

### THIS ACADEMIC TIP SHEET:

- looks at the role of tutorials
- explains how to get the most out of them
- outlines some techniques for taking notes

### WHAT ARE TUTORIALS?

In most units you'll be required to attend tutorials, also referred to as 'tutes'. Usually there are about 20 students per tutorial group. The nature of tutorials will vary from tutor to tutor and subject to subject. Tutorials can be:

- practical sessions in laboratories or workshops
- opportunities for the tutor to explain aspects of the lecture
- an opportunity for you to talk about the subject to broaden your understanding
- an opportunity to interact with other students and hear other opinions
- an opportunity to try out new ideas
- an opportunity to develop your active listening and speaking skills

### GETTING THE MOST OUT OF TUTORIALS

The best way to get the most out of tutorials is to attend regularly and to participate. Speaking up in tutorials will help build your understanding of the topic being discussed. Articulating your thoughts and ideas enables you to see how well you understand the material and also allows others to comment on what you've said.

Speaking in a tutorial is not a case of giving the right or definitive answer. It's about demonstrating, through reading, asking questions and discussion, that you're able to think around a topic and come to terms with its main ideas.

Participation in tutorials can help you develop the ability to:

- think independently
- argue
- defend and support a case
- present a viewpoint
- discern between opinion and evidence

### NEW TO TUTORIALS?

If you're not used to participating in tutorials these steps might help:

- Be prepared for the tutorial. It's important that you've attended any lectures on the subject and completed any specified pre-reading.
- Ask questions. This is one of the easiest ways to participate. It also helps you to clarify any problems you might be having with the material.
- Support others in the tutorial. Respond to their questions or comments.
- Make a contribution to the discussion. Being well-prepared will help.
- Take notes of what is said so that you can follow up on any of the issues raised.

**Note:** Take personal responsibility for any tutorial you attend. If no one contributes then everyone loses. Also, help the tutorial stay on track by keeping your comments to the point and avoiding going off the subject.

### YOUR TUTORIAL NOTES

Like blogs, tutorial notes are an ongoing record of your reading, tutorial discussion, talks with other students and personal musings on a particular topic.

Obviously, when tutorial notes form part of your assessment, they must be suitable for others to read. You must also understand them when you review them at a later date.

#### Content

Good tutorial notes should demonstrate your understanding of the unit content, your ability to research and develop further understanding, to critically reflect on the material and ideas you and others produce, and to draw connections and conclusions from that material.

Tutorial notes for assessment should:

- clearly address any questions given for you to consider
- draw together ideas and examples from your readings, your tutorials/lectures, your own reflection and the reflections of others
- contain a full discussion, never with a yes/no response
- make tentative conclusions and/or identify unresolved issues to questions
- in-text reference all work that is not your own. Use a personal communication in-text reference to draw in a comment or reflection made by another student in your tute or study group.

## Structure

Correctly structured tutorial notes help to communicate your understanding and ability. They also prepare you for other structured forms of academic writing.

### Paragraph form

In general, if you're submitting tutorial notes for assessment they should be written in paragraph form. Note the features of the paragraph in this example:

Paragraphs are not random and unrelated collections of sentences. [Topic sentence]

Good paragraphs introduce and briefly explain the main topic or idea of the paragraph in one or two sentences. They support this idea or topic with 2-8 sentences that provide details, explanations and insights. They finish with a sentence that is more general, returning to the main topic or idea and providing a conclusion. [Supporting sentences]

The ability to write well-organised paragraphs is essential for good academic writing. [Concluding sentence]

### Other forms

You may be allowed or asked to use structures other than paragraphs, e.g. tables or lists. In some cases, good quality notes may also be acceptable (ask your tutor). The main features of presenting notes is shown in this example:

## Note form [Subheading]

Note form – very condensed form of writing. Does not require full sentences but does require good organisation and summary skills. [Explanation]

### When using note form: [Stem]

- extract key words from text to provide subheadings;
- organise facts, ideas and reflections under these subheadings;
- use a stem under each subheading with groups of dot or numbered points under that;
- ensure first words of each dot point read logically from stem (usually done by using parallel forms for first word of each dot point – note verbs used here); and
- provide short comment on or analysis of your points before and/or after dot points. [Dot points. All initial words are verbs].

Well-written notes transform easily into paragraphs.

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## TUTORIAL CHECKLIST

- Did you attend the tutorial?
- Have you completed the pre-reading and other preparation?
- Were you attentive during the tutorial?
- Did you participate in the tutorial?
- Did you take effective notes during the tutorial?
- Did you follow up the tutorial with further study?
- If you missed the tutorial did you find out what happened?

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## WANT HELP WITH YOUR STUDY?

Please contact our Academic Skills Centre to find out how we can assist you.

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