Seminars and tutorials

Learning how to work as part of a team and contribute constructively to group activities is a key skill for future employability.

Many subjects have a high proportion of small-group teaching, others less so: you will get as much out as you put in. Here’s how:

a. Prepare

It’s essential to prepare before a tutorial. You will probably be asked to do some reading beforehand.

Bring your notes along and highlight anything which you need to have answered.

b. Take part

You will learn by taking part. Specifically:

- Listen to other people's ideas and arguments
- Put forward your own ideas and arguments
- Listen to other people's responses to your arguments
- Try out new ideas
- Carefully analyse people's ideas and arguments and criticise the weak points constructively

c. Use logical arguments

It’s more civilised to criticise weak arguments and poor logic rather than to attack the person who presents them.

d. Notes

Take notes if you can. You may have to wait till afterwards, but it's worth noting the key ideas which emerge.

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e. Key skills

The skills which you learn by taking part in tutorials make graduates highly valued in the work-place. Employers are really keen to hire people who can:

- Analyse a line of reasoning
- Spot flaws in the argument
- Persuade people of the value of their own argument (without attacking others).

f. Identifying your own difficulties and challenges

Trying to do too much:

- Make sure you have realistic expectations of the outcome
- Balance time spent on research and time spent on preparing for your part in the session
- Try to build up the right amount of information
- Don't be afraid to edit drastically if necessary

Fears about presentation:

- Confidence in speaking in public comes with practice
- Practice what you are going to say, and think of questions that you might be asked
- Prepare any questions that you might ask others in the group

Contributing to discussion

- Plan to ask at least one question - be relevant
- Speak to the group as a whole, not just your neighbour
- Listen to and consider points raised by others
- Be honest and constructive about feedback

g. Using your own strengths

- Make sure your contribution to the group is balanced - don't dominate if you have a particular interest, and try to participate in areas where you are less sure as well
- Respond to others' feedback and think how you could improve on points mentioned
- Ensure you understand what is required of the group and of you for the next session