# Making tutorials inclusive

In tutorials, tutors usually get to know their students as individuals and there are opportunities to adapt the pace, materials and content of the tutorial to suit the student.

However, tutorials are not automatically inclusive. The tutorial system can seem unfamiliar and intimidating to some students, particularly those new to Oxford who are not used to this form of teaching. Students may encounter different approaches to tutorial teaching over their course of degree at Oxford, each with its own format and set of expectations.

This resource provides guidance on inclusive strategies that can be used to support tutorial teaching. [Key principles of inclusive teaching](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/inclusive-teaching-steps) highlights more broadly key inclusivity issues to consider when teaching.

Reading lists are often core to tutorial teaching and further guidance on [designing reading lists](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/designing-reading-lists) is available.

## Planning

**Structure tutorial progression.** If teaching a series of tutorials, consider the logical order these should follow so students can progress and connect ideas effectively. This structure could relate to chronology, progressing from simpler to more advanced concepts, or align with other learning students are currently doing (eg in classes and lectures). You can make the aims and purpose of each tutorial explicit to your students, so they know what they should be learning and why.

**Remember introductions.** If students in a tutorial pair or group are from different colleges, or if this is the first time they’ve met you, set aside time for introductions. This can help put students at ease and serve as an ‘ice-breaker’ activity before the tutorial gets underway.

**Identify options.** Make space wherever possible for students to bring their own interests and motivations to bear on the tutorial material. Likewise, identify any areas where students could be provided with a choice of topic or whether it is possible to tailor any of your tutorials to students’ interests. It's also good practice to give students options about how they contribute during the tutorial. For example, being asked to read aloud tutorial essays or attempt a problem in front of peers is likely to cause some students anxiety and/or additional challenges, so allow students some choice. This will promote engagement and motivation among your students.

**Use submitted work effectively.** Each tutorial is different because each addresses specific aspects of students’ submitted work. Use students’ submitted work to identify and plan which topics need to be discussed in the tutorial.

**Plan your questions.** Include a list of questions in your tutorial plan. Simpler questions will get the discussion going and help students to form the basis to more challenging questions. So, rather than opening with your main topic of discussion, try breaking it down into smaller, focussed questions to encourage participation. If the tutorial is taking place ‘live’ online, a bit of extra structuring may be needed to make discussion effective and this can be achieved by sharing some of your key questions with students in advance and asking them to submit any questions they want to cover ahead of the tutorial.

**Be flexible.** Discussions won't always follow your plan. Students may take longer or significantly less time than you expected on a particular topic; they may ask unexpected and/or challenging questions or enter into lengthy debates with one another. The tutorial setting enables these important academic discussions to take place. Having a tutorial plan that identifies essential topics and any that can be skipped or added if necessary, is a useful way to ensure key content is covered, whilst allowing some flexibility for the unexpected.

## Facilitating the tutorial

**Clarify expectations about tutorial participation.** What makes a tutorial discussion effective might not be clear to your students, particularly those new to tutorials. This can be particularly amplified in an online tutorial where it is more challenging to read body language and there are multiple means of engaging, for example, you may want to explicitly invite students to use the ‘chat’ function to ask questions. 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 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.

**Foster collaboration.** Encourage students to think of the tutorial as a collaborative, rather than a competitive space. This can be addressed, for example, by asking students to help each other during the tutorial, by encouraging students to feel free to try out ideas and ask whatever questions come to mind about the tutorial topic.

**Facilitate student interaction.** It is not uncommon to find that students in the same tutorial have explored different aspects of the tutorial work (eg 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.

**Reflect back.** Students will be formulating ideas on the spot, so it can be helpful for them (and other students) to hear their ideas reflected back. Clarifying a discussion point in this way can ensure that everyone is clear on what is being articulated.

**Summarise.** This is a way to keep the tutorial on track and can also help students to reflect on their learning at the end. Summarise what you have discussed in the tutorial so far and any conclusions that have been drawn. Consider asking your students to lead on this, outlining their main takeaway points and any follow-up questions. Routinely having students write down summative notes at the end of the tutorial and encouraging them to share these can also help if there are any disruptions to the tutorial, such as student absences.

## Supporting tutorial dynamics

**Encourage students to practice their skills in participating in a productive discussion.** If discussion needs guiding, try assigning students a specific role to play for a section of the tutorial, for example:

* Posing questions
* Providing a counter-argument
* Summarising 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

**Mix tutorial pairings and groups.** This will allow students to observe different discussion techniques and will also enable students to take on different roles.

**Further guidance on tutorial** [**planning**](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/planning-effective-tutorials)**,** [**dynamics**](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/tutorial-dynamics) **and** [**discussions**](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/tutorial-dynamics) **is available.**