



Top tips for getting the most out of seminars

Seminars are an opportunity to explore your course content in more depth, and develop your critical thinking skills by discussing ideas and raising questions. It is important you take an active role, but this can be daunting. Below are some tips for getting the most out of seminars.

What is a seminar?

A seminar is a small group session which will probably happen once a week for each of your modules. Seminars support your lectures and allow you to explore the week's topic in more depth.

Content and format of seminars will vary from subject to subject. For example:

- A seminar in English Literature will probably be a group discussion of a novel, poem or play
- A seminar in Mathematics may involve trying to solve a mathematical problem as a group
- A seminar in Education Studies could involve reading and critiquing a policy document or debating an educational issue

Some seminars may involve one student per week giving a presentation to the group, which could then be followed by a question and answer session or a discussion.

What might you be asked to do in advance?

Most tutors set some reading or a task to do in advance of the seminar. It is important you do this and arrive at the seminar prepared. This will help you to feel more confident and enable you to participate fully.

Be pro-active in finding out what you need to do to prepare for each seminar. Tasks or required reading may be posted on Canvas and it may be up to you to seek them out.

How can you prepare?

- Look at the seminar topic in advance and consider what thoughts you already have.
- Read the set text or do the pre-seminar activity, and note your response – questions, thoughts, criticisms.
- Look back at your lecture notes and jot down questions, comments, and things you'd like to discuss.
- What are the links between the set reading, the lecture, and the seminar activity? Try to anticipate what might be explored and come up with something you could contribute.

What about during the seminar itself?

- Be brave and participate. The more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.
- It is natural to feel nervous about speaking in front of your seminar group or sharing your views. Remember that seminars are not necessarily about getting the right answers and having perfect ideas. They are about experimenting, taking risks, raising questions. If you don't venture your thoughts, you will miss out on that whole process.
- Remember that other people may be nervous too, and you are all at the same level in your studies, wanting to learn as much as possible. Your tutor also wants you to learn, and will appreciate your input in the seminar.

- Try being the first to speak! This will get your first contribution out of the way, and it will make you feel good to be the one to get the discussion started.
- Listen to others. Nerves can sometimes make you focus only on the thing you want to say. Make sure you're also listening to what others are saying. Be flexible and move with the discussion. You can learn a lot from other people, and from the act of discussing and debating.
- Seminars are a chance to test out your arguments on a live audience who will respond to and develop your points. This will also help with assignment writing.

How can I make sure I have learned something?

- Reflect on the seminar afterwards. Try keeping a journal to help you record and consider what you have learned. If your seminars involve practical activities, reflecting on them can be extremely useful. Always strive to see the link between theory and practice.