How to Survive…..
Making the most of tutes

Participating in tutorial discussions can be daunting to start with. Like all communication skills, taking part in group discussions requires practice and self-evaluation. The best way to get started is to understand what tutes are for and what is required of you.

Tutes can be very powerful learning opportunities. Among other things, they:

- give you the chance (perhaps your only one!) to ask questions;
- allow you to develop your oral communication (a skill highly-valued in the workplace, not to mention in life in general!);
- provide an opportunity for you to hear a range of opinions and ideas; and
- promote deep learning by giving you the chance to apply / critically evaluate / test the material covered in lectures.

Speaking up in tutes will help you build your confidence in content covered in the particular unit AND in your ability to articulate your understanding.

Getting started: tips

- If you find you are shy in tutes and never or rarely say anything, you need to ‘break the ice.’ Start by aiming to say one thing at the very next tute (a question or comment for example), then aim to say two things, and so on. Once you have made a start, joining in gets easier and easier.
- Making sure you are prepared (doing the readings, attending lectures) is the key to having something meaningful to say.
- Always ask for clarification if anything is unclear. This helps other speakers improve their ideas and skills.
- Do not worry about looking stupid: chances are several others in the tute also need clarification or are having the same difficulties.
Each person has an important part to play in the tute.

**Take responsibility** for the success of each tute. Many students blame the tutor or other students when a tutorial is unsuccessful. This handing over of responsibility is one of the reasons tutes may be unsuccessful. Your role includes:

**Supporting** others in the tute by listening carefully and responding to comments, asking relevant questions, restating points made, telling others when you approve of their contribution.

**Helping** the discussion stay on track by, for example, keeping your comments to the point or changing the direction when the discussion goes off on a tangent.

**Starting** discussion by, for example, asking a question or offering an opinion.

**Discussion Skills**

**Take risks** – whether what you say is right or ‘wrong’ is less important than your engagement with the discussion. It is better to have said something incorrect than to have said nothing at all. How will you know it is ‘wrong’ if you don’t try it out on your peers? Try not to dwell on mistakes; you are probably the only person who is going to remember them.

**Take more risks** – speak up if you disagree with what is being said. Restate what the other speaker has said and state your reasons for disagreeing.

**Practice** different ways of joining the discussion. Learn from how others’ do it.

**After the tute** – make a note of important points made and consider your own contribution. Ask yourself whether you understand the topic better. If not, think about what you can do to fix this.

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Other useful resources:
- Other Survival Guides – “Speaking to an Audience” “Seminar Presentations”
- BOOK – Rabow, J. et al. (1994) Learning through discussion (LL&RS Resource Area CS400)

This survival guide adapts material presented in Blaber, R and Buchbinder, D Eds. (1993) *Literature, Language and Culture 111: Study Guide*


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