Learning from lectures and seminars
VALUE MaP
1/10/2016

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Aims of the workshop

- To understand why lectures and seminars are used in HE
- To help develop practical techniques for effective learning from lectures and seminars
Discussion

- What difficulties do you have with lectures and seminars?
- If you have attended a series of lectures and seminars in the past, what ‘good practice’ have you developed?
What are lectures?

- They are a formal opportunity for one expert figure [often an academic member of staff in HE] to share ‘core’ information widely
- They provide the essential information about a module: ‘core’ knowledge
- They provide this in a logical sequence
What are lectures?

- They prepare you for parallel seminars/workshops/lab sessions
- They introduce and evaluate the academic evidence that informs the module
- They present main/alternative views and hypotheses
- They deal with current/contemporary information
What are lectures?

- Because of their size, they are an efficient way of reaching large numbers of people.
- This is especially the case where large numbers of students from different programmes are studying a shared core module e.g. SO336; SO337; EN333.
Typical problems

- Going into the lecture unprepared
- Fall in concentration after first 15 mins.
- Trying to note down *everything*
- Conversely, not taking enough notes
- Making lecture notes too ‘dense’ on the page
- Untidy lecture notes
- Lecture notes that are not filed away
Preparation for lectures

- Be on time!
- Don’t miss them!
- Be physically fit and alert
- Map lectures across your programme of study
- Put them in context against
  - Seminar topics
  - Course and module outline
    - Learning
  - Reading for the module/subject
  - Assessment targets
Preparation for lectures

- Think about them in advance
- Carry out essential preparatory reading/tasks
  - Preliminary reading
  - *Checking the previous lecture*
  - Anticipating key content
    - 3 part structure
    - Concept trees
Preparation for lectures

- **3 part structure** – main stages of a lecture (generic)
  - Introduction/explanation
  - Development of ‘argument’ in stages
  - Concluding overview/explanation of next lecture

- Try and anticipate what will be covered in each stage

- Look for visual and verbal ‘clues’

- **Concept tree** (subject-specific)
  - Think about the main concepts behind the lecture
  - Consider their sequence and relationship
  - Draw up a chart/tree diagram to show this
Concept tree: example, Psychology

Learning theory & Behavioural Psychology

Conditioning =

Classical (Pavlov)

Operant (Skinner)
Active participation

- Practice/think about your listening skills!
- Practice/think about your note taking skills
- Use notes creatively
- Learn to listen and write at the same time
- Record some lectures?
  - With permission
  - Streamed lectures: KLS; now to be extended across the University
Active notetaking

- Explore techniques
- But once you have found those that work, stick to them!
- You need to get down information quickly and accurately
- Adapt your techniques accordingly
Active notetaking techniques

- Brain-maps
  - Advantages and disadvantages?
- Rapid-fire bullet points
- SAQs [Self-assessment questions]
- Wide margins
- Layout
- Headings and sub-headings
Active notetaking techniques

- Summary of main points
- Isolating key words
- Underlining key words
- Colour
- Highlighter
- Topic headings
Active notetaking techniques

- Notes template?
  - May aid concentration
  - Gives overall structure & summary
  - Aids processing
  - Gives a focus to follow-on work
  - Aids record-keeping/filing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module/lecture/date/time/details:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of main points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further/additional reading:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Active listening skills

- Listen for pace/volume/tone
  - **Pace**
    - May speed up towards key stages/closure
  - **Volume**
    - Used for emphasis
    - Used for key junctions/stages
  - **Tone**
    - Affirmative
    - Ironic/comical
    - Sceptical etc
Active listening skills

- Check NVC
- Non-verbal communication
  - Gestures
  - Emphasis
    - Hands
- Position
  - At the front of the lecture
  - Around the dais/lectern
Active listening skills

- Listen for key stages of a lecture
  - Introduction/aims
  - Links/summaries
  - Signpost statements
  - Where the lecturer departs from a prepared script
  - Closure
Active questions

- Don’t be shy!
- Formulate questions in advance
- Re-phrase for clarification
- Ask and listen
- Confirm you have heard the reply to your question
- Keep making notes
- Question peers afterwards
Good practice after the lecture

- **Immediately**
  - Go over your notes
  - Tidy and revise – brief
  - Talk to peers

- **Later on**
  - Tidy and revise
  - Follow up SAQs
  - Files notes away systematically
Good practice after the lecture

- Make sure lecture notes are referenced
  - Date
  - Number
  - Cross-reference
  - Title
  - Module links
Good practice after the lecture

- Re-use your lecture notes
  - For active revision
  - For assignment preparation
- Remember the golden rule of lecture notes: *if you re-examined them after a gap of some months, would you understand them?*
Seminars are smaller **discussion** groups.

Knowledge grows from this discussion.

- [The etymology of the term ‘seminar’ relates to seeds/growing]

Like lectures, they cover the essential topics within a module.

They ‘unpack’ lecture topics in more detail.

They map the module, and its learning outcomes, chronologically.

They rely, primarily, on oral communication.
What are seminars?

- The majority of the points relating to lectures apply, therefore
- E.g. having a template/record system; taking notes from an oral source; maintaining concentration...
- If you adjust and apply the tips and techniques suggested for lectures, you will be successful in seminars
Seminars versus lectures

- However, seminars have a freer agenda and allow for greater **participation**
- Two core aspects of the seminar, therefore:
  - Covering core information
  - Allowing participants to discuss and clarify this information
- The key difference is the element of discussion
- The more you put in, the more you (and others!) will get out
Suggestions for enhancing discussion

- Make sure you **think** about the issues your reading and preparation cover
- How do these relate to the module outcomes?
- Before the seminar, do a condensed version of your notes
  - Large post-it; record card?
- Think about any questions you would like to raise in advance
Getting the most out of seminars

- **Use** your preliminary notes during the seminar
- Take fresh notes as the seminar unfolds
- Practice active listening
- As with lectures, there will be an introduction + discussion + closure/summary/re-direction structure
- Pay particular attention to summary points at the end
Participation

- Try and participate
- If you are nervous about speaking, try and obtain some guidance on presentations and oral skills (SLAS)
- VERY QUICKLY jot down the key points of any question you want to raise in advance
- The trick is to put, on paper, a rapid ‘rehearsal’ of the question itself!
Participation

- Think before you speak
- Short, timely, relevant contributions are welcomed by the Seminar Leader
- Long, sprawling, contributions which have not been thought out are not!
Seminar papers

- Full discussion within context of presentation skills etc.
- Short paper, c.10 mins, delivered by different students each week
  - Plan approx. 5 bullet points, 1 per 2 min. discussion point = 10mins
- Leads discussion
- Read short script or talk from bullet points/index cards etc.
- This is *spoken*, not written communication!
GOOD LUCK...

- For getting the most from lectures and seminars...
The Student Learning Advisory Service
www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning