

Essentials of Being a Tutor in Informatics



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Schedule



- What are the responsibilities of a tutor?
- Why are tutorials important for students?
- What should be the steps of preparing for a tutorial?
- What are the possible activities in a tutorial?
- Some practical suggestions
- How can we get a sense of how well we are doing as tutors?

What are the responsibilities of a tutor?



Take a few minutes to discuss your responsibilities in small groups...

Tutor Responsibilities (Informatics Teaching Support Policy)



- Preparation + delivery of tutorial from material
- Taking attendance
- Answering to student queries
- Providing oral feedback/feedforward to students

Tutor Responsibilities (Policy for the recruitment, support and development of T&Ds)



- You are expected to carry out work which is in line with your job description, pay grade, time allocated.
- For development, you may be given limited tasks which are not applicable to your grade; the course organiser (CO) will provide supervision and feedback.
- **Pastoral support: direct students to more specialised sources (e.g. student support officers).**
- You must not start work until provided with formal induction and cleared to do so by Teaching Support
- You must attend mandatory training/ complete Learn module.

Tutor Responsibilities (Policy for the recruitment, support and development of T&Ds)- Marking



- The CO is responsible for supporting and overseeing any assessment and duties, including briefing you on process
- The CO will ensure that appropriate moderation processes are in place and that you are informed about them; more robust moderation in your case.

Tutor Responsibilities (Inf Teaching Support Policy)



- Monitoring your hours of work and submitting online weekly timesheets to Inf Student Services (ISS)
- **2 * tutorial hours (to include 1 h preparation for each tutorial) + hours for other roles + hours in Inf training = hours paid**
- If you think you might exceed your allocated hours, raise this with the course lecturer who will report to the ISS
- **DO NOT work extra hours until you get permission from the ISS (normally for max 15% extra) as you may not get paid for them!**

Why are tutorials important for students?



In small groups, discuss the advantages tutorials bring, both in general and in comparison with lectures and labs

Why are tutorials important for students?



- Differences to lectures:
 - Practical, active learning
 - Learning by mistakes, discovery, practice, problem solving
 - Help to consolidate and enhance understanding
 - Chance to think critically, formulate questions
 - Chance to ask questions and get feedback
 - Develop critical and analytical thinking, communication skills, interaction and cooperation with peers, team work
 - Address personal and group needs
- Differences to labs:
 - Usually less individual, but more group feedback
 - Often first chance to practice notions on paper and carry out design work before implementing in lab
- Tutor approachable (enthusiastic, close in age, has time for questions), even role model

What should be the steps of preparing for a tutorial?



Take a few minutes to describe to your neighbour how you prepare/would prepare for:

- Your first tutorial
- Any other tutorial

Some steps for preparing for your first tutorial

- Understand the course aims, objectives and requirements from the course website or Learn
- Clarify your roles and responsibilities
- Participate to the initial briefing session
- Get to know the structure of the course team and who to approach for different problems; speak to the teaching support team if unsure
- Check with the CO and student support team about students who may need special attention and have learning adjustments.
- Read the “Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy” and about mainstreaming learning adjustments (see references)
- Find out how to get in touch with technical support, if needed
- Identify fire exits/notices, emergency phone numbers, first aiders, rules and regulations, risk assessment forms and processes; run through “house keeping” before each lab
- Read “Evacuating disabled people” from the references

Some steps for preparing for a tutorial



- Familiarise yourself with the instructions, aims and objectives of the tutorial, other relevant material (lectures, other reading)
- Attempt the tasks yourself, and contact the course team with any questions; sometimes sample solutions are provided
- Participate to briefing sessions or training, where appropriate

Some steps for preparing for a tutorial



- Important to make a plan for the tutorial, including activities and time allocation, considering e.g.:
 - Your perceived difficulty of the tasks (you may propose tackling them in different order than in instructions)
 - The number and level of the students
 - Previously identified difficulties that they had
 - Alternatives if students have other suggestions or things do not go as planned
 - Some buffer time to be safe
- Also plan how to support the students by thinking of possible questions, ways of explaining things, examples, resources, potential challenging situations (e.g. students not preparing, dominating students)

What are the possible activities in a tutorial?



Take a few minutes to describe to your neighbour the different activities that you may conduct in:

- Your first tutorial
- Any other tutorial

Possible activities in your first tutorial



- For students: first impressions are very important!
- For you: important to know your students, consider their background and interests
- **Useful to:**
 - Get to know the group, and get them to know each other
 - Explain purposes of the tutorials, why attendance is important
 - Explain roles and responsibilities
 - Explain the importance of preparation
 - Set out any ground rules
 - Get feedback on how the sessions would be run

Possible activities in a tutorial



- **Taking attendance (now mandatory!)**
- **Outlining plan for session**, open to questions/comments
- **Working on the board** : only if short revision of theory necessary, or important common or interesting problem
- **Grouping students** to help each other and encourage interaction; afterwards can merge, swap, plenary discussion, turns, etc.
- **Student board work/acting as 'scribe**
- **Improvisation** for explaining relevant new ideas

Possible activities in a tutorial



- **Winding up:** session summary, pointers for preparation
- Quiet word with students who need more help
- Feeding back any observations to course team

Some practical suggestions



- **Useful to ask students for opinion about the plan,** and be flexible to changing it according to their needs
- **Don't do a mini lecture!** Use the whiteboard only when necessary, for short explanations, and involve students
- Consider offering time for preparation, especially for more difficult tasks, rather than putting students on the spot
- Balance the need to make students interact (e.g. in groups) with the time constraints
- Keep track of time by giving students deadlines for working on each task and announcing when time is almost over
- Use a positive and encouraging tone in your feedback

Some practical suggestions



- Don't provide solutions, but guide students in reaching them themselves!
- Listen first! Wait for answers!
- Prompt to check understanding and progress
- Repeat, rephrase, break down questions/ ask students to explain or rephrase
- Use visuals/different material in explanation
- **Be mindful of learning adjustments!**
- Treat students equally
- Try to encourage, motivate and inspire
- Be honest about not knowing the answer to a question, promise to look it up
- It's never a stupid question!

Some practical suggestions



- **Be friendly and approachable:** students should feel encouraged to ask you questions
- **Express enthusiasm** about the subject
- **Be understanding** if students tell you about their difficulties, relate them to your own
- Take time to chat informally with the students, to see how they are getting on
- **Show empathy to personal problems**, and direct students to their CO, personal tutor or student support officers
- **Be strict about course requirements and ground rules!**

In case of an emergency...



- Remain calm!
- Take immediate action to remove danger and prevent further danger
- Avoid becoming a casualty yourself
- Summon help
- Note and report hazards and incidents for follow up
- Knowing the needs of any of your students who have disabilities, offer appropriate help in their evacuation (see “Evacuating disabled people” from the references)

How can we get a sense of how well we are doing as tutors?



- Informal feedback can be obtained by:
 - Chatting informally with students before/after session
 - Scrutinising faces- have they understood?
 - Observing preparation, motivation, attitude
 - Checking attendance rates, coursework marks
- Formal feedback can be obtained from:
 - The students (questionnaires, group discussions, quizzes, etc.)
 - Colleagues (observation, mentoring, discussing plans, etc.)
 - Self (diary, notes, pro formas, etc.)
- Important to get feedback through different means, and not just once

In a future session (Week 3), we will...



- Think of how you could teach your students basic problem solving skills
- Think of methods that you could use for encouraging interaction in your tutorial
- Discuss how you could tackle some frequent challenging situations

Important contacts



- Teaching support team: teaching-support@inf.ed.ac.uk
- Student support team: inf-sst@inf.ed.ac.uk

Resources



- [Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators](#)
- [Informatics Teaching Support](#)
- [Informatics Teaching Support Staff Policy](#)
- [Informatics Teaching Support training webpage](#)
- [Informatics Student Support](#)
- On learning adjustments:
 - The [“Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy”](#)
 - [Disability Service Implementing adjustments for students](#)
 - [Mainstreaming learning adjustments](#)
- [“Evacuating disabled people”](#), especially the Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan

Resources



- “**Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook**” [chapter 4](#) (“Problem solving classes”)
- “**Tutorial teaching- Problem solving classes**” material on the [“IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn](#)
- IAD [orientation](#) and [enhanced](#) courses:
 - “**Effective Tutoring Introduction**”- Wed 12 Sep
 - “**Tutoring in the Sciences**”- Wed 26 Sep
 - “**Enhancing Tutorials**”- Wed 17 Oct