Here are our tips and advice on how to get the most out of face-to-face learning (tutorials and laboratories (labs)), including how to improve your discussion and speaking skills.

About tutorials and laboratories

Tutorials

Tutorials are smaller, interactive classes that allow teaching staff to amplify and explain material delivered through lectures and textbooks, to monitor students’ progress, and to facilitate discussion.

Laboratories

There are many different sorts of laboratories at Curtin. Some are the traditional science based labs, but many are now found in areas such as nursing, computing or design. However, all labs have one thing in common, they are all intended to allow you to explore the practical implications of your discipline in a ‘safe’ environment. Some units, especially those which are dependent on computer-based learning, require you to attend a laboratory class which provides you with the practical knowledge to back up theory learnt in lectures and seminars. Laboratory classes enable you to:

- Explore your knowledge, comprehension and conceptual understanding of a subject
- Develop collaborative learning skills
- Understand the process of scientific inquiry involving ideas such as interpreting data, observing and measuring, problem solving, and applying knowledge and methods
- Develop manual skills (such as correct procedures for image intensification in medical imaging science)
- Learn how to communicate in the language of the discipline.

Benefits of tutorials

Some advantages of tutorials are:

- They allow you to make contact with your tutor for you to ask questions and for your tutor to explain and clarify material covered in lectures and texts
- They give you the opportunity to practise and develop your speaking skills in front of a small, non-threatening group of fellow students
- They can help you prepare for assignments
- They provide an informal forum for expressing your own views and listening to those of others
- When all members of the tutorial group actively participate, tutorials can motivate you to improve your performance in the course.

How to prepare for tutorials

- Read through the lecture notes for the appropriate section
- Take all the necessary books and equipment, including an English dictionary
- Make at least an attempt at all pre-set work e.g. problem exercises, assignments, library searches
- Reflect on any areas that you need clarified and have at least one question written down to ask the tutor.
How to make tutorials more effective

The success of any tutorial depends upon your constructive participation. Here are some ways in which you can contribute:

• Contribute to the group - ask questions, offer information and ideas, and initiate discussion
• Give support - listen to others in the group, give them feedback, restate their views and ask their opinions
• Get to know your tutor and other members of your group; you may need their help sometime during the course
• Do not be discouraged by those people who tend to dominate tutorials.

How to develop your tutorial discussion skills

Like driving a car or writing an essay, discussion skills can be learned and can be improved with practice.

Here are some suggestions you may find useful:

• Go into every tutorial prepared to make one point or ask one question
• The more actively you participate in tutorials, the more confident you will become
• Always query anything that isn't clear to you. If you're having difficulties understanding a point, it is likely that other people in the group are having the same difficulties, and will welcome your question
• Take risks, initiate ideas, be prepared to disagree with other students or your tutor, and ask others to respond to your ideas
• Treat the ideas of others with respect. It's possible to disagree with someone's opinion without being aggressive. Courtesy to others is essential for effective tutorials.

Speaking in tutorials

Students who have attended Australian secondary schools are accustomed to speaking out in class. They are not ‘showing off’ but have learned that demonstrating active participation is valued. You may feel uncomfortable about speaking out, but you will be rewarded for working on this skill.

Start by preparing just one question to ask during the tutorial, and then build up to a few answers to questions you think your tutor will ask.

Keep a journal, recording your progress as you increase your level and quality of participation. It's normal to feel nervous at first, but you will gain confidence if you make sure you participate in discussion at least once in every tutorial every week.

Tutorial checklist

Before the tutorial

• Read through your lecture notes
• Take all necessary books and equipment, including an English dictionary
• Do the required reading
• Do the set homework
• Write down questions you want answered during the tutorial discussion.
During the tutorial

- Ask questions
- Answer questions and offer information
- Listen attentively to other students
- Offer supportive feedback to others
- Query anything that isn't clear to you.

After the tutorial

- Reflect on your participation in the tutorial discussion
- Reflect on how this week's tutorial session has helped you learn
- Consider how to improve your tutorial participation skills.