



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

I CAN'T SAY ANYTHING IN TUTES

Participating in Tutorials

Student Life - Counselling Support

Tutorials (tute groups) are a feature of most university courses, though the form they take can vary from one discipline to another. Some are like follow-up lectures; others can be question-and-answer sessions. But the ones we're thinking about here are the ones where you're supposed to participate, discuss and express opinions. Some (possibly many) people find this difficult!

Why can't I say something?

There seems to be two main causes of difficulty. One is lack of information or knowledge about the subject, and the other - usually more significant - is over-worry and negative thinking about what's expected of you and how people might react. It might be that you need to learn the skills to communicate orally and be lacking practice opportunities to do so.

So first, the easy stuff.

Do some preparation

Face it - it's pretty hard to have really brilliant ideas, or even ask interesting questions, if you have absolutely no idea what's being discussed! So if you've decided that the time has come to participate more effectively, do some preparation. At least look up what the topic will be, and do some reading and thinking. Do you have any reactions? Any questions? Jot them down.

Think realistically and stop frightening yourself

Most tutorials invite people to think and to extend their understanding by discussing with others. It's not about grading people for accuracy. So saying something is a contribution, even if someone (even the tutor) has a different opinion, or points out something you hadn't thought of. A

question can be a contribution, too. Just agreeing with another speaker, or adding a comment is okay.

You may be apprehensive about speaking in front of other students you don't know. They may seem to have more experience or knowledge, or they are more familiar with the tutorial expectations. But no doubt everyone in the group has felt nervous at one time or another - maybe even right now! And it's fairly likely everyone in the room will also have had the experience of saying something that didn't come out quite right.

Here are some of the most common thoughts that may frighten people to the point of stopping them opening their mouths.

I'll make a mistake - that will be a disaster.

What I say will sound really stupid.

Their ideas are all better than mine.

Everyone except me is confident.

If they see I'm nervous, they'll think I'm an idiot.

If these are your thoughts, work on challenging them. Ask yourself: What's the worst that can happen? Will someone disagree with me? How bad is that really? Maybe I won't know something. How bad is that? Maybe I'll learn something? Encourage yourself; don't be afraid to make a mistake. That's how we learn. And the more you practise contributing, the easier it gets.

Figure out how to get a chance to say something

This will vary from tute to tute, so do a bit of observing. Does the tutor call on people? Then be prepared to take your turn. Does the tutor look around to see who wants to talk? Then get ready to signal when you want to say something. You can establish eye contact with the tutor and perhaps make a hand gesture. Does the tutor leave it entirely up to the group? Then - especially if there are a few who are always ready to do the talking - you may have to be ready to break in - politely, of course. There are lots of 'opening' phrases you can use:

I've got a question about that point...

I also noticed that...

I'd like to comment on that...

I'd like to go back to something he/she said...

I see what you mean, but...

I'm not sure I agree...

Can I add something here...

I agree, and I also think that...

There is another way to look at that...

If you have to break in, you can say "Excuse me," and then go on with your opening phrase. Notice that you can also disagree politely - it's all part of the exchange of ideas.

Do a bit of planning - have a few ideas or questions ready - and then decide to DO IT! Set yourself some targets - and DO IT! Remember, you don't have to say something so profound that they will all remember it forever - just say something! It will get easier.

When anxiety is severe

For some people, anxiety about speaking in front of others may be so extreme that it prevents them from attending the tutorial (or university). If this is the case for you, please contact the counselling service (by email if you prefer) to make an appointment to talk about how to overcome the problem, as it can seriously impact on your achievement and academic progress. Phone appointments are also possible.

For international students

If you have to express yourself in a second (or even third) language it can be even harder to get involved in discussions. In Australia it is common for people to express opinions and to disagree or challenge each other. This approach can be especially difficult for some international students who are unfamiliar with this way of learning. If you would like to participate more but are hesitant, help is available. Make a time to speak with your tutor, one of the international student advisors or a counsellor.

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

Counselling Support

Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building

The University of Adelaide

Ph: +61 8 8313 5663

After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197

This pamphlet was written by Flinders University Health and Counselling Services and has been reprinted as part of a collaborative project between the counselling services at Flinders and Adelaide University. Modified by Student Life Counselling Support.

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