

# Speaking in seminars

The thought of speaking up in seminars can generate worry and anxiety. This anxiety can build so that the idea of expressing your views in class can feel very exposing. Spending a whole class worrying about the prospect of speaking up can be very distracting and disrupt your learning.

Working out some strategies before the start of a new module will help you to deal with these worries and help you feel more confident to speak up. With a bit of planning before a class starts and some self-reflection afterwards, you might even find that expressing yourself in class can be one of the pleasures of your life at University.

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## 1. Introduce yourself

If you make an effort to get to know your classmates you will feel more at ease with them in the weeks ahead. Talking a bit before and after the seminar can help you feel more relaxed during classes. Remember that other people may be feeling anxious too.

## 2. Make a decision to speak

Make a decision to speak at least once during the first class you attend for a module. This could be asking someone for clarification on a point, or agreeing with someone when they make a point that fits with your view. Don't decide to wait until you feel comfortable in the group before you speak up; this can end up making it feel harder to contribute.

## 3. Go in prepared

Go in with some points prepared. Have them written down as bullet points if you worry about remembering them.

## 4. Make a point at the beginning

Make a point at the beginning of the seminar. The longer you leave it to speak up, the harder it can feel. If you contribute early on, you will feel more relaxed afterwards, and hopefully more confident to speak up again.

## 5. Act confident

Act as though you are confident, even if you don't feel it. We often overestimate how visible our internal emotions are to other people. It's possible to feel nervous and look confident at the same time!

## 6. Be brief and don't bluff

Be brief. When you have made your point – stop. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is fine to say so. There is no need to pretend you've thought of everything. You are there to learn.

## 7. Be assertive

Don't be afraid to be direct. You don't need to qualify your ideas with phrases such as 'sort of' or 'kind of like'; let your ideas make an impression.

## 8. Listen

If you tend to worry about being picked on to speak, you can get stuck in your own head and end up missing interesting points. Make a conscious effort to be present in the room and focus on other people. This way you are more likely to come up with good responses when needed.

## 9. After the seminar

If you managed to speak up, congratulate yourself. Note how it felt and reflect on it.

## 10. Don't engage in 'mind-reading'

'What if he/she thought my point was too obvious?' You can't control how others see you. So don't waste too much energy trying. Someone who is frowning while you're speaking might be thinking hard, formulating a response, or they might just have a headache!

## 11. Notice group dynamics

Seminars consist of groups of individuals – sometimes these groups might 'click' and the dialogue between people flows. Other times conversations can be stilted and feel awkward; when this happens remember that it is neither just to do with you, or entirely up to you to fix. If things are not flowing comfortably in your group remember it is natural for communication to falter from time to time.

## 12. Balance listening and speaking up

Be mindful each week of how much 'airtime' you are taking up. Holding back now and again creates space for other people to express their views, which could be points you have never considered before.