

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

An on-line support resource for PGRs new to the teaching role

The Aims

This resource has been produced with three aims –

1. To help PGRs gain confidence, knowledge and skills in their new teaching role
2. To prompt PGRs to reflect upon the knowledge and skills they gain through their teaching responsibilities that may be useful in their future careers.
3. To encourage PGRs to develop an ethos and approach to teaching and learning that is in harmony with good practice, disciplinary expectations and the standards expected by The University and nationally.

The Topics

Materials are presented on different teaching topics including:

- Small group teaching (Seminars, Tutorials etc)
- Demonstrating in practical / laboratory classes
- Supporting problem classes

Coming soon -

- Marking and Giving Feedback
- Supporting students doing dissertations and projects

Guidance and information is provided at a number of levels

- Quick hints and tips
 - to get you started when you are teaching for the first time
- Further ideas and information
 - to enhance and develop your practice as you continue to teach
- Links and suggestions for further reading
 - to deepen and broaden your scholarly approach to teaching

Pause for thought

Each teacher brings to the role their own personality, experience, disciplinary expertise, expectations and personal viewpoint. This mix gives every one of us a particular set of natural strengths and abilities as teachers. However, with guidance, thought and feedback everyone can further enhance and develop their knowledge and skills as educators.

These materials do not assume one best way of teaching but recognise that there are many different ways in which we can support and encourage students to learn. The information, guidance and suggestions given in these web-pages therefore need to be contextualised by each reader and considered in relation to the different teaching opportunities, environments and goals we have.

To this end....In each section you will be prompted to reflect upon your teaching situation and asked to think about your own views and personal values. This will help you to make the best teaching choices for you and your learners and support you in honing your own teaching style and approach.

Some underpinning principles and values

The Cardiff University has a clear vision –

Cardiff University provides curricula that are intellectually stimulating and preserved; developing creativity and innovative thinking; and instilling values of professionalism and academic integrity. We work in partnership with students to enable them to become independent and lifelong learners within a culture that fosters, promotes and respects equality, dignity and diversity.

Education Strategy (2011)

What does this mean for a Cardiff University teacher?

If you could underline three words in the statement above what would they be and how might they influence your teaching choices?

The University is seeking to develop students as independent and self-managing learners. This is likely to mean most students are learning how to learn and organise their work in new ways. Many students are also learning how to think in new ways too, to be more analytical and critical, for example.

Will this affect how you teach? If so, how?

The University is committed to enhancing the employability of all students. Employability has been high on the Government's agenda too and the Quality Assurance Agency has recently strengthened its guidance in Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance, of its Code of Practice (February 2010)

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp>

In Wales, employability is a central strategy for Higher Education and attracting considerable Government investment. To find out more please take a look at *For Our Future - The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/forourfuture/?lang=en>

What does employability mean in your discipline?

You might find it helpful to see how employability is talked about by others – Follow this link to the Quality Assurance Agency to have a quick look at how Employability is articulated in the UK Framework for all those teaching in your subject area in a set of Subject Benchmark Statements at

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp>

Learning how to learn and adopting a life-long learning ethos is integral the discussion on employability. Regardless of the particular discipline being 'taught' and 'learnt' there are a generic, set of learning literacies that are associated with University level study. For example, these include all forms of Information Literacy – the ability to recognise what information is needed and be able to find it, evaluate it and use it appropriately. They also include Digital literacies – the ability to use technology effectively. What other learning literacies would you highlight as being key to the future employability of your learners?

Reveal Learning Literacies that should be part of the educational experience in addition to subject knowledge

Learning Literacies:

- **Academic and Professional Literacies** - critical thinking, creativity, innovative thinking, problem solving, reflection, academic writing, teamworking, note-taking, time and self management, numeracy, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, self-directed learning, collaborative learning, interdisciplinarity, equality, dignity.
- **Digital Literacies** - being able to use appropriately and effectively: communication tools, office programmes, digital devices, analysis tools, social software, profession-specific software, collaborative tools.

- **Information Literacies** - searching, retrieving, analysing, interpreting, critiquing, evaluating, managing resources, referencing, sharing content.

What are the implications of this for you and your students?

How can you ensure your students realise that they are developing all these additional skills and are able to articulate them to future employers?

The University aims to support Continuing Personal and Professional Development for all students and so this means you too! Developing a set of teaching skills is part of your Professional Development and may well be an important addition to your employability skills too. If, at a future date, you choose to embark upon a teaching / academic career you are likely to be asked to evidence your teaching practice and/or produce a portfolio of such evidence as part of the process of obtaining a teaching qualification.

As a Teacher - How might this influence how you choose to teach?

As a Learner - How can you evidence your own (teaching) skills development?

If you have a minute take a quick look at the ‘Ten ideas for developing employability without major programme changes’ – provided by Professor John Cowan

Section 5, page 51 – Enhancing Practice. *Employability : Benchmarking employability: a Scottish perspective.*

Recognising and recording your skills

Teaching will provide a great range of opportunities and new demands. It will challenge and reward you in many different ways. You will learn all kinds of things about yourself and your students and this gives many possibilities for personal growth and development. All of which is very good news when it comes to filling out a job application form or preparing for an interview.

Why not take a minute or two to jot down all the different skills you will be using in your teaching role, e.g. in planning, preparing and facilitating a seminar or in demonstrating in a practical class or marking a set of essays or laboratory reports.

How can Cardiff University help me develop as a University Teacher?

No doubt you will get direction and guidance directly from the academics convening the modules you teach on. Your supervisor or principle investigator (PI) is also likely to be a good source of advice and support. Discussing your teaching with friends and colleagues within and beyond your discipline will also enrich your thinking and teaching practice.

More centrally the University offers a full programme of professional development workshops and events, free to attend and covering a wide range of topics each semester. To find out more and sign up for sessions

There are also lots of useful and engaging articles and books written for new teachers on all aspects of University teaching. Some recommended titles and some electronic and audio articles have been collected together for you here.

Gaining recognition for your teaching – you may also wish to explore the Higher Education Academy website to see if their pathway to accredited teacher status could suit you

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingindividuals/professionalrecognition>

Conceptions of Teaching

Thinking back over your own experiences of learning and being taught by lots of different people you will instantly recognise that there are many ways of being a good teacher (and perhaps being a bad teacher too!). When we teach we bring to the role, not only our knowledge, experiences and personality but also our own view of what a good teacher should do and how teachers should approach the role of helping others to learn.

What is special about teaching in a University?

To tackle this question we need to step back a little and ask some fundamental questions

- What are Universities for?
- What opportunities should a University education provide?

We can also consider how we think teaching should be similar or different from the teaching provided in a secondary school.

Pause for Thought

What are the defining characteristics of University education and the role of the University teacher?

What can you do, as a teacher, to help your learners to make the transition between School/College and University learning smoother?

“When I began teaching I was very focussed on what I did, what I said and, if I am really honest, on what the students thought of me. Over this year I have become much more of the view that it is what my students do and what they say that matters.”

A really important point –

Most teachers start by being very teacher-centred in their approach and over time and with increasing confidence, move towards a student focussed approach. To help this transition you might find it useful to concentrate your attention and preparation on creating opportunities for the students to discover, explore, experiment, learn for themselves with your guidance (rather than seeking to ‘tell them’ what you think they should know).

Small Group Teaching

What's in a name?

Small group teaching goes by a number of different names,

- Seminars
- Tutorials
- Problem based learning
- Group projects
- Workshops

And the terminology is not consistently used – ie one person's seminar might be another person's tutorial.

How big is a small group?

The number of students in a small group also varies widely – it might be a tiny group of 2 or there could be hundreds of students in the class but they are actually working in small sub-groups of 6-8 to do their work. That said many people consider a small group to range from between 10 to 30 students.

Why have small group teaching?

Small group teaching is expensive in terms of resource – lots of teacher time, teaching rooms and facilities etc. So for large classes it provides a considerable investment for a Department. As teachers, we have to be sure that our small group teaching is achieving different learning goals than could be achieved readily in a large group teaching situation. If we end up presenting or giving a mini-lecture to our students in a small group.....we could be presenting to many – so why have a small group?

From a student's point of view and from a teacher's point of view, in a notebook list three reasons why small group teaching is important in your subject?

	A student's view	A Teacher's view
The benefits of small group teaching	* * *	* * *

	A student's view	A Teacher's view
The benefits of small group teaching	Can ask questions Develop a range of communication skills Group working skills Share ideas and views	Can check to see if the students understand? Is my teaching 'working'? Be more aware of the individual needs of my students and adapt my teaching accordingly
Some of the worries and concerns	I am very shy I am worried about my spoken English I don't like talking before I have really thought about it I cannot 'hide' I am not sure how to participate Why doesn't the teacher just 'Teach', why ask us?	I am not sure how much I need to prepare They may ask me things I don't know. Time-keeping is a nightmare – sometimes everybody talks and next time nobody does They haven't done the reading / the problems

The Skills of small group teaching

I believe that a teacher uses more skills in small group teaching than in any other kind of teaching. Teachers need to be able to think, respond to the students and if needed, adapt their planned approach to best suit the needs of their learners. This introduces a degree of the unknown and a level of uncertainty that will always require the teacher to use their academic and personal judgement.

Some of the skills used are given here -

Before the Class

Liaising with the course convenor

Clarifying the main learning goals (Aims and learning outcomes)

Making these clear to the learners ahead of the class if possible

Updating personal knowledge, doing some of the readings / problems

Considering the needs of the learners – who they are, what do they already know, what are their individual needs

Selecting the most appropriate teaching methods and techniques to use in the class

Planning the session – sequencing and timings

Preparing and producing any learning resources – *handouts, powerpoint presentations, questions and tasks, case studies, problem scenarios etc*

Designing learning tasks and activities for the students

Checking the learning environment – the room and the equipment

During the Class

Ensure the students know why they are there at what are the learning goals

Ensuring the students know what is going to happen

Ensuring the students know how to participate and what is expected of them

Giving clear explanations and brief presentations

Giving instruction and providing leadership

Asking questions and setting learning tasks

Answering questions and picking up on difficult points

Listening and responding to students

Observing students – their interactions, their body language

Facilitating and ensuring all students are able to engage and participate

Ensuring 'safety' – setting ground-rules?

Giving feedback and encouragement

After the Class

Think over what happened in the class – recognise good things as well as any negatives.

Make notes of any reactions and changes that need to be made for next time

Follow up on any outstanding questions and uncertainties

Pause for thought

Can you add any further teaching skills to the list above?

Which of the skills above would you already claim to have?

Which are you aware that you need to enhance?

Which are new skills for you to develop?

Leading my first seminar

It is a strange thought to be the other side of the teaching table – to be responsible for organising and leading the class. Most new teachers feel a mixture of nervousness and excitement before their first class. Being well prepared and confident of your teaching material is really going to help with the anxiety. So investing in preparation will make you feel more confident. Planning the process will also hugely help the class run smoothly – **focus on what you will be getting your students to do – rather than focussing solely on what you are going to do and say.**

There is not a strict **dress code** for teachers at Cardiff but the general advice is to wear something smart but casual. It doesn't help your confidence if you get mistaken for one of the students at the start! What we wear says something about how we are approaching the teaching role – are we professional, organised, are we taking the job seriously. For many it is also one way in which we show respect for our learners. For example, if you are teaching on an MBA course, your students are likely to be coming to class from work and wearing smart suits - it is appropriate for you to dress more formally in this situation too.

“I actually needed to buy a couple of smarter shirts as I wear a lab-coat all day long doing my research and I realised I needed to feel a bit more of a grown up to tackle the job of teaching for the first time”

Talking to people who have led seminars in your Department in previous years, maybe even leading the same classes that you will be teaching, is also an excellent way to prepare. Talk to them about the methods and approaches that they have found most successful. Ask about common problem areas, topics or concepts that the students may find more difficult to grasp etc. Ask them for their top tips in preparing topics and if appropriate, how they have managed their time effectively in preparing (e.g. how to cope with extensive reading lists).

Small group teaching methods and techniques

'Mixing it up' is important. You can't please all the people all the time but designing your small group teaching session with 'variety' in mind allows your learners to work in their comfort zones for some of the time and provides them with new challenges at others. Different methods facilitate different kinds of student engagement and provide different opportunities to learn.

Pause for thought

Think about the different ways that your students can participate in your class

Just take a minute – make a note of any methods or techniques you are aware of that can be used in small group teaching? Then think about their pros and cons in helping students learn about your discipline?

The name of the small group teaching session will provide some clarity on the overall teaching approach expected. These fundamentally vary in how directive the teacher is expected to be -

- **Tutorials (academic):** small groups of students discuss an issue, their essays or a topical problem
- **Personal Tutorials:** As above but also has a pastoral role in supporting students more widely if they have academic and personal difficulties.
- **Problem classes:** focused specifically on working through a set of given problems – these are frequently mathematical, statistical or computational.
- **Seminars:** groups discuss journal papers and/or other learning materials
- **Workshops:** a mixture of small inputs by the tutor interspersed by work on group or individual tasks, followed by feedback to the whole group and discussion.
- **Problem-based learning:** A group of students work through a given scenario or problem to diagnose a solution. The group is likely to meet 2 or 3 times on each problem, gaining further information each time from a non-specialist facilitator.
- **Student-led groups:** students decide on the topic and how it will be discussed; tutor merely observes or may intervene if necessary
- **Self-help groups:** run by students using the tutor as a resource
- **Action Learning Sets :** tutor acts as a facilitator to the set, each students present issues in turn with others asking questions and suggesting ways forward – the presenting student then decides which points to act on.

In some classes it is expected that the teacher will be very knowledgeable and be prepared to lead on a specific subject or topic. The teacher is in the class to share their expertise and to 'present' information and his or her views to the group. However, in many small group teaching sessions this is definitely **not** the role of the teacher. A more

common situation is that the teacher is there to help manage the process of learning, by facilitating discussion and supporting the students to work through learning activities and tasks. Tasks that have been designed to encourage the students to think for themselves, share their ideas with each other and help them to develop a set of, much valued, academic and communication skills.

One thing that I hadn't expected was that I actually found it really difficult to shut up sometimes – what I mean is, it is hard to stop yourself jumping into the discussion all the time and effectively doing the work for the students.

These two very different teaching roles typify, two very different teaching ideologies - firstly, a **teacher-led** approach and secondly, a **student-led** or a **student-centred** approach to learning.

Student-centred Learning

Student-centred learning describes ways of thinking about learning and teaching that emphasise student responsibility for such activities as planning learning, interacting with teachers and other students, researching, and assessing learning.

Cannon, (2000)

Student-centred learning therefore, requires that students get actively involved in the learning process and take responsibility for their own learning.

The implications of this for teachers are that they place greater importance on what their learners are doing, and why they are doing it, rather than on their own actions and performances as a teacher (Biggs). It requires a mutual respect within the student – teacher relationship.

Pause for thought

List three challenges you might anticipate in trying to follow a student-centred approach to learning in a small group teaching session?

You may find the following toolkit of use -
European Students' Union, Student-centred learning: Toolkit for students, staff and Higher Education Institutions:
www.esib.org/documents/publications/SCL_toolkit_ESU_EI.pdf

Active Learning

Several authors have emphasised the importance of learners being actively engaged in the process of their own learning and have criticized educational methods that view learners as human vessels to be filled with knowledge. Workers, such as Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner, saw learners as people who are constructing their own understanding by interacting with knowledge and very importantly, with other people (including teachers and peers).

Constructivism

<http://www.learning-theories.com/constructivism.html>

This construction process is greatly helped by the provision of frameworks, structures and mental models that help learners to begin to organise and arrange knowledge in ways that are meaningful to them. This means that each learner will build their understanding in an individualistic way and will find different personal connections points of relevance in their learning

Some take home points arising from a student-centred view –

As a small group teacher it is going to be important to:

- challenge students to think for themselves,
- help students to organise and structure their thoughts and ideas,
- encourage students to vocalise and discuss their views and understandings
- design learning activities and tasks that require students to actively engage
- give students feedback on what they are doing well and how they can improve.

Please note down two more points –

- ?
- ?

The role of the Tutor

There are three main activities that small group teachers have to manage simultaneously:

- managing the group dynamics to enable all to participate
- planning and organising learning activities
- managing the learning so that the learning aims are met and the learning outcomes are achieved

In many small group teaching situations, the role of the teacher is that of facilitator of learning: leading discussions, asking open-ended questions, guiding process and task, and enabling active participation of learners and engagement with ideas. However, small groups have a range of different purposes and goals. Tutors therefore need to be able to take on a range of different roles to meet these demands. A Tutor may adopt a number of different roles in any one teaching session

McCrorie (2006) describes seven key roles

- the instructor, who imparts information to students
- the neutral chair, who seeks to bring all into the discussion
- the consultant, from whom learners can ask questions
- the devil's advocate, who will challenge and stimulate
- the commentator, who observes and remarks on process as well as the topic
- the drop-in wanderer, who calls into small group conversations
- the absent friend, who leaves the students to self manage for some of the time

However, I think there are several more important roles a Tutor can take on

- the giver of feedback
- the adjudicator
- the assessor
- the time-manager
- the counsellor (*)
- etc etc

(*)Post graduate tutors are not expected to act as Personal Tutors for their students but sometimes there are clear connections between a student's personal problems and their academic difficulties. For example, a student may hand in course work late or be poorly prepared for and distracted in class because they are worrying about a personal problem. It is likely that you can help by simply being a sympathetic listener and then advising them to talk to their Personal Tutor or seek further help from student services. (suggest insert link here?) Do not feel you should solve your student's personal problems and do recognise your own limits in trying to offer any guidance or suggestions – better to leave this to the professionals.

How to prepare for the role of Tutor

Pause for thought

Take 5 minutes to list the practical and academic preparations you would make before starting your first small group teaching class as tutor.

Being a Tutor for the first time

Some very practical things –

- Check out the teaching room – can I use the equipment and log on OK?
- Print off a sheet of my students (with photos if possible) - begin to learn names
- Produce and photocopy any handouts or learning materials well in advance

Some content things –

- Consult with the course convenor and module information to ensure I understand the key learning goals of the class (The Aims and Learning Outcomes)
- Do any preparation of content – update my knowledge, do the important readings, run through the calculations myself etc
- Check my role with the convenor (ie does it include any marking or assessment ?)
- Plan the session carefully – not just thinking about the subject content but also the process – what will the students actually do in the class?
- Have a look at some past examination questions on the module and topics I will teach

Some personal things-

- Feel confident – the University wouldn't have asked me to teach if they didn't think I was capable of it
- Be enthusiastic – students do appreciate teachers who not only show a real love of their subjects but also who have a willingness to teach it too.
- Get to know the students – who are they, why are they taking the course, what have they studied before – and do what I can to develop a rapport with the students and a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere in the class.

Encouraging Active Learning - Some Seminar Techniques

There are hundreds of different ways in which students can be encouraged to participate in a small group teaching session and actively engage with new knowledge, concepts and ideas...(and with each other).

Crossover groups: the class is sub-divided into two or more smaller groups with transfers of some students between groups at appropriate times. E.g. Students begin part A of a task in groups of four, after completing this, two people from one group swap places with two people from a second group – to form a new group of four. The task then continues to part B.

Buzz group: Write a question or a topic on the board and ask each student to write down any ideas / responses they have. Then ask them to share their thoughts with a colleague for a couple of minutes. Give them time to discuss and then ask the question again – asking them for their suggestions.

Brainstorming or Ideas storming: Write down a statement, a word or a question on the board. Ask the students to shout out their thoughts and ideas and write them down without comment, on the board or flipchart. Do not stop to analyse any of the suggestions, just produce the list of comments. When suggestions or time has been exhausted, organise and critique the list together. The intention is to separate ideas generation from the editing and checking phase.

Presentations: individual students or groups of students present on a topic devised by the tutor or on a self or group generated topic

Debates: The teacher or the students can set up a debate between two opposing positions. Time is allocated before or during the class to prepare arguments and then the debate is 'chaired' by the teacher.

And some more techniques

Jigsawing a topic – Produce two sets of cards giving two sets of alternative variables or situations. The students would be given one card from each set to generate a unique set of circumstances. E.g. one set of cards could include the names of different historic figures and the second set a number of political issues – the students have to discuss or present on the connections between the person and the issue.

Snowballing: individuals, then pairs, then fours etc to generate wider views on a topic progressively. You effectively grow the size of the working group and draw in an increasing range of views.

Mini projects: individuals or groups work on a particular small project and report to the whole group

Resource based tasks: Provide the students with a range of resources (could be articles, quotations, x-rays, tables of data, test results, photographs, printouts etc). Ask them to solve a problem or address a question using the provided resources.

Role play: students take on specific roles and act out the views or actions associated with those roles. This could involve experiencing different points of view or putting into practice certain skills and approaches. E.g. Taking a patient history, or interviewing a witness etc

Simulations: The teacher provides the students with a set of 'briefs' that provide information and background to the simulation. The students often work in small teams to adopt different roles within the simulation. E.g. groups taking the stance of different European countries in a European Union strategy negotiation.

Fishbowl: a sub-group of students are observed (in the 'fishbowl') by the rest of the students. The student in the bowl are asked to argue a case, debate or role-play a situation. The observing students are then called upon to feedback, summarise the discussion, or take the reverse role.

Pause for thought

Which of these methods have you had personal experience of, either as a student or as a teacher?

Choose two methods to consider in more detail – what do you think are the benefits and the potential difficulties of using these two methods in a class in your discipline?

It's not working

Small group teaching is amazingly variable in nature – the dynamics of the group, the personalities of dominant individuals, the complexity of the topic, the teaching space allocated....and you, ...will all combine in a unique way to produce the small group teaching session. Teachers frequently comment that given the same topic to teach with two different seminar groups and the teaching experience is completely different.

Here are some recognisable problems that occur in small group teaching situations. Please look down the list and take a few minutes to think about how the problems could be addressed (e.g. avoided, minimised, corrected etc).

A Student view**Starting off.....**

Not sure why we are here
Don't know how to participate 'properly'
There is a huge reading list each week, not sure what I should actually read
I haven't done the preparation and so I can't participate
The questions are so big we can't get started

In the class....

Nobody says anything
The teacher does all the talking
One confident student always answers so quickly I haven't had chance to think
I get really fed up – it's the same people who have done the work every week
It is really competitive – everybody is just trying to score points
The teacher just criticises our ideas and is really intimidating
I am not confident to speak in English yet and the other students speak so fast
I get really anxious about speaking in front of other people

And finally.....

We talk but it doesn't go anywhere – I don't know what I should be taking away from it
We talk but I am not sure I am learning anything new – it's very superficial
I feel I spend all my time helping other students who don't get it – not sure this helps me
Is it going to be on the exam because if it isn't I can't really see the point in discussing it
Not sure if I can ask the tutor to give me help with my coursework (essay)?

Tricky situations

Please consider these difficult teaching scenarios – how would you advise these teachers?

When you have given yourself some time to think them over you can see some of our suggested responses too.

1. My Friday morning seminar group are so quiet – I just cannot get them to talk. I am not sure if they are shy, bored or just lazy.
2. There is one guy in my class who always answers the question – he speaks even when he hasn't really got anything new to say. I find it really difficult to stop him dominating the discussion every time.
3. There is a little group, who always sit at the back and constantly chat, text and giggle. I find this behaviour really quite rude and very distracting but I am not sure how to deal with it.
4. Half my group do not have English as their first language – I think they find it quite difficult to contribute to the discussion and I sometimes struggle to understand what they say.

Response to 1. You could...

Write two or three questions on the board – try and give questions that have a range of possible answers, then ask the students to work in pairs to discuss them. Give them a few moments to begin and then 'drop in' to the pairs and try to prompt deeper discussion or ask them to expand on the points they are making. After about 5 - 10 minutes ask the students to come back together as a whole class and ask each pair for a response to the questions.

You can repeat this approach

You can ask the students to now work in groups of four.

You can point out how much better this discussion has been and thank them.

Response to 2. You could...

Try to limit his opportunities to dominate by asking specific questions of different students or pairs of students. You could ask each student to add a point. You could ask this student to write up these points on the board.

Alternatively you could try to encourage the other students to be more participative – “What do you think of that point?”.

You could speak to the dominating student, privately, at the end of the class and explain that you do not mean to be rude but you will sometimes limit his contributions because it is your job to make sure that all the students contribute to the discussions...and you know that for a shy person it is more difficult to speak out.

You do not want to ‘punish’ this student for his eagerness but you do want to manage his contributions so that they are helpful for the whole group.

Response to 3. You could...

mix up the seating arrangement and allocate specific students to specific working groups, e.g. use the numbering system where you give each student a number, counting off 1 to 4 around the room. Then ask all the number 1s to work together and all the number 2s to work together etc, etc. This way you will mix up the clique and establish a new in class dynamic.

Tackle their rudeness head on and ask them to turn off their phones for the duration of the class or let you know if there is a pressing need for them to have them on.

Response to 4. You could...

Give the students ‘thinking time’ in the way that you set up the learning tasks, e.g. You could say ‘Please write down three things that you think make this more likely...’, and give them a couple of minutes to make a note and then say, “Now compare your list with your neighbour and together choose the top two reasons”. After a further minute or two you then ask for contributions.

Giving this opportunity to think and write and then to ‘check out’ their ideas with a colleague before you ask them to contribute it to the class – will increase their confidence and give them chance to ‘practise their English with a peer first.

Give the opportunity to give contributions in ways other than speaking out – for example, give the students a sheet of flipchart paper and ask them to make a list of points to feedback. This also helps in two-way communication.

Write your instructions on the board as well as saying them - not only does that give two ways of communicating your instructions – it also gives the students a little thinking time whilst you write.

Planning a small group teaching session

You will quickly find the best ways for you to prepare for a teaching session but here are a few suggestions to get you started.

1. Think about the main aim of the class – what is it trying to achieve ? Write this down in one or two sentences.
2. Identify the key learning outcomes for the session – in other words what would you like all the students to be able to do at the end of the class?
3. Sketch out a lesson plan – again these can take many forms but try this one to get you going.

An example is included for a 50 minute class

Time line	Main activity	Resources needed	Purpose
0 – 15	Opening input from the tutor	One page handout, PowerPoint presentation – 5 slides	To set the scene and link to the lecture
15 – 35	Discussion in pairs with quick report back to whole group	Four discussion questions written on the board	Apply preparatory readings, share views.
35 – 45	Whole group generate a grid on the board summarising the four key theories	Construct the grid on the board	To consolidate and structure Provide a useful revision tool
45 – 50	Tutor take any final questions Set the reading tasks for next week.	Reading list for next week	Quick check of understanding Set task for following seminar

Note:

You may find it helpful to divide the “Main Activity” column into two columns – to distinguish between the main activities for you, the tutor, and the main activities for your

learners. This also provides a check that it is your students who are actually doing most of the work!

4. Don't try to cover too much but maybe have an additional set of questions or mini-task in reserve just in case you whizz through more than you thought you would. It is actually more likely that you won't cover everything you intended to.

5. It is much easier to run a seminar if you have a clear task or activity for your students to do – the idea being that if the students do the task they cannot help but learn the things that you want them to learn.

Who are my learners?

Some helpful questions to ask yourself about your students

Why are they taking this module?

What have they studied previously?

What are they likely to find challenging in the topics covered or the way the classes run?

What are likely to be their strengths – what can I build on and work with in the class?

Pause for thought

Add two more questions that will help you prepare effectively for the class
Think about how you can begin to answer these questions?

Aims and Learning Outcomes – Learning goals

Aims are the big statements that try to capture educational intent – what the module, or the teaching session, is trying to achieve and why it exists. They are holistic statements usually written from the teacher's point of view, ie. What the teacher wants to happen.

Learning Outcomes or more precisely the 'intended' learning outcomes are very precise statements that try to capture exactly what a student will be able to do, or know

about, after the period of learning. They are always written from the learners' perspective,

e.g. At the end of the seminar students should be able to*describe and critique the main features of cultural identity with particular emphasis on the works of x, y and z.*

e.g. 2. At the end of the module students will be able to... *use appropriate quantitative methods to analyse population size in the wild.*

Learning Tasks

Designing a clear and focussed task or learning activity is at the heart of seminar planning. The task may be simply a set of structured questions that the students work through alone or in small groups before reconvening to give their comments and feedback. Alternatively the task maybe more complex. Some suggestions are –

- Show a video clip or an audio clip to stimulate discussion
- Bring in current articles or newspaper clippings to provide material for a debate
- Ask students to work in pairs to prepare 2 minute summaries to give to the class.
- Ask them to organise material and information according to a useful structure, e.g. a time-line, a production pathway, strengths and weaknesses, pros and cons, arguments for and against etc

Questionsand asking them

Probably the most challenging of the teaching skills you will use in small group tutoring is phrasing and asking really useful questions. Here are a few ways of thinking about preparing and phrasing questions and then a few thoughts on what to consider when actually asking the question in class.

1. Phrasing a question

Four dimensions of questions

a. Open versus Closed

Questions that begin with 'How' or 'Why' tend to be open questions – the students have to answer with a sentence or two. Closed questions can usually be answered with a single word – e.g. Yes, No, 54!

b. Memory, Observation and Thought

What do you want to question to achieve in the learner? Do you want to see if they can remember something (from the lecture say?), do you want them to take a fresh look at something (using the question to re-focus) or do you want the students to think about something (perhaps coming to their own opinion or working something out).

In short – you can either remember something or you can't – so Memory questions tend to be fairly quick fire, Observation questions need to be asked and then time given for the learners to re-appraise and finally thought questions are much better answered if the students actually have time to think.

c. Convergent versus Divergent

Convergent questions, (single or limited number of response) help narrow and focus discussion – they are frequently used to bring conversations to a close and to arrive at a conclusion or to highlight a key learning point. Divergent questions, (many correct answers or even unknown answers) on the other hand are used to open up a discussion – to encourage a more holistic or 'big picture' perspective.

d. Fact or Opinion

Is the question testing to see if a learner knows a specific piece of information, a name, a date, a formula etc, or is the question encouraging the student to formulate a personal response, e.g. to interpret or analyse a situation or set of findings?

2. Asking questions

Three dimensions of asking questions

a. Challenging (threatening) versus Supporting (encouraging)

This refers to how the question is asked – is the question asked in an encouraging, supportive way or is it asked to challenge and perhaps intimidate the learner. This may sound strange – but sometimes teachers use questions to 'discipline' learners – for example, asking a direct question to the student who you think isn't paying attention or is chatting with a friend.

The impression created has lots to do with body language, the tone of voice and the vocabulary used. Because being asked a question sometimes has negative connotations (e.g. being interrogated) – it is helpful to try and soften body language and aim to minimise the hierarchy that naturally exists between teacher and learner.

b. Individual or Group

Is it better to ask direct questions to specific individuals or to ask questions to the whole group? This is quite a controversial question with advocates on both sides of the fence but there are pros and cons for each approach. The individual can

feel 'picked on' and unfairly put on the spot and yet questions to the whole group may not produce any response or it could be the same few students who always answer. There is a third way – why not ask a question to a pair of students or to a sub-group (e.g. can I put a question now to the back table). This approach places a group under more pressure to answer but avoids the full focus on one person.

c. Instant 'hot potatoes' versus Thinking time

Most learners will give a higher quality answer if they are not taken by surprise or asked for an immediate answer. Giving comfortable thinking time is therefore beneficial and there are a number of ways to do this,

- Flag that you are going to be asking a question in a minute (e.g. 'I am going to ask you what you think about this in a moment...')
- Ask the question verbally then take a minute to write up the question on the board.
- Ask the question and ask everybody to write down a quick response before getting some feedback in the class – (e.g. " please note down three different ways you think this could be achieved.")
- Use the 'buzz group' technique

A couple of 'Question pitfalls to avoid'

- Try and avoid always answering your own questions – wait 20-30 seconds before speaking and, if necessary, re-phrase the question or give a hint rather than answering. Answering teaches the students that your questions are really rhetorical and they will increasingly expect not to have to answer at all.
- Try to avoid asking several questions at once – keep it simple and ask one thing at once.

What to do with the answer?

Value the contribution – listen carefully. Check back with the student to clarify if necessary.

Invite other students to add to or comment on the response – try to widen the discussion and bring in other contributors.

Sometimes answers will only be partially developed and you may be able to build on the contribution and give it a clearer structure to help other students learn from it.

Always build on the positives in a student's response first and praise them.

If the answer has errors – don't ignore these – pick up on them so that students do not leave the class believing you have endorsed the error with your silence. Try to do this sensitively and avoid undermining the contributor – in essence you are pleased that they have given you an opportunity to pick up on a misunderstanding (that is probably shared by other students in the group).

Listen out for sub-text, sometimes key points are hidden in what isn't said or in how something is phrased. Try and read between the lines and interpret non-verbal communication too.

Try to remember who said what and refer to these points later in the conversation as a way of showing the value you place on student contributions, e.g. *“As Andy said earlier, we cannot forget about the role of the law makers in this..”*

Ground-rules (implicit or explicit)

In your first small group teaching session with a new group of students you might find it helpful to clarify the 'rules of engagement' – ie what the students can expect from you and what you expect from them. This will be particularly valuable if you are teaching first year students at the start of the academic year.

Some teachers use this 'scene setting' as an opportunity to practice what they preach – and do something active with their learners rather than simply telling them their expectations.

For example – begin by asking the students to discuss three questions with their immediate neighbour

- What are the purposes of seminars?
- What do learners need to do to get the most they can from seminars?
- How does the role of a seminar tutor differ from that of a lecturer?

Or similar.

Give the pairs a few moments to chat about this – then take a reply from each pair in turn – commenting and adding to their replies to emphasise the ground-rules you wish to set.

An alternative approach is to give the job of drawing up a set of ground-rules to the students, as a first learning task. Explain to the group the aims of the class and then ask them, *“To achieve these goals how do you think we need to work together?”*

If you feel this would be take too much time, you could give your students a possible set of ground-rules and give them five minutes, in pairs, to review the list and edit it.

An Example set of Class Ground-rules

Punctuality	-The class should start and end on time
Preparedness	- We will come to class having read the core readings
Respect	- All contributions are valued.
Feedback	- Will be given constructively
Environment	- It is our responsibility to contribute to a productive session
Scholarly	- We need to back up our ideas and 'claims' with evidence

Inclusion

Cardiff University has adopted and seeks to promote an inclusive approach to teaching and learning.

*The **vision** of the Inclusive Curriculum Project is to achieve an inclusive curriculum at Cardiff University, a curriculum which is designed to value the diversity of students and staff, to anticipate and provide for a range of student learning needs, and to maintain high academic standards within a culture of dignity, courtesy and respect. The **aim** of the project is to support academic schools in reviewing the inclusivity and accessibility of their practices in learning, teaching and assessment, and in implementing an action plan to promote equality.*

Inclusive Curriculum Project, Cardiff University

Teachers need to consider the needs of all their students and where possible seek to provide an integrated and inclusive learning experience. For some students this raises particular challenges and for the teacher to be empathetic, responsive and supportive.

Inclusion – Students with a Disability

In determining whether or not a person is disabled, reference is often made to the social model of disability which suggests that people with impairments are disabled by social, attitudinal or environmental barriers. The advisory group considers this to be a key principle and would wish to emphasise that institutions should attempt to work towards an inclusive environment in which quality of provision and the best possible experience for all learners is pursued.

QAA, Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 3: Disabled students - February 2010 (Updated March 2010)

The University seeks to ensure that all learners have equal access to the learning opportunities it provides and requires that all teachers consider the individual needs. Students who have a disability may require that reasonable adjustments be made in order to achieve this. For example, a student with a physical disability may need classes to be time-tabled in seminar rooms with appropriate access, students who have impaired sight may need to be provided with readings in advance of the class etc. The University's Disability and Dyslexia Service, <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/dyslxl/> can provide tutors with further guidance and advice.

Two important issues

1. Confidentiality and Disclosing a Disability

The information that a student provides relating to their personal circumstances and disability should always be treated with sensitivity and as private. If a student discloses a disability to you, the University is deemed to know and should put in place the reasonable adjustments to support the student. In order to do this it is important that they discuss their particular situation with the Disability and Dyslexia Service and their Personal Tutor.

2. Pre-empting needs and making reasonable adjustments

Legislation (<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/dyslx/infoforstaff/discrim/index.html>)

makes it unlawful to discriminate against students with a disability and requires that teachers try to anticipate the needs of their students. For example, anticipating that a student with a severe hearing loss may need the room layout to enable them to lip read etc

Inclusion – International Students and Students who are non-native English speakers.

The demands of a small group teaching session, such as a seminar, are high both in terms of confidence and linguistic ability. Speaking out in front of the teacher and your peers is a challenge for most students but is likely to be far more so if your first language isn't English and/or your previous education didn't encourage such a discursive approach. Many new International students talk about the huge challenge of keeping up in lectures and seminars because of the speed of conversation and the differences in regional accents. In addition to the linguistic challenge, many students are also busy adapting to a new style of teaching, one in which they are expected to speak out and give their opinions and critique published work etc.

Particularly in small group teaching situations the teacher / student relationship and the ways of communicating may also be different from their previous experiences. Some international students may be much more comfortable seeing the teacher as 'expert' and provider of knowledge and may not expect their teacher to ask them questions and ask for their views.

Pause for thought

Considering the expectations of international students, who are also non-native English speakers, – how might you seek to include them fully in a seminar session.

Make a note of three things that you could do help your students engage actively in the class.

Inclusive teaching strategies

- Language concerns

- To Write down questions and key vocabulary and terminology on the board
- Provide handouts with discussion questions and tasks and further reading suggestions
- Encourage discussion in pairs before opening up the conversation across the whole group.
- Try to give 'comfortable thinking time' in the way you ask questions

-Adapting to a different educational culture

- Explain why you are taking the teaching approach that you are –e.g. don't assume it is obvious why discussion is helpful to learning.
- Explain your role as a tutor – e.g. that this shouldn't be a mini-lecture from you.
- Recognise that change takes time – if you are teaching new first year students or new Masters students they are likely to be experiencing lots of the 'new' and need some time to adapt.
- If it is possible – consider using the different views and expectations in your class as a learning resource for the group, e.g. draw upon the different experiences that your learners have had before coming to Cardiff.