

Tutor...*n.* & *v.*

LME. [AN, OFr. *tutour* ...or L *tutor*, f. *tut-* pa. ppl stem of *turei* watch, look after, protect...]... **A** *n.*...A custodian; a keeper; a protector; a defender.... **B** *v.* ...teach or instruct (*in* a subject)....



A guide for tutors in disciplines in the humanities & social sciences



Centre for Higher Education Development
University of Cape Town

Tutor...*n.* & *v.*

A guide for tutors in disciplines in the
humanities & social sciences



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

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Editor

Mapping the Territory

Since you are reading this, you are, or are about to become, a **tutor (n.)**. Congratulations. This is an achievement, and one which you can use to extend yourself as well as to make a real difference to the lives of fellow students. To **tutor (v.)** gives you an opportunity to really get to grips with your own understanding of your discipline, and to help others discover their understanding. Experience and understanding gained in tutoring can help you in your post-university career as you lead teams or support development opportunities in the workplace.

Think about it: tutorials are a part of every student's experience. Think back on the ones you have attended.

No, seriously – think back.

What was the worst tutorial you ever attended? What was the best? What made them so? How did they (and others like them or others that were just 'okay') affect your experience of being a student?

Tutorials can make a difference. Not all of that is the tutor's responsibility – the students, the lecturer, the administration staff, the maintenance and technical staff, they all play a role; but as tutor *you can create the opportunities and the space for students to engage with ideas, concepts and information in such a way that they (and you) will come to know things differently.*

This guide won't make the difference – you will.

So what's this guide about then?

In this guide we'll identify important areas of theory and practice around tutoring in small to medium groups (up to 30 members). Beginning with some general comments about tutoring, the guide will lead you through a brief look at how students learn (consider how you relate to this section.). Then, in the light of these ideas, we'll consider what roles tutorials can play in creating the space for learning to happen. With these issues in our minds, we then consider how tutors can design and plan a tutorial. Yes, the lecturer may provide a tutorial task, but how can you turn that into an engaged tutorial? (Once again, think back on those good tutorials – what made them 'work'?).

Planning an engaged tutorial is one thing, putting it into practice is another. So we'll offer you a few strategies that you could use to support learning – a kind of 'tricks and tips for making tutorials work', but of course it's never that easy. Then we look at what happens in

groups (sometimes called 'group dynamics') and ways of responding when the group isn't working. Tutoring is not just about managing a group: it's about student learning, and so it's back to that again. This time though, we look at how assessment (marking) can play a role in learning, and how to go about marking assignments in a way that helps everyone.

With these ideas of how students learn, how groups may work, how student diversity can impact on student learning and tutorials, what information literacy is, and what role assessment can play in student learning, we then look at evaluating tutorials, tutor practice and what you as a tutor learnt from the experience.

One issue that hardly ever gets adequate attention at universities is that student learning involves working with new information – and most students are not that information literate. What is information literacy? (It is not computer literacy, although it will increasingly require some ability to use a computer.) How can tutors support students in their development of information literacy skills? What other help is there on campus?

Tutoring – an honourable tradition

The Western (and rather patriarchal) origins of 'tutoring' can be traced back as far as Ancient Greece. Initially, tutoring frequently involved a philosopher being hired as a guardian for the sons of a family. In some cases, this was to fulfil the guiding role of an absent father, but frequently was simply to help prepare a young man for his leadership role in society. In some cases, tutors were favoured and well educated slaves. Tutors are to be found frequently throughout history in various guises and roles, but mostly as private teachers and moral guides to the children (including girls) in families.

Since about the 18th Century, women were frequently employed in similar positions, but called 'governesses' – a feature of the patriarchal societies. By the 18th Century tutors were well established in university contexts, especially in England and Scotland. Normally these were junior academic staff members who held Masters degrees – doctorates being relatively rare. Some universities continue to call certain staff 'tutors' and their role of being a personal tutor to a number of students remains pretty much as it was. As women were permitted into universities (only in the mid- to late-19th century, and then with great reluctance) some women's 'colleges' within universities appointed female tutors.

Graduate students (as we know them today) appear to have first started tutoring after the First World War; especially in the UK, but also in other countries that had suffered huge losses of young men, and, to a lesser extent, women, during that war. Whether this was a result of a reduction in available staff, changes in student numbers, or the developing 'democratic spirit' of the times, is hard to tell – but these appear to have supported the burgeoning number of Graduate Teaching Assistants in USA. In South Africa, the deployment of graduate students as tutors only really took on a significant role in universities in the 1970s. This trend became more formally entrenched by the late-1980s as student numbers began to increase and it was no longer possible for staff to act as class tutors (Jaques 1991; Vorster 1996; Goodlad 1998; Park 2004).

So, tutoring is not new. But what has changed is the context in which tutors work? As more and more people want to attend university, so the numbers and background of students has begun to change immensely. Increasingly, many students come from families in which they are the first family member to attend university. Such students have the educational background (they have achieved the school-leavers qualification required, or an equivalent), but they are often unprepared for the learning and social demands of university life. Such students have long been part of university life – what is different in the 21st Century is that there are often more first-time students than students from families with a tradition of higher education. So not only has the sheer number of students increased (thus increasing the staff:student ratio), but the educational needs of many students have increased. This is a challenge for all teaching staff. It presents no less of a challenge for tutors.

What Do We Know About the Way Students Learn?

Some cautions to start off with:

- Students are people too, although in a particular learning environment.
- There is no such thing as 'a typical student'.
- People who are learning change from January to December.

These three cautions are important because they remind us that no student comes to tutorials without a past and a present.

- **Students have more than this *discipline* on their minds** – students are not only students of psychology, history, social anthropology, sociology, etc.; but are students of combinations of these and other disciplines.
- **Students have more than this *tutorial* on their minds** – students are also members of families, in (or out of) relationships, looking for funding, part-time workers, and so on. All of these things jostle for priority and influence in the life of the student arriving in the tutorial.
- **Each student's motivation for being there is personal** – some are 'looking for a job', others are following a dream, while others are 'taking subjects' with no clear aim at all. Equally, students change remarkably over the space of a year – from uncertain first years in February to 'hardened students' by October.

All this suggests that while learning theories are useful, we must not be surprised if students (as people) do not always fit any one theory, and if strategies of running one tutorial do not work a term later.

What do we mean when we talk about 'learning'?

'Learning' is not the same as 'getting information'; just as 'knowledge' is not something that we can simply 'get' from a book or a lecture. 'Knowledge' requires work on our part and that work is what we call *learning*: i.e. the process of turning *information* into *knowledge*.

'Knowledge' refers to our examined experience of living in a relationship with the world, including social relations that in some way influence the way we act in the world by either confirming or changing our relationship with the world. Knowledge includes:

- The **judgement(s)** involved in understanding what information is relevant, how trustworthy the information is, and when, where and how to apply that information to a real (or imagined) context.

- The **skill(s)** required to apply the selected, relevant information in responding to a problem, expanding an idea, or creating/imagining something new and different.
- Our **experience(s)**, so it's not just a matter of organising propositions (conceptual information), techniques and skills, but also about what and how we react to new ideas and events.
- Our ability to know what we know and what we don't know – to think about the ways that we think and act. This is called our **reflexivity**.

Learning thus involves our working with new information in the form of ideas, experiences, images, text, etc. in order to develop and exercise judgement and skills, examine our experience and reflexively consider our engagement with these ideas so that we may understand the world better, and/or influence some aspect of living in the world.

At the heart of this understanding of learning is the idea that learning involves making meaning of something. Memorising, while possibly an important strategy, is not the same as learning. This may mean changing our way of understanding something, or it may mean that we have to abandon an old way of understanding something.

This may mean that sometimes we cannot, or will not, accept new information because it does not fit with what we already understand. Sometimes that decision is based on good judgement, but it could also be because we feel threatened by what it will mean for us if we have to accept the new ideas – although such fear may also be rooted in good judgement.

Here's a thought 1: Creation or evolution?

For example, if we have understood the world as being created in a short period of time by a single Creator, and now we hear in a lecture about evolution, we may:

- Become excited by this new idea, and begin to question our earlier knowledge, and perhaps abandon that understanding altogether.
- Like the new idea, but feel we cannot abandon our old understanding altogether and rather try to reach a compromise between the two ideas.
- Reject the new idea as false.

Whatever happens, we have to find some way of connecting our current understanding with the new understanding that we have been presented with. As you can imagine, this is not just an intellectual exercise. It involves our emotions as well.

Looking at the alternatives in the example above, how do you imagine each of these responses could affect the way a student works in a tutorial on this subject? What could the effect be on the student for the rest of a lecture once they have heard this? How could this impact on their learning? (This is an example from a real class situation in Anthropology, and student responses were across the range (J Reynolds, Rhodes University, pers. comm., 2006)).

Even when learning ‘facts’, the learner is still required to make sense of what they are working with (it must have some meaning for them). So, for example, memorising the formula for a Standard score in psychometric measurement and statistics (Morgan & King 1971:300)

$$Z = \frac{\text{Score} - \text{Arithmetic Mean}}{\text{Standard Deviation}}$$

does not indicate that the formula has any meaning for the student, or that the student will have any idea of how to apply the formula or the resulting Z score. Not only will a student need to understand (to make sense of) each of the components of the formula, but s/he will also need to recognise when it is appropriate to apply the formula, how to interpret the results, what its limitations are, and what concerns there are about standard scores. So, although a student may be able to repeat the memorised formula, they do not ‘know’ it, nor have they learned much about standard scores. At the same time they must be able to recall the formula (or be able to reconstruct it) to use it.

Memorisation is sometimes necessary, but not sufficient, for learning. For example, in history, politics or sociology it’s no use being able to write an essay about Steve Biko and not be able to locate him in the historical setting – South Africa, 1946 to 1977 – in which he lived and was killed. It’s also not much use being able to repeat the information that a person named Steve Biko was born in 1946 and died in 1977 if we can’t say why that information is important.

The way learning is presented in this guide is that **learning is a social activity**; learning does not just happen in our heads, but happens in and through our relationships with others – including lecturers and authors. We make meaning of new experiences and information in relation to others in the world. Even if we are alone in our rooms, thinking about a new idea, that idea is thought about in relation to other ideas, to language, and so on.

One important implication of this is that how and what we learn also depends on the context in which we learn (Wells 1999; Harris 2001).¹ So, learning that emerges in a lecture may be very different from the learning that emerges in a tutorial. Both kinds of learning experience have a place, but they serve different purposes.

Central to learning is the (conscious and unconscious) relation of new ideas to other ideas that we have acquired and developed over time. **Learning involves connecting new information with understanding we already have**, and seeing the relationship between the new and the old (Haggis & Pouget 2002).

But there’s more....

¹ For those who are interested, this would be a socio-cultural understanding of learning.

Approaches to learning

Academic learning, while related to all learning, has special characteristics because not only is it about meaning, but also because it must be proven that we have learnt something: academic learning involves testing. Learning for meaning and learning for tests (or examinations) *should* be the same thing. Often they're not. Since the late-1970s research into student learning at university has suggested that students tend to adopt one, or a combination of, *approaches* to learning based on their intentions (Entwistle 1997, in Light & Cox 2001:49). In the first approach, the students' intentions are to understand ideas for themselves. They do this by:

- Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience.
- Looking for patterns and underlying principles.
- Checking evidence and relating it to conclusions.
- Examining logic and argument cautiously and critically.
- Becoming actively interested in course content.

The researchers called this a **deep approach** to learning. Here students seek to *transform* information into something meaningful for them in their context. They engage with the information.

At the other extreme students adopt a **surface approach** that intends to cope with course requirements. This approach is characterised by:

- Reading or taking notes without reflecting on either purpose or strategy.
- Treating the course as unrelated bits of knowledge.
- Memorising facts and procedures routinely.
- Finding difficulty in making sense of new ideas presented.
- Feeling undue pressure and worry about work.

There are some students who successfully negotiate their way through these two extremes and adopt what researchers term a **strategic approach**. This approach is aimed at *achieving* good marks and is based on being able to make good decisions about where to follow a deep approach and where to follow a surface approach. Like the deep approach, it is in fact hard work. It is characterised by:

- Putting consistent effort into studying.
- Finding the right conditions and materials for studying.
- Managing time and effort effectively.
- Being alert to assessment requirements and criteria.
- Gearing work to the perceived preference of lecturers.

David Jaques (1991:45) suggests that people adopting a surface approach to learning focus on the 'signs' – learning words, definitions, formulae, lists of dates, etc. – without trying to make any sense or meaning of that which the sign points to. The focus, in other words, is on *reproducing* what was heard in lectures or read in a textbook. This approach can work, but it often lies behind the student who opens the exam paper, reads the first question, and declares that 'we never did *that* in class...'. Because s/he has learned the examples off by heart (rote learning) without taking the time to ensure that s/he understood the

meaning of the material, s/he is lost when a question is posed using a different example or setting.

Students adopt a surface approach for lots of reasons: lack of planned preparation, lack of interest in a course or discipline, lack of time because of a crowded curriculum, too many tests and assignments, and so on. Some authors (e.g. Boughey 2008) suggest that the kind of approach to learning which is characterised as a 'surface approach' arises from the student being unable to access the way of thinking, the values and ways of arguing, that the traditional university demands. These ways of thinking and valuing are rooted in years of cultural tradition which Western people are barely aware of. People from other cultural traditions and experiences find these impenetrable and hard to decode. In lectures there's no opportunity to engage with the underlying assumptions, while tutorials can be excellent opportunities to examine assumptions. Tutorials can become very important opportunities to help students uncover and engage with the assumptions, values and rules of the discipline.

Learning is unsettling

There is another set of research that helps us understand another element of student learning. It may even help explain why some students begin by opting for a surface approach, and once they have adopted this approach, find it hard to change. This research into the 'intellectual and ethical' development of students also began in the 1970s, this time at Harvard University. It has been extended by a number of researchers since then (Felder & Brent 2004a). Felder and Brent give an excellent summary of the results of research done by Marcia Baxter-Magolda (1992, in Felder & Brent 2004:279).

Baxter-Magolda research suggests that students evidence two distinct 'patterns' or perspectives on knowledge that are evident through a number of levels of development during their undergraduate and postgraduate years. Generally (but not exclusively) the two patterns tend to be gendered (i.e. men dominate in the one, and women in the other). These patterns are identifiable at each level of development, although they change as they develop. Beginning with a level of what Baxter-Magolda termed *Absolute knowing*, students then move through *Transitional knowing*, and *Independent knowing*, to reach the level of knowing found among professional scientists and academics, *Contextual knowing*. The following text sets out these levels (named in **bold**) with the patterns (in *italics*) evident throughout:

Absolute knowing. All knowledge that matters is certain; all points of view are either right or wrong. Authorities have The Truth and the responsibility to communicate it; and the students' job is to memorise and repeat it. In the *mastery pattern* (exhibited more by men than women), students tend to raise questions to make sure their information is correct and challenge deviations from their view of the truth; and in the *receiving pattern* (more women than men), students are more likely to simply take in and record information without questioning or challenging it.

Transitional knowing. Some knowledge is certain and some is not. Authorities have the responsibility to communicate the certainties, and the students must make their own judgements regarding the uncertainties. In the *impersonal pattern* (more men than women), students make judgements using a logical procedure prescribed by authorities and believe that they deserve full credit if they follow that procedure, regardless of the clarity of their reasoning and the quality of their supporting evidence. In the *interpersonal pattern* (more women than men), students base judgements on intuition and personal feelings and distrust logical analysis and abstract reasoning.

Independent knowing. Most knowledge is uncertain. Students take responsibility for their own learning rather than relying heavily on authorities or personal feelings. They collect and use evidence to support judgements, but tend to do so superficially, and they believe that when knowledge is uncertain all conclusions regarding it are equally good if the right procedure is used to reach them. In the *individual pattern* (more men than women), students rely on objective logic and critical thinking, challenging their own and others' positions to establish truth and make moral judgements. In the *interindividual pattern* (more women than men), students rely on caring, empathy and understanding of others' positions as bases for judgements.

Contextual knowing. All knowledge is contextual and individually constructed. Students take responsibility for making judgements, acknowledging the need to do so in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity. They use all possible sources of evidence in the process – objective analysis and intuition, their own thoughts and feelings and ideas of others whose expertise they acknowledge – and they remain open to changing their conclusions if new evidence is forthcoming (Felder & Brent 2004b:279–280).

Here's a thought 2: What does Baxter-Magolda's research suggest about tutorials?

Have a look at Baxter-Magolda's model and think about which category describes the way **you** think in your discipline area. How do you think **new first years** have experienced this discipline? How would someone who is operating from the perspective of Absolute Knowing respond to a task asking her/him to 'critique' an argument? What does the model suggest to you about the way male and female students approach discussion in tutorial groups?

The principle of models of student learning such as these is that there are no short cuts through the stages; we have to pass through them all (although we will revisit some repeatedly). However, when we are able to think through how we arrived at ideas and answers (and this is something tutorials can really help with), these opportunities create the opportunity for us to extend to the next stage (Hilton & Southgate 2007).

This research also indicates that the movement from one 'phase' to another is often a kind of crisis for the student (think back to *Here's a thought 1: Creation and evolution*). Each shift implies a change in the way the student understands how s/he relates to the world, and can thus be very unsettling. For some students already dealing with being new to university, being away from familiar communities, struggling with the concepts themselves, it may be easier to avoid the kind of engagement that will bring about that change. So, for example, Boughey, in a study of students' writing in a philosophy course, argues that:

The actions undertaken by students to learn ... are deeply related to their identities as individuals outside the university and how they understand 'outside' contexts. Although the students in ...[the study she reports on]... were black working class South Africans, the university is arguably just as alien for millions of students across the world whose home contexts provide them with experiences which are 'other' to those offered, and valued, by the university. For how many other students, then, is the university a place which, to borrow from the participant in this study, makes them 'discourageous'? (Boughey 2008:8)

So there is a sense in which adopting what appears to be a surface approach may simply be a strategic decision to enable the student to manage their lives. Part of that 'managing' may include finding ways to retain their own cultural identity in the face of the onslaught of the cultural identity out of which the university grows.

Generally, what such models suggest is that people who are new to university, and new to a discipline, need to learn far more than just the content – they need to understand the values and rules (especially the hidden rules) of a discipline. They need to understand what the main ideas at work in the discipline are, and what the implications are of these ideas. Learning the content is important (indeed, is vital), but getting the opportunity to engage in discussion (or simply to hear others engage in discussion) around ways of working with that content is supremely important for them to develop their own understanding and then to develop in their ability for judgemental thinking. It is in this area that the tutorial is the key teaching and learning strategy.

In the light of what we have considered about student learning, Jaques suggests that small group spaces in the curriculum are those most conducive to students whose approach to learning is both deep and holistic (1991:49), to which we could add from Baxter-Magolda, *independent* or *contextual*. But as Jaques goes on to note:

...tutors require sensitivity and skill in accommodating the variety of student styles within a climate of intellectual growth (not to speak of the tutor's own styles and predilections)... What we as tutors must do is to help students understand what choices there are in approaches to learning and to give them the opportunity and support in making their choices. Small groups provide the most suitable environment for this to occur. (Jaques 1991:50)

How Do Tutorials Support Student Learning?

Former University of Cape Town lecturer Greg Pastoll proposes that: 'A tutorial is an occasion for students to receive feedback about their own constructions of meaning' (1992:1). That seems a good place to start, but perhaps we can extend this understanding a little. If students are to 'receive feedback about their own constructions', then they need the space to develop and test out these constructions too.

Tutorials support learning by creating a safe space for students to feel comfortable enough to venture an opinion. That safety consists in many things, but fundamental to them all is the security in knowing that they can trust the tutor. In one of the fundamental texts on learning in small groups, Jaques (1991) identifies this aspect as both essential and neglected in university learning:

The sense of identity and social belonging which a student can gain from a well-run group should never be underestimated. Nor should the inhibiting effect of tutor authority, a competitive atmosphere and the student's fear that they may make fools of themselves. Four important words seem to be missing in academic courses: support, commitment, enjoyment and imagination. The first three may be created in a group where the climate of open communication, involving trust, honesty and mutual respect, takes place. Imagination should blossom in this climate. It might also create it. (Jaques 1991:11)

Here's a thought 3: What makes tutorials un-safe spaces?

What sorts of things go into make a tutorial an **un-safe space**? Anything that can make a student feel at risk: Will their lack of command of English be mocked? Will the 'jocks' snigger at the ideas of the only woman in the group? When tutorial work is for marks, and so on. Thinking back on your own first-year experience, what other things could you add to this list? How could you as a tutor go about reducing the risk for students? How could the experience of a clash of identities, as suggested by Boughey (2008, above), make the tutorial an un-safe space?

As Jaques notes, tutorials provide one of the central spaces for the development of many of the educational aims of university education, namely:

- Developing imaginative and creative thinking.
- Developing a critical and informed mind.
- Developing an awareness of other's interests and needs.
- Developing a sense of academic rigour.
- Developing a social conscience.
- Developing an ability, and sense of enjoyment, in lifelong learning. (Jaques 1991:64)

Here's a thought 4: Tutorials and high ideals?

Compare this list to this extract from University of Cape Town's Mission statement (see Appendix A):

Our mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society.

Educating for life means that our educational process must provide:

- *a foundation of skills, knowledge and versatility that will last a life-time, despite a changing environment;*
- *research-based teaching and learning;*
- *critical enquiry in the form of the search for new knowledge and better understanding; and*
- *an active developmental role in our cultural, economic, political, scientific and social environment....*

To equip people with life-long skills we must and will:

- *promote the love of learning, the skill of solving problems, and the spirit of critical enquiry and research; and*
- *take excellence as the bench-mark for all we do.*

If tutorials should offer this kind of 'space' in the curriculum, here are some other things that we should bear in mind (feel free to add to these.):

Tutorials are not the place to teach new content. The tutorial is there to enable students to explore their understanding, to ask questions, to test ideas, to try on the language and identity of the discipline. They cannot do this if they are being taught completely new material in the tutorial.

Tutorials must be planned and integrated into the course. There are lots of different ways of doing this. For example, tutorials can be linked to the lectures of the previous week, or they can focus on themes, concepts, theories or leading theorists. In some cases, they can provide opportunities for practical application of content taught in lectures; in others they can present students with the opportunity to engage with theories that

challenge what was taught during lectures (which while new material, is not unconnected to the lectures).

Tutorials should not be used for 'high stakes' assessment. While sometimes a tutorial period can be used for a test, task or assignment, this should not be done as a matter of course. No student can afford to take the risk of trying ideas and arguments if the tutorial 'counts for marks'.

Given what we've said about tutorials, here's a definition of a tutorial in Humanities and Social Science courses:

Tutorials are small-group based curriculum spaces that form an integral part of the course curriculum. By creating safe learning spaces tutorials intend to enable students to participate in active engagement with the discipline content, values and skills, and through exchange with peers and more experienced tutors, to develop and test their own understanding of the discipline.

Clearly tutorials are central to learning at university; but just as clearly, the tutors' role is demanding. Now's a good time to take a look at the tutor.

What About the Tutor's Role in Supporting Learning?

If the tutorial is all these things (and more), and student learning is at least as complex as we have suggested, then what would the tutor's role be in supporting learning?

Regainers of the Lost Art

Unsurprisingly, the tutor's role isn't simple. Generally student tutors are not expected to teach, but to 'facilitate learning' (Mather 1996:70). The inevitable question is: what's the difference? Well, as you will hear often in academic life, it depends. In this case, it depends on what you mean by the term 'teach'. Usually the way this distinction is made with reference to tutors, is that tutors are not expected to, and should not, provide mini-lectures (Mather 1996).

The tutor's role is to create the opportunities that will enable students to 'develop and test their own understanding of the discipline'; to make it possible, in a structured way, for students to test out their understanding in a secure environment. The title of this guide starts with reference to a side of tutoring that is hardly mentioned these days: the reminder that the term 'tutor' originated in reference to someone tasked to watch over and protect others – in other words, to care for.

As a tutor you are the guide for the student's journey into the world of the discipline. However, to be that guide within any given tutorial, the tutor can be expected to act as (at least, and in any combination of) observer, group dynamics facilitator, information giver, teacher, coach and assessor (Potter *et al.* 1996). To these we have added the caring role. Such a range of roles obviously makes significant demands on the tutor. Potter *et al.* argue for an even more complex role:

The tutor's task is diagnostic, the aim being to identify the areas of difficulty experienced by students, and to take on a role appropriate to mediating the necessary concepts, skills or applications. There is no one recipe which is effective for all students. Effective tutoring requires flexibility and skill as well as knowledge of different tutoring methodologies. (1996:42)

So, not only should tutors be able to help create a safe space in which students can engage with course content in such a way as to articulate and test their own meaning, but tutors should also be able to help students identify where they are struggling or don't understand. How are you to manage all of this?

Planning an engaged tutorial

Tutorials, good or bad, don't just 'happen'. Students *can* learn from an unplanned tutorial that stumbles its way through the hour and from which everyone emerges with relief, but such a tutorial is not completely accidental. Either the tutorial was badly planned or not planned at all – both of which are deliberate decisions, even if workload is blamed. Tutorials, to really become the *safe spaces* that may *enable students to participate in active engagement with the discipline content, values and skills*, must be planned and prepared for.

Some of this preparation is really basic, but often forgotten or difficult due to the realities of venue availability and timetable constraints.

Planning and preparation of 'ponderables'

- At your first tutorial:
 - **Establish group ground rules** as early as possible. One way to do this is to do a 'round' through the group asking each person for a suggestion. Try and avoid a 'brainstorm' of ideas, as it often wastes time. Be sensitive to recognising cultural/gender perspectives. As a group, decide right at the beginning on what cannot be compromised (but be prepared to revisit this if need be). The kind of 'rules' you may consider could include: No cell phones may be left on or used during the tutorial; A person has the right to speak without interruption; Challenge the idea, not the person; Be on time; and so on.
 - **Names.** Learn your student's names as soon as possible. Get them to use name tags for the first two sessions and do a round learning their names. This makes leading group discussion so much more effective, reflects a valuing of the students, and enables you to identify students who need help.
 - Help students develop a language that will enable them to challenge ideas, and not reject people.
 - **Start on time, finish on time.** Always, even if people are missing (within reason). If most people are arriving late, give them an opportunity to settle in when they arrive.
 - Ensure you have correct contact details for everyone in the tutorial.
 - Do NOT give out your cellphone number.
 - Provide an email address you will check regularly.
 - Set up a meeting place and time where individual students can meet with you during the first few weeks if they want to speak to you privately.
 - Remember, some students may not know how, or where, to access computers – be sensitive when checking this out, as it is vital in most courses.
- **Check the venue** beforehand to be sure you know what's there (raked, fixed desks or flat, moveable chairs? Whiteboard or chalkboard? OHT? PC and data projector? Lighting?).
- **Ensure that you have what you need** for the tutorial in place (whiteboard markers, newsprint, felt-tip pens etc.), as well as all necessary documents, including a few spares because some students will not have brought these with them.

- **If possible, arrive early** enough to make sure that the venue is tidy, boards clean, OHT working, seating arranged (it takes up valuable time, and starts the tutorial in disorder if you try getting all this right once the students are present).
- If your lecturer/senior tutor does not hold regular preparation sessions, then **get together with fellow tutors** and go through the readings/texts/exercises that form the basis of the tutorial at least one day before the tutorial itself.
 - Identify where this tutorial material fits in with the course.
 - Identify issues you feel are important and that the lecturer has identified as important (and why they are important).
 - Check for difficult terms or concepts and ensure you can explain these.
 - Find and prepare examples (e.g. from current events, newspapers, songs, films, etc.) which you can use to help students link material to their worlds.
 - **Identify issues which may create tension or conflict** in the group (religious or politically controversial content and/or opinion, for example) and consider how you may manage the conflict.
 - **Plan the session's activities.** How are you going to manage the time? What strategies can you use? See below under 'Strategies for an engaged tutorial'.
 - Remember it is quite legitimate for you to play the information-giver role for part of a tutorial. The key is to avoid doing this regularly so that students come to expect you to 'lecture' them (or provide the answers for them).
 - **Plan your time** so that you are at the venue in time.

Preparation and planning of 'imponderables'

These are not so easy, but if you consider them beforehand they will be less stressful.

- Prepare alternative resources in case there is a power outage (depending on your venue and plans for the tutorial this may not be a problem).
- Ensure that you have contact numbers in case you are sick.
- Plan your tutorial on the basis that at least some students won't have prepared (see 'Strategies for an engaged tutorial' for some ideas).
- Consider how you will manage potentially contentious issues.
 - Remember, your focus is on enabling the students to construct meaning, but that meaning will have some relation to the way the course content will be assessed. If, for example, a few students refuse to accept evolution as valid, based on their religious convictions, but the lecturer teaches the course from an evolutionist perspective, how can you ensure that their views are given space? At the same time you will need to ensure that they think through how they are going to respond to assessment requirements.
 - Choose your language carefully.
 - If you suspect that the content may cause unnecessary conflict, defuse this to some extent by acknowledging this upfront, and asking how people *felt* or *reacted* to the material when they read it.

- If students criticise the lecturer, ask them if they would like you to try and set up an opportunity for them to speak to the lecturer directly. Discourage personal attacks, separating out issues from personalities.
- If it becomes clear that the group really has misunderstood a key part of the course, ensure you have the details and let the lecturer know as soon as possible.

Right, but what can we *do* in the tutorials? How do we find ways of 'engaging' the students?





Strategies for Use in a Tutorial

As Potter *et al.* (1996) suggest, there are no simple recipes, but there are some strategies that have proven themselves over time and some of these are listed below.

Strategies for getting students involved

The strategies listed below assume groups of around 12 to 15 students. If your groups are smaller (which is ideal), then adjust the strategies accordingly. If they're much bigger, then some of these strategies won't work. Strategies which appear suited to most group sizes are indicated with the symbol †. All of these strategies assume preparation over and above being merely familiar with the tutorial task set by the lecturer. They would mostly work better if students submitted a written tutorial assignment at the beginning of the tutorial.

Strategy	Application
Basics	Seat your group in a circle or semi-circle as far as possible. Pose a question relating to the tutorial task and give everyone a few minutes to think about their response. Select individuals from the group to respond. Move on to the next question, this time asking different people to respond.
Pair-share † (but starting with groups of 4 in large tutorial groups)	Put the group in pairs or threes (you can permit self-selected pairs, but, as we shall see, this can have problems). Give each group a mini-task based on the tutorial task (but different from any written response they had to prepare). Give them 10 minutes to develop a dyad/triad response. Pairs/triads then share responses with the group. Either (a) let the group respond with questions to each pair; or (b) pool questions on a board, if possible under broad themes. After all groups have responded, pick out the themes of the questions: What do people not understand and need work on? What do people disagree with, and why, etc.? To some of these you could give a few minutes' input, others you could signal to the group that they should read up in their textbooks, and/or you could undertake to present the areas of confusion/questions to the lecturer.
Snowball † (but can start with groups of 3 or 4 in large groups)	Similar to the above. Pairs discuss their responses to the tutorial assignment, then join another pair and each person presents their understanding of their colleague's answer to the bigger group. In the end the whole group could come together to identify questions or areas of discovery which arose in the tutorial.

Strategy	Application
Debate 	Split the group into three. Debate groups should not have more than three members on each side. One sub-group presents a position; the other argues against it, while the third acts as adjudicators/audience – but with the proviso that they must argue for their evaluation of the debate's outcome.
Popular opinion 	Bring a newspaper/magazine article with enough copies for everyone (or for the group in pairs/triads). The article should have direct bearing on the tutorial task (be creative: you might pick something from the Iraq conflict to consider a point about Vietnam, and so on). Try and illustrate the difference between journalistic argument and academic argument over the issue at stake. Groups identify the point in the article, suggest its relevance for the tutorial task, note the way evidence is used in the article and suggest whether this would be acceptable in an academic setting – report back in plenary. In a big group different sub-groups could be given different tasks with the same reading(s).
One thing about...	<p>This works best with a tutorial about an event, specific 'hot' topic or a person, but it can be adapted. Tell the group that you are going to go in a circle around the group, and each person is going to have to say one new or different thing about the topic on which the tutorial is based. Give them a minute or two to think beforehand. The rules are simple: no repetition, no made-up ideas, only one thing, and people can only 'pass' on the second round. As the ideas come, list them on a board. Go around again if need be. Don't try and keep this up for the full tutorial. It's a useful starter, and from the list you can then build up a discussion (or a debate).</p> <p>An adaptation to this: instead of verbally offering a response, students could write their response up on the board as a concept or mind map. This has the advantage of giving students the opportunity of showing how the ideas link to one another</p>
Multi-media  (with caution) In all cases venue and equipment are important considerations	Beware, this takes planning and preparation. Choose an excerpt from a video, or a song (make sure you have the lyrics as well) that relates to the tutorial task. Introduce the exercise carefully by explaining what you will do: in pairs/triads, etc. listen to the song (watch the excerpt) and note down any connections to the tutorial task that arise, and why. Discuss in plenary.
Freewrite 	Give the group a SHORT (1–2 minute) written task related to the tutorial subject. ('Freewriting' is useful here. Write, for 1–3 minutes [you set the limit] without planning, worrying about spelling, etc. on a given topic.) Share that response with a partner, then in groups of four. Reach a consensus understanding. Report back. You can move directly from the 'freewrite' to report-back, or skip the groups of four.

Strategy	Application
Freequest (Can be a little chaotic for a large group)	An adaptation to the Freewrite would be for the Freewrite to consist of one question students would like to ask arising from the tutorial preparation. Collect these and read them out in a way that the author cannot be identified, while putting them on a board/wall in categories (get one of the class to do the sticking up according to categories the class suggests). Get the group to vote on two or three issues they think are most important to discuss in the tutorial (you will have to lead/direct these discussions).
Mock exam Y	With the help of the lecturer, either set, or find from old papers, an examination question that relates as directly as possible to the tutorial task. Set up the tutorial to resemble exam conditions as far as possible, then give the students the task of simply writing a plan of the way they would answer that question in an exam. Give them a maximum of 10 minutes for this task (vary this according to the task – an MCQ would require a different approach; they would have to respond to the question, and then justify their answers in the plenary). Volunteers (pressed or otherwise) can then present their answer to the class and the class, following a simple rule of 'positive contributions only', can make suggestions as to how the answer could be improved, or suggest a 'mark'. If the latter, each suggestion MUST be accompanied by a motivation. This serves a number of purposes: it helps students think about planning for exam questions, it links the tutorials to the assessment, and it gives students the opportunity to think about how well they have engaged with the material in preparation for exams. It does work better when exams are looming.
Interview the lecturer (Can be a little chaotic for a large group)	This will need to be well negotiated. Do not tell the class in advance. Invite the lecturer to the tutorial, explaining that you would like her/him to act as a visiting expert in the area of the tutorial. Ask the lecturer to come 10 minutes after the tutorial would start. Ask the class, as individuals, to write down one question they would like to ask an expert (or the lecturer) about the tutorial task if s/he were present. When the lecturer arrives, explain that s/he has come as an expert in 'x' and will respond to their questions. They could either ask the questions from the floor, or they could choose to give you written questions and you could select one or two for the lecturer to respond to, thus preserving the anonymity of the questioner. It might be wise to prepare a few questions yourself in advance. You will need to limit the lecturer's time – just as in a radio or TV interview. Explain the 'rules' to the lecturer in advance. Note that it's important to avoid simply presenting another mini-lecture format of passive learning, where 'knowledge comes from the expert'. The focus must be on the kind of questioning and cross-questioning that students could carry out – i.e. a constant engagement with the lecturer-visitor. This can be varied by inviting experts related to the topic, but please negotiate this with your lecturer well in advance.

Suggestions taken and/or adapted from Jaques 1991; Pastoll 1992; Baume & Baume 1996.

Strategies to support learning

Always remember that the prime purpose of a tutorial is to support student learning. The organisation of the tutorial, the planning and preparation of the task, and the way the lecturer has organised the tutorial in relation to the course curriculum, are all fundamental. Within those broad parameters, there are however other things that tutors need to think about. During the tutorial, especially in discussions, and even in exchanges between yourself and a student:

- **Work toward a conclusion** rather than arguing from a conclusion. This helps students to think ahead, to engage with the process and to see the thinking in action.
- **Be comfortable with silences.** Ok, not forever, but a silence can feel like hours when it is merely a few minutes. Silence gives people time to think – and maybe feel comfortable enough to try an answer. This creates space for the quieter student to have a chance to participate.
- **Ask students to react to each other's ideas** directly. This will add diversity and reduce the tendency to look to the teacher for the 'right' solution. Encourage constructive arguments and differences of opinion (Streichler 2005:33).
- **Encourage your students to guess at answers** and then to check their guesses; this will involve them in the process of seeking results and help them learn to make intuitive, 'educated guesses' (Streichler 2005:33).

Questioning is an art

Most often we when think of teaching, or helping people to learn, we think of giving answers. But one of the most effective tools to support learning as we have described it in this guide, is to learn to ask questions (Jaques 1991; Pastoll 1992; Baume & Baume 1996). Questioning is also central to the tutor's diagnostic role noted by Potter *et al.* (above). Asking questions that help people learn is not easy. Such questions must create space for people to think, to try ideas and to understand what is expected of them – all at the same time.

Baume and Baume (1996:11) propose that good learning questions should

- Be real – asking questions so that you can provide the answer is not a 'learning question' strategy.
- Open up a subject, creating opportunities for people to think differently.
- Build on current knowledge (start from what people know or understand).
- Be simple, so that people can clearly understand what lies behind the question.
- Lead the learner through a chain of reasoning.

Some further hints about using questions in tutorials:

Strategy	What's the point?
Avoid closed questions	Questions which require only yes or no answers (they do not reveal the student's reasoning).
Avoid asking 'do you understand'?	No matter how bad their understanding is, the student does have <i>an</i> understanding, so legitimately will answer 'yes'. It is better to ask: 'What do you understand?' or 'How could you explain how you understand?', and so on.
Question toward the student's understanding, not the answer you want	Don't lead the student on to answer what you want (they may have guessed that), rather try and phrase your questions to probe the student's understanding. ('Ok, can you explain how you reached that answer?'; 'If that is so, what will it mean for...'; and so on).
Avoid long, complicated questions	Break your question down. If it must be long, have it written out.
Avoid questions which imply total recall	'What are all the reasons for....?' is too much, and a student could simply say 'I don't know'. Ask perhaps: 'What would be the most important reason?' (this opens up for discussion), or 'Give us one reason', which opens the way for others to think about the next one.
Avoid confronting questions	Where possible, avoid questions such as: What makes you think <i>that</i> ? Why do you believe that? It's better to ask, 'Can you explain how you came to that answer?'

Other kinds of questions are:

Strategy	Example
Clarifying/elaborating	Ask a student to rephrase their answer or to give an example.
	'Bounce back' the question as you understand it. ('What I understand you to be asking/saying is....?')
Prompting/redirecting	Probing questions can be used when a student has responded with a low-level response (rather than saying 'No, that's not enough') – e.g. 'Ok, but how does social class influence a person's job prospects?'
	Modify your original question by breaking it up into parts or steps. (NB: Our questions come from having a bigger picture than the students do.)
	Redirecting the question – asking how others would respond (don't use this just because you don't know).
Testing/extending	Bounce-back – ask the student to reflect on what they <i>think</i> the answer <i>may</i> be.

Jaques (1991) and Baume and Baume (1996) suggest a scaffolding approach – start with lower-level questions and then build up the level of questions so that the process supports the students in developing deeper answers. (This can be used with either the group as a whole, or with an individual. The key here is that you do not move on to the higher level questions until the lower level ones have been satisfactorily answered.) These authors make use of the well known taxonomy of educational objectives developed by Bloom *et al.* (1956). Baume and Baume argue that '[d]ifferent types of questions lead to different ... kinds of learning' (1996:11). Like Jaques (1991:134) they suggest the following kinds of learning, which can be prompted by different kinds of questions:

Learning desired	Question example
Descriptive	Who, what, where, when questions.
Comprehension	Checking understanding of the relation between facts: How would you justify...? Why would you suggest...? How? Can you rephrase that? Can you describe it differently?
Application	How? In what ways? How could you use this theory to explain...? What would your answer mean in 'x' situation?
Analysis	Can the student break down the problem into its constituent parts? – What would happen if...? Why would this happen? What are the key elements of the problem? How would you compare (or contrast) these two...?
Synthesis	Can the student use known ideas to build one that is new to her/him? Ok, what happens if you link those ideas together?
Evaluation	The student's ability to judge the value of an idea in an understood context. What would be the best way of doing this, and why? What criteria would you suggest we should use to assess...?

The **University Teaching Development Centre, Victoria University of Wellington (2006)** has another take on questions, although once again reminding their Graduate Teaching Assistants just how important questioning is to the learning process (University Teaching Development Centre, Victoria University of Wellington 2006:15):

Types of questions

Educationalists have identified two types of questions: closed/lower order and open ended/higher order. Dawson (1998) states that, 'Lower order questions ask students to recall, define and describe, that is, to provide facts. Higher order questions require them to perform interpretive rather than descriptive tasks. They may be asked to analyse, compare, evaluate or synthesise to rank, hypothesise, design or predict. Good questioning leans towards the open ended and higher order forms as much as possible' (p. 28). The following list offers some examples of different types of questioning, from

those requiring simple answers to those demanding more thought. The list has been adapted from Davis (1993) and McKeachie (1999).

Factual or exploratory questions probe facts and basic knowledge and allow little opportunity for dissent: 'How many leadership theories are discussed in this book?' 'What does x equal in this equation?'

Challenge questions examine assumptions, conclusions and interpretations: 'How else might we account for the findings of this experiment?'

Relational or comparative questions ask for comparisons of themes, ideas or issues: 'What distinguishes a transformational leader from a traditional one?'

Diagnostic questions probe motives or causes: 'Why do younger employees resent a directive leadership style?'

Action questions call for a conclusion or action: 'In response to a protest occupation of the Registry [the main administration office], what should the Vice Chancellor do?'

Connective and causal effect questions ask for causal relationships between ideas, actions or events: 'If the university raises student fees, how will that affect enrolment levels?'

Extension questions expand the discussion: 'How does this comment relate to what we have previously said?'

Hypothetical or problem-based questions pose a change in the facts or issues: 'Imagine the government suddenly found another \$100 million to spend on education: how might they best spend it?'

Priority or evaluative questions seek to identify the most important issue, or make a judgement on the relative value of two points being compared: 'Which should we be more concerned about: stagnating staff salaries, or rising student fees?'

Summary questions elicit syntheses: 'What themes or lessons have emerged from today's class/about leadership styles/the occupation of the Registry?'

How Do Groups Work (And Not Work)?

We'll start this section with some advice on how to make sure your group never works, then have a look at what we can draw from here about the nature of groups. The key to remember is that a group is not an accidental collection of individuals who happen to be in the same room (in which case it's really just a small crowd) – a group consists of a number of people gathered for a purpose, 'interacting and interdependent' (Robbins 1983).

The fine art of squelching small groups²

The ability to squelch the life out of a small group may be thought of as an art. Because of the strong interest in this new art (especially in academic circles) the following ground rules are offered to give direction and purpose to would-be squelchers who wish to develop their talents in this direction:

1. Keep the tutorial group too large for the members to really get to know each other. This also allows people to 'hide in the crowd' and either remain silent, sleep, subvert the group, or generally absent themselves without being noticed. By all means have at least 15 to 20 members in order to do this. (You may need your lecturer's assistance in ensuring that this works well.)
2. Complain at every tutorial about the lateness or absence of 'tutlings'. This will encourage as many as possible to come as late as possible so as to avoid hearing you moan about the latecomers. It also gets the mood right for a sulky, disenchanted and unco-operative session.
3. Arrange seating in formal rows, like a school classroom. Don't permit informality to sneak in by sitting in a friendly circle or semicircle, in which members might feel encouraged to express themselves, may enjoy attending and actually learn something.
4. Include long announcements and assorted administrative business read directly from notices that are available on student boards or other communal forums. This will bore everyone to tears. The group will soon wither and the tutorial become a graveyard.
5. Dominate the group from the beginning. Establish yourself as the authority on all matters that may come before the group. Make all the decisions yourself. This is

² Adapted from Reid (1969, in Rogers 1993). Note that the wording of this resource has been altered and adapted for use in the context of tutorials.

especially effective if you can do this while giving the impression, and using the language of, a democratic spirit.

6. If possible, establish yourself as the teacher of the group and deliver a learned lecture at each tutorial. (Our rock-bound guarantee: the tutorial will fail to achieve any learning objective and the students will dread each session more than root canal treatment without anaesthesia.)
7. Pay no attention to the needs and interests of the tutorial members. Most people don't know what's best for them anyway.
8. Answer all (any?) of the questions yourself. Don't let group members speak to each other or answer each other's questions. What do they know that you can't say better?
9. Don't permit the belief to arise that tutorial members should be prepared to contribute to the learning and growth of the group. They're liable to get too deeply involved and interested and try to keep the tutorial alive despite your efforts.
10. Never allow any tutorial members to share a personal insight. Change the subject to a nice neutral and irrelevant discussion when that happens. This can be best achieved with a good put-down such as 'Gee, that's really interesting. Pity it's so ill-informed.'
11. By all means, don't encourage members to express themselves (see also 3, 5 and 6 above). Limit the participation to the more vocal, intellectual members who share your understanding of what is important. They will bore the rest of the tutorial to sleep.
12. Keep discussions on a theoretical plane. Mention names that students may have barely heard of such as Nietzsche, Habermas, Bohm and the like. Casual and unexplained name-dropping such as this (especially if the names belong to scholars from disciplines unrelated to the students) helps them feel inferior and showcases your superior breadth of reading.
13. Allow one or two persons to dominate any discussions that may arise (accidentally or as a result of careful planning on your part). That way others will become quietly angry and the tutorial will collapse into lethargic disarray. By all means avoid pointing out to the dominators what they are doing. This might lead to some hurt feelings and personal growth – things to be avoided at all costs when squelching a group.
14. Don't urge/encourage silent members of the group to speak. They might get the idea that you care or that their ideas count after all. They may even learn something or get to enjoy the subject. They will then become more difficult to discourage as a result.
15. By all means don't let the group express themselves honestly or challenge each other's opinions, prejudices and assumptions. You may find them understanding each other too well as a result and the tutorial group may become interesting enough for them to enjoy.

16. If the above option does not fit with your worldview, the other (contrary) approach is to ensure that you come to the tutorial as unprepared as possible. Blithely admit to having not done the work which the students should have done. Appear very laid back about this, thus reinforcing the message that tutorials (especially yours) do not matter. Stumble through the list of prepared tasks as though you have never read them before. Wait a few seconds for students to respond, and in the absence of a response, giggle and offer some vague answer which underlines your superiority over the need for this aimless tutorial.
17. The above strategy can be dramatically enhanced if you keep, surreptitiously because you must maintain appearances, checking your cellphone for SMS's, or longingly caressing your cigarettes and glancing at your watch. Or, of course, light up a cigarette/pipe/cigar, and stare wisely through the smoke rings you blow while the students struggle with responses to your aimless leadership.

Note: It is recommended that every tutor/lecturer express her or his own unique personality in using the above rules. There is a squelching method that is uniquely yours. You may have found ways to squelch a group that haven't been thought of yet. However if you follow these rules with dogged persistence you need not fear. You will have expressed yourself. The tutorial will surely collapse for you will have violated just about every principle of human nature.

So then, that's how to make sure your tutorial goes nowhere, s-l-o-w-l-y dragging out the minutes of each meeting with ever reducing numbers. As we read through it we can pick up a whole lot of hints as to why some tutorial groups just don't work. But to understand groups a little better we need to have some idea of what goes on in groups. For this we will rely on Jaques (1991:28–42), who made use of the research of Malcolm Knowles.

What goes on in groups?

Expectations. Remember that everyone comes to a tutorial with some expectations. No matter how unsure (or reluctant) they are, they have in mind something when they think of 'tutorial'. It is quite probable that there will be some overlap between their ideas and yours, but it is unlikely that there will be complete agreement. Part of those expectations will be built on previous experience (or lack thereof), and of course, on what students from senior years have told them. (The first year's worst enemy is the second-year student.) So, individuals when they first meet together *are not yet a group*. The first session needs to have the space to create (some) shared expectations; create boundaries (including the ground rules) such as the what, when and where of the tutorial; establish tutor's role(s) and student(s)' role(s); and help them to know (something about) each other. By the second tutorial this small and uncertain set of shared ideas can form the basis of their becoming a tutorial group. This, however, is a process, not an event. It will take time.

Patterns of participation are established early on. To some extent, these depend on expectations (first years may expect the tutor to do all the talking, while they frantically take notes), but the pattern will also be moulded on the lead you provide. Generally, tutorials should aim for the broadest possible pattern of participation. This does not mean that everyone must say something every week (although some disciplines require that). If you are worried about patterns, try using some of the aforementioned strategies to change the patterns in your group. It may even be useful to discuss concerns with individual students (privately, outside the tutorial). People who feel they are different or not accepted will often withdraw, or give minimal input. However, they can also be aggressive and dominating.

Communication. A lot of communication in groups is non-verbal. We all know these patterns: the sigh, the snigger, one group exchanging comments every time someone from another group within the tutorial says something (often, for example, along gender lines – Hunt 1994). We also see it in the slouch, the student who stares out the window, and the new escape from group work (or call for attention): the iPod, cellphone and their associated headphones. So, keep an eye on posture, expressions, tone of voice, etc. And remember that silence is eloquent: a student or group of students that may suddenly be very quiet is normally a 'heads-up' for the tutor.

Norms. Groups quickly establish their own norms or (hidden) rules. This is more obvious in students who have been around a while (even as early as the second semester of first year). These hidden rules are often enforced by the non-verbal, or barely verbal, actions we noted above. One of the biggest problems here is that those whose backgrounds differ from the majority in the group, or who are new to a group, can find it difficult to understand what the group norms are, and why they operate the way they do. One of the reasons that setting ground rules early on is so important is that it serves to establish a basis for the group to develop norms that may support learning. Try and keep an eye on the way your tutorial group seems to reward or 'punish' behaviour, and think about revisiting the ground rules if there seems to be a problem.

Opinion formers can appear quite early in the group. This is often linked to popularity or friendship groups that are 'imported' into the group, or to socially established campus norms (who makes up the 'in' groups and who is excluded). Opinion formers can easily (and even unconsciously) silence some understandings, and some ideas. It is important to keep a tab on who these people are, and to ensure that the strategies you use in the group create space for different opinions, while not silencing the influential. Simply using the traditional 'round the group' or 'anybody any ideas' type tutorial reinforces the authority of the opinion formers.

Goals. Clearly the goals of a group will have significant influence on the way the group functions. Establishing these openly and early on helps to keep focus when the work is boring or the workload is heavy.



What maintains groups?

Unsurprisingly, 'group work' best maintains groups. This is often broken down into two categories – *group maintenance roles* and *task maintenance roles* – although too sharp a distinction between these is not helpful. Essentially, if enough of either of these roles is ignored, the group will struggle.

Group maintenance	Task maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraging – supporting others, accepting ideas.• Mediating – helping people understand different perspectives and bridging disagreements; not forcing agreement.• Gate-keeping – creating space for group members to make a contribution; allowing everyone to be heard.• Standard-setting – clarifying and reminding group of the ground rules.• Following – being a good listener.• Relieving tension – appropriate humour, helping people move from focus on people to a focus on ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiating – suggesting ideas or changes.• Information seeking – asking for facts, sometimes when you can see someone else can't (or won't).• Information-giving – providing authoritative, reliable information.• Opinion giving – formulating a belief statement.• Clarifying – probing for meaning and understanding.• Co-ordinating – pulling ideas together and making connections between concepts.• Orienting – defining the progress of the discussion, and linking this to the task and group goals.• Testing – checking to see that everyone is on board.• Summarising – reviewing the content of past discussion.

The key here is to remember that these roles do not have to be assumed by the tutor alone; the group as a whole must exhibit all of these – in fact these roles will emerge from within the group, if you permit and encourage them.

With respect to tutorials, size does matter. The following table adapted from Jaques (1991: 19) makes the effect of the size of the tutorial group quite clear:

 More cohesion	Number of students	Changing characteristics	  More tension
	2–6	Structure or organisation is less complex, and leadership can be fairly relaxed.	
	7–12	Structure and differentiation of roles begins (need for more formal leadership emerges). Face-to-face interaction less frequent.	
	12–25	Provision of structure and clear leadership. Sub-groups emerge (even if not structured). Face-to-face interaction difficult.	
	25–?	Positive leadership vital. Sub-groups will form, greater anonymity, stereotyping and 'groupings' occur.	

1. Behaviour of the tutor sets the tone: if you bring a positive (not breathlessly enthusiastic.), organised and unthreatened tone to the group, students will, by-and-large, adopt the same approach.
2. Clearly communication is at the core of group work. If the tutor dominates, the students are silenced. Equally, if individuals (either loud, knowledgeable or both) dominate, it becomes the pattern for the group.
3. Pay attention to the interests and needs of the group.
4. Conflict is in itself okay. People may, can, and do, differ. What the tutor must enable is an environment where we challenge ideas while valuing people.
5. Create space for students to identify areas of interest, concern or confusion.
6. Be honest about your knowledge – and be ready to find out answers, clearly making yourself accountable to the group for this.

Diversity is normal

Much of the talk around 'diversity' sounds as if working with a group of people who are all different is something completely new. For some of us it may well appear to be, but when you think of it we have always had to learn to work alongside people from whom we differ. Even in our families we soon learn to cope with diversity. So, the first thing to realise is that diversity is normal. Sameness, on the other hand, *is* unusual. Generally, however, our exposure to working with people who have different ideas, values, practices and cultural traditions is rather limited. While this is changing all over the world, but especially in South Africa, one of the places where that change is most difficult is in education, especially universities.

Universities are largely a Western institution (although arguably the earliest ones were the Islamic universities of what is now called the Middle East). Generally speaking, universities tend to be dominated by Western systems of knowledge, argument, logic, science and philosophy – and in many countries they are dominated by English (although to a lesser extent in Europe). This means that the culture of the university itself, the sources of knowledge (texts, journals, books and the like), the models of teaching and learning

expected are strongly Western. Even the ever-present computer is rooted in a specific Western culture, and while changes are slowly being made, the language of computing is overwhelmingly English. Students whose culture and primary language are other than Western and English therefore face additional hurdles. Perhaps that should be reversed? Perhaps it should be that the universities should face hurdles in learning about knowledge in other cultures?

Tutors, as the face of the disciplines and the university, have a specific role in supporting students in finding ways to engage with the culture of the discipline (e.g. sociology, economics); - including the culture of knowledge, argument and logic that are specific to the discipline.

Imagine for a moment if you had to suddenly attend a university in Japan. The textbooks would be in both Japanese and English, but all lectures, signage, customs, announcements, etc. would be in Japanese. In fact, for many students the experience of a sudden transfer to Stellenbosch or the University of Pretoria might be almost as daunting.

Diversity is not limited to students whose cultural experience differs from that of the university. Our society is still very patriarchal, and there is extensive research that shows that female students are either silenced in tutorials, or end up doing most of the work while the male students remain dis-engaged (Hunt 1994).

In addition to cultural and gender differences, there are of course different reasons for being there, different subject combinations, different levels of interest in the discipline, different religions, those who have no interest in religion at all, and those opposed to religion, those with strong political views (often opposing views within a tutorial) and those who seek to be a-political (which of course, is also a political view). In the large class these differences go almost unnoticed, but in the tutorial they cannot be avoided. Ways of working with difference are absolutely crucial if every person is to be given an equal opportunity to learn.

There are, again, no simple rules. There is one fundamental one, however; it's just not simple. The golden rule of tutorials is ***respect for the other person***. This does not mean that everyone must agree, but what we should avoid is what in traditional academic circles is called the *ad hominem* argument. (Now even the term serves to ignore diversity: it means attacking the man.) In other words, avoid arguing against – making statements about – the person whose views are being presented, and respond to the way the argument is offered. Again, this sounds simple; but as we so often see and hear in university life, it's easy to belittle another person while appearing to challenge their argument. Comments like 'that's a stupid argument' imply that the person presenting it is stupid. Better to simply say that you don't agree with the argument, and then present your critique *of the argument*.

Think about the ways we sneak around that *ad hominem* restriction. We can say, for example, 'Prof X's argument appears convincing, but on closer examination it is clear that s/he provides a facile defence for'. We have just managed, in a backhanded manner, to call our colleague simplistic, silly. A more reasoned response would have been to argue that 'Prof X's argument appears convincing, but on closer examination there are a number of questions that remain.'

Even here there's a minefield. To go back to our 'creative example', if a person's religious beliefs preclude their acceptance of the evolutionary model, to critique their argument is to critique their belief system. Constitutionally South Africa defends freedom of religious expression, so we have no legal right, nor the moral right, to deny the person their belief. That does not mean that we have no right to challenge these beliefs. What we can do is to expect such a person to be fully informed of the evolutionary model, its evidence and its arguments so that, given an examination, they can present the case for evolution, even if they distance themselves from it personally. At the same time, tutors cannot permit the imposition of a person's religious beliefs on the rest of the tutorial group. Just as within the academic environment of the university we must respect the beliefs of those who hold religious beliefs, so too those who hold religious beliefs must respect the views of those who hold different views.

This does lead, however, to questions about how we respond to the way people express their ideas. We have noted something of this in the comments about *ad hominem* arguments. But what about our ordinary responses to students' ideas expressed in their assignments? Again, respect is the key. This brings us to the thorny issue of referencing: how do we show respect for people whose ideas (and hard work) we have used in our learning?

Information literacy

Too often when academics speak of referencing the talk seems to be limited to warnings about citation and plagiarism, with a list of 'how to cite' instructions. Those are all important, but referencing is part of a much bigger issue – **information literacy**.

This sounds obvious, but working with information – whether we access it through paper-based, electronic or oral media – is fundamental to learning. It is also fundamental to employment. These statements are so obvious that we don't think about them very much. But working with information is not as straightforward as we seem to assume. For one thing, decisions as to what counts as useful/appropriate or relevant information in a given situation is rarely clear to someone new to a context.

Can you recall writing your first assignment at university? Let's say that it was in English, and involved a discussion of the central character in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one Winston Smith. The assignment title was:

'Is Winston Smith the hero or villain of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?
Support your answer with reference to the text.'

- What counts as 'information' in this essay?
- What would make a good source of or for such information? Would, for example, a reference from the Wikipedia article on the novel be acceptable? Why is that so?
- Could you reference something your high-school teacher said at school?
- Or will simply your ideas with quoted sections from the text suffice as 'authority'?

As students and scholars (and later as employees) we must learn to identify, select and make use of information in ways appropriate to the context. Many new students (and some not-so-new students.) have no idea how undertake this process and, oddly enough, we rarely help them find out – we seem to assume that someone else has dealt with that before.

Part of the problem is that schools generally do not expect the same capability of working with information as we expect from even a first-year student at university. While lecturers can help by explaining this with respect to their disciplines, and departments can hand out citation guidelines, all these make little sense to the new student who doesn't yet appreciate the problem (for example, many new students have no idea of how to select an appropriate resource for an essay – and end up using a book published in 1931 as the primary source in a discussion on social theory in 2001).

Tutors can make a huge difference to students' exposure to, and grasp of, what we call 'information literacy' – the ability to effectively access, identify and apply information to a task. The UCT library has some great resources for students on information literacy, ranging for working with the question right the way through to resolving citation dilemmas (for example, you can find some help at <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/Training/lit/infoskills.htm>).

What about citation and plagiarism?

Well, plagiarism is a serious contravention of academic values. It is so serious that students deemed to have plagiarised can be expelled from the university, and academics can be dismissed. But what is it? American Supreme Court Justice, Richard A Posner in his book *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (2007) argues that we should view plagiarism as *intellectual fraud*. But this presumes intent, and many students do not intend to pass off the ideas of others as their own – they just do not know how to paraphrase, how to take notes when they are reading (which leads them to copying out the book word for word, and then copying this copy into their assignments), or why we should do this.

Way back in the 12th Century, John of Salisbury provided us with both an excellent example of citation and a way of understanding the need to cite. In 1159, John wrote in his *Metalogicon*:

Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical

*distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.*³

Today the designers of Google, the well known search engine, have carried that idea forward into the information age. Have a look at the opening search page of Google Scholar – just below the search box stands the line: ‘Stand on the shoulders of giants’.

We cite to show that:

- We acknowledge these ideas are not our own.
- That we recognise the work of those who made the ideas available to us.
- That we have read the literature.
- To show a map of the way we have used the literature by showing the reader which scholars and authorities we have been reading.

If you find your students are struggling with issues around academic citation, you may also want to refer students to the resource that can be found on the UCT library site at <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/Training/lit/plagiarism.htm>. This is also accessible through the information literacy resource noted above. A tip though: don’t simply send the student(s) to the site – first help them identify the core issues, and then check with them afterwards as to how they understand the problem after reading the resource.

For this tutor guide, Professor Karin de Jager of UCT’s Centre for Information Literacy has compiled a very useful ‘quick guide to information literacy’, which can be found in Appendix B. Please read it carefully – not only will it be useful to you as a tutor, you will probably learn something as a postgraduate student yourself. The idea of this resource is not that you copy it and hand it out to students, but that you become more aware yourself of the issues facing students and are able to better identify the information literacy issues when assessing their work, or even better, when discussing a new assignment or task.

But even after we have helped students with their writing, information literacy and citation, we still have to assess (mark) the work...

Is this for marks then? Assessment and tutorials

One of the recurring themes in this guide is that tutoring is about facilitating student learning and we have identified a number of ways in which tutors can facilitate learning. One of the single biggest influences on students’ learning is assessment. No matter how much we say, for example, that critical independent thinking is important, if our assessment allows and rewards regurgitation of other people’s ideas, that’s what students will do. It’s simple: ‘You get what you assess’ (Resnick & Resnick 1992). So how do we make sure that assessment is a *learning* opportunity, that through our assessment we reinforce the kinds of thinking, knowing, being, doing that are important in our discipline?

³ Standing on the shoulders of giants, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Standing_on_the_shoulders_of_giants&oldid=222950878 [Accessed 6 August 2008].

Let's think quickly about why assessment may often *not* be a learning opportunity. Firstly, we don't *think* of assessment as learning. We are more likely to think about assessment as judgement – have my students 'got it' or 'not got it' (and all the negative feelings that are associated with judging or being judged). Secondly, many of the assessment tasks or exercises that we set for students (essays, tests, exams and projects) are not designed with learning as part of their purpose. It has been said that assessment in higher education is largely 'unreflective traditionalism' (Elton & Johnston 2002). In other words, essays are set in our discipline because that's the way we were assessed. We don't stop to think: Why is this method of assessment being used over others? What particular knowledge, skills and attitudes is this essay assessing?

So to re-cap, assessment has different purposes. The literature refers to these as summative (giving a mark) and formative (contributing to learning). Because grades are an important form of academic 'currency' (so that students can pass courses, graduate with degrees), we cannot, nor should we try, to run away from its summative purposes. And we must do this with as much reliability and fairness as possible (we'll come back to this). But this purpose has been so dominant, that the role of assessment in promoting learning is sometimes lost. So the next question is, how can you turn assessment into a learning opportunity?

There are unfortunately no magic formulas or fool-proof tricks. But here are three questions that can guide you. Use these questions to shape your interactions with students around assessment:

- 1. What is the particular purpose of this assessment task?** Besides contributing to the course mark, why have students been tasked with writing this particular essay? How does it fit into this unit/course? Every course has (whether explicitly stated or not) particular objectives it aims to achieve in terms of the kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes (or ways of thinking). In what way does this assessment task assist students in *practicing* these ways of thinking? If you think of the essay as the 'YOU ARE HERE' sign on the map, tutors need to be able, as a tour guide would, show students what the expectations of the essay are in relation to where they've been and where they going. This is not always apparent to students. Words like 'critically analyse' or 'compare' or 'discuss' are loaded with expectations shaped by the discipline, the course and the lecturer who set the essay. Your role is to translate or interpret this for your students. That leads to the second and related question...
- 2. What does it take to get a first?** The issue of assessment criteria is a challenging one. Everyone (well, most everyone) thinks they have a good idea, but designing assessment criteria that assist us in marking consistently and fairly is difficult. There are a number of reasons for this. For example, the nature of assessment tasks in Humanities gives students a great deal of leeway in their possible responses; no set of criteria can anticipate all the possible responses. So your job as a tutor is a very challenging one. If assessment is to assist learning, you need to be able to help students understand what makes for a good essay and this is an ongoing process that starts long before the first essay is even handed out. For example, you can use the lectures, the readings and the tutorial discussions to point out to students examples of relevant/irrelevant points,

appropriate/inappropriate evidence, strong/weak conclusions and persuasive/faulty arguments. If your course convener has provided a marking grid, it can be extremely helpful (especially to new tutors) to have a marking workshop – where everyone marks the same one or two essays using the marking criteria and discusses their marks. If your convener has not provided marking criteria, get together with other tutors and design one using the many examples that can be found on the Web. You will find the conversation about the essays with a peer as helpful as the criteria themselves. Ultimately, your course convener (or senior tutor) is responsible for making sure that the essays are being marked consistently.

- 3. What feedback will help this student improve?** The feedback you give students on essays is one of the most important means of ensuring that students learn through the assessment. We have all had the experience of getting something back with the *only* feedback being a disappointingly low mark or getting trite and meaningful feedback such as ‘you should try harder next time’. This is highly demotivating. Particularly with large numbers of students, it is not possible to give detailed feedback on everything. Here are a few tips to help you focus your limited time on feedback that can make a difference.

Tips for good feedback

- Prioritise the big issues over the little issues – big issues are things like the overall argument, which takes priority over grammar (grammar and spelling are important, but make it clear to your students that you are not an editor). It often happens that the big issues are common across many essays. To save time, write up general feedback which goes to a number of students and gives you more time to address specific problems at the individual level.
- Give feedback which is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to the criteria for success. If the purpose of the essay is clear and the criteria are clear, this should be the major focus of your feedback.
- Feedback should focus on students’ performance, rather than on the students themselves. For instance, instead of ‘You have missed the point’, rather ‘This paragraph misses the point of the article’. The difference is subtle, but important. (It may also be important to clarify what the point of the article *is* if it is apparent that the student has not understood it.)
- Feedback must be timely – better to get less feedback back to students while it still matters to them than reams of feedback when they have long forgotten the essay. It is particularly important towards the end of term that essays be handed back in time for exam preparation.
- Note strengths as well as weaknesses. Everyone likes to be affirmed and it makes the weaknesses easier to acknowledge.
- Encourage students to respond to your feedback. Invite students to come and speak to you if they have concerns about their mark and the feedback. These are important learning moments too.

Evaluation – How Are the Tutorials Going?

You need to keep an eye on how the tutorials are going, but this need not be a mission.

Evaluation is important, and has become a part of almost every work environment in which you will move. Carrying out simple but thoughtful evaluations has a number of advantages:

- They act as a lightning conductor – if students are unhappy, you give them a chance to say so before things get out of proportion.
- They help you build on what you do well – when students express their appreciation for something it helps you build your confidence and your skills range.
- They provide you with evidence of your work (both while you are at university and to some extent for your first job interview/application (although no employer wants files full of documents – but you can summarise them and have them available if need be).
- They provide the opportunity for improving the learning in the tutorial.
- They give students a chance to think through the processes and content of the last few tutorials.

Some simple evaluation techniques

WARNING – HAZARDOUS MATERIAL.

- Seriously, evaluation can be over-done. Choose carefully and avoid weekly evaluations requiring time from your students.
- Don't wait until the end of the course to evaluate – that won't help you make changes.
- ALWAYS report back to them on the evaluation – including how you will respond to concerns.
- If you are worried or upset by the evaluation, make an appointment to see the senior tutor or lecturer to discuss matters with them.

The following may also be useful in conducting evaluations:

Post-its

Bring a pad of coloured post-it notes (choose the size according to what you want to ask). Get the students to write one word (or one sentence) on the note that reflects how they felt about any selected aspect of the tutorial. This a very basic tool, and can be frustrating if they say 'bored' when that is because they are never prepared. So choose your question carefully. You can also use this as a teaching tool – they can write one word that describes

the key thing they learnt from the reading/exercise, etc., and that can be stuck on a board and form the basis of a class discussion.

One-minute paper

Ask the students to write for one minute only about the aspect that you are wanting to evaluate. You must be specific, and keep time carefully. Whether or not you ask students to add their names may influence the kind of response you get.

Pre-prepared questionnaire

Careful! Keep these short (maximum three items). Avoid tick boxes or scales – they tell you very little and require very little thought to complete. Evaluate either the tutorial exercise, the process or your role – not all three with one evaluation.

Use a colleague

Ask a colleague to attend the tutorial (ideally one of the tutors in the same course) to monitor what is happening. Give her/him specific issues to concentrate on (again, no more than three). They must agree not to interfere though, and merely observe.

Ask a lecturer

This has advantages and disadvantages. In many cases the lecturer's presence will change the dynamics of the tutorial and give an unrealistic impression. At the same time, it may do the lecturer good to see what's happening in the tutorial. They must agree not to interfere though, and merely observe.

Keep a reflective diary

This will be a personal document, but if you write down what happened in a tutorial (as soon as possible afterwards), making note of how you felt it went and why, this helps you think through what is happening on a regular basis.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Mission Statement of the University of Cape Town

Our mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society.

Educating for life means that our educational process must provide:

- a foundation of skills, knowledge and versatility that will last a life-time, despite a changing environment,
- research-based teaching and learning,
- critical enquiry in the form of the search for new knowledge and better understanding, and
- an active developmental role in our cultural, economic, political, scientific and social environment.

Addressing the challenges facing our society means that we must come to terms with our past, be cognisant of the present, and plan for the future.

In this, it is central to our mission that we:

- recognise our location in Africa and our historical context,
- claim our place in the international community of scholars,
- strive to transcend the legacy of apartheid in South Africa and to overcome all forms of gender and other oppressive discrimination,
- be flexible on access, active in redress, and rigorous on success,
- promote equal opportunity and the full development of human potential,
- strive for inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration and synergy, and
- value and promote the contribution that all our members make to realising our mission....

To equip people with life-long skills we must and will:

- promote the love of learning, the skill of solving problems, and the spirit of critical enquiry and research, and
- take excellence as the bench-mark for all we do.

We are committed to academic freedom, critical scholarship, rational and creative thought, and free enquiry. It is part of our mission to ensure that these ideals live; this necessarily requires a dynamic process of finding the balance between freedom and responsibility,

rights and obligations, autonomy and accountability, transparency and efficiency, and permanence and transience; and of doing this through consultation and debate.

This Mission Statement was formulated by a Working Group of the University Transformation Forum and was affirmed and adopted at a University Assembly on April 24, 1996.

Available online at: <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/intro/> [Accessed 11 May 2007]

Appendix B: Working with Information

Students are required to find, read and comprehend texts and other information resources for their written assignments, which in turn have to be informed by what they have read. It is expected that acquired information will be internalised or understood by students before they start writing. These days students are required to be familiar with both print and electronic information resources and are sometimes unsure about what is expected of them and how to deal with a variety of resources. This section will discuss the following aspects of dealing with information:

- Finding information from print resources.
- Finding information on the Web.
- Evaluating Web information.
- Writing, citing and avoiding plagiarism.

Finding information from print resources

Although this is not often made explicit at university, students are expected to know the very real differences between the kinds of information found in reference works such as encyclopaedias, scholarly books (also known as monographs) and journal papers. The main differences are the following:

- Encyclopaedias provide brief introductory articles and overviews of more comprehensive topics. They are often a good place to start finding out about a topic and to provide references to further and more in-depth resources.
- Scholarly books take quite a long time to prepare, so one would not expect to find the most up-to-date information in books. They are good at analysing and discussing a subject at length and in detail. Students should understand that it is often not necessary to read a book from cover to cover, but that scanning the table of contents, the introduction and the index at the back, should give them a good idea of what it is all about and whether it is relevant for their needs.
- Journals (which these days are generally available in electronic format from the Library website) are used by scholars to communicate their research findings and report on other academic activities. Papers in journals are *peer reviewed*, which refers to a rigorous process of anonymous review of all writing that is offered for publication in a particular journal. It is a lengthy and time consuming process which (even though not entirely immune to abuse) ensures accountability and reliability in the transfer of knowledge. Journal papers are essentially different from articles in newspapers and

the popular press, which are business ventures intending to make a profit. While the journalistic press may take reasonable measures to produce facts accurately, they are written for the 'average' person in the street and may oversimplify issues, express opinions as facts or aim to entertain as well as to inform. They should be used with caution in academic writing.

Finding information on the Web

Students are increasingly relying on using information resources from the World Wide Web for their learning. It is important that they understand that Web sources might be substantially different from those sources found in the academic library or from the electronic journals and other resources available on the library web page.

The major difference is that articles on the Web are not peer reviewed. Anybody can publish anything on the Web. There is very little verification of online information, so it may be difficult to establish the identity of the author(s) or the origin of the information. Sites that purport to provide objective information may actually be trying to sell a product or convince the reader of a partisan point of view.

A further problem is that web pages are not stable. They may be updated or changed at any time and may disappear altogether (for example, when sites are restructured), or when persons responsible leave organisations or lose interest in their page(s).

Evaluating web information

In using information from the Web, therefore, it becomes the student's own responsibility to check for reliability of the source. The first question one has to answer when faced with some potentially interesting information source on the Web is to establish where it comes from. Are the authors named and do they belong to a credible organisation? Look at the URL which is often a very good indicator of the kind of information contained: '.ac' or '.edu' indicates that it comes from an academic organisation with the intention of presenting accurate information. If the URL contains '.gov' it indicates a governmental source, while '.com' or '.co' clearly has commercial implications.

Look for the author of a site and check on the Web to see if s/he is an expert in the field. If the site is anonymous you should be careful, as you would when there are readily apparent language errors. Reputable authors sign their work and check their language.

The tone of a text should be considered. Extravagant statements or over-emphatic claims are not found in serious academic writing, nor are sweeping or vague statements without backup. You should look at the sources cited. An absence of citations, or only references to what other people have *said* but not published, are not hallmarks of reliable information. Beware of one-sided positions or evidence of bias; reputable writers tend to try and present different points of view or balanced arguments. Evidence of ulterior motives such as

promotion or advertising does not point to reliable information either. It is a student's own responsibility as a writer to ensure that only reliable information is used in written work.

Writing, citing and avoiding plagiarism

Academic writing requires that all the sources that have been read and consulted in the preparation of your work are properly cited in the written text, with a full reference to the original provided. Citation and referencing consist of quoting from or referring to other writers' words and thoughts and the listing of their names, together with the titles and other details of their publications so that these can be tracked down independently. Citation has long been regarded as a hallmark of academic writing of all kinds. There are good reasons for this:

- Citations tell the reader of a text that the author understands the topic and has read about it. One gives authority to statements and adds value to one's writing by showing that other writers have supported one's arguments.
- Citations show how well an author knows the field. It is important to give evidence of familiarity with the important writers in a specific field and if some of them are left out, or if the writings of those who are less highly regarded or who have been discredited are used, it will detract from the author's work.
- Citations show that reading is up-to-date. In certain subject fields (such as computer science), it is very important to be aware of the most recent developments. In other subjects, e.g. philosophy and history, one may quote or cite writers who lived decades and even centuries ago.
- Writing is 'intellectual property' and one has to give credit to persons who first expressed an idea.
- Citations enable the *reader* of one's work to check the accuracy of a quotation, or to find the source and the context of a quotation.
- Citations are most important in protecting the author from being accused of or from committing plagiarism, as will be discussed below.

Citing correctly to avoid plagiarism

Cutting-and-pasting from electronic resources is so easy these days that student plagiarism has become an issue of great concern at academic institutions, including UCT. It is very important for students to realise that any accusation of plagiarism will be serious and could be dealt with very severely.

Plagiarism is essentially the stealing of others' words, thoughts and ideas by pretending that they are one's own, original work. It is treated like fraud. Ignorance or carelessness is no excuse. It is not acceptable academic practice under any circumstances to 'lift' text and to present it as one's own. UCT has now invested in access to **Turnitin**, which is a website designed to assist in detecting plagiarism in student work. Classes may be required to submit written work electronically for testing. Students found guilty of plagiarism could at best fail their course, or at worst face expulsion. The following guidelines should be followed in all written work:

- Every single instance of using phrases and ideas that are not one's own must be acknowledged. This is done by giving the name of the person who first expressed every concept or thought that is mentioned in one's text.
- When someone's words are quoted directly, they *have to be placed in quotation marks*.
- Longer quotations, which should be avoided or used sparingly, should be 'blocked' to make them stand out clearly. This means indenting and single-spacing the entire quotation, or by using a smaller typeface to show clearly that this is a different 'voice'.
- If another's words or ideas are expressed by *paraphrasing* them, one's own words have to be used. It is *not enough* simply to change the word order or to substitute one or two words only.
- More lengthy material may also be *summarised* in one's own style and language. Do not repeat the author's words without placing them in quotation marks.
- Even when using one's own words to express the ideas of someone else, the source must still be quoted, even though it is not then necessary to use quotation marks.
- Do not take over quotations from other writers and pretend that you have found and read the originals yourself.

It is important to keep a list of full details of all the sources that might be used as one searches for information. UCT has just invested in providing campus-wide access to the website **RefWorks**, which allows one to download all the necessary details about library materials as well as online journal papers into one's own personal database. The system will then automatically prepare correct citations and references according to a large variety of referencing conventions as and when required.

RefWorks is available at <http://www.refworks.com> and although it is very easy to use, students should be encouraged to attend a tutorial on using it to its full potential. Information about RefWorks as well as further personal assistance with the kinds of issues discussed here are readily available in the Knowledge Commons in the Library. Tutors should encourage students to work there.

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