

Practical Seminar Tips

You must attend seminars.

Seminars are there to help you get the most out of lectures, to help clarify points of difficulty, and to ensure the course is responsive to feedback from students (i.e., you), so it is in your best interest to attend them. Also, be aware that although most seminar groups are very informal, attendance is generally compulsory, though how this is enforced will vary. Some institutions deduct marks for poor attendance; some go as far as to enforce course expulsions.

Do the set reading.

It's not just a courtesy to your tutor as you'll get more out of the seminar and out of the reading. This will have a direct impact on your ability to write a good essay, get a good mark, win friends and influence people (OK, maybe just the first two).

Be prepared to speak up.

It is not an uncommon scenario in a seminar group for the tutor to introduce the topic and pose a starter question, hand over to the students to pick up the discussion, and be met with a deadly silence!! Somebody needs to get the discussion going, so why not you? If you speak up, others will appreciate it and be encouraged to pitch in themselves. Remember, the best seminars are those full of lively discussion that all the students participate in. So remember, go prepared to speak up and join in.

Use your seminar to clarify and discuss points from the lecture.

It's generally not the done thing to stick your hand up in the middle of a lecture and raise questions, suggestions or complaints, neither is it the done thing to sit quietly in a seminar taking notes. The tutor is there to listen to you, not just talk to you. If you're having difficulty with something in the lectures, you're probably not the only one. Ask your tutor, there will be someone else thinking "I'm glad they asked that!" If tutors pick up on widespread confusion over a particular area of the lectures they will report this to the lecturer, who will generally welcome such feedback and try where possible to remedy the situation.

Develop your communication skills.

Seminars afford you an opportunity to develop your oral presentation skills which will generally be very useful in almost any subsequent employment environment.

Be respectful of other people's opinions.

As you have chosen to study your subject to degree-level, there is a very good chance you have developed a number of strong opinions in respect of your chosen subject. Seminars provide you with the perfect arena to air your opinions and present arguments. However, you must remember that not everybody will share your opinion, and although you should defend your point of view, always remember to allow others to speak and not shout them down if you don't agree with them.

Develop your debating skills.

A group discussion is an opportunity to develop your debating skills, again a useful, practical skill. A management strategy meeting which proceeded like a pub discussion would not be very productive!! Seminars help you develop the diplomacy and teamwork skills required in many a walk of life you may enter later.

Suggest or request topics for discussion.

Lectures are by their very nature relatively inflexible and impersonal, seminars are by design the reverse. So remember the seminar is there to meet your needs, while the lecture has to meet the needs of the course as a whole, so feel free to make suggestions about **a)** what material is covered and **b)** how it's covered; e.g., if there's a group consensus that next week's topic is less pressing than another, it may be possible to change it (lectures by contrast are unlikely to be rewritten to accommodate student preferences).

Raise any problems with your tutor.

If you have any kind of problem which is affecting your work, even if it's not directly course-related, you should feel free to approach your tutor. If it's not a matter they can deal with themselves they will be able to put you in touch with someone who can.

Remember, seminars offer a freer intellectual space than lectures.

They provide an opportunity to form and develop your own ideas, and are intended to foster independent thinking which is one of the main aims of university teaching. Graduates dependent on lecturers to tell them what's what would not have been well equipped for the outside world!!