# Managing tutorial dynamics

Tutorials provide opportunities for students to actively engage in discussions with their peers and tutors. Some students, however, will be more confident and vocal than others in this particular teaching context. Below are some ideas to help you manage tutorial dynamics and so enable all students to make the most of these learning opportunities.

## Clarify expectations about tutorial participation

What makes a tutorial discussion effective might not be clear to your students, particularly those new to the tutorial format. Clarifying your expectations for ‘good practice’ in tutorial discussions helps students to understand how your tutorials will work; for example, stating the importance of listening to peers' contributions and not interrupting or talking over each other. Explaining when and how you will be asking for students’ contributions and that you are interested in hearing from all students are important elements to ease any anxieties students may have about tutorials. This could be achieved, for example, by emailing your tutorial group prior to meeting with them to introduce yourself and to outline your expectations, or by setting aside time to discuss this in the first tutorial.

## Allow students to contribute to tutorials in different ways

Giving students different roles for part of the tutorial can help to equalise participation. Roles could include:

• Posing questions

• Providing a counter-argument

• Summarising the discussion so far

• Taking notes for the tutorial group

• Linking to previous topics

• Taking it in turns to attempt a problem on the whiteboard (or equivalent) with the help of the rest of the tutorial group

## Provide thinking time

Allowing thinking time after asking a question gives students an opportunity to formulate their answer. It can be tempting to fill these silences, but try to resist, and instead allow students this time to consolidate their thinking, to construct questions and/or to check their response to a question before sharing it verbally with others. Another method is using ‘think-pair-share’ which involves giving students a minute to think/write down ideas in response to a question then asking students to talk in pairs, comparing their ideas and points where they agree or disagree before sharing more widely with the whole group.

## Facilitate student-student interactions

It is not uncommon to find that students in the same tutorial have explored different aspects of the tutorial work (e.g. read different research papers), or that one student has excelled in an area of the tutorial work that others found challenging. You can draw on these differences as part of tutorial peer learning, for example by inviting students to explain to their tutorial partner(s) how they approached a question or topic before opening up to a group discussion. When teaching online, you may find that you need to provide more encouragement for students to talk to one other, as well as talking with you. Consider sharing discussion prompts and ask students to discuss these with their tutorial group in advance of the tutorial, and then draw on these peer-peer discussions as part of your tutorial.

## Encourage active participation

You may experience tutorials where one or two students are dominating the discussions, making it more difficult for others to contribute. It is important to acknowledge these students’ engagement, but also to provide opportunities for others to participate. Try asking if anyone else has anything to add, or say that you'd like to hear from someone who hasn't yet contributed to the discussions. You could ask students to discuss their responses to a specific question in pairs before calling on less vocal students to participate in the group discussion. It is important to be aware that being quiet in tutorials does not necessarily mean that a student has not understood something and/or is unwilling to participate.