

# Managing One-to-One Online Tutorials

## Overview

With remote teaching and learning, understanding the [‘human element’](#) in virtual spaces remains the same as when face-to-face with your students.

Many academics are very comfortable with face-to-face tutorials both on campus and online. However, some [online interaction protocols](#) will be new to some of us and this guide offers advice about how to maximise engagement on a one-to-one basis.

It includes how to manage your communication methods, considers language and tone and concludes with some advice about managing your work-life balance when hours and days seem to merge in this fast-changing landscape.

## Create a clear communication plan

Having a communication plan is key to managing expectations of online one-to-one tutorials and also [building a rapport](#) with your students. It will require up-front planning before the term starts so that students know exactly when staff will be available and how much time will be allocated to tutorials over the coming weeks.

Put up your communication details on the main course or module web page (e.g. Moodle), which all your students will see every time they log on. Keep this at the top of the page so your students always know how to reach you.

There are two usual types of one-to-one tutorial:

1. General ‘virtual office hours’ for students who want to sign-up for specific help, and these will be offered each week in the same way as if you were on campus
2. ‘Set’ tutorials as part of your normal curriculum design and this maps to the contact time you would have offered on campus

1. General ‘virtual office hours’:

- Decide how many hours are needed each week for students to have access to course staff. Sharing the tutorials between the course team will help to manage this workload. Two hours each week was the norm when on campus, but you may decide to increase this if your workload balance allows and/or for those students who are still coming to terms with remote working
- [Set your students’ expectations clearly](#) about when you are available each week for one-to-one tutorials. Make your availability flexible each week to reach more students, i.e. a different time and day each week when your virtual office hours are ‘open’
- Create weekly time slots which students can sign up for, using a ‘live’ document, such as Word or Excel, using your Microsoft 365 work account OneDrive link on the learning platform (e.g. Aula or Moodle)
- Always put the sign-up slots for students to use at least two weeks in advance so that students can plan ahead

- Keep a register of the students who engage with you and consider directly contacting students who have not engaged, inviting them take up a future time slot
- Where you have large cohorts, give each course team member the same set of students each week, so a rapport can be built between the student and staff member

## 2. 'Set' tutorials as part of your normal curriculum design

- Just as you would put up a time-table for one-to-one tutorials on campus, you need to do the same for virtual tutorials, using the main course platform your students are used to. Be realistic about how much time you can devote each day and allow for a healthy work-life balance
- Allow space between tutorials for you to rest and reflect between sessions. As one-to-ones can sometimes be intense, it's important to give yourself a comfort break before the next tutorial if you have set them up one after the other
- Remind your students to come to their set tutorial with their questions or materials to be discussed, so that you can both use the time available productively
- Ask your student to make notes on your feedback as the session progresses so they can use this to improve their work. Keeping your own record helps you to keep across their progress too
- Share the workload between the course team and/or meet with the team on a virtual basis as often as you can to share ideas and tips for future tutorials
- Create a generic FAQs space on the course or module platform to address student queries that are the same – this also benefits your students as they can then use their tutorial time more effectively for queries that are individual to them

## Verbal and non-verbal communication

Both verbal and non-verbal communication makes a difference to your student's online experience with you. You are probably very competent across these areas, but for those staff who would like more advice, these tips may be useful:

### 1. Verbal (and on-screen) communication

We all think we speak clearly, but that is subjective and some students will be too shy to admit they don't understand what you're saying (there are plenty of reasons for this, of which some you will not know about or be able to 'fix').

However, [speaking clearly and at a balanced pace](#) comes with practise and if you're not sure, consider recording yourself and ask someone to give an honest opinion about how you come across.

We need to allow for students who will be on all different types of devices, from phones, to tablets, to computers with large monitors, and some of these will have

good quality sound and vision, whereas others may not. Add to this any background noises (yours and/or theirs) and it is easy to think your student has been given a clear tutorial, when their experience may be the opposite:

- [Think about how you appear](#) in front of the student. If your device is angled downwards, you might come across as 'looming' in on the student which can be disconcerting. Likewise, if your device is angled upwards (where we see more of your chin and neck), this reduces your impact. The best way to angle your laptop is to make your face and shoulders on an even level – use books to raise your laptop to eye level in the middle of the screen
- Your speaking tone needs to be light and balanced so that your student does not feel 'judged' during the general conversation. Even though you may feel you're neutral in your communication, your student may feel differently
- Grade your language if appropriate, e.g. with an international student, they may not understand everyday colloquial phrases found in [British idioms](#)
- Think about students with [disabilities](#) that may also be '[hidden](#)'. If you are not sure where this might apply, check with your student records team and if you need technical help, with your faculty learning technologists

## 2. Non-verbal communication

Your non-verbal communication can sometimes [reveal more about you](#) than anything you say:

- Your body language (and/or movement) needs to be neutral and calm
- The background behind you needs to be bland so that it doesn't distract from what you are saying
- When engaging with your student through your device's camera – find out where your eye contact is projected. Giving eye contact to your student is really worthwhile, rather than just looking at the screen which is usually 'slightly off' in terms of eye contact

## Managing your workload with one-to-one tutorials

- Some staff may find it difficult to bring one-to-one tutorials to a close and this is the case both on campus and online. Set clear timelines with your student beforehand and if a student wants more time beyond the allotted session, ask them to either raise it until the next session, or to email you with a specific query
- With queries that keep coming up, encourage students to engage in small peer-to-peer discussions on your course platform which you could facilitate and support and this will help to alleviate generic queries in your one-to-one sessions

- Give yourself at least ten minutes between each tutorial so that you can have a comfort break and/or make notes for the next time you see that student. Allow extra time for these breaks when creating your 'office hours' time slot sign-up sheet
- Collate a 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs) space on your course platform to communicate advice and support to answer general student queries – this will help to avoid duplicate queries during tutorial sessions. It is also a good indicator of which areas the students feel they need more help and you can offer extra materials or support during remote teaching group sessions in response
- If you find it difficult to manage your workload with one-to-one tutorials, advice and support is available via your manager. In the first instance, you may prefer to explore specific advice about remote working and well-being in the staff portal web space called [Connections Matter](#).