Essentials of Being a Tutor in Informatics

CRISTINA ADRIANA ALEXANDRU
CRISTINA.ALEXANDRU@ED.AC.UK
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...
What are the responsibilities of a tutor? (Informatics Teaching Support Policy)

- Preparation + delivery of tutorial from material
- Taking attendance
- Answering to student queries
- Providing oral feedback to students/feedforward during the scheduled tutorial
Changes to University Documentation

- The “Code of Practice on Tutoring and Demonstrating” (CoP) included clear responsibilities for tutors
- CoP recently replaced by a “Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators”
- This policy focuses on university and school responsibilities, and has very little on your responsibilities
- The implementation of the policy will be phased, with full implementation expected in 2018/19
- The responsibilities from the CoP still common sense, so I will still describe them
What are the responsibilities of a tutor? (old CoP)

- Take teaching and related duties seriously
- Participate to **briefing sessions/training** that you and course organiser (CO) decided is appropriate
- **At the lab:**
  - **Be on time!** Notify if need to miss/rearrange lab
  - Take note of and report **attendance (now required for all years)**
  - Complete any **assessment duties** by agreed deadlines
  - Refer students who approach you for help on other course aspects to other members of course team (**know the team!**)
  - **Limited pastoral role** as convenient first point of contact
  - No obligation to provide help outside formal contact hours
• Marking the work of someone in whom you have a strong personal interest is not permitted
• Any marks that you assign are preliminary, to be checked by the Board of Examiners
• The course organiser (CO) is responsible for checking marking standard and consistency between markers
• For formal assignments, the CO will provide marking criteria and requirements for special circumstances
• You will be informed about the required amount, type of feedback, and requirements and deadlines for submitting marks and feedback
Pastoral responsibilities (old CoP)

- Respond sensitively to personal matters, be discrete
- Do NOT promise absolute confidentiality, advise about need to consult another staff member (e.g. Personal Tutor - PT)
- If there may be implications on student performance, encourage him/her to contact the CO and/or PT.
- The CO/ITO will inform you about students with disabilities for whom additional support has been agreed
- Not appropriate to get involved with students on matters not directly related to coursework-> be aware of PT system and other available support
Relevant points in new policy

- You are expected to carry out work which is in line with your job description and pay grade.
- CO may occasionally request you, for development reasons, to do limited tasks which are not applicable to your grade, in which case he/she will provide supervision and feedback.
- **Pastoral support: direct students to more specialised sources of pastoral support.**
- You must not start work until you were provided with formal induction on core aspects of your role.
- You must attend mandatory training.
Relevant points in new policy
- Marking duties -

- 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.
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
- 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
- Check with the CO/ITO about students who may need special attention
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
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
• **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.

PLUS suggestions from ‘Essentials of being a demonstrator’
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

Also see slides of ‘Gathering Feedback’ workshop in Sem 1
In a future session (Week 4), we will...

- Discuss about possible challenges in tutorials, in terms of:
  - grouping students and room arrangements
  - explaining things
  - students not behaving as expected
  - time management
- Propose ways to tackle them, and learn from one another’s experience
- Get advice from a more experienced tutor/demonstrator
Resources

- UoE old “Code of practice on tutoring and demonstrating” and “Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators”
- Informatics Teaching Support Policy
- Resources on Informatics homepage – Staff Intranet – Student Services – Teaching Support – Training
- Slides of “What Makes a Good Tutor and Demonstrator in Informatics?”, “Supporting Students” and “Gathering Feedback” sessions in Sem 1
- “Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook” chapter 4 (“Problem solving classes”)
Resources

- “Tutorial teaching - Problem solving classes” material on the “IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn
- IAD course “Enhancing Tutorials” - Wed 14 Feb