University tutorials and seminars and your future work environments require you to work with other people in an effective manner. People skills are an important feature of any community or institution, as organisations in which you will be working need team players rather than individual contributors. Being a team player requires your contribution in professional work meetings and presentations. One of the key instruments in working with others is to have the ability to use the art of consultation.

University life provides the avenues of tutorials and seminars through which you can learn and practise the art of consultation by discussing your course material, which will demonstrate, expand and elaborate on your understanding. Active participation in tutorials prepares you not only for your course content but also for future professional work opportunities.

**THE PURPOSE**

Group discussions:
- provide an opportunity to ask questions and clarify issues regarding your course content and assessment tasks
- improve language skills
- build confidence in speaking and presenting at seminars and tutorials
- facilitate sharing of ideas/opinions and thoughts
- allow you to receive feedback
- build on current knowledge
- assist in the making of decisions within groups
- create new knowledge and understanding
- stimulate workplace problem solving
- help you to prepare for your assignments
- help groups to reach a consensus/conclusion
- investigate the truth
- increase understanding and knowledge
- assist with the implementation of new ideas
- ensure an effective tutorial session which contributes to an effective learning experience for all
- offer an opportunity for student-to-student learning to take place
- provide the opportunity to discuss how theory applies to reality.

**TOOLS**

In order to participate successfully and effectively in group discussions, you need to develop the ability to:
- think critically and analytically
- practise active listening
- speak clearly and confidently
- see the bigger picture
- see the problem/issue from multiple perspectives
- observe diligently
- structure thoughts/suggestions and evaluate examples
- voice and justify an opinion.
ATTITUDES

• Be respectful
• Put forth your idea(s) honestly and openly with courtesy
• Be detached from your suggestion/opinion – understand a negative response is directed towards your suggestion/opinion and not yourself
• Be open to other people’s points of view and understand that other people might hold different views based on their value system and cultural background
• Put forward your ideas positively, in a constructive and encouraging manner
• Encourage others to contribute and commend other students’ contributions
• Keep your body language friendly.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING

• Be an active listener
• Make eye contact with participants
• When contributing, speak to everyone not just to the tutor
• Speak up so everyone can hear you
• Make friends with your fellow students by learning their names
• Observe good speakers and learn from them
• Do some preparation before going to tutorials, so that you have something to talk about
• If you do not understand, ask
• Think about your contribution before you speak. How best can you answer the question/contribute to the topic?
• Try to stick to the discussion topic. Do not introduce irrelevant information.

OVERCOMING YOUR NERVES

Ease your way into active participation in the discussion. Asking questions during tutorials is welcomed by the tutor as it shows your interest in the topic. Each time you contribute during tutorials you will find that your confidence will increase. Set yourself achievable goals for communicating in a tutorial. You can start by asking simple questions about content or saying ‘I don’t understand what is expected by …’, or ‘I don’t understand the point being made on p. 3 of the reading’, to stimulate discussion.

When there is the possibility of working within a group, you can start by asking simple short questions in response to participants’ remarks, such as:
• Can you please expand/elaborate on that point?
• Can you please provide more information?
• Can you please repeat your answer?
You can also:

- agree with what someone has said
- disagree politely with what someone has said and give reasons for your differing opinion
- give an example of the point under discussion
- summarise the points which you have understood and ask clarifying questions.

You will progressively find that you can:

- respond to a question that is asked of the whole group
- relate what has been said to other points discussed earlier.

### LEADING A GROUP DISCUSSION

Suggest to the group to establish ground rules (such as to be respectful and/or listen attentively to others) for creating an emotionally, intellectually and spiritually uplifting environment for discussion. The ground rules will promote good interpersonal relationships and will help participants to observe emotional maturity and balance.

When you are leading a discussion:

- initiate the group discussion
- guide the group when the discussion begins to lose relevance
- encourage all members to participate in the discussion
- be more people-centred and less self-centred
- remain objective
- develop the ability to empathise
- discuss in a non-threatening manner
- be a team player, always maintaining the vision of the ultimate goal of the discussion.

When you get an opportunity to present a tutorial paper:

- check the physical environment and equipment
- have a clear structure for your presentation, with an introduction and conclusion
- relate your presentation to the overall course content
- observe the time limit given to you by your tutor
- include all the relevant information within the specified time frame
- engage the interest of the audience by:
  - preparing relevant quizzes, using maps, graphs, charts, photos, sound recordings, audio-visuals or inclusive small group activities
  - avoiding reading directly from your notes
  - maintaining eye contact with your audience
  - varying tone and pace
- rehearse your presentation in front of your friends to check your timing and to receive constructive feedback
- prepare for questions which may be asked following your presentation.
REFERENCES


STUDENT LEARNING CENTRE
REGISTRY BUILDING ANNEKE

TEL: 61-8-8201 2518

E-MAIL: slc@flinders.edu.au

INTERNET: http://www.flinders.edu.au/SLC

POSTAL: PO BOX 2100, ADELAIDE, SA 5001