TUTORING AND DEMONSTRATING—TRICKS AND CHALLENGES

Cristina Adriana Alexandru
Cristina.Alexandru@ed.ac.uk
IN ESSENTIALS, WE HAVE SEEN...

- The responsibilities of demonstrators and tutors
- Why labs and tutorials are important
- The steps of preparing for a lab/tutorial
- Possible activities in labs/tutorials
- How we can gather feedback on how well we are doing as demonstrators or tutors
Schedule

- What makes for a good demonstrator/provider of explanations, feedback, support? Strategies, tips and tricks
- DOs and DON’T’s of explanations and feedback
- How can we check for understanding?
- Dealing with possible challenges as a demonstrator
- DOs and DON’Ts of tutorial activities
- How can we encourage equal participation and interaction in tutorials?
- Dealing with possible challenges in tutorials
WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD DEMONSTRATOR?

Watch 2 videos on good and bad demonstrating and take notes...
SOME TIPS AND TRICKS

- Actively identify students who need help
- 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
- Treat students equally
- Be friendly and approachable (but how much?)
- Try to encourage, motivate and inspire
- It’s never a stupid question!
DOs and DON'Ts of explanations and feedback

As split into 2 small groups, discuss and write on poster paper what you think are the DO’s and DON’Ts of explanation and feedback

Visit the other group’s poster
**EXPLANATIONS- SOME DOs**

- Discuss how a question should be interpreted, and what is expected
- Discuss problem solving strategies, and the thought process (the why)
- Provide (motivating!) real-world examples
- Watch faces, or probe for understanding
- Be prepared to repeat, use simple words, explain things in several ways (e.g. text, diagrams, code)
- If you get carried away, remember to stop and ask for contributions
EXPLANATIONS- SOME DON’TS

- Don’t dominate, and do a mini lecture! Know when to stop, encourage contributions!
- Don’t go too fast!
- Don’t assume prior knowledge!
- Don’t skip steps just because they are “easy”!
- Don’t just provide the solution!
- Don’t be afraid to acknowledge your mistakes, or that you do not know an answer!
**Feedback - Some DOs**

- Keep a positive, encouraging tone (e.g. ‘you’re almost there’, ‘it’s not that difficult when you try it, you’ll see’)
- If something is incorrect let the student down gently, helping him identify the omission himself through questions; useful to ask class!
- Try to find something positive in everything (e.g. ‘good try’ instead of ‘this is rubbish’)
- Praise students who do well
- Treat students equally

**Student mistakes help identify common misconceptions**
FEEDBACK- SOME DON’Ts

- Don’t make fun of or put down a student if his/her solution is incorrect!
- Don’t act dismissive, or show frustration!
- Don’t just point to course requirements or material, but try to get the student going!
- Don’t let one or two students use up all your time
RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS

- First check your understanding- ask them to repeat/rephrase question, or rephrase it yourself
- Ask students to talk you through their progress and what could help from material
- Discuss steps and point them to material
- Give out clues to encourage finding solution
- Give enough explanations to get them going
- Examples and using simple words is essential
- Go back to check progress of students who had problems
YOUR ATTITUDE

- **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 or personal tutor
- **Be strict about course requirements and ground rules!**
HOW CAN WE CHECK IF A STUDENT NEEDS HELP?

Brainstorm strategies to check whether a student:

- Has questions
- Has understood your explanation
CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING- SOME TIPS AND TRICKS

- Asking “How are you getting on?”/”Do you need help?”/“Any questions?”/“Is this clear?”/”Have you understood?” does not always give true reply
- Students may be confused, too shy to ask, embarrassed, or only understand superficially/think they understand.
- Ask them probing questions
- Use closed questions
- Give them another task to solve to prove their understanding
Some frequent challenges as a demonstrator

In groups, propose solutions to the following challenges:

- A needy/demanding student takes up a lot of your time and hinders you from working with other students

- A student is not engaging with the task and is disruptive to others
DEALING WITH A PARTICULARLY DEMANDING STUDENT

- Investigate **possible reasons**: 
  - **Disability/particular needs**: consult CO, discuss with student about what helps them.
  - **Language problems**: speak clearly, slower, rephrase, use visual aids, if necessary refer to CO or advise on English training courses.
  - **Not enough preparation**: stress its importance, help to get started, point to material.
  - **Attention-seeking behaviour**: may need encouragement, making it interesting or more challenging.
DEALING WITH A DISRUPTIVE STUDENT

- **Ask for motivation:**
  - Task is too easy: ask him to explain why; give additional tasks
  - Task is too difficult and he has given up: offer advice, explain relevance
  - Lack of interest: check why (relation to other courses, covered in the past?), explain relevance, make it interesting by giving practical real-life examples and relating to your commercial work/research, be enthusiastic
- Explain 1-1 that you cannot focus
- Bottom line: ask him to leave, report to CO
Let’s remind ourselves of possible activities during a tutorial/lab

- Individual work
- Grouping students
- You working on the board
- Student working on the board (tutorials)
- Plenary discussion (tutorials)
- Brainstorming (tutorials)
- Student presentations (tutorials)

...
Dos and DON’Ts of tutorial activities

As split into small groups, discuss and write on poster paper what you think are the DO’s and DON’Ts of different tutorial activities.

Visit the other group’s poster.
INDIVIDUAL WORK

DOs:

- Use it for reflexion, reviewing material, generating questions, checking understanding, preparation for further steps.
- Approach students who seem to have difficulties
- Move around the class (useful for shyer students)
- Use probing to set the scene and get them going

DON’Ts:

- Don’t let one or two students use all your time
GROUPING STUDENTS

DOs:
- Use it for encouraging interaction by helping each other, comparing/ sharing strategies/ solutions, practicing communication skills, getting to know each other.
- Useful for shy, weaker students, non-native speakers
- Go round the class to check progress of each group
- Within the group approach shyer student
- Group dominating students together
- Can later merge, swap, plenary discussion, take turns
GROUPING STUDENTS

DON’Ts:
- Allow the development of ‘freeloaders’-> re-allocate
- Allow discussion to stray too much from the topic-> check on progress, remind of ground rules
- Speak with only one, more dominant, student in the group
- Let one or two groups use all your time
You working on the board

Dos:
- Use it when a short theoretical revision necessary, there is a common/interesting problem, improvisation.
- Plan when to use it, how to use the board.
- Let students choose the problems.
- Ask students for contributions, prompts if necessary.
- Allow students to interrupt with questions at any point.
- Explain not only what, but why you are doing something—help develop problem solving skills.
- Write legibly, be organised and schematic!
YOU WORKING ON THE BOARD

DON’Ts:

- Turn your explanation into a mini lecture! Get students to take over as soon as possible.
- Stay with your back to the students for long
- Write long excerpts
- Cover the board
- Rush and write illegibly
- Forget to check faces for understanding
How can we encourage interaction in tutorials?

In small groups, propose strategies for encouraging interaction, thinking of:

- Non-verbal communication
- Organising the group
ENCOURAGING INTERACTION- SOME TIPS AND TRICKS

- Glance round the group, watch faces and reactions and respond to them by calling people to contribute
- Do not fall into the temptation to give out the answer, but ask for opinion or re-direct
- Ask others for agreement on wrong, but also right ideas
- Do not correct or act judgemental!
- Be personal- call students by name when you refer to them
- Group students
- Use the round robin technique
**Some frequent challenges as a tutor**

In groups, propose solutions to the following challenges:

- *Students not preparing ahead of time*

- *Some students being hesitant to participating*

- *Some students dominating the discussion*
DEALING WITH STUDENTS WHO DON’T PREPARE

- Find out reason
- If real reason (e.g. coursework deadline), be understanding
- Explain the importance of preparation: for assessment, passing the course, pre-requisite to other courses, relevance for specialism
- Do not encourage non-preparation by providing summaries or solutions yourself
- Raise interest in the material by explaining its relevance
DEALING WITH HESITANT STUDENTS

- Encourage discussion and interaction by grouping students to work on a question
- Pass by groups to check work and provide feedback
- Round robin to explain their group’s solution, with a different speaker each time
- Be friendly, approach shy students individually with encouraging comments
- Encourage interaction right from the start
DEALING WITH DOMINATING STUDENTS

- They are important assets, important not to alienate them
- Put them in common group
- Round robin to also give others opportunities to contribute
- Sit near them, reduce non-verbal encouragement
- If too insistent and raising less relevant points, explain importance to pass to next point to keep to schedule, and discuss remaining comments after session.
Resources

- Resources on Informatics homepage – Staff Intranet – Student Services – Teaching Support – Training

- “Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook” chapters 5 (“Demonstrating”) and 4 (“Problem solving classes”)

- “Laboratory demonstrating”, “Tutorial teaching- Problem solving classes” and “Open discussion classes” material on the “IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn

- Future IAD courses on tutoring:
  - “Enhancing Tutorials”- Wed 19 Oct