



Learning Resource Centres

Effective Discussion

Learning Resource Centres
Study Skills Series 3

Studying at college or university usually includes group discussion sessions called 'seminars' or 'tutorials'. Often, insufficient importance is placed on the value of discussion as a way of learning, and therefore the tutorial can sometimes be under utilised.

What is a Tutorial?

It is not:

- A lecture with gaps for questions.
- An interrogation session, designed to show up your weak points in front of others.
- An easy option that needs no preparation.

It is:

- An opportunity to receive information from various sources, not just the lecture.
- A time for asking questions and getting them answered straight away.
- A way of learning from a 'non-traditional' source.

What are the Advantages of a Tutorial?

- Asking questions are a way of learning. The ability to frame a question on a given subject is a good indicator of how much of the subject is understood.
- Discussion is an effective way of exploring existing beliefs as well as examining new concepts and ideas. Discussion enables you to identify mental blind spots and learn new material more efficiently.

Preparing for Discussion

There are various steps that can be taken to prepare for discussion:

- Read the suggested reference material.
- Note down any points that you either;
 - a) had difficulty with, or:
 - b) found particularly interesting.
- Look over any additional material that you have on the subject. Raise any problems that you have encountered at the tutorial.

At the Tutorial

- Take along the suggested reading material and any other material that you feel is relevant.
- Raise the points that you noted down either because you had difficulty with them, or that you found them particularly interesting. The discussion process can help you to address any problems that you may be having with the subject matter.
- Taking notes during a tutorial can be difficult, especially if you are trying to contribute to the discussion at the same time. One solution is to tape record the session, provided that no-one objects or feels inhibited by it. Alternatively, you could ask the tutor to plan a five-minute summary at the end of each session.
- Successful group discussions are dependent upon everyone contributing and taking something away from the tutorial.

After the Tutorial

- Go back over the tutorial in your mind, write a summary of the main points if one was not provided for you.
- Re-read any lecture notes on the subject to reinforce your understanding of the subject.