



Session

PREPARING TO PARTICIPATE IN LECTURES AND SEMINARS

At the end of this session, international students will be able to:

- Identify why and how to participate in lectures and seminars
- Understand how to prepare for lectures and seminars

How and when to use this material

This is an introductory session best used as an intervention when lecturers want to introduce students for the first time to what happens in seminars, what is expected of students in terms of participating in seminars and lectures, and when lecturers want to start building students' skills in interacting in groups. It precedes the more advanced session on **Participating in group discussions**.

Introduction

Students will need to build up their confidence to speak out their ideas without 'hiding' behind well-prepared and rehearsed formal presentations. The following activities provide a chance for students to hear their own voice. The extent to which individual students will have an opportunity to speak out in front of the whole class (or just in pairs or small groups) will depend on how important lecturers think it is for all students to share their responses, or for just a few to be selected to share with the rest of class. (See associated Briefing Notes on **Participating in seminars: Notes for lecturers** and also **Developing skills in turntaking, discussion and critical dialogue: Notes for lecturers**.)

Student activity 1: Informal oral discussion

With the whole class, watch a video of a seminar in action. For example:

- Student voices at Birmingham University
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-12fb9yWTA> (3.24 minutes)
- One lecturer's explanation about seminars
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUi7eeOyxiM> (2.38 minutes)

Ask students to individually consider the following questions and write down their answers.

Then ask them to discuss their answers in pairs, noting similarities and differences in their responses.

Now ask each pair to share these answers with the whole class, either by writing them up on a whiteboard or by speaking them out in class.

Q1. What do you think is the purpose of a seminar?

Q2. What are you expected to do in a seminar?

Note to lecturer

Rationale for the exercise: Chinese students are unfamiliar with seminars, with preparing beforehand to participate in seminars and lectures, and with voicing their own opinions in class because learning in China is generally lecture-based and lecturer-centred.

Teaching strategy: THINK PAIR SHARE is a strategy to encourage students to practise their ideas first before speaking. By having individuals write down their ideas, then share them, the exercise encourages each student to express themselves. The other person has a real purpose to listen carefully and try to understand.

Lecturer input

Check that some of the below points have emerged from students' responses (either verbally or written on the whiteboard) and from broader class discussion. Throughout, the lecturer might emphasise that seminars support not only students' own learning but also the learning of their peers: everyone benefits when everyone participates.

Some of the following might be elicited from discussion (and refer also to the Briefing Note on **Participating in seminars: Notes for lecturers**):

- Seminars help students develop a better understanding of the topic under discussion:
 - having a go at talking about an idea – even if it's not yet quite clear in your mind - is a good way of working out what you think about something
 - if you're not entirely clear when you express your ideas, then there is usually someone else in the group willing to try to build on your ideas
 - when you ask questions in class, it helps everyone to clarify something
- Seminars help students integrate what they have heard in the lecture with their readings and experiences:
 - sometimes one person will make a connection between something in the lecture and something they've read, then someone else will connect that to something else they've read or seen in the media. In this way, you develop your learning together
 - it's a chance to share your experiences and cultural viewpoints
- Seminars provide students with the opportunity to voice (and defend) their opinions in public:
 - this is a safe place to try out your stance on a topic and defend it, without fear of retribution or ridicule
 - it gives your peers a chance to hear different points of view on a topic and decide their own stance
- Seminars help you and your peers, and your lecturer, get to know one another better:
 - for example, a lecturer can usually identify if someone is struggling in their understanding, and can provide some assistance, either in the seminar or later in a one-to-one meeting

Student activity 2: Informal oral discussion continued

Ask students in pairs to discuss the following:

Q: Identify what you think you need to do each week to prepare for your seminars.

Then ask them to share their responses with the class.

Rather than a group discussion, the lecturer might consider having pairs make a note of their responses and then write their answers up on the whiteboard. Alternatively, they might write their response then put this into a cardboard box or container from which the lecturer draws out the answers and writes them up on the whiteboard. Using a container guarantees anonymity for students, and therefore prevents them from feeling threatened by their ideas being made public. It increases confidence as they learn to share their ideas.

Now ask students to identify for themselves one or two from the above answers on the whiteboard which they think will be particularly useful for them, individually, to concentrate on. Ask them to choose just one to focus on immediately.

It is important to make the point that no one can focus on everything at once!

Note to lecturer

Another version of this exercise is for the lecturer to ask students for positive or negative responses to '*What you need to do each week to prepare for your seminars?*'. After pairs have placed answers in a container, the lecturer might write answers on the whiteboard under two columns: Positive Ideas and Negative Ideas, e.g. not writing down the source of a reference for an idea, not attending the lecture before going to a seminar, etc.

Lecturer input

Hints on what to draw out from student answers to the questions:

- Prior to going to a lecture, do the relevant readings so that they are familiar with discipline specific language that they're about to hear.
- Students need to attend the lecture and make notes from listening to it.
- Do the assigned readings prior to going to the seminar and make notes to jog their memory about the material (note: highlighting passages in the text is not sufficient).
- Make notes about the connections they see between the lecture/s and readings, or their responses to any questions the lecturer has asked them to prepare to discuss in the seminar.
- Write down any questions they have – anything that's not clear, or unsatisfactory
- Think about any relevant examples from their own experiences related to the topic. This might be from their work experience, or from living or studying in China, or from accessing the media in Australia, China or elsewhere.
- Read over their personal glossaries (if they have developed them) to reacquaint themselves with words they have already come across.

Student activity 3: Personal glossary and handout

- Students to add any new words or phrases to their personal glossary.
- Share them with the person next to them.
- At the end of the session, handout the Briefing Note for Students:
Commencing study in Australia: A quick reference guide for Chinese students.

Note to lecturer

The creation and ongoing development of a personal glossary enables students to build a working vocabulary - with definitions - for important, unfamiliar or frequently encountered concepts, idioms and metaphors that will be useful during their study of media and communication.



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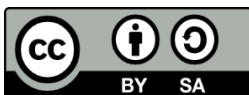
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Additional materials and resources are available from
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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