
Chapter 1

Introduction

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Tutoring and demonstrating play well-established and fundamentally important parts in undergraduate teaching, especially in the formative first and second years of the undergraduate curriculum. Within the setting of a small group, tutorials and practical classes enable students to deepen and extend their understanding of material introduced in lectures or seminars. Equally importantly, they provide a bridge to independent study, helping students to consolidate what they have learnt through wider reading and assigned coursework. These classes also serve as direct points of contact with a particular member of the teaching staff, avoiding the impersonality and sense of isolation which might otherwise arise at a time when student numbers – and class sizes – have grown substantially.

In the 1990s, tutoring and demonstrating responsibilities are increasingly being taken up by part-time teaching staff: postgraduate research students, graduate teaching assistants, postdoctoral fellows, graduate professionals (such as practising lawyers and accountants) and teaching fellows with relevant postgraduate qualifications. If they are to perform their roles as tutors or demonstrators effectively, however, these part-time staff need to be adequately briefed, trained and supported. This handbook is intended to make a key contribution to that end, and can usefully complement departmental briefing seminars, faculty or university-wide workshops, and course-based support systems. Although written chiefly with new part-time teaching staff in mind, the handbook should also be helpful to many others: to more experienced tutors and demonstrators, and to the lecturers and course organisers who are their course team colleagues.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

The contents of the handbook have been tailored broadly to the needs of new tutors and

demonstrators in universities. The handbook does not address teaching practices within individual departments, nor could it realistically seek to do so given the range of disciplines involved and their distinctive approaches to teaching and learning. The handbook is therefore a complement to departmentally based briefing, training and support.

The eleven chapters which follow can be seen as falling into three main parts. The first group of chapters provides an orientation to tutoring and demonstrating and examines the main areas of day-to-day practice.

- *Chapter 2* presents an overview of the different roles and responsibilities and suggests how new staff might begin to go about learning the ropes.
- *Chapter 3* outlines what is involved both in preparing for and in conducting tutorial classes in the arts and social sciences.
- *Chapter 4* focuses on tutoring of problem-solving classes in mathematics and the sciences.
- *Chapter 5* reviews demonstrating practice in laboratory and field classes in the sciences including marking of practical work.
- *Chapter 6* reviews the tutor's role in relation to coursework essays and offers guidance on marking students' written work and on giving constructive feedback.
- *Chapter 7* broadens out the themes of guidance and support, looking at what can be done during classes and in one-to-one discussion with students.

Next there is *Chapter 8*, which reviews some of the key research findings on student learning. This chapter has a crucial bridging function. On the one hand, it provides a theoretical underpinning to the first group of chapters. On the other, it explores

ideas and insights which can inform the chapters which follow, each of which addresses ways in which part-time staff can enhance their effectiveness.

- *Chapter 9* points up the benefits of working with a mentor and of sharing ideas and experiences with other tutors and demonstrators.
- *Chapter 10* outlines a range of methods for getting feedback on one's teaching and suggests how feedback information can be analysed and applied.
- *Chapter 11* argues for the adoption of a reflective approach to practice and indicates some possible ways of doing this.
- *Chapter 12* is a compendium of sources of information and advice on which tutors and demonstrators can draw for their own needs or those of their students.

This three-fold chapter structure therefore progresses from practical matters through

theoretical perspectives to developmental concerns. Nonetheless, the chapters have been designed to be read independently as well as sequentially, since it is recognised that staff will approach their reading of the handbook from a variety of different standpoints. Some will want to make practicalities their priority, dipping into whichever of the early chapters will best prepare them for the particular role they have been assigned. Others may prefer to see theory as their chosen avenue towards practice, by beginning with chapter 8, *Student Learning*.

At key points throughout the handbook, readers are invited to consider how they might apply what is being discussed to their own particular circumstances within a specific course and departmental setting. Working through these activities can be an effective way to begin to put into practice many of the ideas, principles and strategies presented in the handbook. Where appropriate, suggestions for further reading are included at the end of chapters.