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# Chapter 3

## Tutoring in Arts and Social Sciences

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### INTRODUCTION

Tutorial classes, in which a small group of students meets with a tutor on a regular basis play a well-established and crucial part in the quality of undergraduate learning in the arts and social sciences. The broad purpose of these classes, as indicated in chapter 2, *Roles and Responsibilities*, is to help students consolidate and extend their learning beyond that acquired from other parts of their courses, notably from lectures and private study.

This developmental process has two aspects which are intimately connected. Tutorials are used to promote students' further understanding of the concepts, theories, facts and procedures which make up the core of a subject. Additionally, they provide opportunities for encouraging students to develop those critical and creative thinking skills and forms of expression and argument which are characteristic of a particular academic discipline. Thus, tutorials enable students to become more knowledgeable about subject-matter but also to develop the facility for using their knowledge in the manner of the disciplinary practitioner – for example, to think and argue as a language specialist, a musician or sociologist as the case may be.

The potential that tutorials have for developing these aspects of learning lies in the opportunities they provide for students to work actively and cooperatively with their peers and tutors – something which is largely missing from lectures and private study. Tutors are thus well placed, indeed uniquely so, to assist their students to develop those higher-order intellectual functions which are at the heart of a university undergraduate education. They do so in a number of ways.

- By drawing on their subject expertise, tutors set learning tasks for students, monitor what they make of them and respond accordingly.
- Through skills of group management, tutors can encourage students to take an active part in the group and so learn from the other students as well as the tutor.
- By exercising self awareness, tutors can judge the fine line that lies between, on the one hand, contributing their subject insights to the work of the class and, on the other, so dominating the group that students are denied the space to take responsibility for their own learning.

Thus the tutor contributes to the tutorial class from two perspectives simultaneously – as subject expert and as facilitator of the students' learning.

This chapter is primarily concerned with some of the practical issues which tutors address as they prepare for and conduct tutorial classes. In particular, it draws attention to a range of strategies and tactics which they may find useful for their own tutorial circumstances. It is assumed that tutors will be dealing with inexperienced undergraduates, that they are to conduct a series of tutorials on a regular basis, such as weekly or fortnightly, and that they have considerable discretion over the pattern of learning activities that will take place during classes and also in preparation for them.

The material in the chapter is organised into three sections which mirror the principal emphases in the concerns of tutors as they move from appointment through an orientation phase, meet with the students for the first time and pass on to the mainstream of their tutorial classes. Tutors are invited to:

- clarify some key issues which have a bearing on the selection of tasks for tutorials and on their approach to management of the group
- consider in detail the first meeting they take with a class
- review some of the practicalities of preparing for and conducting tutorials.

Whilst written principally for tutors in the humanities and social sciences, much of the material is relevant to other disciplines in higher education.

## FINDING ONE'S BEARINGS

Understandably, most tutors wish to develop an early feeling of security about their dual role as a subject authority and a leader of a learning group. Clarifying the following issues can give tutors some early confidence:

- the nature of academic discourse in their discipline;
- the subject-matter for their tutorials;
- the learning aims for their tutorials;
- the importance of student participation.

All of these issues have a bearing on how tutors approach and deliver tutorials. Thinking them through will give tutors a set of frameworks against which to select relevant subject-matter, to devise and sequence appropriate learning tasks and to choose methods of working which will encourage active involvement by students.

### Academic Discourse<sup>1</sup>

Having been successful undergraduates and having begun to develop their specialist postgraduate studies, tutors will already be familiar with the intellectual processes and nature of academic argument in their disciplines. As a principal purpose of tutorials is to inculcate these habits of thought and practice in students, tutors may find revisiting them reassuring. Clarifying these perspectives with a mentor, a course leader or other colleague may help tutors appreciate how much more they are likely to know about these fundamental matters than beginning undergraduates. Hopefully they will come to see that they are in fact better equipped to approach their tutoring duties than they perhaps feel at the outset.

*What do you see as the principal intellectual skills that your subject area requires? It may be helpful to contrast your own subject with another with which you have some familiarity.*

### Getting to Grips with the Subject-Matter

An early concern for many tutors is to understand the subject matter to be covered in their classes.

Chapter 7, *Supporting and Advising Students*, outlines a number of ways they can go about tuning in to details of course structure, content and what it is that is required of students. Here we are only concerned with tutors acquiring an understanding of the essential subject-matter needed to conduct tutorials. Probably the most efficient way of getting to grips with this is to attend the students' lecture course(s), time permitting. But even where this is possible, tutors may find it helpful to have copies of the basic texts and additional recommended reading materials. These are needed both as information sources and as resources for the setting of tasks.

The question of what depth of knowledge is needed to be able to tutor effectively is one that causes a lot of concern. Some very anxious tutors become so concerned at the thought of being unable to answer students' questions that they resort to encyclopaedic preparation in a vain attempt to cover every eventuality. Clearly, a minimum is to be well acquainted with the sources and course material that the students are studying. In some subjects this may mean a deep immersion in detail – for example where technical accuracy is required as in translation of foreign languages.

Drawing the line at what it is useful to know, however, is very difficult. Some feel for where the limits lie may perhaps be gained by considering how tutors use their subject knowledge to support their students' efforts to learn in tutorials. They do so in broadly three ways:

- They draw on their knowledge to devise learning tasks such as setting a passage for translation, selecting a topic as a discussion focus, choosing a chapter of a text for detailed reading, selecting a piece of music for listening to and comment ...
- As students disclose in tutorials what they make of the task, tutors register this against their own knowledge and in turn respond – perhaps, for example, to encourage students to do further exploration of the topic.
- They may respond directly to queries from students.

Tutors who feel confident about setting tasks and listening to and responding to students' exchanges will usually know enough to answer most student queries. Occasionally, however, a tutor will be stumped and some suggestions for how to respond in this situation are given on page 17.

Finally, tutors need to be alert to a specific hazard which attends excessive preparation. The danger

is that a tutor may feel driven to justify the investment of preparation time by moving centre stage with his/her own material to a degree which denies the students space to contribute.

### Clarifying Aims

Learning aims are statements of intent which indicate in a general sense what it is that students are meant to achieve. Some of the principal aims pursued in tutorials are shown in *table 1* with examples of the learning that students might do in pursuit of each.

Aims help tutors by providing a clear guide to the

learning focus and hence to choosing appropriate learning tasks. For example, if the development of students' verbal communication skills is the aim, then suitable learning tasks might be for students to present papers, to chair discussions, to engage in a debate, to offer summaries of discussions and so on.

Making the aims explicit for a series of tutorials and for each individual session within it can be very helpful to students too. This can assist them to see the essential purpose for a tutorial and so meet with a shared understanding of common purpose. Without this, individuals might work to their own

#### SOME LEARNING AIMS FOR TUTORIAL GROUPS

<i>Aim</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<p><b>1. UNDERSTANDING</b> <i>Helping students to consolidate and enhance their understanding of a subject or discipline</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarifying concepts, theories and procedures</li> <li>reflecting on inter-connections</li> <li>testing their understanding through examples, cases, illustrations</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. CRITICAL THINKING</b> <i>Helping students to develop their capacity for thinking critically and analytically</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing evidence in the light of theories</li> <li>learning how to 'set' and solve problems or approach questions and issues</li> <li>enhancing their capacity for logical reasoning and formal argument</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. PERSONAL GROWTH</b> <i>Helping students to develop and mature as individuals</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarifying attitudes, articulating and reappraising values</li> <li>developing in self-confidence and self-esteem</li> <li>evolving a sense of responsibility and commitment</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. COMMUNICATION SKILLS</b> <i>Helping students to learn how to communicate effectively with others</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>refining listening, questioning and explaining skills</li> <li>presenting and defending a position clearly and cogently</li> <li>giving and getting feedback</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. GROUP AND TEAMWORK SKILLS</b> <i>Helping students to learn how to collaborate and work as an effective group or team</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>setting, allocating and monitoring tasks</li> <li>supporting and encouraging other members of the group or team</li> <li>initiating, directing and leading tasks</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. SELF-DIRECTION IN LEARNING</b> <i>Helping students to take progressively greater responsibility for their learning</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarifying their own goals as learners</li> <li>managing their study time and effort and setting priorities</li> <li>accepting responsibility for evaluating their own work and their progress as learners</li> </ul>

Table 1

unspecified aims and agendas to the detriment of cohesive learning in the group.

Which learning aims have priority will usually be made clear by the department. In practice, most tutors will follow a combination of those shown in *table 1*. The fact that multiple aims are often pursued is another very important reason for making them explicit as students may otherwise miss the essential point. As an example, understanding subject content is almost always a major tutorial aim. But the second aim in *table 1*, critical thinking, may have a higher priority. In the absence of clear guidance about this, weaker students especially may continue to believe that, as at school, understanding the facts is the ultimate goal. Aims then are a fundamental issue; clarifying which ones have priority for a tutorial series is one of the ways in which tutors can begin to feel that their initial orientations are soundly based.

*Looking ahead to your tutorial classes, which of the learning aims in table 1 will be most relevant to your students?*

*Are there any additional aims that might be important?*

### Encouraging Participation

The information in *table 1* will alert tutors to the need for students to be active in tutorials if such aims are to be achieved. It is through the linked processes of thinking and communicating amongst the members of the group that students' intellectual and social skills are sharpened and attitudes are clarified, challenged and perhaps modified, whilst at the same time knowledge of the subject matter is consolidated and extended.

Tutors can do a lot to help these sophisticated learning processes come about by taking steps to create a positive and cooperative climate for learning in the group. This needs to be addressed overtly because a lot of new undergraduates may be reluctant initially to participate in a group setting. Some students arrive at university brimming with confidence, but tutors can hardly assume that this will be the norm. Others will be unaware of the purpose and value of tutorials; few will have a clear understanding of discussion skills – fewer still will be practised in their use. Also, many new students, doubting they could have much of value to say, will

feel obliged to view the tutor as an expert to whom they should defer. Additionally, others will see the tutor as an assessor and be inhibited from expressing views by this. A considerable number may also be confused by having to work together in tutorials and will need encouragement to do so. Indeed it is easy to forget they are in a setting where marks matter and they are in competition for these. Clearly tutors need to anticipate these kinds of issues and plan to deal with them from the start. What then makes for effective student participation in tutorials?

*Figure 1* lists some of the factors which can encourage students to take part in tutorials. There are a number of implications here for tutors as few of these desirable conditions are likely to exist when a first year tutorial group first meets. Initially, measures are required to encourage individual students to grow in confidence and also to help

### ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO CONTRIBUTE

Students are encouraged to contribute in tutorials when:

- they feel comfortable with each other and the tutor
- trust and respect are displayed and support is given
- learning is seen as a cooperative exercise
- there is a clear understanding of what they have to learn
- they are aware of the importance of participation
- they are aware of the skills which they are expected to practise
- students are set realistic and achievable tasks
- methods are used in early tutorials which foster students' contributions
- ground rules have been agreed, e.g.
  - everyone prepares and attends
  - everyone tries to contribute and helps others to do so

*Figure 1*

establish an early climate of trust as members of a group with a remit to work together. Though these processes have to be worked at over a period of time, tutors can go a long way to fostering them during the early meetings of the class through the use of appropriate methods. Some examples of useful approaches are given below in the review of the first meeting of the class.

A further implication is the need to make explicit to students what is expected of them. Usually *what* they are to learn is made clear but making clear *how* the learning is to be achieved is also important. Students are more likely to contribute in the group for example, if they are made aware of the skills they can use in discussion. The initial meeting of the tutorial group is therefore a critical one for laying some of these foundations. In the next section we focus on this meeting, reviewing some of the key purposes it can serve and drawing attention to some strategies which tutors might use to get the group off to a good start.

## MAKING A GOOD START

It is important that the first meeting goes well – for students and tutor alike. If the experience is a favourable one, this will act as a spur to student motivation and attendance at the following sessions.

The underlying purpose is to get the students and tutor to take the first steps towards functioning as a learning group. To this end, some important aims are to begin to:

- develop in students a respect for serious academic work;
- foster a spirit of cooperation and collaboration;

and for the tutor there is also a need to:

- develop confidence in the dual role of subject expert and facilitator of the group.

These purposes suggest a balanced agenda between business items and activities aimed at establishing a positive climate for learning. Because this meeting is an introduction to a series there are usually a considerable number of administrative and procedural matters to deal with. Of necessity, these will be tutor-led. Counterbalancing these with activities which will involve students as contributors is critical. Students' expectations for the tutorial series will be shaped in part by what happens to them during the first meeting. If they leave having had opportunities to participate and having had their contributions valued, then

significant groundwork will have been laid on which to build later.

Naturally, the precise form an agenda takes for this meeting, the detailed activities it contains and their sequencing, will vary with the subject and course. Below are some key ideas which tutors may find they can use directly or adapt for their own situation. In practice, social convention usually exerts a pressure to begin with introductions of group members to each other.

## Getting to Know Each Other

In everyday life we find it easier to talk to people we know than to strangers. Tutorials are no exception. Learning each others' names and perhaps a little about each other is a helpful way to begin to establish relationships. Inviting students to join with you in making introductions to one another (or to members of a sub-group if the class is a big one) ensures every student says something and begins to establish a presence in the group. This process takes only a few minutes and everyone will contribute given a few moments of private reflection to pull together one or two personal points to share.

*Can you think of other ways in which you could help students in a group to get to know each other better? Various techniques for 'ice-breaking' as it is sometimes called are included in many of the books about teaching groups.<sup>2</sup>*

## Establishing an Intellectual Climate

Students will expect the tutor to brief them about the work that the group will undertake and also what is expected of them. This gives an early opportunity to begin to establish a climate of serious academic intent by:

- explaining the aims of the tutorial series;
- making explicit the roles and responsibilities of members of the group including the tutor;
- reviewing the skills needed for effective participation;
- giving guidance about preparation for the following tutorial.

**Making Aims Explicit.** It can be helpful to provide students with a written statement of the learning aims for the tutorials, as it can be all too easy for a

verbal briefing about such issues to be forgotten. It can also be useful to tell students how these learning aims complement those which apply to lectures and other learning activities such as self-study. They will then see how the different strands of their learning contribute to their intellectual development and this may influence their behaviour – for example, if they know that tutorials are meant to build on concepts and arguments introduced in lectures and they see that this is adhered to in practice, this can reinforce their motivation to attend lectures and tutorials.

**Making Roles and Responsibilities Clear.** Establishing a clear understanding of the aims for the tutorials clears the ground for a review of the methods that will be used in the group and of who will be responsible for what. If students know that a prime purpose of attending tutorials is to develop intellectual skills of analysing information and appropriate communication skills of argument, they will more readily see the value of their two-fold responsibilities to do preparatory work and to come to tutorials prepared to take part in discussion.

It is important that tutors make clear their own positions. Informing students they will fulfil different roles in the group as circumstances require, for example acting as chairman of discussions, as manager of the group, as occasional contributor and so on, reinforces the point that the learning outcomes will hinge primarily upon the students' own efforts.

**Skills for Student Participation.** Reviewing roles and responsibilities will highlight for students the importance of participation in tutorial classes and the need for understanding the skills they can use in their particular academic setting. *Figure 2* lists some of the skills which are relevant to a discussion class.

Reviewing these skills can be very reassuring for beginning students. For example, knowing that it is legitimate and helpful to ask for clarification when puzzled, or to concur with a point made by another student by offering a supportive example of one's own, can do a lot to reduce anxiety. Lacking this kind of information, some students will imagine that tutorial discussions are about the sharing of rarefied insights – which they know they rarely possess – and so become discouraged. By dispelling such myths, tutors can do much to bolster the fragile confidence of beginning students.

**Setting Preparation.** Tutors can send a strong signal about the serious professional work of the tutorial group by specifically setting preparation for the

### SKILLS FOR PARTICIPATING

- Listening attentively to others.
- Giving information to others.
- Asking others for information.
- Giving examples.
- Checking out what others have said.
- Giving reactions to the contributions of others.
- Asking for reactions to one's own contributions.
- Initiating discussion by asking questions, giving ideas, making suggestions.
- Bringing together and summarising.
- Encouraging others to take part.

*Figure 2*

following class before the close of the initial meeting. If every member of the group is asked to undertake this work, including the tutor, this can underline the message of group as well as individual responsibility. It is important not to devalue this preparation by a rushed briefing. Rather, establishing a climate of serious academic intent can be reinforced by taking time to brief the students fully – for example, by pointing out how the preparation will be used in the next tutorial and by leaving space for students to ask questions. Having the details on paper also underlines the importance of the issue. These measures help to signal to the students the value that the tutor places on the contribution that everyone can make to the early work of the tutorial group.

### Ground Rules

Ground rules are literally rules which the members of a group agree to have in place to guide their work. (For example 'students and tutor will arrive on time', 'sessions will not over-run at the end'...). Framing such rules can head off behaviour which might otherwise irritate some members of the group.

Involving students in agreeing ground rules has several advantages:

- students are immediately valued as having ideas of their own;

- the process involves everyone in modelling some of the working methods which may apply in the group (for example, proposing a ground rule means offering it for scrutiny and experiencing confirmation, qualification or rejection of it);
- tutors have an early opportunity to show how they will work in the class – for example, by chairing or passing over the management of the process entirely to the group.

Setting ground rules can most appropriately be done once students know the purposes of the tutorials and the responsibilities that they and the tutor have. Knowing the likely pattern of work in the group provides a practical context for thinking about appropriate rules.

Putting time aside for this process and involving the whole group can give a strong sense of ownership to ground rules. In turn, this can have a positive influence on the rules being honoured. If the agenda for the initial meeting is already overfull, agreeing ground rules is something that can be returned to at the following tutorial when students have had time to consider the matter more fully.

*Once you become familiar with the place of your tutorial series in the course and the broad pattern of work for the term, you may wish to make an early start with drawing up a programme for the first meeting with your tutorial class.*

- *What do you see as some of the essential items of business you will need to include?*
- *What activities might have a place in your programme to give students an early chance to participate?*

## TUTORIAL PREPARATION

### The Value of Preparation

Regular preparation by students and tutors can help the work of the tutorial class in a number of ways. Students who come well prepared are in a position to contribute. Moreover, material they bring will have received some prior thought. Taking part from such a platform can reinforce confidence and motivation for continued involvement in the group's work.

For tutors too, careful preparation can give a well

grounded sense of security. Understanding the subject material means they can set tasks which really mesh with the learning aims. They will also be in a strong position to listen effectively to the exchanges of students during a class and to respond appropriately.

Potentially, these advantages of regular and effective preparation by students and tutor can significantly raise the quality of the work that a tutorial group will achieve.

### Preparing the Students

Tutors can take a number of steps to help ensure student preparation is undertaken. Particularly during early classes, it can be useful to set tasks which are limited in scope and achievable. Initially, students are likely to be able to handle tasks which are fairly concrete in nature ('Read pages x to y then note three reasons why you think ...'). Being able to complete such preparation will quickly help students to develop confidence. Progressively more challenging work can then be given. This graded approach may help avoid the loss of student motivation which can happen if early preparation is too abstract and outstrips their skill levels.

Tutors can also encourage students by setting tasks on material which relates to core course content which will underline the central importance it has for their learning; also, indicating how prepared material will be used in the forthcoming tutorial can help motivation. Giving instructions in writing avoids confusion, saves valuable tutorial time and ensures they can be sent on to those who may be unavoidably absent. Finally, students are more likely to complete preparation where they have ready access to necessary source materials. Checking out resource availability and taking steps to resolve difficulties is an important part of setting preparation.

In addition to taking steps to encourage students to prepare for tutorials the quality of preparation is also an important consideration. Here there are a number of points to bear in mind.

Setting preparation in the form of questions acts as a stimulus to reflective thinking. This is much more valuable than unreflective reading. Setting sub-groups of students different preparatory tasks on a common subject can be an effective way of ensuring a wide and varied set of contributions without overloading any one student.

When preparation is set it is desirable that all students undertake it – otherwise, when the group

meets, those who have not done it may be marginalised from the proceedings. This is a particular hazard when tutorials are structured round a student presentation of a paper or an essay. Often only the presenter and the tutor have a basis for discussion. If this approach is adopted, it is useful if the presenter involves the other members of the class in preparation – for example, by providing a synopsis of the talk plus a series of questions to trigger students' responses prior to the session.

Where classes are based on students' presentations, tutors can help speakers gain from the experience by directing them to advice about how to present a paper as part of their preparation.<sup>3,4</sup> Clearly this will be of particular importance where the development of communication skills is a high priority.

By thinking through student preparation in such ways, tutors show that they see it as a significant part of the tutorial group's work, that they are placing trust in the students to meet their responsibilities and that they are trying to ensure that tutorial sessions are grounded in students' own work.

*Given your particular tutorial circumstances, what strategies do you think will be most effective in getting students to undertake preparation for your early classes?*

### Preparation by the Tutor

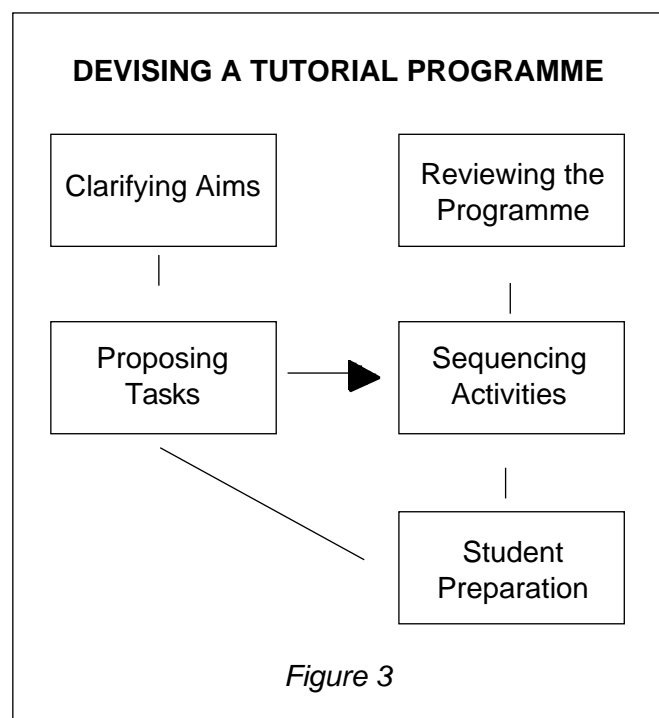
In undertaking their own preparation, tutors will find it helpful to hold firmly in focus two perspectives. First, preparation needs to be to some degree flexible – a planning for possibilities rather than for a relatively rigid path as would be entailed in preparing to deliver a lecture. This is because the course a tutorial takes can be unpredictable – the unexpected can and does occasionally occur. For example, students may become absorbed in discussing a topic and what was envisaged to take ten minutes extends to half an hour. Alternatively, the tutor may expect students to find a particular conceptual area difficult but this turns out not to be the case and the group moves forward much more quickly than expected. Given such possibilities, tutors need to avoid being over rigid in their planning.

The second point relates to an important distinction in the way tutors approach preparation of their subject-matter for tutorials and preparation for one

particular aspect of managing the group. Preparation of subject matter lends itself to an incremental approach – for example week by week. But as group managers, tutors may have to respond to a range of commonly occurring situations, such as having some apprehensively silent students in the group, at any time. Becoming aware of strategies to deploy in such circumstances before tutoring begins is sensible so that the tutor can deploy them as and when the need arises. This aspect of tutor preparation is dealt with in *figure 4* opposite.

### Tutorial Content

*Figure 3* summarises the main steps involved in preparing a tutorial programme. In practice the process will often be a freer and more iterative one than the diagram suggests. It does however provide an organising framework to appreciate what is involved.



The goal is to produce a coherent programme of learning tasks for the students to work with which will enable them to achieve the learning aims set for the session. Illustrative examples of learning tasks drawn from a wide range of disciplines show the enormous range of possibilities:

- translating a section of foreign language text;
- listing items from experience;
- identifying the form of a movement from a symphony;



- listing items culled from reading;
- solving a problem;
- discussing a presentation;
- devising categories for data or observations;
- giving reactions to/opinions about an exhibit;
- discussing critically;
- filling in the missing parts in a musical piece;
- generating ideas;
- arguing relative merits;
- ranking/rating/comparing values;
- drawing up a list of similarities and differences.

The range of possible tasks is limitless and devising them offers tutors considerable scope for providing creative learning opportunities for their students.<sup>5</sup>

As emphasised earlier, clarity of learning aims and a clear understanding of the subject matter which is the focus for the tutorial are fundamental. Tutors need to be sure that proposed learning tasks will address both of these. Some of the other variables against which tutors can usefully check a proposed task are:

- an estimate of how long the activity will take;
- whether the available room arrangements are suitable;
- availability of resource materials;
- whether it requires the tutor's involvement and if so, when and in what roles;
- whether the method it involves will assist the continued building of a supportive learning climate – for example activities which provide opportunities for individual work followed by sharing in pairs or threes are useful for this purpose;
- what briefing students will require and whether this needs to be put on paper beforehand.

Thinking these issues through will not only help a tutor decide whether a task is acceptable, but also where best it fits in the sequence for the class. In drawing up the final programme, the tasks the students have undertaken as preparation also need to be incorporated into the sequence. Finally, a check is needed to ensure that time has been set

### DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

Some suggestions for dealing with five common problems are given below:<sup>6</sup>

**Non-preparation by students.** This can happen for a range of reasons despite tutors' best efforts. For example, students may have several courses and with heavy schedules may give preparation for a particular tutorial series a low priority. Tutors can anticipate this by having materials available relevant to the subject in hand – perhaps a few prepared questions or short readings – and commence with the students working on these. It is important that tutors do not reinforce non-preparation by giving summaries or solutions to the set work themselves.

**Students who are hesitant about participating.** The most constructive way to avoid having silent students is to provide tasks which begin with students thinking about an issue and logging their responses. Sharing these in pairs or threes is invariably successful in involving everyone. Grouping up into fours or sixes will provide confidence building opportunities for shy or nervous students to get used to speaking in front of larger numbers.

**Students who dominate.** Whilst students who make a surfeit of contributions may inhibit others, they are nevertheless precious assets and it is important not to alienate them. Putting dominating students into a common sub group will provide others with space to talk. Tutors can also lead from the front on a one-to-one question and answer basis to ensure everyone has opportunities to participate.

**Dealing with the inaccurate.** In some circumstances a blind eye to the occasional inaccuracy may be appropriate. Where a shy student, for example, summons up the courage to say something which is incorrect, ignoring the issue may be justified in the interests of encouraging more (accurate) contributions. Frequently drawing attention to inaccuracies risks both focusing the proceedings on the tutor and also the creation of a negative climate. These outcomes can be avoided to some extent if other students can be used to resolve some of the inaccuracies.

**Handling difficult questions.** Occasionally students will ask questions to which tutors do not have the answers. Conscientious tutors need not fear this situation and students will invariably welcome candour from the tutors about it. Putting the question back into the group can often produce an answer from another student. In the last resort, the tutor can give an undertaking to check the point before the next meeting.

Figure 4

aside for other necessities such as administration and setting of preparation for the next tutorial.

The end product of this process is a map of the tutorial session giving details of the activities the students are to undertake and an indication of what the tutor and students have to do.

*It is easy to under- or over-estimate what can be achieved in a tutorial session. You may find it helpful to draw up an outline of a programme for an early class, thinking through each proposed activity against the above constraints – and any others which may apply. Reviewing your proposals with an experienced and trusted colleague can act as a useful check on their suitability.*

## CONDUCTING TUTORIALS

There is a great variety in the way that tutorials unfold in different subjects over the allotted time. Despite this variety in detail however, a general similarity of form is recognisable. Most classes move through three stages with particular functions associated with each (see *figure 5*). Broadly, an *opening phase* is followed by a *main working phase* which is succeeded by a *closing phase*. We will look at these stages in turn and the functions of the tutor in each, paying detailed attention to the activities of the main working period.

### Opening Phase

This period is usually in the form of a tutor led briefing and is concerned with making clear to everyone the work to be undertaken, how it will be done and the various roles members of the class

will play. Typically it might include:

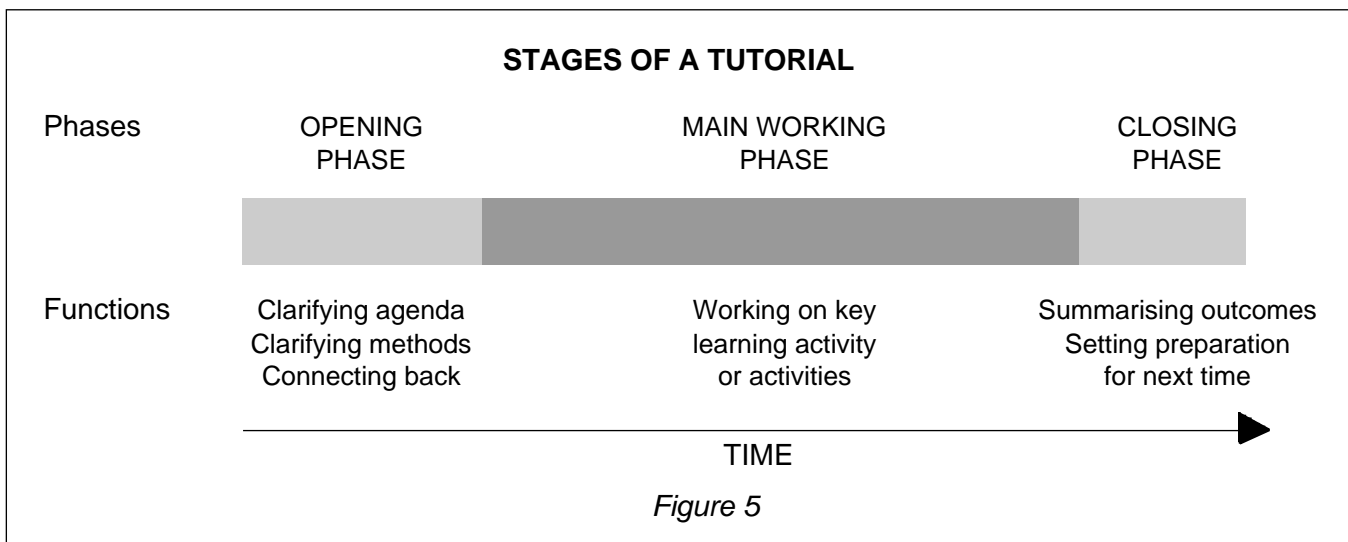
- a reminder of the aims of the session;
- an indication of how the work will connect to other parts of the course;
- a briefing about the activities to be undertaken;
- an indication of where and how students' preparation will fit in;
- guidance about the methods to be used and the specific ways everyone is expected to contribute;
- a reminder of any particular ground rules that apply.

Making such matters clear helps students see how their learning might develop in the session and can reinforce the sense of trust and openness in the group.

### Main Working Phase

The form of the main working phase varies from the simple to the complex. At one extreme, an open group discussion embracing everyone may be the sole activity. At another, students may be involved in a series of sub-group activities and plenary sessions more akin to a workshop. Whatever the pattern, however, the tutor's essential functions are to manage the proceedings and to use their expertise so that students are able to make the most of the learning opportunities.

To see how tutors do this in practice, we will consider two contrasting situations where the full group is to work on a single activity. The first example is overtly tutor-led, in which the task involves, say, the translation of a foreign language text or a keyboard harmony exercise. The second example is of an open discussion, with the tutor's role akin to that of a chairperson.



**Starting Off the Activity.** The initial goal is to draw the students into purposeful work. Invariably this means giving an introduction, preferably a short one to avoid the leadership of the session becoming anchored with the tutor. It could end, say, by directing students into the details of textual translation or by phrasing a suitable open question to get discussion underway ('What views do you have about ...?', 'What do you think of ...?'). The chances of students becoming involved will be increased, of course, if the tutor leads directly into their preparatory work. Especially in the opening few minutes of an activity, tutors need to be alert to the danger of reinforcing passive tendencies in the group by over responding to questions which cast them in the role of information providers. Where

queries arise, tutors will assist the group's purpose if their replies are brief and they return the business to the students.

**During the Activity.** Once the activity is under way, the tutor's task becomes a three-fold one of:

- *attending* to what takes place, by observing and listening;
- *mapping* what is heard and observed on to the tutor's own knowledge and reflecting on it;
- *responding* to what is taking place with various strategies which may include questioning, commenting or taking other management action.

### WHAT TUTORS DO IN TUTORIALS

<b>ATTENDING TO</b> <i>by listening and observing</i>	<b>PROCESSING</b> <i>by mapping onto own knowledge, reflecting</i>	<b>RESPONDING TO</b> <i>by questioning, commenting or management action</i>
Students' engagement with intellectual content of learning task	e.g. what is valid or invalid? - areas of misunderstanding? - degree of depth? - degree of breadth? - issues/areas well understood?	e.g. directing discussion by: - giving supportive feedback - switching the agenda focus - encouraging deeper or broader coverage - correcting misunderstandings
Students' demonstration of intellectual skills of the discipline	e.g. examples of skills being well used or underused: - reflection - analysis - synthesis - creativity - communication	e.g. feedback to students: - commending their use of particular skills - encouraging them to practice neglected skills
Patterns of students' contributions	e.g. dynamics of participation, espec. recognising: - who needs encouragement? - who needs constraining? - who/what is constructive/helpful?	e.g. judging when and how to: - invite in the quiet - restrain the dominant - reintegrate the whole group
Pattern of tutor's contributions	e.g. reviewing whether you are: - intervening too little? - intervening too much? - attending in a balanced way to all dimensions? (subject content/ subject skills/patterns of student contributions)	e.g. deciding to give the group: - more space - more trigger material - more feedback on their progress

Table 2

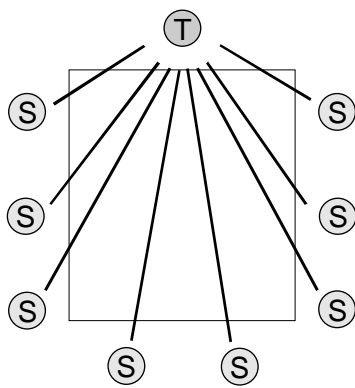
These activities apply to the students' engagement with the subject matter, the students' attempts to use their disciplinary specific intellectual skills, the patterns of interaction amongst the members of the group and the tutor's awareness of his/her own behaviour. Additionally, the tutor is carrying out these activities in a fluid group setting with considerable pressure to make immediate responses.

Table 2 shows the three elements of the tutor's task in relation to these four dimensions. Some

illustrative examples of processing and responding activities are also shown. To illustrate what is involved in practice we can return to our two contrasting approaches. Typical patterns of interaction in a class during a translation activity or keyboard harmony exercise (A) and an open discussion (B) are shown in figure 6.

This brief review illustrates how all dimensions of the framework shown in table 2 have a place in two widely contrasting situations. In any tutorial, needless to say, the emphasis given to the different

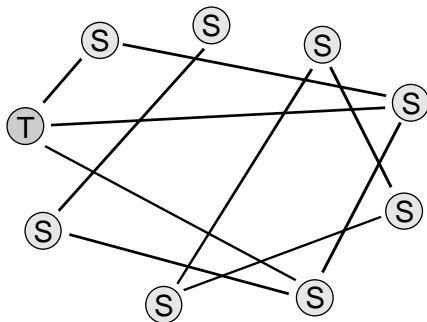
### CONTRASTING PATTERNS OF TUTORIAL INTERACTION



#### A. A CLOSE TRANSLATION OR A KEYBOARD HARMONY EXERCISE

In A, the tutor pays close attention to each student's understanding of the textual/harmonic content and

also their proficiency in the skills of translation/playing. The need for managing the group may seem at first sight to have little prominence as the interactions are channelled through the tutor and the dominant exchanges are on a one-to-one basis. However, the tutor faces some subtle management decisions – for example in maintaining the involved interest of everyone in the work of the group whilst at any time only one student is speaking/playing; in deciding how long to keep the translation/score with any student; or when to progress to a weaker or a stronger student; and perhaps in deciding when to switch the whole group into open or structured discussion to review general issues which may be arising from the work. With the tutor controlling the pattern of students' involvement and also being the source of technical expertise, there are strong tendencies towards reinforcing student dependency to which the tutor needs to be constantly alert.



#### B. AN OPEN DISCUSSION

In B, there is much scope for a diversity of student opinion and argument to be expressed. The tutor's group management role is often prominent as students are encouraged to contribute. The degree to which the discussion is based on the ideas and views of students will also be influenced by how restrained the tutor is in promulgating his or her own.

Thus the tutor's self management and group management skills significantly influence the outcomes from discussion activity.

However, many students can be unsure about what they have achieved at the end of a discussion session. If they are to get a balanced picture of their achievements it is vital students receive feedback from the tutor about what they have made of the subject-matter and also about how they have gone about the work. Tutors are well placed, as chair or as an observer of a discussion, to do this. By monitoring the breadth and depth of discussion, they can prompt further exploration as required; by commenting on examples of students' use of skills they can encourage their further development.

To be effective, tutors need to identify the different strands that emerge during a discussion and to spot important themes that do not. Being able to remember who said what is also important so that contributions of individual students may be acknowledged and valued.

Figure 6

facets of the framework will be influenced by the learning activities being used and the personal style of the tutor.

How might new tutors best put the information contained in *table 2* to practical use? It is easy for new tutors to become overwhelmed by the complexity of all that happens in a group. Hopefully this information will help tutors appreciate that an order can be placed on events. It is clearly not possible to attend to all of these dimensions at once and even very experienced tutors occasionally find they are stretched by the demands. A helpful way forward may be to view the framework as something to be used selectively rather than a comprehensive map of what has to be attended to at all times. Thus, as the occasion and the mood suggests, tutors may in one part of a tutorial pay attention to the students' use of skills, and in another part, focus on the dynamics of what is going on in the group whilst all the time picking up on how well they are handling the subject material. Hence the tutor's task may seem more manageable.

**Skills for Tutoring.** The discussion so far has not addressed the particular skills which tutors can deploy in the *attending* and *responding* aspects of their work. There are many such skills and here attention is drawn to only a selection of them. Two skills of *attending* are picking up on *non-verbal cues* and *note-taking* and two valuable response skills are using *non-verbal signals* and *questioning tactics*.

*Non-Verbal Cues.* During a discussion, regular scanning of the tutorial group will enable tutors to pick up cues of facial expression and body language from those not speaking. From these, those who have something to say or those who are showing developing disinterest can be recognised.

*Note Taking.* In discussions ideas do not necessarily come out in a logical flow. Keeping a brief set of notes against a clock-face diagram can help to register who said what. This will enable a tutor to attribute ideas to those who produced them when giving feedback. It will also help to identify some of the key themes touched on when pulling together summary comments for the close of a session. Students need to be told about the tutors' purposes in keeping brief notes.

*Using Non Verbal Signals.* In discussion, responding to non-verbal cues with non-verbal gestures can be an effective way of keeping things moving without obtrusive verbal intervention. For example, tutors can bring in people or encourage them to continue by eye contact or hand gesture; or they can encourage them to stay out with a raised hand.

## QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

### Testing Questions

Used to elicit information and concerned with: checking knowledge:

*Which of the social indicators will be most reliable?*

comprehension:

*What do you think is meant by ...?*

application:

*What relevance would that have in ...?*

analysis:

*What qualities do they have in common?*

synthesis:

*Could you summarise what we have said so far?*

evaluation:

*What do you feel is best?*

### Clarifying Questions

Used to ensure a shared understanding (often by elaborating a point previously made):

*What did you mean by ...?*

*Can you give an example ...?*

### Elaborating Questions

Often provide a gentle way of encouraging students to say something more fully - both about thoughts or feelings:

*Can you tell me more about that?*

*What does that make you feel?*

Implicit in the above are two *forms* of asking questions - open and closed. Closed questions usually offer little scope for response ("What was the date of the first NHS act?"). Because students risk answering wrongly, these may act to inhibit discussion. However, they clearly have their place where checking of factual material is required. Open questions, such as the examples of elaborating questions above, allow more scope for response. They will often draw students out and their use is a powerful enabling strategy in discussion work.

Figure 7

*Questioning Strategies.* In the course of tutorials tutors often wish to ask questions of their students.<sup>7</sup> Some common categories and purposes for which they may be used are given in *figure 7*.

A final point to make about using questions is that the quality of students' responses will be raised if they are given a short period of time to think before responding.

**Closing the Activity.** As was suggested earlier, there is often a need for the tutor to draw out from an activity what has been achieved. Quite apart from the value of reminding students about the ground covered, tutors can also use their greater awareness of the subject at this point to help round out students' understanding. They can show how the group's work connects into the wider picture or perhaps draw attention to areas which were under-explored and where some supplementary work may be needed. This process need take only a minute or two and it can be a very effective way of helping to consolidate students' learning. As the group gains in experience, students can be asked to provide summaries themselves.

### Closing Phase

As just described, a principal purpose of the closing phase of a tutorial can be to look back and clarify what has been achieved. An equally important function is to look ahead and anticipate the work the class will handle next time by briefing the students about any preparation to be undertaken. Tutors often find that for a variety of reasons the ending of a tutorial becomes a rushed affair and the best laid plans go awry. In such situations, they can feel driven to cut short a review of the current session or trim the briefing for the next. Clearly, sometimes needs must, but the danger of giving students mixed messages is one tutors should keep in mind. Tutorials are important precisely because the students appear centre stage. Thus, reviewing what has been achieved and going over what has to be done for next time and making time to ensure these processes are considered ones, shows how much the tutor respects and values the efforts of students and continues to expect of them.

This chapter has focused on one of the major aspects of tutors' practice, the preparation for and the managing of students' learning in tutorial classes. Tutors make significant contributions to their students' development too through the guidance and support they give to coursework written assignments. This is the theme chapter 6.

*Though few new tutors can be expected initially to have an array of finely tuned skills to manage a tutorial group, all tutors will be able to handle some aspects of this complex task well.*

*Which aspects of the framework shown in table 2 will particularly apply in your tutorial situation?*

*Which do you already feel some comfort with?*

*Which do you feel you might make an early focus for development?*

### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1. At certain points in this handbook (see also pp. 55-56, 62 and c.f. pp. 69ff.), we have used the term "academic discourse" to refer to the distinctive ways in which those within an academic discipline communicate with one another. This form of discourse involves much more than the use of technical terms or specialist jargon. It is characterised by distinctive ways of thinking: a concern with theories, concepts and abstract ideas; an alertness to the available evidence; and the grounding of discussion and debate within an established body of published scholarship and research. Needless to say, if students in higher education are to succeed academically, they have to master the language of academic discourse, as it is manifested in the particular disciplines or subjects they are studying.
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7. Jaques, D. Op.Cit. pp. 129-136