Learning from lectures and seminars
VALUE MaP
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SHAUN THEOBALD
THE STUDENT LEARNING ADVISORY SERVICE
SRT@KENT.AC.UK
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. 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
  - 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
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
- Use Kent Player, where available
  - Recordings on Moodle Module Pages
  - Available to students registered for the module
- Use recordings to review/revisit lecture
- Participation becomes an on-going process
Kent Player

- [https://www.kent.ac.uk/elearning/kentplayer/students.html](https://www.kent.ac.uk/elearning/kentplayer/students.html)
- Information, advice and guidance on Kent Player
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>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of main points:</td>
<td>Follow-on questions/SAQs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further/additional reading:</td>
<td></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
- Note that, within a module, there is an ‘organic’ link between the lecture and the seminar they work in tandem
As will be shown, seminars are designed to develop discussion and intellectual ‘growth’.

They are more individual, detailed and participatory.

Simplistically, lectures ‘prepare the ground’ and cover the field generally; seminars allow more detailed exploration.

Whilst it is important/helpful to do some reading before lectures...

It is **essential** that you do some specific, **detailed reading** before seminars!
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.

There is also a chance to clarify issues.
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
- **Use** the seminar reading to prepare yourself for the seminar
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 = 10 mins
- 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