- take notes to record the line of argument, main points, useful examples.

Clearly it is not possible to pursue all three activities simultaneously. Ideally you need to concentrate on listening to what is being said but allow occasional spurts of

reflection and note-taking. You will get more out of a lecture if you do some preparatory reading beforehand.

The style of lecture varies from lecturer to lecturer. Some utilise PowerPoint, slides, overhead slides or diagrams or provide outline notes or headings. Most outline the planned structure of their lecture at the beginning in order to provide a framework for taking notes. Some include activities to encourage student participation in lectures.

Advice

- Do some preparatory reading on the subject of the lecture.
- Don't try to write everything down. Listening and understanding what is being said is more important.
- Be prepared to adapt to different lecturing styles.
- Try to find time to review and summarise your notes after each lecture.

Tutorials

A tutorial is a teaching session arranged for an individual student or a small group of students (usually no more than three) who meet the tutor for thirty to sixty minutes once or twice a term for discussion. The function of the tutorial is to enable you to develop a deeper understanding of the subject and to enable you to communicate with confidence in oral debate. The basis of the tutorial is work set in advance and is often an essay.

Tutorials typically cover:

- discussion to check that you understand recent material covered in the course
- advice about tackling assignments (eg planned reading, essay plan)
- feedback on assignments
- study skills support.

Advice

- Try to prepare the work set for the tutorial
- Don't be shy about contributing your ideas
- Be receptive to constructive criticism and learn to modify your ideas to incorporate alternative arguments
- Don't be afraid to acknowledge problems and seek advice.