



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF TUTORIALS

IN

THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND
COMMERCE

2nd Edition

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

INTRODUCTION

Lectures, workshops, independent study and tutorials in Economics and Commerce form important components of your learning.

Tutorials have a different educational purpose than lectures. The major differences between tutorials and lectures are:

- Tutorials are smaller, (in Economics and Commerce there are typically 18-20 students per tutorial)
- The emphasis is on exploring your understanding
- Tutorials are more interactive than lectures
- You are expected to participate actively by questioning, discussing or working cooperatively
- You are expected to have completed the required reading and problems set for each tutorial – you should allow about 2 hours of preparation time for tutorials where work is set
- Attendance and participation in at tutorials may count towards your final mark in some subjects

HOW TUTORIALS HELP YOU TO LEARN

Tutorials in Economics and Commerce can help students in a number of ways. They can help you to:

- gain a deeper understanding of subject material
- develop other important professional skills, for instance in the areas of your verbal communication and teamwork skills
- develop a sense of belonging to and identification with the faculty.
- get to know each other students
- foster a learning community and a sense of collegiality, both important aspects of university life.

A deeper understanding of the subject material is gained through discussing your ideas with your fellow students and your tutor.



Research in cognitive psychology has found that memory is affected by how deeply we process new knowledge (McKeachie, 1999:45)

1. Tutorial Discussions

Discussion is useful because it stimulates active learning by allowing you practice integrating, elaborating and applying knowledge.

Discussion:

- Allows you to see your misunderstandings as well as the areas in which you are confident.
- Stimulates you to think like an economist or an accountant (or whatever you are studying).
- Allows you to evaluate the logic or evidence for your own and others points of view
- Lets you apply the knowledge and principles your are learning.
- Allows you to share your understanding – and misunderstanding - and comparing progress with others. This means that you will obtain feedback on your learning.

Communication skills can be developed in the secure environment of a tutorial. Students can be a source of support for one another.

Tutorials allow you to ask your tutor questions about the material that you have been reading or covering in Economics and Commerce lectures. Your tutor is the first point of contact with the academic staff of the faculty and it is helpful if you get to know him or her.



2. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ECONOMICS AND COMMERCE TUTORIALS

Academic staff notice the difference between prepared, enthusiastic students and the others – this is important in subjects where your preparation and participation in tutorials forms part of the assessment in the subject

What do lecturers want students to do for tutorials? When academics were asked this question they came up with the following list:

- Be prepared
- Be enthusiastic
- Ask when you don't understand
- Contribute/discuss/interact
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Develop appropriate skills

- Be punctual (Race, 1999).

Although these points can be addressed in turn, they are interlinked.

Being prepared. Preparing for a tutorial means completing the required work, reading the recommended texts and working on set problems as required. If you have done the required work then you can contribute much more during the tutorial. You will have a greater understanding of the concepts being discussed and of your level of understanding. Preparing for tutorials allows you to ask questions in the tutorial on any issues that are unclear to you. It will also reveal areas where you may need more information from the tutor. The greater the amount of preparation, the greater the return in terms of your learning.

Your **enthusiasm** for each tutorial can be affected by many things, among them an interest in the subject material. Even if this particular topic is not your favourite topic, you will get a lot more out of it by being positive and enthusiastic. It is easier to be motivated for tutorials if you have prepared. Set yourself some targeted questions to ask. Regard the tutorial as an active learning opportunity rather than 50 minutes to get through. Reward yourself afterwards!

Ask questions that you have prepared in advance. Don't worry if another student asks 'your' question, you can still benefit from the answer. Asking questions is not an admission of failure, rather it is a good way to raise important issues and gives other students the opportunity for discussion. When you don't understand, it is important to say so. Try not to nod just to please the tutor if he or she says 'do you all understand?' if you don't. Tutors would much prefer to clear up any misunderstandings along the way rather than try and correct them much later on and you won't cause offence. Also, it may be that the point you have pretended to understand is crucial to the next problem, which will leave you even more confused. You are probably not the only person in the room who would prefer the tutor to go over the point again.

Contribute. This is the biggest difficulty in tutorials for many students, especially at the beginning of the year. Don't be afraid! Tutorials are an opportunity to learn and practise your communication skills. Don't worry that you are going to say something wrong or stupid. Other students in the tutorial have probably been waiting for that question to be asked! If you feel you are talking too much, check that you are still on the point, or ask for other points of view. Try and distinguish between facts and opinions. If English is not your first language, set yourself weekly goals in tutorials, for example; speak to one other student, ask a question, be prepared to answer. If you have problems talk to your tutor, ask the on-line tutor or visit the Faculty of Economics and Commerce TLU (Second Floor Babel). It's worth remembering that learning in tutorials can occur as a result of interaction with your tutor, your peers and/or the required reading.

Maintaining a **positive attitude** is a valuable tool. If you act positively towards your peers and your tutor in tutorials then they will respond in the same way. By being positive you will be more likely to get the information and explanation you need.

Tutorials can be a great way to develop interpersonal, communication and presentation **skills**. In the tutorial:

- Try and remember the names of your fellow students.
- Make sure you know how your tutor likes to be addressed.
- Make an attempt to take turns in speaking and listen respectfully to the opinions of others. If you don't agree with them, you will get the opportunity to say so.
- Critically analyse ideas, which is an important part of the Western academic tradition. In some cultures it is considered disrespectful to disagree, especially with teachers. However, this is not the case here. You are expected to think and to question.
- Be prepared to have your ideas or opinions evaluated and commented upon.
- Practice your presentation skills if you have to give a paper or overview of a point.

Being punctual. Although this may seem trivial to some students and obvious to others, being punctual is important. It helps you to manage your time effectively. Being punctual allows your tutor to manage the tutorial effectively and maximise the learning. Being punctual will not annoy your punctual colleagues!

3. TYPES OF ECONOMICS AND COMMERCE TUTORIALS

In the Faculty of Economics and Commerce tutorials take a number of forms:

1. Collaborative problem-solving tutorials
2. Tutorials using a lap-top
3. Expository-type tutorials
4. Review tutorials
5. Pitstop tutorials
6. On-line tutor

3.1 Collaborative problem-solving tutorials

In these tutorials, students work together in groups to actively solve problems. Our research in Economics and Commerce has shown that students felt they had developed analytical and critical thinking as well as problem solving skills after participating in this type of tutorial.

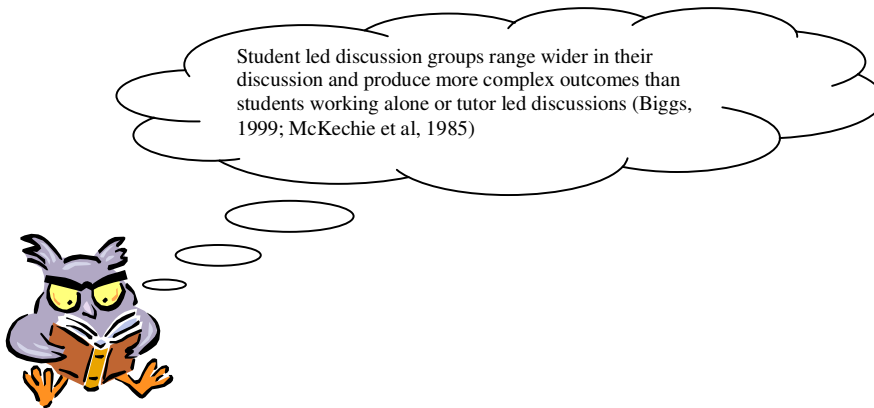
There is no single best method of teaching but the second best is students teaching other students. (Biggs, 1999; McKeachie et al 1985)



Benefits to be gained from working in groups include:

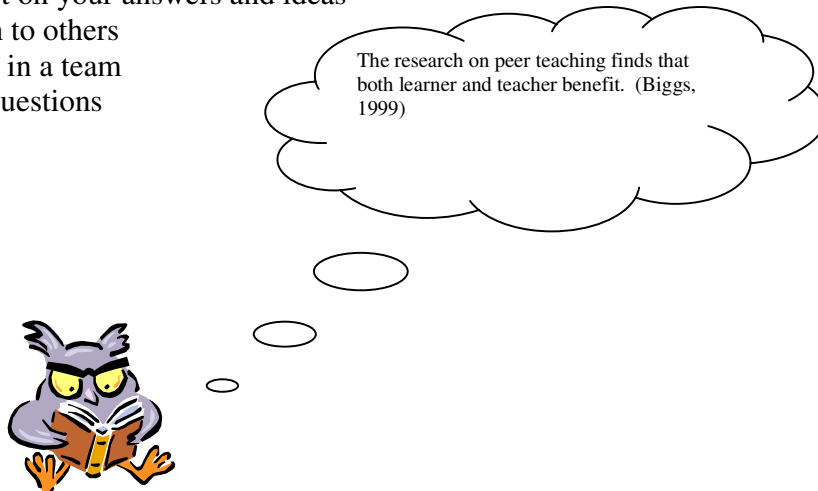
- Sharing your knowledge with, and learning from the knowledge of others in, your group.
- Learning from explaining concepts and your ideas to you by your peers.
- Developing active listening skills
- Developing a rapport with your fellow students

Students learn in these tutorials by doing – by gaining an understanding of the application of theories and engaging actively with ideas. These skills will all be useful in the workplace – employers look for team skills in their graduates.



In order to prepare for these tutes:

- Do the work on the blue sheets – the reading and the problems
- Come to the tute with a positive, active learning frame of mind, ready to tackle the pink sheets
- Be prepared to:
 - work on the unseen task on the pink sheet
 - report on your answers and ideas
 - listen to others
 - work in a team
 - ask questions



3.2 Tutorials using a lap-top

These tutorials have been developed to help students work on economic and accounting problems using real data sets. They will also advance your computing skills. Once again, in order to get the most out of these tutes, you need to be prepared:

- Put some time into familiarising yourself with the programme and tools that are being used, for example Excel
- Complete any set problems **before** the tutorials
- When you share lap-top take it in turns to manipulate the data
- Explain to your colleagues what you are doing and how you arrived at a solution if they don't understand
- Listen to the tutor and ask questions – if you are prepared for your tutorials then your questions are likely to be of value to others in the tute

3.3 Expository tutorials

In this type of tutorial you will be less active, although you should still be prepared to answer questions put to you by the tutor. The tutor will have prepared work to go through in the tutorial. He/she may put what is to be covered up on the board. Identify areas that you have found difficult and ask the tutor to go through these first. Feel free to interrupt the tutor as they go through the solution. Listen carefully to what other students have to say. Volunteer to answer questions – it is okay to be wrong.

3.4 Review Tutorials

Review tutorials are held in various Economics and Commerce subjects to help students review and revise the critical subject material, as well as answer any student questions - particularly exam questions. These questions may be long or short essay-type questions and/or multiple-choice questions. Review tutes are like mini-lectures and are held in lecture theatres. As it is up to you whether you attend, you may find anywhere between 10-80 students present, depending on the time of the tute and the week in the semester – attendance tends to rise closer to the exam! Again, the motto (like the Scouts!) is 'be prepared':

- ❖ Prepare answers to the questions supplied to you in advance of the tute
- ❖ Watch carefully as the tutor works through the answers to the questions
- ❖ Always come to review tutes with questions raised through your own revision
- ❖ Listen carefully while the tutor goes over past exam questions – this will help you to answer similar types of questions in the exam
- ❖ Listen to the questions raised by other students in your review tute – they may point to an aspect of the subject you might have overlooked
- ❖ If you still don't understand, ask for help



3.5 Pitstop Tutorials

Are provided in many subjects in addition to your regular tutorial. The objective of the pitstop tutorial is to provide students with the opportunity to ask a question on an individual or very small group basis. Times and locations of pitstop tutes will be announced in lectures. When you go to a pitstop tute you also need to be prepared. Be very clear in your mind exactly what you would like the tutor to explain to you before you go. It is not helpful if you simply say that you 'don't understand *anything!*' The time you spend with your pitstop tutor is up to you. Once your problem/question has been answered you may leave.

3.6 On-line Tutor

This is a tutorial service available via the Internet. The benefits of this service are:

- You can ask questions any time, day or night, and do not have to come into University
- All questions and answers are posted to a subject bulletin board for all students to see. This allows all students to have access to the information, not just the student who posed the question
- Questions are sorted by topic as that students can refer to the on-line bulletin board when revising for examinations or completing assignments
- The On-line tutor can post messages to individual students as well as to all students in the subject
- Test and assignment results are sent to each individual student via this system so that students receive feedback on how well they are performing
- File attachments can be sent between students and tutors or between students, facilitating assignment submission and group work

Subjects within the Faculty with an Online Tutor are:

316-101 Introductory Macroeconomics
316-102 Introductory Microeconomics
306-103 Accounting 1A
316-202 Intermediate Accounting
316-206 Quantitative Methods 2
325-201 Organisational Behaviour
325-211 Principles of Marketing
306-304 Auditing
316-306 Money and Banking
325-332 Chinese Business and Economy
300-410 The Actuarial Control Cycle 1

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- McKeachie, W. J., Pintrich, P.R., & Lin, Y-G. (1985). Teaching learning strategies, *Educational Psychologist*, 20(3), 152-160.
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- Race, P. (1999). *How to get a good degree*, Buckingham, U. K: Oxford University Press



If you would like more help, please contact the Teaching and Learning Unit at the Faculty of Economics and Commerce. You can do this via the website, www.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/tluwww/, or through the faculty office.

The TLU has developed a series of booklets like this one to support you in your Economics and Commerce course. They are:

- Learning to learn
- Getting the most out of lectures
- Getting the most out of tutorials
- Effective reading strategies
- Good writing
- Doing well in exams
- Tips for first years
- Concept mapping
- Basic referencing using the APA system
- Intercultural Communication