

# Tutorials

## Academic Tip Sheet



### **This academic tip sheet:**

- looks at the role of tutorials;
- explains how to get the best out of tutorials; and
- outlines some techniques for taking notes in tutorials.

### **What are tutorials?**

In most units you will 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 may:

- take the form of practical sessions in laboratories or workshops;
- provide opportunities for the tutor to explain aspects of the lecture; and/or
- provide an opportunity for students to talk about the subject to broaden their understanding.

### **What are tutorials for?**

Tutorials are an important part of university life. They give you the chance to:

- explore and clarify a topic by asking questions;
- try out new ideas;
- interact with other students;
- develop your active listening and speaking skills;
- hear a range of opinions; and
- go further into particular topics or questions.

## Getting the most out of tutorials

Undoubtedly 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 have said. Speaking in a tutorial is not a case of giving the right or definitive answer. Rather it is demonstrating, through reading, asking questions and discussion, that you are able to think around a topic and come to terms with its main ideas.

Participation in tutorials can help develop the ability to:

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

If you are not used to participating in tutorials then the following steps might help:

- Make sure you are prepared for the tutorial. It is important that you have attended any lectures on the subject and have 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 you here.
- Take notes of what is said so that you can follow up on any of the issues raised.

Take personal responsibility for any tutorial that you attend. If no one contributes then everyone loses. It is equally important that you help the tutorial stay on track. Keep your comments to the point and avoid going off the subject.

## Tutorial notes

Like blogs, tutorial notes are an on going 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 tutes/lectures, your own reflection and often the reflections of others;
- contain a full discussion, never with a yes/no response;
- make tentative conclusions and/or identify unresolved issues to questions; and
- contain 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 are submitting tutorial notes for assessment they should be written in paragraph form. Note the features of the paragraph in the example given below:

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 from two to eight 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, lists. In some cases, good quality notes may also be acceptable (ask your tutor). Note the main features of presenting notes in the example given below:

### 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.

## 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?**

## References

Andersson, B., & Beveridge, A. (2007). *A guide to assessments and skills in SCCA* (2nd ed.). [Booklet]. Perth, WA: Edith Cowan University.

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