

WORKING WITH TUTORS

GUIDELINES FOR STAFF



Working with tutors – guidelines for staff

1 AIMS

This guide is for Victoria University staff who work with tutors or have any responsibility for appointing them or supporting their work. The document should be read in conjunction with the policy and procedures for tutors issued in 2018. Available at the University policy website: <https://intranet.victoria.ac.nz/staff/learning-teaching/quality-assurance/academic-policies>

This guide provides information relating to:

- The role of tutors in undergraduate teaching
- The different aspects of working with tutors
- The resources, support and training available for tutors.

2 TUTOR/DEMONSTRATOR ROLES

Tutors are responsible for a significant and substantial portion of the undergraduate teaching at Victoria and are an important conduit between lecturers and students. As such they play a vital role in students' learning in many courses particularly in first and second year.

The University's policy and procedures for tutors provide definitions of the terms 'tutor' 'demonstrator' and 'senior tutor'. The expectations for each role are outlined below; this is a general list and there may be variances between schools/faculties. The expectations for each role must be clearly defined in the relevant role description and letter of offer.

Tutors

- Facilitate group discussions between students (20 maximum) in small group teaching environments;
- Reinforce content taught in the lectures through examples and discussion;
- Encourage the use and application of concepts covered elsewhere in the course (e.g. in the reading, in lectures, in assessments);
- Provide feedback to support students' learning;
- Provide support for students by being a contact for course and some non-course related (see later section on supporting students) issues;
- Marking some student assessments under supervision and with moderation (see assessment)
- Administrative duties relating to recording students' attendance, assessment feedback and grades.

Senior tutors

- Perform the role of tutor (as above)
- Administration of tutorial processes;
- Arrange and convene tutor meetings;
- Provide support for tutors;
- Facilitate contact between teaching staff and tutors.

Demonstrators

- Supervise lab-based activities;
- Work with small groups of students to facilitate understanding and completion of lab activities;
- Support students' learning of course content through lab activities;
- Provide feedback and mark in-lab assessments as required;
- Undertake marking of course work under supervision and with moderation (see assessment);
- Provide support for students by being a contact for course and some non-course related (see later section on supporting students) issues.

Tutors/demonstrators should **not** be expected to:

- Teach important new content from the course;
- Mark students' work without guidance and moderation (see assessment);
- Take responsibility for any decisions relating to the students' performance, extensions, aegrotats or continuance in a course;
- Perform other duties that have not been included in the 'hours of work'; e.g. attend lectures unpaid.

3 RECRUITING TUTORS

Recruitment of tutors and demonstrators must be undertaken in accordance with the guidelines provided by HR <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/staff/human-resources/agreements/tutors-and-other-teaching-and-research-support-staff/appointment-of-tutors-and-other-teaching-staff-and-research-support-staff-guidelines.pdf>.

4 COURSE COORDINATORS

The tutor/demonstrator role is a very important one within a course. It is therefore important that the course coordinator is involved in the recruitment process, either by conducting interviews in person or in collaboration with a tutor coordinator. Course coordinators should also expect to meet with tutors and to be involved in preparing them for their tutorial work. This may happen in a variety of ways (see section later) but the relationship between course coordinators and tutors is a very important one as it provides context and coherence to the whole course.

5 SUPPORTING TUTORS/DEMONSTRATORS

Tutoring and demonstrating are key roles within the University's teaching provision. Given that tutors may be inexperienced in working with students, it is important that they receive support that will help them provide the most effective learning experiences for their students. You can support tutors by:

5.1 Tutor meetings

Ensure tutors understand what the students are learning, particularly if they have not taken the same course themselves. It would be costly and impractical for all tutors to attend every

lecture, but they should be provided with the materials and time to allow them to prepare for their tutorials.

Tutor meetings are an opportunity for tutors to discuss the aims of the tutorials they will teach and to think about how they teach them. It can be helpful to allocate some time in the meeting to the process of teaching, rather than just the content. For example, students in the tutorial might be expected to answer questions relating to set reading. The lecturer begins the meeting with the tutor by providing some short notes about the answers to the questions, some references for the ideas to be covered as well as some pointers about places where students commonly misinterpret or misunderstand the content. Tutors discuss the answers to the questions and note where they need to check out their own understanding. The meeting might then continue with a discussion about how best to organise the tutorial time. Lecturers may prefer that the tutors do this themselves, in which case the tutors should have the opportunity to discuss their ideas together and to share previous effective approaches. Alternatively, the lecturer could provide space for open planning of the tutorial time where a group approach is discussed. For example, if the tutorial includes a series of 6 questions for the students, the tutors might decide that the best way to allow for each of the questions to be covered effectively is to get small groups to work on a single question and then feedback to the whole group. Each group might be asked to spend five minutes discussing the answer to one question and to come up with some key 'take home' points in response. Then each group presents their key points to the other groups. The tutor provides feedback and corrects misconceptions. When each group has presented their key points, a larger group discussion follows in which the main ideas are summarised and indications of where further information or ideas can be obtained are discussed.

5.2 Developing ideas for tutorials

Tutors can be an excellent resource for developing tutorial activities. Most of them have had the experience of being in tutorials and know what they find most useful.

Tutors themselves have identified that 'knowing the material' is only one facet of effective tutorials, and that the values of enthusiasm, approachability, encouraging discussion and debate, and creating inclusive learning environments should also be recognised. When discussing teaching with new tutors the importance of these other aspects of teaching should be emphasised and tutors encouraged to consider how they might create the type of learning environment that they value.

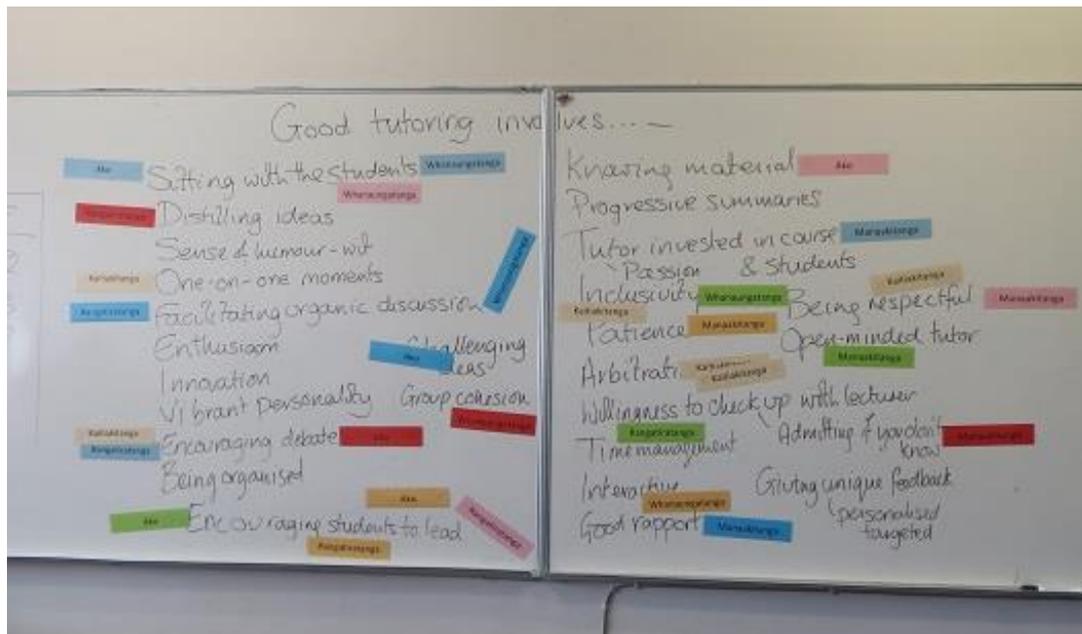


Figure 1: A sample of what tutors at an introductory training session identified as making up an effective tutorial

Course co-ordinators and lecturers can help tutors by spending some time with them thinking about how they can use different activities to address the tutorial content. Some courses provide detailed instructions for each tutorial so that the tutor is effectively following a script of the tutorial. This is a useful approach when consistency between a number of tutors is required or when a particular learning exercise is required. In other cases, tutors are provided with a copy of the course outline and little other information. This approach requires too much preparation on the part of the tutor and often results in inconsistency and misunderstanding. Tutor meetings are an opportunity to discuss the ‘pedagogical approach’, that is the teaching activities in which the content is embedded, for a tutorial.

Planning in this way can help tutors to understand how the tutorial might run. It is also beneficial as it allows tutors to learn from others’ experiences and to share good ideas.

5.3 Understanding a difficult concept

One way to help students to understand a complex idea is to use examples which illustrate the concept in action. Examples could include a newspaper article, a case study or even a photograph. Students can interact with the information and develop their own understanding through sharing ideas and comparison.

Another way to help students to understand that different groups might have different expectations is to allocate the students into groups representing the relevant stakeholders. Each group could be asked to consider how they would define success in relation to the intervention. Students could then discuss how they might collect data relating to these success measures and how they would reconcile the priorities of the different stakeholders to produce an overall conclusion from the intervention.

5.4 Resources for teaching

Tutors will require access to a variety of resources to support their teaching. The school should expect to provide:

- Key texts required for teaching on the course;
- A copy of the course outline/syllabus
- Access to photocopier and printer if required to produce learning materials;
- Whiteboard markers;
- Other relevant materials where needed.

6 MARKING AND FEEDBACK

Many tutors are expected to mark students' work as part of their role. This is a major responsibility and some tutors, particularly those who are still undergraduates, may find it daunting. Training is provided via the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) for all tutors who mark students' written work; however, they will also require support and feedback from tutor supervisors. To enable tutors to mark effectively, the following steps should be undertaken:

- Provide tutors with a marking guide for the assessment. This may be a detailed rubric, where marking criteria are identified and descriptors provided for levels of achievement for each criterion. Alternatively, the guide may include instructions for each element of the piece of work. See page 5 for an example of a marking guide for a lab report.
- Provide tutors with an opportunity to practise marking using the guidelines provided. This might be done using a sample of a previous assignment or by using one to three submitted assignments. Tutors should mark them together and discuss any differences or possible ambiguities in the marking guidelines. The aim is to give all tutors an experience of working with the guidelines and to reduce any anxiety associated with the responsibility of marking students' work.

A sample of part of a marking guide for tutors (Note: the level of detail depends on the type of assessment, but should be sufficient to aid tutor judgement)

Method (worth 3 marks)

Design section: 0.25 marks

- Needs to include that it was a correlational design
- Needs to include predictor variables (maladaptive perfectionism, adaptive perfectionism, procrastination and academic performance).
 - **Give them 0.25 marks** if they include the information above
 - **Give them 0 marks** if they are missing some/all of the information above. Tell them what was missing in your comment for the method section. Likewise, comment if they did something like called our variables independent variables, tell them why that is incorrect in a correlational design.

Participants section: 0.5 marks

- **Give 0.25 marks** for reporting a total of 523 students took part in the study.
- **Give 0.25 marks** for reporting how many males (160) and female (363) participants.

Materials: 1.25 mark (0.5 mark for each scale/measure used and 0.25 for the measure of academic performance)

Students need to describe both scales and the measure of academic performance well for full marks. The description of each scale is worth 0.5 marks.

Descriptions of the scales should include:

- Name of scale
- number of questions on scale,
- range of scale (e.g., 1-5)
- scale anchors (e.g. 1=strongly disagree)
- example of a question from each scale.

Great if they include the citation for the scale too, but don't worry if they don't. I would expect students should be able to do this well given that all relevant info about each questionnaire was given to them on their lab slides!

- **Give 0.5 marks for each scale** if they include most the elements from the list above.
- **Give 0.25 for each scale** if they are missing 2 of the elements from the list
- **Give 0 marks for each scale** if they are missing more than 2 of the elements from the list above.

6.1 Moderation

Moderation can be done in a number of ways. Tutors may be asked to submit a small selection (perhaps three examples) of their marking and feedback to the course co-ordinator or lecturer for checking. Checks should focus on whether the guidelines are being appropriately followed, whether grading is obviously too high or low and the quality of the written feedback written to the student. Alternatively, tutors may be asked to moderate in pairs where at least one of them is an experienced marker.

Tutors should also be encouraged to self-moderate, to check regularly that they are still following the marking guidelines and that they have not become tougher or more lenient over time. This is good practice for tutors but should not be seen as a replacement for moderation by an experienced marker.

Prior to returning work to students, the course coordinator or lecturer should ensure that tutors have marked consistently and that all anomalies (for example, a tutor whose marks are much higher than others) are verified.

6.2 Feedback to Students

Given the high workload associated with marking a large number of essays/reports in a short period of time, tutors are encouraged to give concise and specific written feedback. Tutors can give generic feedback (e.g. on referencing or on particular key ideas) to the whole student group in the form of a list of bullet points or an email, and focus their written feedback on the elements of each student's work that will lead to the greatest improvement in future assignments. The following is an example from an academic paper summary exercise:

Hi John

A few bits missing from this summary but there are some good answers. Reading these papers is much more complicated than it first seems. You may find that you have to read the sections several times to get what they are on about.

When it comes to writing about these for your lab report, read over them again, perhaps looking to see what the researchers have highlighted in the Abstract and making sure you understand it so that you can write it clearly in your own words. Some of the statistics in this paper are a little hard to grasp so see if you can make sense of what is being argued from the text itself.

The key things you should focus on in your report are: what was being compared with what, how they went about collecting data or information about the comparison, what they found and why it is important for your study.

7 PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR TUTORS

Being a tutor can be rewarding but can also be stressful. Tutors usually take their responsibility towards supporting students very seriously and some can become overly concerned about their students' wellbeing as well as their academic success. Stress can be alleviated through regular meetings with tutors where they have an opportunity to share their experiences and concerns. Issues that tutors may raise include:

- How can I get my students to participate in the tutorial?
- How can I deal with a student's behaviour in the tutorial? (for example: non-participation, dominating discussion, rudeness, etc.)
- How can I help students to understand a particular piece of content?
- How can I support a student with an issue which is affecting them? (for example: health problems, relationship problems, international student issues, finances, etc)
- How can I maintain a balance between my course work and tutoring?

Encouraging tutors to share experiences and ideas can be very helpful. It can be useful to set up a file or blog of resources that tutors can refer to.

Occasionally a tutor may have a query or problem that they do not wish to discuss with other tutors. In such circumstances it is important that tutors know who they can address their concerns to. If concerns arise about the management of the course or about another tutor, tutors need to know who they can approach to discuss the problem without fear of future disadvantage.

8 FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

Tutors require student feedback so that they can develop more understanding of the way in which their teaching is supporting students and, if time allows, respond to perceived problems. This information will be useful whether or not tutors intend to undertake more tutoring in the future.

8.1 Formal feedback

The University offers feedback services for tutors using the same online system as for staff. The course co-ordinator is responsible for requesting tutor feedback for the tutors working on their course. Tutors may request feedback from their students via the course co-ordinator. It is recommended that feedback about tutors is collected from students. Once collected, tutors must be given the results of that process by the course coordinator.

8.2 Informal feedback

It is recommended that tutors might also like to collect informal feedback about how their tutorials are going and whether there is anything they need to do to support students' learning. Some examples of how this might be done include:

- Tutors may want to provide students with a couple of questions about what they have learned and what questions they have (see The Tutor Guide for examples of these techniques)
- Tutors may ask students to give them feedback on their understanding of a particular piece of content.

The aim of student feedback is to help tutors to develop their teaching rather than to assess their performance. Tutors should use this information confidentially and should be encouraged to discuss feedback with their course coordinators, their peers, or a member of CAD to get the most benefit from it.

8.2 Observation of tutors

It would be beneficial to both tutors and their course coordinators if their tutoring were observed at some point during the trimester. Ideally, observation should be pre-organised so that tutors know what to expect. The aim of this process is to provide developmental support for tutors rather than to assess their performance. The observer should meet with the tutor in advance to find out what they are going to be doing and whether there is anything specific that feedback should focus on. The observer then attends the tutorial and makes notes in response to the tutor's questions. The tutor and observer meet again later to discuss the teaching and to focus on questions. Examples of good practice or things to consider for the future should also be discussed. Resources on peer observation of teaching are available from CAD, 10 Waiteata Road.

9 CHECKLIST

The following is a checklist developed to help administrators to manage the requirements of appointing and supporting tutors. This can be adapted for your own use.

- If you organise the contract for tutors please ensure that they receive the template letter informing tutors of their requirements, and access to the collective agreement.
 - Contract
 - Link to collective agreement
 - IRD form
 - New employee details form
 - Hours of work
 - Schedule of training
- Monitor and confirm that all tutors have attended the required training
- Work with the course coordinator to ensure tutors undertake an induction process
 - HR
 - Health and safety
 - Teaching and learning expectations
 - Services on campus
 - Troubleshooting (e.g. what to do when ill or personal circumstances require a variation/end of contract).
 - Introduction morning tea for all tutors.
 - End of year 'Tutor Appreciation' Event – organised by Senior/Head Tutors.
- Ensure that tutors have a clearly identified academic supervisor or support person.
- Ensure that tutors are advised of private meeting spaces that can be used for consultation with students.
- Ensure that tutors are introduced to administrative support staff and advised of any relevant administrative processes.
- Ensure that tutors are provided with all relevant resources:
 - designated work spaces
 - swipe cards
 - computers
 - email
 - stationery
 - library access
 - access to photocopiers and printers
- Notify tutors that they can subscribe to relevant email lists, such as the Learning and Teaching list, which will advise them of free events, workshops, training, etc.

- Work with the course coordinator to ensure that tutors are evaluated, as required
- Maintain and update contact details for current tutors.
- Ensure that the school has a process for regularly communicating with tutors
- Maintain an organisational list of tutor details including past experience and pay rates (according to HR guidelines)

Career and Employability

- Work with tutors to provide in-house development opportunities.
- Provide references (written and oral).
- Support career and employability.