

# Tutor's Guide



This version of the Tutor's Guide has been updated by the Learning and Teaching Unit from the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Western Sydney.

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### **Feedback**

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this booklet that will help us improve future editions. Please email your comments or suggestions to [ltu@uws.edu.au](mailto:ltu@uws.edu.au)

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# Introduction to the Tutor's Guide

## SECTION 1 – Getting Started

### Your role and responsibilities as a tutor

Knowing your role and duties *before* you start teaching is a very important step in preparing yourself to teach. Make sure you clarify with the unit coordinator what they expect of you, and ask them where and how you will be given your contract or statement of duties.

Common duties for a sessional teacher or tutor include:

- Leading tutorial classes.
- Conducting laboratory classes.
- Marking assignments and exams, or other student activities (e.g. lab reports, quizzes, journals, in-class activities).

### Meeting with the Unit Coordinator

Meeting your unit coordinator before the session (i.e. semester) begins, and then regularly throughout the session helps to establish and maintain good communication channels between yourself and your coordinator, enabling you to keep abreast of current tasks and issues in the unit.

Also, getting to know other tutors, either those working on the same unit/s as you or other tutors in your school to give and receive support from your peers can be the most beneficial way to survive and thrive as a new teacher! Apart from giving and getting social support, you can share teaching, tips, experiences, and broaden your knowledge base.

At your initial meeting with the unit coordinator, make sure that you ask about the following things:

- What skills and knowledge will you need to tutor on this particular unit? When is the Introduction to Learning and Teaching for New Sessional Staff held? Who is the School's contact person for this?
- The tutorial program – ask for a copy of the unit learning guide which contains a schedule of learning and teaching activities. If the learning guide doesn't provide information about what each tutorial will focus on, check this with the unit coordinator.
- The tutorial program – how are tutorials conducted? Are you required to develop tutorial plans and materials? You might ask for past examples of tutorial activities so that you can familiarise yourself with your role.
- Ask for copies of other teaching materials, such as textbook/s, lecture notes (if produced for students), references/readings, lab manuals etc, so that you can prepare in advance of class
- What is the assessment for the unit, and are you required to mark students' work? Criteria and standards for each assessment task will be detailed in the unit learning guide. What is the expected turn-around time for marking, and the expected number of hours associated with marking? How should you record marks, and who should you submit these to?
- Ask the unit coordinator whether/when a meeting will be held to brief tutors about assessment tasks, as you will be responding to at least some student queries about assessment tasks.

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- Are you expected to attend lectures? Is this part of your paid work or expected as part of your own preparation?
- What are the expectations in terms of your availability for contact with students out of class hours?
- What resources are you allocated as a staff member – office, phone, photocopying/printing allocations, stationary, library card, parking permit, etc?
- Can you have a list and contact details of other tutors teaching in the unit so that you can create or participate in a supportive peer network?
- What should you do if you become sick and can't take a tutorial? Who should you notify, how, and by when?
- Have previous students in the unit identified aspects of their tutorial experience as amongst the 'best aspects of the unit', in the University's Student Feedback on Unit (SFU) process? If so, what aspects did they find particularly useful?
- Will you be required to undertake, or be subject to, an evaluation of your performance? If so, when, and how?

It is also a good idea at this initial meeting to ask your unit coordinator if they would be willing to set a number of meeting times with you throughout the session. Having this regular contact with them serves several purposes, for example:

- You can keep the unit coordinator up-to-date with how students are going in the unit, as you are most often the first 'port of call' for students;
- You can keep the unit coordinator informed about your work, and you have an opportunity to discuss any difficulties you may be experiencing;
- You have an opportunity to clarify your understanding of particular aspects of the unit such as the assessment, before any problems arise or become worse.

If face-to-face meetings become difficult to schedule, keep contact via email on how you are going. It's OK to take the initiative to contact the unit coordinator; they will usually appreciate the effort that you make.

### Concerns about teaching your first class

New tutors often have a variety of fears and concerns about their first tutoring experience, and most of these fears and concerns are common worries for all new tutors.

- *"I'm really nervous, and worried that the students will see how nervous I am"*
- *"I feel so overwhelmed, that I don't know where to start"*
- *"What if I don't know something? I'll be so embarrassed"*
- *"I'm worried that there will be some problem students who I won't be able to handle"*
- *"How will I last a whole hour? It will be embarrassing if I haven't got much to say"*
- *"What if the class doesn't want to do the things I've planned... what if they don't want to participate?"*
- *"I don't really know what they are going to expect of me... and what if I don't give them what they want?"*

## SECTION 1 – Getting Started

These comments are valid concerns for new tutors who have never dealt with a classroom environment, or if you are tutoring in a new environment. However, there are some things that you can do in the first tutorial (and beyond) to start addressing these concerns. That's why careful preparation and planning before the first tutorial is so important.

### Preparation and planning

Remember, first impressions often do count, so it is important that you make the kind of impression that you want on the group. This might seem a bit intimidating, but remember as the tutor, you have the opportunity in the first tutorial to 'set the scene' and establish the kind of classroom environment that suits YOU. If you can make a strong start, many of your fears and concerns will be easy to handle if they arise.

The following list contains key tasks for you to consider in preparing for your first tutorial class.

### Checklist for new tutors – Surviving your first class!

- **Get organised** (find out where the room is, make sure it has the things you need in it, organise materials such as documents for the document camera, Power Points, whiteboard pens, eraser etc.).
- **Prepare material thoroughly** (read the material and think about it –What will students find difficult to understand? What questions will I ask about it? etc.).
- **Dress and behave appropriately** (dress to assert authority and credibility, and behave in a professional manner at all times).
- **Arrive before or on time.** This is very important modeling behaviour.
- **Make a strong start** (be aware that nerves will be worst at the beginning – have some strategies to cope with these – documents with your name and contact details, an outline of the tutorial class and objectives, what is going to happen, etc.).
- Talk to the group about your **expectations** of them; **establish a set of ground rules** for their class (see below for ideas).
- One of the greatest challenges at the beginning of a new session is coping with **learning students' names**. No matter how large the class, it is worth persevering so students have a sense that you care about them as individuals. This can help create the kind of atmosphere that facilitates learning.
- **Facilitate** the tutorial, don't dominate (see section in Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning for ideas).
- **Question skillfully** (see section in Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning for ideas).
- **Be aware of diversity and inclusiveness issues** (see sections in Understanding Student Learning and Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning for ideas).
- Be prepared with **some strategies for dealing with challenging students** (see section in Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning).
- Reflect on your first tutorial class – How did it go? Did you achieve all your objectives and get through all the necessary material? What went well? What did you enjoy and what did the

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students seem to enjoy? What could be improved for next time? It is a good idea to write down your reflections. At this stage, commit to continuing the things that worked and changing the things that didn't (before these become your habits and the group's expectations).

Finally...Celebrate! You will never be a new tutor again!

### Establishing expectations or ground rules

Often problems arise with students because of unclear expectations about your role as a tutor and about their role as a student and a member of the class. Establishing expectations or ground rules at the beginning of semester can help clarify these expectations and help in maintaining a good working relationship between you and the group, individual students, and among the students themselves.

If you feel uncomfortable using the term 'ground rules' with university students, as sometimes this may seem to be perceived as juvenile, then use the term 'expectations'. Getting the students to generate the ground rules themselves (with input from you as the tutor, of course) can also help to establish rules that will be more likely to be kept by the group, as students will feel like you trusted and valued their perspectives. A set of ground rules can be a helpful tool when having to deal with difficult situations at a later date – for example, if some students are dominating discussion or behaving inappropriately, being able to refer back to the ground rules that the students themselves negotiated can be quite powerful in getting back control of the class.

It is also quite useful to review the ground rules during the session, to get feedback from students on how they think things are going, if there are any rules that aren't working or any rules that should be added.

Here are some possible ground rules (for the tutor and the students).

Everyone will:

- Arrive on time.
- Respect each other's point of view (okay to critique a fellow student's point of view, but not okay to criticise or 'put down' the person).
- Listen to each other, and not interrupt when another person is speaking.
- Come prepared for each class.
- Acknowledge that it is okay to make mistakes – mistakes are an opportunity for learning.
- Agree to not make sexist or racist comments.
- Turn off mobile phones or turn them to 'silent.'

Some possible ways to generate a set of ground rules with the class include the following:

- Use pyramiding to get students thinking about their expectations and what they would like as ground rules. First, ask students to think about (and write down) what kind of expectations they would like set for the group on their own, then after a couple of minutes, they turn to their partner and share their ideas. Then each pair joins with another pair and this group of four shares ideas and negotiates a common set of ideas. After

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a few minutes (say 5 – 10 minutes), ask one member of each group to report back to the whole class and you write each idea on the board. Once a set of expectations/rules has been generated, discuss the list with the class, clarifying if needed and making changes (if appropriate).

- Start with a short list of rules and expectations that you have created, project this or write on the board, and ask the class to form small groups (around four students) and discuss the list – do they agree, is anything missing, etc? Then ask each group to feed back to whole class their comments. This then works in a similar way to the last part of pyramiding.

## SECTION 2 - Understanding Student Learning

### What do students learn?

Confucius said, *"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand"*.

According to research, generally, students retain

20% of what they hear,

30% of what they see,

50% of what they see and hear,

70% of what they see, hear and say,

90% of what they see, hear, say and do.

Consequently, effective learning is most likely to occur if students have the opportunity to hear a lecture or discussion, see a demonstration or visual display, discuss the material, and have an opportunity to do something with this material. 'Doing' something is what we call 'active learning', engaging with the learning material through activities by themselves and with other students.

In universities where the common structure for a unit of study comprises lectures, tutorials, lab sessions and increasingly, e-learning, the role of the tutor and the tutorial becomes vital for the learning process. It is the small group environment of the tutorial that can provide most opportunities for students to 'say' and 'do' what they have seen and heard in the lecture.

### However, not all students learn in the same way.

How do students approach their learning?

Studies of student learning show that often the approach adopted by students

is strongly influenced by factors in the environment such as the teaching method, the amount of content to be covered, the workload required, the type of assessment used, feedback received and the enthusiasm of the teacher.

Research also shows that the learning approach adopted by students is often closely related to the quality of their learning and their academic achievement. Students who have a surface approach to learning are extrinsically motivated and focus on facts and details rather than on understanding and relating concepts and developing an interest in what is being learned. Students taking a surface approach to their learning will normally achieve a lower quality learning outcome.

Teachers can influence these factors to varying degrees. For example, we can encourage students' intrinsic interest by sharing our own passion and enthusiasm for the subject, emphasising its relevance to students' overall program of study and their career goals. We can design interesting activities and assessment tasks that help students to make connections between the subject and the 'real world' of work or the profession.

It is making connections between ideas that distinguishes between surface and deep approaches to learning, and hence, the quality of students' learning. We can also see now why students retain more knowledge if they see, hear, say and do; that the more students 'say' and 'do', the more they are likely to make sense of the information for themselves, develop an understanding of the material and

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relate information learned to other parts of the subject or beyond. There are a variety of models that explain the different ways in which students approach their learning, most reflecting different activities or strategies that students use and the motivations behind using them.

### Some notes about adult learners

Research shows that adults, as mature-age students, have some common characteristics. One of the major differences between mature-age students and university students who have moved on straight from high school, is that adults have much more work and life experience. Their experiences can be an excellent resource and contribution for the class, and the teacher should try to capitalise on this and integrate these rich work and life experiences into the learning environment.

Adults also often have a real sense of purpose for their learning that is sometimes quite different from younger students. They are often wanting to change their career, or have come to university after many years at work, and may not be learning 'just for learning's sake'. They may have a very clear idea of what they want to do when they finish studying. This is in contrast to high school leavers who often don't really know what career or occupation they want to pursue. Adult students are often extremely motivated: they are spending their own time, money and resources to study. They may have given up work to study, but still have family to support, so are dedicated to passing each subject. Adult students tend to be very focused in the classroom and like to cover material quickly, but completely.

All students, but particularly mature-age students, need to feel valued and respected not just by the teacher but also by their fellow students. Set an example in the class and treat them as individuals with a mature outlook, successful in their work, and with a variety of experiences. If adult students have not been in a formal learning situation for a while, their self-esteem may be fragile. They may approach learning with some fear as their past learning experiences may have been negative.

Here are some key principles for adult learners – they prefer learning environments that:

- Are active, practice/problem-based, rather than passive (e.g. listening or watching).
- Support and promote positive self-esteem.
- Enable them to integrate new ideas with what they already know.
- Show respect for them as individual learners.
- Value their experiences and perspectives and contributions.
- Allow them choice and self-direction, and are meaningful for them and their needs.
- Reinforce their learning, and enable them to apply their learning immediately.

## SECTION 2 - Understanding Student Learning

**Table 1: Principles of learning**

<p><b>1. Learners need guidance and support</b>, and benefit from being given some basic structure from which to grow their knowledge – having ‘sign posts’ pointing out key information is crucial if it is to be learned.</p>
<p><b>2. Learning is best facilitated when students’ prior knowledge is ‘cued’</b>, so that they can begin to assimilate new information in an organised way that relates to their existing knowledge.</p>
<p><b>3. Learning occurs through communication and social interaction</b>, and students should be encouraged to share, question, reflect on and challenge ideas so that their knowledge is modified and advanced.</p>
<p><b>4. Learning is not a ‘spectator sport’</b> and students need to act on information for it to become meaningful and integrated with their existing knowledge.</p>
<p><b>5. Deep understanding occurs when students are able to apply their knowledge to new situations</b>, and this kind of learning occurs through practising with this information many times in different contexts.</p>
<p><b>6. Students learn better when they are aware of their own learning processes</b>, the strategies they use, and if they continually monitor their understanding.</p>

(from: [www.trainingpost.org/index.html](http://www.trainingpost.org/index.html), and [oesi.nci.nih.gov/series/cted/trainersguide](http://oesi.nci.nih.gov/series/cted/trainersguide))

### Theories and principles of learning

Recent developments in student learning have primarily been based on a constructivist philosophy, whereby effective learners are considered to be the determinants of what is learnt. From this ‘learner-centred’ view, the teacher’s role is that of a facilitator of the learning, and the prior ability and knowledge of the learner determines the learner’s approach to a learning task. Learners take an active role in the learning process, particularly those who choose to be engaged in meaningful learning where their intentions become more significant than those of the teacher (Moon, 1999).

According to the constructivist view of learning, the effective learner constructs their own knowledge and the knowledge is conceived to be organized like a network (i.e. cognitive structure) rather than a bucket of information contained in memory. Students utilise what they already know (their prior knowledge) in helping them learn new material and integrate or assimilate it with their existing knowledge – they build on what they already know and are more likely to engage in meaningful learning.

Meaningful learning (or deep learning) occurs when the learner intends to understand the learning material and make sense of it in terms of what they already know and experience. It occurs when learners intend to utilise this knowledge in new situations. This is in contrast to rote learning or learning by memorizing (or surface learning) which occurs when the learner does not, or cannot, relate the

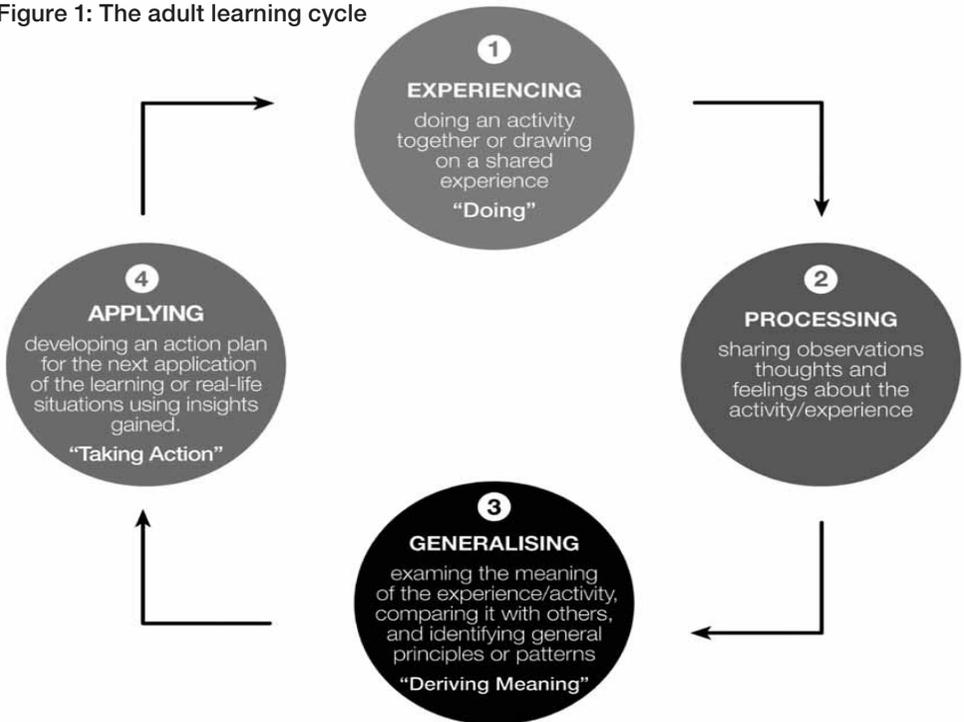
## SECTION 2 - Understanding Student Learning

material of learning to prior knowledge and instead learns isolated bits of knowledge such as fact and details.

Given these notions about how students learn, here are some key principles of learning that are important foundations for effective teaching and learning (Angelo, 1998; Biggs, 1999).

The following diagram represents a model of the **Adult Learning Cycle** (based on what is called the Action Learning Cycle). It represents a good model for all learning and can be used to plan individual tutorial sessions, and well as the overall session program. Guiding learners through this cycle will help promote a learning environment that supports the adoption of meaningful or deep learning approaches.

Figure 1: The adult learning cycle



[from: [http://oesi.nci.nih.gov/services/cted/trainersguide/Trainers\\_1\\_m.pdf](http://oesi.nci.nih.gov/services/cted/trainersguide/Trainers_1_m.pdf)]

## SECTION 3 - Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning

### Introduction to small classes

Small group teaching refers to tutorials, seminars, practical classes, demonstrations and clinical settings where students are taught in groups of between 20 and 35 – just the kind of teaching environment that you will most likely be responsible for as a tutor.

These classes are very important in the overall quality of the experience that undergraduate students have at university, and are especially important in establishing and maintaining contact between students and their teachers and peers, helping students to learn effectively and develop a sense of belonging to the university.

Small classes provide opportunities for demonstrations, expansion and elaboration on student understanding. They provide a more effective forum for giving and getting feedback for both students and teachers (than larger classes do), and they allow students to explore the relevance of knowledge within the context of a unit, lecture or topic. Moreover, in the small class environment, students can develop in three key ways:

Personally – small classes are important for students' well-being, as well as learning, and fulfill a very important role in:

- Building confidence in themselves as learners e.g. developing the ability to discuss and argue, solve problems, give presentations, work in pairs/trios/ project groups, present and justify an opinion etc.
- Making studying at university more enjoyable and more rewarding (although

not for some such as introverts, who may never prefer smaller classes) – providing an environment in which students can establish friendships and peer groups that can then be extended outside the classroom.

Socially – effective learning is often collaborative and social, rather than competitive and isolated and as such, learning is essentially an interactive, interpersonal, and emotional activity. Therefore tutorials can:

- Provide an opportunity for teaching staff to get to know students – frequent student-teacher contact in and out of classes is perhaps the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. The concern that teachers show for students helps them to keep working and get through rough times. Knowing a few teachers well enhances students' intellectual and emotional commitment to learning.
- Enhance learning by making it more like a team effort than a solo race – like the old saying, “two heads are better than one”. Working with others significantly extends the potential for learning. Articulating ideas and questions and sharing these as well as responding to others' reactions improves students thinking and deepens their understanding – not only of the course content, but of the process of learning itself! A supportive learning environment where learners feel empowered to negotiate tasks, take risks and be part of a shared context is necessary to develop cooperation among students.

## SECTION 3 - Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning

Educationally – working in small groups not only improves the quality of learning, enhancing students’ personal understanding and learning, but also extends the scope of learning from unit content to higher order reasoning and thinking skills, and other such skills and abilities that are often called “generic skills”. These include:

- problem solving skills,
- reasoning skills,
- development of relevant or appropriate attitudes (e.g. professionalism),
- speaking skills,
- listening skills,
- leadership, and
- cooperation.

### Essential elements of small classes

According to Newble and Cannon (2000) there are three elements necessary for successful small group teaching: active participation, face-to-face contact, and purposeful activity. Suggestions for promoting these elements are made below.

#### Active participation

- Participation by all the students requires keeping numbers as low as five to eight. You can break up classes of 20-35 into smaller groups for at least some of the time. Having students work in twos or threes is even more effective in promoting participation by everyone.
- Getting everyone involved in a way that is productive and inclusive – this is one of the major skill areas for you to develop as a small class teacher.
- Creating the right atmosphere from

the beginning is important, and it is important to recognise and respect students’ personal comfort zones. The use of ice- breaker activities and learning students’ names helps in the early stages to make the context non-threatening thus students feel comfortable discussing their ideas and sharing their questions with the group.

#### Face-to-face contact

- It is important to ensure that your physical environment (i.e., classroom) allows face-to-face contact between you and the students, and among the students themselves. If it is possible in the room you are using, arrange seating so that students can see each other; a U-shape works well for discussion-based activities and groups of four to eight around a table works well for example-based activities.
- If you are teaching in a room with fixed furniture arranged in rows, ask students to work with their neighbour or with their neighbour plus a student in front or behind. (When you finish, remember to put the room back the way it was before, and to clean the whiteboard for the next teacher using the room.)
- Non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) is often just as important as the spoken voice in the delivery and comprehension of people’s ideas.

#### Purposeful activity

- Learners must recognise that information is important if it is to be learned. Knowing why you have to know something

## SECTION 3 - Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning

enables students to 'fit' this into their developing knowledge and connect new information with their existing knowledge. It is much easier to learn subsets of knowledge when you have an idea of the big picture, can see its relevance, see how it is connected to practice and understand how it builds on what you already know.

- Each session should have a purpose or rationale that is clearly explained to students. This requires you to plan tasks that are going to facilitate the learning you want students to achieve. Be mindful that you are part of a whole learning process, so spend time trying to establish what your unit coordinator hopes to achieve with this tutorial. During the class, monitor time spent on activities to ensure that all the intended outcomes for the class are achieved.
- Remember there are many skills students may be learning, such as social and personal skills, while they are working through tasks that seem, on the face of it, to be concerned with content. Staying mindful of what your students can, and are, learning while engaged in small class activities is important because it allows you to self-consciously build into your planning the specialist disciplinary content and the small group skills you want them to learn.

*To these three key elements, we could also add:*

### **Intellectual engagement**

- Students need to make some sense of what they are learning in terms of what they already know, or think they know. It

is important for teachers to encourage students to relate the learning material to their existing knowledge, but to also go beyond simply linking ideas to prior knowledge. Encourage students to engage in investigative inquiry stemming from the linking of prior experiences and identification of relationships between new and already known concepts.

- Students need to be intellectually challenged in a manner that is relevant for the learning you want them to achieve – consider what kind of learning outcomes have been set for the unit; do students have to acquire knowledge of particular concepts? Do students need to be able to demonstrate their ability to critically analyse key theories or research findings related to the topic? Do students need to show how they can use reasoning and analytical skills in order to draw conclusions from sources of information?

### **Working with small groups**

Effective small group teaching requires not only a good understanding of the subject matter, but knowledge of how groups develop and function over time. As the initial 'leader' of your class group, it will be important for you to keep track of how the group is going, being mindful of potential difficulties, and being ready to respond if or when these arise. This is particularly important if the students are also required to form small groups within the class in order to undertake learning activities. The following section will guide you through the essential principles of working with small groups.

## SECTION 3 - Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning

### Getting students to form groups

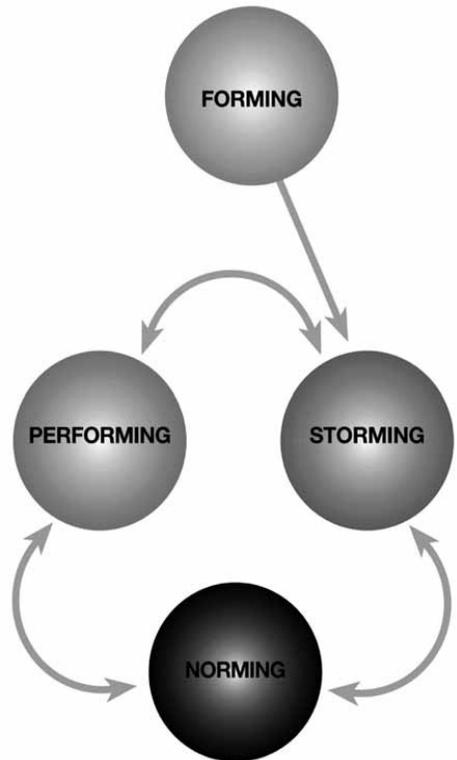
There are a variety of methods you can use to get students to form small groups. For example, prior to class you can allocate numbers to groups and then get each student to select a numbered card from a bucket in class, and join together as groups according to your selected groupings (e.g. if you have 28 students in the class, you might allocate numbers 1 to 4, 5 to 8, 9 to 12, etc into groups). This method is completely arbitrary and depending on the mix of students in your class you might prefer to use a method by which students form groups on their own.

Through self-selecting groups students may miss out on learning from each other in some ways. For example, by not mixing interest areas those students who do not think the unit is particularly interesting may not pick up on other students' enthusiasm and interest. Enthusiasm can be contagious. Or by not mixing achievement levels, some of the lower achieving students may not learn from their higher achieving peers. However, the obvious advantage to using self-selection is that you may minimise group conflict problems.

If you find that self-selecting groups are not performing as well as you would like, try reorganising these, either during the class or for the next class.

### A model of group formation and processes

**Figure 2: A model of group formation and processes**



(from: Tuckerman, 1965, and Atherton, 2003)

**Forming** – the group is just coming together, and members often show shyness, uncertainty and diffidence, although extrovert members may assume some kind of leadership.

**Storming** – establishing pecking order among members, and sometimes 'testing'

## SECTION 3 - Effective Small Group Teaching and Learning

out the leader (in a class, this is often the teacher, but may be fellow students in the initial stages of group work). Disagreements can occur and roles are eventually allocated (initial leadership may change). This can be an uncomfortable process, but an important stage not to be avoided by the facilitator.

**Norming** – following on is an emergence of group identity and cohesion. What kind of behaviour and contribution is acceptable and what is not? This is rarely done explicitly, of course, and it can readily slip back into Storming.

**Performing** – when the productive work and learning occurs.

The diagram shows the group process not as a linear sequence, but a cycle, after the initial forming. However, the group can progress to and from any of the three later stages during its lifetime.

In extended group work such as occurs when students work on projects over weeks or months, it is to be expected that the group will revisit various stages of group formation.

For teaching in small classes, it is perhaps most important to recognise the ‘Storming’ phase. This process may not always be obvious to you as the tutor, or to the students in the group. It is inevitable and it cannot be structured out of existence, however, within the classroom situation, it may need to be contained to some degree, particularly if the process begins to test the most obvious role in the group – that of the teacher (Atherton, 2003).

It is important for you as the tutor, to respond to any processes of storming, particularly if your role is tested (e.g. students not adhering to ground rules, out-of- role questioning, etc.). The rest of the class will be looking at you to act in some way, to respond to students involved, and may become confused about their place and role (and yours) in the class group, and will not know where to look for leadership if you do not act. You may not want to “lead” or emphasise your authority as you may well have a problem of wasted time and loss of a learning culture if you do not.

### Techniques for group facilitation

#### Ensuring equal participation

Promoting a good group ‘climate’ is one of the main things to establish and maintain in order to ensure active and equal participation by all students in the group. Avoiding the dominance of a single member is an important role for you as the tutor, as is supporting and encouraging the quiet student/s to contribute or participate. Steps to facilitate equal participation of all students are listed below.

- The physical layout of the room can be arranged to encourage participation by everyone, e.g. sitting members around a table so that they see each other while discussing or problem-solving together.
- Provide a set of ‘rules’ for discussion/ group work. These may be rules that were generated as ground rules for the group in the first tutorial (e.g. contributions can only be made in turn, time limits may be set, comments in favour of an idea are allowed only by comments against it, etc.).

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- You may find yourself tempted to fill silences by reverting to mini lectures. Remember that tutorials are places of student learning activity – allow them time to reflect on what has been said or asked. Silence can be a useful prompter of activity. When you pose a question to the class, allow students time to think, perhaps discuss with the person beside them, jot down their thoughts, or formulate their own questions before you require a response.
- It is easier to draw all of the students into a discussion if you know their names. Use a list if you cannot rely on your memory. It is important however not to embarrass or force contributions from class members which may scare them off opening their mouths in class again! Consider drawing in the quieter students by asking non-specific questions, e.g. “What do you others think about Rachel’s model for an alternative?” Or, “I’d like to hear from students who haven’t spoken yet in this discussion”.
- Consider telling students that next week’s tutorial class will involve a discussion about “X”, to give anxious or shy students plenty of time to think about the topic and therefore feel more confident about sharing their ideas during group discussion.
- Similarly, ask students to brainstorm their ideas about the discussion topic for a few minutes alone before starting the discussion. You may also ask students to share their brainstorming with the person next to them first.
- If students are required to form small groups, in selecting members for each group, take into account the

likelihood that any one member will ‘dominate’ perhaps from their personality characteristics or ‘expert’ knowledge. Consider building in participation by asking students to take on group roles such as note- taker, time-keeper, participation or process consultant.

### Using questions

Facilitating student participation in the group also relies on the use of questioning. This is a key skill for small group teaching. Sometimes you will need to use a variety of techniques to get discussion going and to maintain it for any length of time. It is often a good idea to prepare some strategies for asking questions, particularly if you have a feeling that the topic for discussion is difficult or boring, something to which students may not spontaneously respond.

It is also important to remember not to use closed-ended questions – these are questions that can be answered with only one or two words, or with ‘yes’ or ‘no’. This does not encourage discussion, and does not require students to show the reasoning behind their responses. Open-ended questions are best, and usually start with terms such as “How...” or “Why...”. Facilitation of discussion and questioning is important to effective small group teaching and you will find advice about questioning techniques in just about every guide to teaching.

Some common questioning techniques that are easy to remember and implement as a new tutor include:

- **Pausing** – allow students time to think about a question before responding;

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- **Re-phrasing** – perhaps the students are not responding because they have no idea what you mean, but allow sufficient time to get a response (try counting to 10 or 15 before speaking again) and use eye contact to encourage any student “thinking about” having a go at responding;
- **Directing** – the question in different ways (for example, ask a question to the whole group & wait for response, or ask an individual to respond, or ask an individual the question first up, etc.);
- **Redirecting** – questions to other students (e.g. “Mary has argued that.., what do you think Tim?”) is a useful technique to involve other learners and draw out other views;
- **Focusing** – using pre-planned questions.
- **Refocusing** – is essential when students have wandered off track, and you can either repeat the original or focus question (e.g. “so, how does that relate to...” or “now, to go back to our original topic...”), or try rewording it slightly – this is particularly useful if you want to encourage students to see something from another perspective (e.g. “how do you think that would work when....”, or “how does that compare with what [reference] theorises?”);
- **Probing** – use probes to follow-up on students’ contributions, for clarification or for examples (e.g. “What do you think will happen then?” “Tell me more about the...”), as this can help to stimulate thinking and reasoning skills; Some other key things to remember when facilitating group discussion include:
  - **Reacting** – always react in a positive way despite the response. In the case of an inadequate answer it may be necessary to clarify the question or redirect it to another student;
  - Make sure the questions **involve all the students if possible**, and discussion is distributed around the class. Allow many students’ contributions to build towards a coherent whole answer to the initially-posed problem, rather than making a large contribution yourself;
  - **Encourage** student questions, and perhaps allow time for reflection. Respond positively to any questions that emerge, showing that you value all responses (e.g. either verbally or non-verbally with smiles, nods, eye-contact, etc.);
  - It is very important to **pitch questions at an appropriate level** for students’ understanding, but vary the level to accommodate different individuals’ levels of understanding – and to respond to every contribution appropriately;
  - **Reward the good** (including that within a response that otherwise needs work), and correct the bad (avoiding ridicule) – try using these questioning techniques to draw out the problems or strengthen up the argument.

### Methods for group-work during class

Even though a class of 20 to 35 students is considered a ‘small group’, as a tutor, you will find that this is often too big to enable effective participation by all students in the class. Breaking students up in to smaller groups can be very successful in facilitating students’ active engagement in the learning

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material, and in providing opportunities for practising problem solving and critical thinking. It also takes the focus away from you, the tutor, as being the 'knowledge holder', acknowledging that students themselves have valuable ideas and knowledge to offer. Here are some common techniques for group-work in class.

### **Pyramiding or "Think, Pair, Share"**

To start, ask students to think about (and write down) their ideas or response to a question, topic, or problem on their own. After a couple of minutes, students turn to their partner and share their response. After a couple more minutes, each pair joins with another pair and this group of four shares their responses, thinks about the issue further, and negotiates a common set of ideas. After a few minutes (say 5 – 10 minutes), ask one member of each group to report back to the whole class (group generated points can be summarised by you or the students on a whiteboard).

### **Buzz Groups**

This is a great technique for getting students to discuss a particular issue, problem or topic for a very short period of time (say 5 minutes). Students form small groups of three or four, and one student acts as reporter and/or scribe. Depending on the size of the class, all or some groups are called upon to report on their discussion. Group generated points can be summarised by students or the teacher or the teacher can provide his or her own solution or summary of important points.

### **Jigsaw Method**

For this strategy, each student works on one part of a learning task and then works collaboratively with a group of other students to combine the various parts and complete the activity. The learning task/problem is broken into parts and students are asked to work on a response to that part-task individually. Then students working on the same part work in a group together to come up with a response and check their understandings against those of other students. Students then form into different groups in which each of the different parts of the task is represented, and each student explains to the others their response to their part of the problem.

### **Debate**

Divide a class or individuals into groups to represent particular points of view (most commonly 'for and against') on a controversial topic. Each group works to develop an argument to support its allocated point of view. Students could be invited to argue a view they do not endorse, engage in the debate in character or through role-plays.

### **Fishbowl**

This is a great method for introducing a bit of fun and energy to a focused class discussion. Some students start off the discussion by sitting in a small circle of chairs, with the rest of the class in a surrounding circle of chairs, listening to the discussion. Students in the outer circle can join in the discussion by swapping seats with someone in the small inner circle.

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### Dealing with difficult situations

**Don't panic!** Many tutors may never encounter a really difficult, tricky or uncomfortable situation in class. Those who do may at first feel like just running away from it, but like all the skills you need as a tutor, you will develop skills in managing difficult situations with experience. However, it is worth putting in place good management strategies in order to minimise or avoid such situations.

Here are three important tips for good classroom management:

**1. Ground rules help the group work better** – especially if the 'rules' are generated by the students themselves (see Section 1 for details).

**2. Structure is just as important in small groups as it is in lectures** - students will work better if the purpose of the class and/or activity is clear to them (e.g., a statement of aims and learning outcomes for the class works well). Remember to be explicit about what you expect from your students, and avoid giving them a task to complete without a rationale – this may help reduce some problems in class like students being distracted, off track, disinterested, or non-communicative.

**3. Pay attention to the 'tone' of the group** – interaction in a small group is greatly influenced by the tone or atmosphere, and whether students feel able to take a risk in front of you and their peers. You can actively work towards setting and maintaining the tone of the group through your own actions and non-verbal communication.

### Problems with student participation

Of the problems that you are most likely to encounter when working with small classes, many of these will be related to student participation and interaction, particularly in terms of group discussion. Below are some possible problem situations and useful techniques for trouble-shooting small group discussions.

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**Table 2: Suggestions for promoting student participation**

Problem	Possible techniques
The group is silent or unresponsive	<p>Use buzz groups, pyramiding sequences</p> <p>Ask what's going on – why are they silent?</p> <p>Make a clear statement about what you want from the group.</p>
Individual students are silent	<p>Use small group methods such as think- pair-share to get discussion going.</p> <p>Try to draw the student out by picking up on something relevant to them and the topic for discussion e.g. "You've had experience as a nurse, Jane, haven't you – so how do you think psychological illness is perceived by nurses in general?"</p> <p>Ask to hear from students who haven't yet contributed to the discussion.</p>
Students not listening to each other, not building discussion but point scoring	<p>Use a listening exercise e.g. where one student has to paraphrase what another student says.</p> <p>Refer back to the ground rules (or introduce a new one)</p> <p>Say what you see or feel, e.g. "There's seems to be a lot of antagonism here in the group..."</p>
Sense of a group or clique among some students, a private joke	<p>Don't use sarcasm, but confront the students, e.g. "Is there a reason why you aren't participating with the rest of the class?"</p> <p>Invite them to share their discussion with the group</p> <p>Self-disclosure, e.g. "I find it hard to lead the group, and listen to what people are saying..."</p>

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Problem	Possible techniques
One or two students dominate	<p>Use hand signals and verbally ask them to let others speak</p> <p>Assign roles for the group discussion, e.g. timekeeper, scribe, summariser, reporter</p> <p>Ask to hear from students who haven't yet contributed to the discussion</p>
Discussion goes off track, or becomes irrelevant	<p>Set a clear topic at the start</p> <p>Draw the groups attention to the situation, e.g. "I'm wondering how this is related to our topic of discussion?"</p> <p>Ask a clear question or make a clear statement to direct discussion back to the topic</p>

(adapted from: Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1989; Smith, 1997).

### Managing student behaviour

Just as you, as a member of staff, are bound to behave according to the University's Code of Conduct and Teaching and Learning and policies. These policies and codes outline the expectations and responsibilities relating to students and are available at [uws.edu.au/policy/policy\\_dds](http://uws.edu.au/policy/policy_dds)

For example, the University's Code of Conduct states that all members of the University community will act with diligence and responsiveness and treat other UWS members with fairness, respect and courtesy and without discrimination or harassment. The Student Non-Academic Misconduct Policy states that, students as individuals are expected to avoid conduct which:

- damages or destroys University property (including library books, computing hardware or software, or the deliberate release of computer viruses);
- harasses, vilifies, bullies, abuses, threatens, assaults or endangers staff, students or other members of the University's community directly or by other means of communication;
- unreasonably disrupts staff or students or other members from undertaking their normal activities at the University; and
- behaves inappropriately in an activity (e.g. in the virtual and physical environments such as e-learning sites, face-to-face classes, meeting), facility in or under the control or supervision of the University or a recognised University student association. It's unlikely that you will ever have to draw students' attention to these policies in order to deal with problem behaviour, however it is important for you to know that they exist. More often than not, the kind of behaviour issues you will come across as a tutor will be related to the following kinds of students (adapted from: <http://www.ust.hk/celt/ta/taguide/skills/manage.htm>).

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### The expert student

Often, you will have one (or two) 'experts' in your class, students who seem to have a comment or opinion about just about everything! While you will probably find these students frustrating and disruptive to the flow of the session, it's important not to 'put them down' or openly show your frustration. This may discourage other students from offering their comments and opinions, but also may impact on the 'expert' student quite negatively. Sometimes, people who appear to be 'experts' are over-compensating for an actual lack of self-esteem and may perhaps feel 'beneath' the rest of the class (e.g. a mature-age student, a student from a different discipline or experience background, etc.). Or, sometimes they may be 'experts' in the true sense – this is particularly likely when students are mature age. In this situation, draw on the students' experience when appropriate. In class discussion times, allow 'expert students' to respond, but use techniques such as 'redirecting' (see section on questioning above) to encourage other students to have a go. Often peer pressure will also work to eventually limit their activities. If you can't seem to work around the person using subtle directing and redirecting (e.g. "Thanks Sue – that was very interesting... how about someone else...?"), then you may want to talk with them before or after class – be gentle, alert them to their 'over-zealousness' in discussion and how it would be for the other students if they didn't dominate so much...etc.

### The negative student

You may also experience different kinds of negativity, either overt, such as challenging

the class discussion or activity in a negative manner, or covert such as remaining silent and not participating. Try methods such as those above (under 'the expert') for dealing with the overt negative student, and try bringing the covert negative student into the group activity by methods such as asking them directly to give their opinion, etc. If these kinds of techniques do not work, then try talking with the students individually. You might actually find that there is a particular reason for the negativity, and that by addressing this with the student you are able to facilitate a change in attitude quite easily.

### The truly 'disruptive' student

While the above two kinds of students are usually quite disruptive to the healthy flow of the tutorial session, you may also have to deal with a truly disruptive student at some time. This student's behaviour is much worse and can involve direct disagreements with other individual students (possibly physical), verbal outbursts, cursing or other disruptive actions. Obviously, this kind of behaviour is not something that you can 'just see how it goes' with subtle management techniques.

Instead, try using silence to direct the student's attention to you and to the situation. Usually, the rest of the class becomes silent also, thus making a bigger impact. Politely ask for his/her co-operation, and use the ground-rules set up by you and the class as a way to direct your request. Otherwise, ask the student (or students) to stay after class and talk to them about how disruptive their behaviour is to you and to other students. If you decide it is appropriate to meet with the student privately, ask the unit coordinator to be

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present at the meeting. Draw the student's attention to the codes and policy mentioned above (under Managing student behaviour) and review what their responsibilities are as students of this University.

### Helping students find support

Because of the nature of your role as tutor, and your relationship to a small group of students, students often see you as an important person in their lives as a student, and may approach you with problems or issues other than those directly related to the course you are tutoring in. While it is important to deal with students empathically, do not feel that you must help (or solve) all of their problems for them. If a student approaches you with a need, problem or concern outside the scope of your role as a tutor, it's important for you, and for the student, that you direct them to the appropriate student support network or section. Students will always have concerns or needs external to their course or program of study that are best dealt with by other people, such as those in student support services.

The university has policies and departments that deal with student support issues. However often not all teachers and students are aware of the range or extent of services, or indeed that some exist. For example, at UWS there are services that support students with:

- academic skills programs,
- careers advice,
- counseling,
- disability services,
- indigenous student support,

- international student support,
- library skills,
- accommodation,
- childcare,
- financial aid and managing money resources,
- enrolment, and
- clubs and societies.

As a tutor, you might like to summarise some information about the kind of support services that are offered at your institution, and provide this to students at the first tutorial session. The booklet *Teaching@UWS* (Section 4: Support services for learning and teaching) provides an overview of the services for students and staff at UWS. The Support Services for students website provides links to a range of support services to help students reach their academic and personal goals. Refer to [uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current\\_students/getting\\_help](http://uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/getting_help)

## SECTION 4 - E-Learning

### Introduction to e-learning

The UWS definition of Blended Learning refers to “... a **strategic and systematic approach to combining times and modes of learning, integrating the best aspects of face-to-face and online interactions for each discipline, using appropriate ICTs**”. The aims are to:

- provide flexibility for students
- scaffold the introduction of independent learning skills
- support work-integrated learning.

UWS is designing units and programs of study for optimum learning taking into account learner needs, discipline accreditation requirements, a mix of directed and self-directed activities, and available resources and infrastructure. Given there is an overall ambition to provide increased flexibility in terms of time and place of learning for students this would imply moving away from putting all, or most of effort, into offering face-to-face lectures and tutorials. This may imply some online activities. It may also imply some different on campus experiences or community engagement experiences. Good learning design is at the core here.

The mix of learning activities would then normally include:

- **Some on campus experiences.** When students come on campus the experience should be designed to be engaging and an experience worth making the effort to attend and in a space and context designed to foster interactive learning.

- **Online experiences** including synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. This includes structured and self-directed learning activities. In some cases a whole unit may be delivered on line but it is not expected that whole courses or programs would be delivered on line at undergraduate level.
- **Community based activities.** This can include external projects, work placements and practicums. These activities of taking UWS learning into the community or bringing the community into UWS learning is important for a university grounded in a region that is not as higher education focused as others.

The above aspects or categories, comprising blended learning are agnostic with respect to specific technologies, and are more related to curriculum design needs. They would align with the strategic objectives of the learning and teaching plan.

In place of the traditional focus on teaching time in class, the Senate Education Committee endorses a student-centred model based on the proportion of time students spend on different learning activities, as follows:

- 1. Time spent with a teacher physically present in synchronous learning environments.** This would include lectures, tutorials, laboratory and practical classes.
- 2. Time spent doing structured activities online** in vUWS or other online learning environments. This involves interacting with information, resources or people. Generally online activity will be designed

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to take a certain amount of student time, and in some cases Unit Coordinators will be able to use student learning analytics in vUWS to verify how much time students are spending on various online learning activities.

**3. Time spent on self-directed study** (whether on an iPad or on paper; on the bus, at home, or on campus; singly or in groups) includes any time on research, reading or production unless it is timetabled and done in the presence of a teacher.

**4. Time spent on work placements or external projects** could be counted separately, as this would give a measure of the patterns of engaged or work-integrated learning.

The SUNSET design tool can be used to guide and record decisions on how each of these activity types is used within a study unit – taking into account the term structure and length and also the needs of the students at that point in their study. School based blended learning support staff can also help.

The student-centred model will allow better tracking of university-wide patterns in the balance between classroom and online learning and also would show how each blended curriculum design develops independent and engaged learning year by year.

### Getting started

The QiLT (Quality in Learning and Teaching) site ([uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt](http://uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt)) is a good place to look for resources relating to designing for

blended learning. Highlights include:

### SUNSET tool

This a template approach to designing units and mapping learning outlines, major content areas, identifying specific activities such as recorded lectures, polling, guest presentations, online tutorials, group work, peer review and so forth that the instructors and students will be involved in, week by week. Self-directed learning activities can also be identified and included in the plan for the unit. These activities can have an hourly allocation that is automatically calculated to determine the number of hours students are engaged in on-campus, online and self-directed learning activities. Assessment tasks can also be captured in the template.

### Basic Standards

The *Basic standards for blended learning* have been designed to be applicable to the diverse ways in which blended learning environments including vUWS, other UWS supplied learning technologies and mobile apps are used. The *Basic standards* consist of organisation and appearance; consistency and compliance; appropriate use of tools, technologies and mobile apps; and learner resources and supports.

The *Seven principles guide for vUWS* is a guide that assists staff to select the most appropriate vUWS tool to achieve each of the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education.

## SECTION 4 - E-Learning

### Using Technology in Blended Learning

#### vUWS

Virtual UWS (vUWS) is the blended learning environment at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). UWS uses vUWS to provide learning environments that facilitate collaborative learning and enable greater flexibility to learning materials.

Each vUWS site is a secure web area linked from the vUWS portal. To access any of the sites available from the UWS vUWS portal you must first be a member of the site. At UWS there are over 2000 individual vUWS sites. Students enrolled in a unit or courses are automatically added as members of all the sites relevant to them via a linkage between vUWS and Callista. The instructor of each site is able to grant other staff members varying levels of access to the sites they manage. Each site is purpose built by one or more instructors by adding the required content and tools.

Just about any type of digital content can be added to a site to enhance the learning process such as HTML web pages, PDF or MS word documents, spreadsheets, databases, images, video or sound files. Tools such as discussion boards, chat rooms, virtual classroom and quizzes can also be easily added.

Each site is available for a set period of time dependent on the type of site that it is. The instructor of a site can request a copy of their previous semester's site. Using the new date rollover tool, content that was selectively released by date can have the release date easily updated for the new

semester.

#### iTunes U

UWS on iTunes U is the University of Western Sydney's iTunes U presence. iTunes U is an open online repository of learning material that is free to subscribe too and use. Content can be downloaded to an iOS device and used when it suits; on or offline. iTunes U is available on PC and Mac with enhanced features enabled when using an iOS device (iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch) with the iTunes U App installed.

With UWS on iTunes U you can create, use and share educational content with the world.

#### Blended Learning Technology Toolkit

There are a multitude of technologies available that can be used for blended learning, however careful selection is required to ensure appropriateness for the learning activity. Not all technologies are created equal and some require more expertise to use than others. On the QILT site there is a Blended Learning Technology Toolkit that presents the different supported and available technologies that can be used in designing blended learning resources and activities under the main categories of: content creation and presentation; synchronous communication; asynchronous communication; and e-assessment.

The Learning and Teaching Unit provide a range of professional development activities and services and the latest program of events is available at [uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt/events,\\_workshops\\_and\\_forums](http://uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt/events,_workshops_and_forums)

## SECTION 4 - E-Learning

### Communities of Practice

The *Designing for Learning* professional development program offers online resources, group sessions (face-to-face, online), forums, showcases, webinars and individual mentoring opportunities. Webinars have been scheduled to provide greater flexibility and access to the learning and teaching professional development and designed to enable sessional staff, in particular, to participate in these sessions.

Monthly Blended Learning Forums are held on different campuses and feature presenters from all Schools and different departments to share experiences and perspectives in designing for blended learning. They are designed to share experiences in terms of successes and lessons learned, showcase innovations and discuss issues that are relevant to designing learning in higher education. Presenters at the forums include academic staff, professional staff involved in supporting blended learning who are located within Schools and in organisation areas such as the iDVC Education portfolio, the Library, Capital Works and Facilities and Information Technology Services. A research student has recently presented at a forum on work relevant to using open educational resources. Open discussions and panel debates have proven to be popular as they provide opportunities to share concerns and discuss strategies to address issues that are impacting on blended learning.

These events provide a valuable networking opportunity and enable academics and blended professional staff who may not normally get together to share experiences, showcase teaching innovation and debate issues affecting them and their students.

## SECTION 5 – Marking and Giving Feedback

Most tutors will be required to undertake some kind of marking of students work, whether it be formal assessment tasks, in-class or take-home activities or exercises. Whichever the case, it is important to prepare yourself appropriately for the task.

Students are often very anxious about assessment and their performance, particularly when it concerns major pieces of assessment. Your ‘performance’ as a marker is therefore just as crucial as their performance as a student. From the student’s perspective, every mark counts!

Before we talk about marking students work, here is an overview of some of the key principles regarding assessment at UWS.

### UWS principles for assessment

Assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching process and makes a significant contribution to the achievement of student learning outcomes. At UWS, the purposes of assessment are to:

- promote learning;
- provide timely feedback to students on levels of attainment;
- indicate to students areas of misunderstanding or conceptual difficulties and assist with improvements;
- provide feedback to teaching staff to indicate areas in which students are experiencing difficulties, and to identify and diagnose if there is a need for a change/modification of teaching method;
- judge performance using appropriate methods, and to award marks and a grade which indicate whether, and how well, a particular student has attained the

stated learning outcomes; and

- determine whether the student is sufficiently well prepared in a subject area to proceed to the next level of instruction.

At UWS, students are provided with information about their assessment at the start of session, in the unit learning guide. While an overview of assessment (number and types of assessment, due dates and marks allocated for each task) is also provided in the unit outline, detailed information about each assessment task forms a major part of the learning guide. The learning guide also provides a standardised cover sheet which students should attach to their completed assessment task. In addition, the learning guide provides information about plagiarism and processes for late submission of assessments, or requesting an extension, etc. As the tutor, ensure that you provide an opportunity in class time for students to ask questions about assessment tasks. Any questions of an administrative nature, e.g. ‘What topics will be covered in the test?’ etc. should be referred to the unit coordinator.

UWS has a criteria and standards-based Assessment Policy. This requires that assessment is based on established criteria and standards for each task. Students’ work is marked against criteria and standards for the task, and not ranked against the work of other students. The Teaching Development Unit has produced an Assessment Guide to support the UWS staff in implementing criteria and standards-based assessment. This is available electronically at the University’s Quality in

## SECTION 5 – Marking and Giving Feedback

Learning and Teaching QILT website at [uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt/blended\\_learning/resources/teaching\\_practice](http://uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt/blended_learning/resources/teaching_practice)

### Guidelines for marking

- Be sure you use the marking guide (the criteria and standards, or rubric) that has been established by the lecturer in charge of the unit, for the specific assessment task. If the unit coordinator doesn't clearly explain the marking guide to you, arrange to meet with them to discuss this. It is important that you check your understanding of the criteria and standards against which you will be marking students' work, especially with regard to giving 'part-marks'.
- Explain the assessment criteria and standards to your students. Consider providing examples of good assignments, and have students use the criteria sheet or marking guide to identify the difference between their own work and these examples. Of course, this can only be done with the permission of the students whose work is used as examples. Run your plans for providing example assignments past your unit coordinator.
- Explain to students the accepted academic conventions for writing and authorship in their field of study. Check the University's policy on Student Academic Misconduct and explain to students the consequences of failing to follow these conventions. Policies are available at [uws.edu.au/policy/policy\\_ddds](http://uws.edu.au/policy/policy_ddds)
- Be vigilant about cheating and copying.
- When marking, make comparable judgments across students and groups – e.g. moderation before marking, or cross-marking with other tutors. In moderation before marking or cross-marking each tutor marks a few assignments, making a note of the marks given, and then exchanging these assignments with another tutor who marks them without knowledge of the original tutor's marks – tutors can then discuss their assessment of the students performance and the marks they have allocated, checking that they have a shared understanding of the criteria and standards for that assessment task. If the unit coordinator does not set up arrangements for cross-marking, suggest this to them.
- It is often useful to check back over your marking of students' work, particularly if the length of time between marking the first few and the last few was quite long. Sometimes your ideas change as you go through, and it's important to ensure that your judgments are consistent throughout the marking process.
- Provide constructive timely feedback. Try to avoid the 'red-pen' effect and just correcting grammar, spelling and references. Try to find something within the assessment on which you can comment favourably and then indicate to the student the weaknesses of their assessment task, as well as what they can do to 'feed forward' (Hounsell, 2004) for the next assessment task. Choose an appropriate amount or detail of feedback according to the importance and length of the assessment task (e.g., a short 1-2 page report should not require as many comments as a 1500 word essay).
- Consider giving generic feedback to the whole class (such as a summary

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of overall performance on assessment and common strengths/weaknesses) – but ensure that generic feedback is meaningful. For example, if the worst results were for a particular question of a test, or aspect of an assignment, explain why and how students' work for this particular task could be improved.

### Giving feedback

Giving feedback to students, apart from being part of University policy, is a very important part of the learning process. According to policy, staff are “to ensure that feedback is timely and justifies the mark given against the stated assessment criteria and standards, and identifies what could have been done to achieve a higher mark”. Feedback is a valuable and personal way of improving individual student's learning outcomes and developing rapport between you, the tutor, and the students in your class. However it can also lead to difficult interpersonal situations between you and a student if they become upset with the feedback you give. Try and think about how your feedback will be received by the individual. Feedback can be provided to students in a number of ways and, as mentioned in the section above, may vary in its level of detail depending on the relative importance of the assessment item (its weighting), and its location within the session - students may pay less attention to feedback on final assessments or exams. It's worth putting more effort into feedback on the initial, formative, assessment task, when students are likely to pay more attention to feedback and hopefully will be able to use this in improving their achievement in the later assessment

task/s.

The amount of feedback that can be provided is also dependent on resources – your time. It is important to determine upfront how much time you should allocate to marking a particular assessment task in the scheme of the overall session/unit. Feedback may include discussion as a group, written comments on work, model answers, lists of common mistakes, peer and self- evaluation, and sheets containing common positives and criticisms as well as some individual comment on the completed criteria sheet or marking guide. Also, you may consider including ongoing tasks that utilise tutor and/or peer feedback such as set exercises, short in-class quizzes, weekly papers – this forms continuous assessment and feedback to track progress.

### Tips for giving feedback to students

- **Provide constructive, timely feedback** – part of the responsibility for marking also requires markers to be clear in their responses to students, and as objective and specific as possible (remember that the primary purpose of giving feedback is to inform students about exactly how they are going – what they are doing well, and in which areas they can, or need to, improve).
- **Be sincere and positive** with students about their results.
- **Use criteria and standards or marking schemes** for marking work and giving feedback to students so there is consistency in the way you structure and provide feedback to individual students.
- **Be constructive in your comments** – identify strengths and areas for

## SECTION 5 – Marking and Giving Feedback

improvement in relation to the learning outcomes, and give indications of how the work can be improved.

- **Avoid generic symbols** (ticks/crosses) without explanatory comment.
- Remember to **balance your comments** with both positive remarks and critical (yet constructive) comments. It's good to begin and end with a positive comment.

Race (2001) says that feedback should be '**oriented to opening doors, not closing them**'. He suggests being careful with the words chosen to give feedback. Words such as 'weak' or 'poor' can communicate final judgments without giving the student specific information about what was weak or poor. Be specific so that the student can learn from the feedback.

For further ideas about marking and giving feedback see the QILT website at [uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt/blended\\_learning/resources/teaching\\_practice](http://uws.edu.au/qilt/qilt/blended_learning/resources/teaching_practice)

### Plagiarism

The University has adopted the following definition of plagiarism:

Plagiarism occurs in a student's work when he or she submits work in which ideas, words or other work are taken from a source (for example, a web-site or computer program, another student's essay or presentation, a book or journal article, a lecture, a performance piece or other presentation) and presented as if they are the student's own, without appropriate acknowledgement of the original author.... In this definition of plagiarism, it is the act of presenting material as one's own

without appropriate acknowledgement that constitutes plagiarism, not the intention of the student when doing so. 'Appropriate acknowledgement' is defined as the conventions of citation recognised as acceptable to the University (Misconduct-Student Academic Misconduct Policy, available at [uws.edu.au/policy/policy\\_dds](http://uws.edu.au/policy/policy_dds)

Plagiarism can take many forms (James, McInnis & Devlin, 2002), and is also described differently depending on the conventions of the particular discipline or culture you are working within. However, some common forms are:

- Cheating on an exam by copying from other students or other unauthorised material.
- Submitting someone else's work as one's own for a piece of assessment
- Using any information, written text, graphics or other material from the internet and not acknowledging it as someone else's work (and therefore, presenting it as one's own work).
- Quoting or paraphrasing material from a source (e.g., a book or journal article) without acknowledging where you sourced the information (and therefore, presenting it as one's own work).
- Group work also presents a context for possible plagiarism. For example, if a student copies from other members while working in a group, or if a student contributes less, or nothing to a group assignment and then claims an equal share of the marks.

However, plagiarism may not be necessarily

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intentional. Even if you do detect some plagiarism, don't immediately assume that the student intentionally did it. Some reasons why unintentional plagiarism may occur include:

- The student may not understand what plagiarism actually means, either at university or in the particular discipline area.
- The student may not have a correct understanding of citation and referencing conventions, or may have limited skills in summarising and paraphrasing of information.

The student may also have problems with stress and workload management.

**An important part of your role as a teacher is to make sure that your students are aware of plagiarism as a University policy, to discuss with them what plagiarism is, and to check that your students are aware of the correct referencing conventions for your discipline.**

**As a tutor or sessional teacher, discuss any case of suspected plagiarism that you encounter with your Unit Coordinator and Head of Program (before you talk with the student!). Inadvertent plagiarism and suspected deliberate plagiarism are treated differently (see the Misconduct-Student Academic Misconduct Policy).**

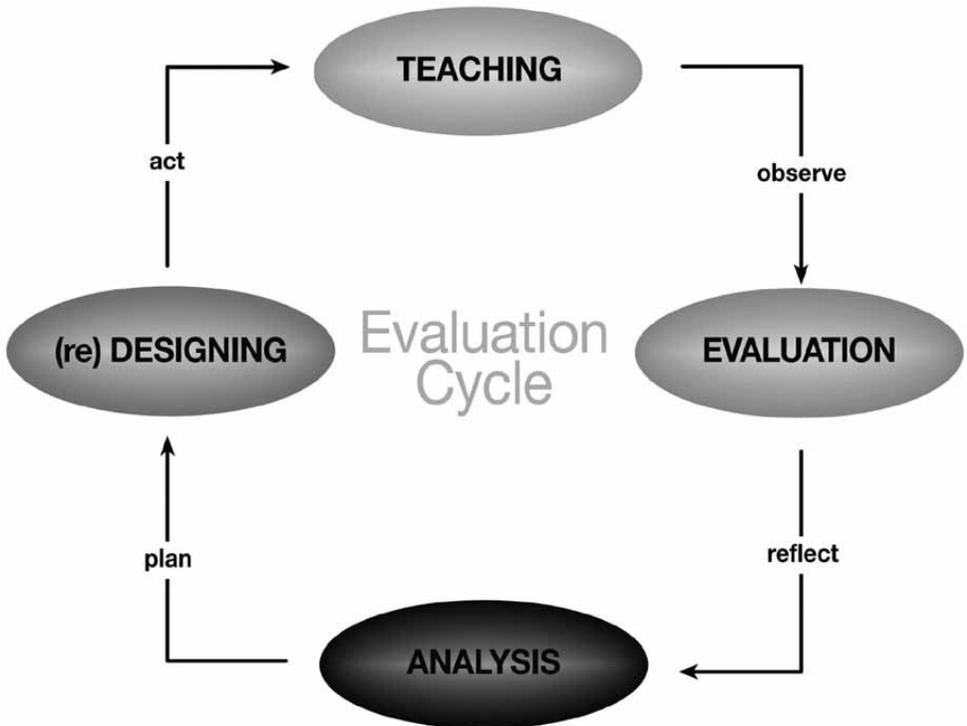
## SECTION 6 – Evaluating and improving your teaching

### Evaluation as reflective practice

A good professional reflects on what they do, and why they do it, to gain an understanding of their strengths and their weaknesses, or areas in which they can improve. In higher education, we call this process engaging in reflective practice, an ongoing cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (adapted from Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

This process is described in the diagram below. As a new tutor, you will start in the planning and designing phase before your first tutorial, move to the acting phase, which in this case is teaching, and then the observing or evaluation phase. Once you have some information about your practice you might then reflect or analyse this information in order to find out in what areas of teaching you are doing well, and what areas you can improve on.

Figure 3: The evaluation cycle



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The information you recollect with regards to your practice can be used for both summative (i.e. used for promotional/career purposes, you can put this in your CV as evidence of your skills and abilities) and formative purposes (i.e. used to develop and improve your practice).

There are a variety of methods for evaluating your teaching practice, and different types of information or data you can collect. For example, the data can be qualitative (e.g. student comments) or quantitative (e.g. ratings on survey items), and it can be formal or informal. The next section describes different methods of evaluating your teaching practice.

### Evaluation methods

There are four key areas by which you can collect and evaluate data about your teaching practice – yourself, your peers (e.g. other tutors), your students' experiences, and your students' learning.

### Self-evaluation

#### Self reflection, analysis & evaluation

*The Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI)* can help you collect your thoughts and summarise your ideas about teaching. The TPI is quick to complete – it usually takes no more than 10-15 minutes to answer all the questions and to automatically score your results. You may also choose to print out your profile sheet to help you visualise and interpret your scores. See – [teachingperspectives.com/html/tpi\\_frames.htm](http://teachingperspectives.com/html/tpi_frames.htm) – to access the Teaching Perspectives Inventory.

### Teaching journal

It can be very useful, particularly as a new teacher, to keep a journal about your teaching experiences. This can be in the form of a kind of 'diary', where you write about certain events or personal thoughts, reflecting on these experiences and hopefully then learn from these experiences. When making a journal entry, it is helpful to keep in mind the three stages of recalling the experience, reflecting, and learning (see Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985). You may, for example, after your first tutorial class for the session replay the class or parts of it from memory, observing and recalling your behaviours and perhaps the behaviours of students. You may recall feelings, exactly what took place and what your reactions were, attending to detail, but avoiding judgment.

### Peer feedback

#### Classroom performance

Ask another tutor (usually someone who is an experienced teacher) to sit in on your class and give you feedback. Be specific about the aspects of your practice that you want to be observed and commented on – this makes it easier for the observer to give useful feedback to you.

### Teaching and learning materials

If you have developed some materials for use by your students, you can ask the unit coordinator or a fellow tutor to comment on these materials in relation to certain aspects as requested by you (for example, whether they are they interesting, well constructed, clear, etc.).

## SECTION 6 – Evaluating and improving your teaching

### Student experiences

Students are a very important source of information about how your teaching supports their learning, and they are often the best source of information about classroom processes, assessment tasks, and the interpersonal aspects of teaching. The following methods describe different ways in which you can obtain information from students about your teaching, both formally and informally.

#### Student Feedback on Teaching questionnaire

Most universities encourage their teaching staff to use student evaluation of teaching methods, and often there is a standard tool that teachers can access. At the University of Western Sydney, this tool is called Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) Survey.

The survey also asks two open-ended questions which enable students to comment on those characteristics of the lecturer/class which they found most valuable and which they feel are important to improve.

If you want to seek student feedback on your teaching using the SFT process, lodge a request online through the staff link on the website. SFTs are personal: you can request SFT for your teaching and your class, but others cannot request SFT on your behalf. SFT results will be sent directly to you, after the end of the session. It will be up to you to decide whether to share the results with anyone else. Academic staff employed in contract and tenured positions are required through the Enterprise Agreement

to participate in SFT at least once a year. Sessional staff can choose whether to use the SFT process, but it is valuable to do so if you are interested in continuing teaching as it will help you identify where you might improve your teaching.

A point worth noting is that if you want quick feedback on your teaching in order to judge whether and what may need changing, then use informal methods such as those discussed below. Informal methods produce immediate data.

#### Informal class feedback

The Minute Paper (Angelo & Cross, 1993)

Stop the class two or three minutes early and ask students to respond very briefly – in one minute! – to two questions: “What did you find most useful about the session today?” and “In what way could the session be improved?” Ask students to write their answers, anonymously, on a piece of paper and to leave this sheet at a designated place near the exit when they leave the class. This is a very quick and easy method of producing instant and manageable data to which you can respond. It’s important to remember to give feedback about the general outcomes of the questions to the class and note any changes that you are going to make as a result of their feedback.

#### Chat

Chat with students as they come into the room to re-establish a friendly atmosphere for the start of each class. Ask them how they’re finding the class so far.

## SECTION 6 – Evaluating and improving your teaching

### Suggestion Box

Consider using a “suggestion box” for getting feedback either on how a particular session went, or about how the classes, and your teaching are going in general. This might be a good option if students seem uncomfortable or shy about chatting to you as in the above method, and it provides the students with an anonymous way of giving you feedback.

### Student learning

#### Student’s self-reported knowledge

Sometimes it can be very helpful to get feedback from students about their learning as a way of getting feedback about your teaching. For example, if you have taught a class on a particular concept and you want to know whether your approach was effective in helping students to understand that concept, try using a method called “The Muddiest Point” (Angelo & Cross, 1993). At the end of class, ask students to respond to this question on a piece of paper – “What was the ‘muddiest’ point in this class. In other words, what was least clear to you?” From students’ responses you can gauge how effective the class was in facilitating student learning, and perhaps identify where any major problems occurred (e.g. if the majority of students comment on the same aspect as being the muddiest point). You then have the opportunity to address this the next time you meet with your students. This strategy can be used during a class too, allowing you to address immediately any shared difficulties.

### Student work

Similarly, you can get an idea of your students learning from their performance on assessment, in-class or out-of-class activities. This information can also help you to pinpoint where you may need to think about your approach to teaching and how effective it is in facilitating student learning. For example, if your students complete an in-class quiz and most get the questions about facts correct, but many fail the questions that require application of knowledge to solve a problem, then you may need to think about how you approached this aspect of the learning material with students.

### Approaches to learning

#### The VARK questionnaire

This questionnaire can help people to appreciate the variety of different ways in which people learn, and to identify their own learning preferences (e.g. visual, aural, read/write, kinaesthetic or multimodal). The VARK questionnaire can support students who have been having difficulties with their studies by helping them to identify the most effective learning methods for their learning preference. It is useful too for teachers who would like to develop additional learning strategies for their classrooms. The VARK questionnaire can be used with a group or class or with one-to-one counseling, but it does require some explanation to avoid students or teachers leaping to inappropriate conclusions. Try it yourself first. Access the questionnaire at: [www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp](http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp)

## SECTION 6 – Evaluating and improving your teaching

### Some general principles...

- Be careful not to overuse students as sources of evaluation data.
- As a new teacher, consider getting feedback early on in the session, so that you have an opportunity to address any aspects before it's too late.
- Always be prepared to respond to feedback and inform students what you will and will not be doing on the basis of it, and why.
- Ask broad questions about the unit or your teaching if you do not intend to or can not change this.
- Guarantee anonymity – students need to be confident that any written feedback they give is anonymous.

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