University of Glasgow

Top Teaching Tips

for GTAS in the College of Arts

Introduction

This booklet contains examples of good practice, innovative ideas, and established techniques which have been used to good effect in small-group teaching in Arts. The ideas it contains were contributed by GTAs working in the College in session 2016-17, as part of a competition organised by the Deputy Dean of Learning and Teaching, Dr Wendy Anderson, with a view to inspiring future GTAs to engage with creative teaching strategies. This booklet has been compiled from GTAs' ideas by Natalie Finlayson, PG intern in the College of Arts in 2016-17.

The first section focuses on practical techniques which may be implemented in the classroom, while the second looks at materials and resources that can be used to enhance the small-group teaching experience. Not all techniques will work in all teaching contexts, but all should provide some inspiration for tutors. Contributors are credited by name or anonymously according to their own wishes.

Happy teaching!

Contents

1.1 Teaching methodologies

Teaching methodologies and how these may be applied in practice to small-group teaching

My best tip is... the magic triangle! I noticed that in seminar discussions, in seminar exercises and in their ALG exercises, students were focusing their time on making broad statements. I wanted them to think more about providing supporting evidence and developing analytical and critical thinking skills. The aim was to provide them with ways to structure the course content, to keep the discussions on track, encourage more people to engage and improve their written work.

I waited until about week 3 to get a feel for the ability levels of each seminar group. After the student presentation, I asked everyone to draw a triangle. I explained that this is the key to a well-structured discussion, essay planning and forming an argument. I drew a blank triangle on the whiteboard too.

In the top corner of the triangle: I wrote 'statement' and explained that this is an 'argue that...' phrase. In the bottom right corner, I wrote 'evidence' and explained that this is a 'such as when', or 'for example' phrase. In the bottom left corner I wrote 'analysis' and explained that this is a 'this shows...', 'this means...' phrase. I then drew three horizontal lines equally spaced through the triangle to show weighting: statements get the least airtime, evidence gets roughly two or three times the amount of airtime as the statement and the majority of time should be given to analysis. We did an example as a group on the board and I gave suggestions. I then gave them 5 mins to try it on their own, talking them through each step, (I walked around to help with this bit).

We used it after the presentation each week in weeks 3-5 to structure discussion. It kept dominant members of the group on track when speaking and gave anxious speakers a speaking prompt from which they could build out. I repeatedly emphasised that they should look to include a statement/evidence/analysis for each point made in their week 6 essay.

In weeks 7-10, we worked as a group to make a mini essay plan at the end of class (3 triangles on a theme, with 2 rectangles for introduction and conclusion). Using the course content, we discussed how to make the argument move cumulatively (this remained an issue in their essays). Importantly, I kept the template the same shape every week to encourage them to visualise the format for an essay plan. In week 11, we then looked at how the template could work as an exam essay plan for discussing and contrasting two texts with 4-6 triangles (or paragraphs/points). In their feedback, over half of the students cited this as their favourite bit of our seminars. They also reported verbally that it had boosted their confidence.

Emma Ward, English Literature

I apply Honey and Mumford learning styles research to prepare for my tutorials. These learning styles indicate what is the best way for a student to learn based on which style they ascribe to. You could describe it as getting on a student's 'wavelength' about a given topic, and explaining it in terms they will understand. The four learning styles identified by the research are an Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist and Reflector. I used this myself to identify my own learning style, and have become good at identifying which style many of my students may identify with.

In practice this has allowed me to shape my tutorial preparation for each group. One of my groups for example is dominated by pragmatists. Therefore, they often agree on theories that work at a pragmatic level even when they have obvious flaws - this is a huge challenge for a philosophy tutor. I therefore spend some extra time discussing pragmatic elements before keeping them focused on the underlying theories we are discussing within the philosophy class. In the beginning students who are pragmatists found it difficult to grasp the theoretical level of discussion that was required from them. However, knowing the general learning style of each of my tutorials allowed me to be better prepared for a class dominated by pragmatists, in comparison to a class with an overall Theorist inclination who, do not require the pragmatic level of discussion and can move straight to dealing with philosophical theory.

GTA, Philosophy

My seminars place considerable emphasis on developing the skills of close reading as a methodological anchor for textual analysis. I have experienced different approaches to this at Glasgow, including structuring seminars around student presentations, requiring 'seminar evaluation' exercises and managing 'autonomous learning groups'. I believe that, where possible, a flexible approach to class structure that can adapt to the chemistry of particular groups works best.

I begin my seminars by soliciting a first response from each student, which stimulates the discussion, breaks the ice and compels everyone to contribute. The only ground-rule is 'no value judgements', a difficult impulse to resist. I will then invite responses to pre-circulated questions/ideas.

In general, I have found split group-work to be an effective means of encouraging self-directed learning. During classes, I often form the students into groups of 3 or 4 and ask each to focus on a passage, piece of criticism and/or theme. It can be useful to distribute these ahead of class, so the groups can begin developing their thoughts.

I find the students respond very positively to this approach, not least as it relaxes some of the quieter personalities who might be nervous when addressing the whole class. Following 10-15 minutes of this group-work, I will then ask each group to report on their debate, either together or through a nominated spokesperson, to the rest of the class. This creates a presentation element within this method. These short reports can then act as a stimulus for the remaining class discussion.

Gerard, English Literature/Scottish Literature

Get students to structure their learning about a particular writer or piece of work by using a chart or matrix with the following headings:

1) Context (historical, political, personal)
2) Questions / issues raised by the reading
3) Answers given or suggested in the reading
4) Comparison to other thinkers / writers / theories

Move through the columns one at a time, getting the students to work in pairs to pool their knowledge. Encourage students to be taking notes in this format; use a whiteboard or PowerPoint to take down your own notes. Ask students to give specific references in the texts for answering questions in columns 2 and 3, and facilitate their discussion of these particular issues and answers. For the final column, set a discussion question that enables the students to compare the text to others that they have covered so far in that class.

This works because it enables students to see the links between the context and the content of the work. It also encourages students to see that the value of a work may be in the questions that it has raised rather than particular answers given. Students can compare or apply the knowledge they have gained in working on the first three sections of the chart in relation to the wider course. The chart supports students in developing frameworks for approaching other texts too.

GTA, College of Arts

1.2 Planning and preparation

What can be done before class to ensure seminars run smoothly and maximise the time and space available

Always have an action plan in mind for when students have not done their reading for your session, or have not prepared what you asked them to, or are missing their presentation. Go into your sessions with belts and braces. It is really helpful to prepare doubly and have made up your mind about how you likely want to react when students come unprepared. This way, you can not get caught off guard and lose focus of your teaching role: How do you want to react in these situations? How can you give students time to catch up with the reading material? How can you adapt your session plan accordingly? What can you do if a student does not show up for their scheduled presentation? It might also be important for you to know why students have not done the reading, why they have come unprepared or why they have missed their scheduled presentation. In small group teaching, I would always recommend to ask the students directly and address the elephant in the room. Even if the learning environment in small group teaching tends to be more active and supportive, students are human beings and there is always the risk that they might not come be prepared to class. Be sensitive to their issues and potential problems, but also make sure that they are aware that satisfactory participation is key for the course's success and that it is required to complete the course successfully.

Anika Marschall, Theatre Studies

The space of the room plays a huge part in determining the success of a seminar and the level of discussion within it. The room that I teach in is very small and its chairs are lined up to face the front of the room. Upon entering, one of the first things that I do is ask the class to work together to rearrange the chairs into a semi-circle. Working together to complete this task of rearranging the chairs at the very beginning of the seminar breaks down some of the initial stiffness or nervousness, especially in first year students.

GTA, College of Arts

Have a plan, but be flexible and responsive to students' learning. There's no point trying to launch straight into a discussion question only to find that most students struggled to understand the basics of the reading. Encourage the students to reflect on their levels of comprehension and what they want to learn in the tutorial.

At the start of a tutorial, ask students how they got on with the reading (e.g. confident, confused, interested) and what particular issue/topic they want to cover or need clarified. State that this isn't about testing them, but about working at their pace; if you think students will be scared to speak up, get them to work in pairs or to write on post-its.

Get students to pool their relevant 'broad strokes' knowledge by giving students 2 minutes in pairs to list, for example, as many points as they can about the historical context, or key themes, or questions raised in the reading.

Ask students to explain in their own words to a partner a key point, theme or structure of an argument. Then ask the groups to feed back what was shared, any differences, and what they need clarification on.

This works because students have taken control of their learning, especially in building their skills for identifying and tackling what they don't know, not just repeating what they do know. As a small group teacher you can then be more focused on supporting students to respond to these areas.

GTA, College of Arts

I find it easier to get students to engage with a text/example we are looking at if I give them a concrete goal. For example, when we were translating a passage from the Miller's Tale *from Middle English to Present Day English, I asked students to write me a physical description of the Miller (or to draw me a picture, but no one went for that option). I found this worked better than just asking them to translate the passage, and they seemed more motivated to decipher it when there was something they needed to find out.*

GTA, English Language and Linguistics

1.3 Small-group activities

This section contains suggestions for activities, games and classroom procedures to ensure students stay focused and motivated

I found that doing close reading exercises with History of Art students within our seminars helped them to build on their critical reading skills, and encouraged discussion. I divided a short chapter of a relevant book into five sections - each group received a pdf copy with a different section highlighted. They read and discussed their highlighted section in their groups and then we discussed it within the larger group. This exercise encouraged them to organise their thoughts quickly and essentially do a simple literature review. They could learn from their peers' approach to analysing the reading and presenting it back to the group. I found that by focusing on some of the language and active verbs within the reading this helped them think more critically about the position of the author rather than just passively reading it. My aim here was to encourage discussion on the relevant subject matter but also to help them develop skills that would help them in their academic career across the university.

GTA, College of Arts

I thought it was incredibly useful to split students up in smaller groups (3-5), but let them work on the same or similar question about the same topic. E.g. I would show one film clip to four small groups. 2 groups respectively would work on the same question (e.g. focusing on sound or performance) and prepare a little summary of their discussion. They would then report back to the big group, and because someone else has worked on the same question, potentially with a different result, this would automatically stimulate a wider discussion with the entire class.

GTA, Film and Television Studies

A most valuable tool for my small group teaching have been drama games. Even though they might be easily employed in subjects such as Theatre Studies, they are much more flexible and can be used in many different groups, disciplines and spaces. Drama games such as Zip Zap Zop, 1-2-3, and Augusto Boal's Rhythm Machine form an important part of my teaching practice. They are brilliant icebreakers but also allow me as tutor to get a sense for the group's emotional readiness for the work ahead. They can make tutors more aware for the different student learning types in the group: How attentively do they listen? How do they interact with each other? How confident do they seem? Drama games can help to enhance key group learning factors of sharing and they further help to tie everyone to the group. They highly influence the level and success of group interaction and can make students (and tutors) develop and foster positive attitudes towards their learning environment. Throughout continuing group sessions, they can help to prevent or counter students' withdrawing and passivity. Tip for Success: The games should be sensitive to gender and cultural issues. Tutors should use tact to help students take an active part but also make them feel most comfortable in doing so.

Anika Marschall, Theatre Studies

In the fourth or fifth week of class, depending on when the students prefer, I spend half a class practicing essay planning. I divide the class into smaller groups, and have each group plan an answer to an essay question that I give them, requiring them to make use of two of the texts that we've looked at so far (as they will have to do in an essay).

By putting them into smaller groups, and getting them to think about the set text that week in relation to another text we've studied, it turns our normal class discussion towards a very practical end. The seminar room is a more comfortable setting in which to tackle the scary prospect of an essay plan, and I find its a good way to get the students to raise any concerns. I suspect that most of the students won't have thought much about their essays at this point, so this also forces them to think about planning in an essay, and shows them that you can make a good start early on.

I have each group report their essay plan to me, and we discuss them as a group. I suggest ways they might strengthen their essay, and give general advice about structure and argument, which is made more tangible for the students because I can refer directly to the example they've all just heard. This exercise also shows them that essay planning is not easy, and they should get started!

GTA, English Literature

The Speedseminar
(This works best in a room that is easy to move around in and for groups of 10+ students)

Students are split into 2 groups for a quick round-robin style discussion of the central themes of the text. Students are paired in a circle with the inner group rotating after the buzzer. The tutor writes the first theme on the board, sets the timer and lets students develop a question in relation to the theme in 3-5mins (depending on time). After the buzzer rings students must add their question to the board before rotating on to a new pairing and repeating until all themes have been addressed. The remaining seminar uses these self-formulated questions as discussion prompts.

Example text: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

Theme 1: Gothic Literature

Questions: How does Shelley engage with the Gothic tradition? What is the function of the grotesque in the text? Do you agree that this novel can be read as a precursor to Sci-fi?

Theme 2: Frame Narratives

Questions: How does Shelley use intertextuality in the novel and to what effect? What is the role of Walton as a Narrator vs Victor as Protagonist? How many frames are there, what is the significance of this?

Theme 3: Travel and the Sublime

Questions: How does the landscape reflect emotion? What is the importance of ice and fire in the text? How does the Arctic setting relate to ideas of enlightenment?

Theme 4: Gender and Sexuality

Questions: How do we respond to the absence of female figures in the novel? What is the significance of Victor destroying the female creature? What is the significance of birth in the text?

The structure of the seminar allows students to become comfortable with their peers and to talk to students they might not normally engage with due to usual seating arrangements. Rather than relying on the tutor to provide the points for discussion, the formulation of discussion questions as a group allows students to set their own agendas for the seminar and enables students to feel comfortable formulating their own critical positions. The formulation of essay-style discussion questions allows students to gain a familiarity with the text while also preparing them for future assessments.

Alexandra Campbell, English Literature

Instead of having the class read a single passage, I will split the class into three groups and have each group read one of three complementary passages. I give them time to close read the passage together (always reminding them that this should be a loud exercise: I want to hear them talk their way through the passage), and will go around the class talking to each group privately for a couple of minutes, to ask questions that might trigger discussion or help them if they have questions (which they're more likely to ask in that more private discussion).

I find that going around each group individually helps me keep track of the discussion that'll result, and help them to focus in on particular parts of the passage if they're unsure about how to approach it. Because I choose three different passages to close read, the discussion at the end isn't repetitive, and I've found that each group gets a lot from the others' readings, and recognise that it will be useful to go and read the others' passages in their own time.

Looking at three passages also gives the whole class a better sense of how certain techniques/ideas are working throughout the whole text. The more general discussion after this close reading exercise tends to be very strong, as we have a lot of closely read material to work with, and three groups' worth of different interpretations and evidence.

GTA, English Literature

1.4 Building confidence and boosting morale

Tips for putting anxious students at ease, encouraging quieter students to participate and creating a positive learning environment

Recognising students as individuals in small group work is important for setting an environment in which students feel that their participation matters. It may sound simple, but learning and using students' names is crucial, particularly in first year tutorials where new students may feel overwhelmed by the size of lectures and so group work is a key space for being known as an individual. Tips for learning names include making a map of where they are sitting, checking through the attendance list, or grouping students up so that you know who is working together. Use student's names to encourage their participation ('Stacey, what do you think about this?') and to respond to their comments ('Emily made a really interesting point about…')

In the first tutorial, it also helps when students are introducing themselves to ask about their degree program, subject interests and why they chose this particular course, and then to draw on these areas of interest during discussion. Using open questions such as 'what struck you as interesting about this reading/topic?' encourages students to take charge of their learning as well as feeling that their thoughts and perspectives matter. This works, because students are more likely to participate when they feel known as an individual. The most interesting discussions in small group teaching often emerge when students draw on existing knowledge and interests in relation to a particular topic.

GTA, College of Arts

The problem

Students' fear of contributing because they believe they might get the answer wrong or say something which they believe might appear foolish.

A solution

Create an atmosphere in which there is a general enthusiasm for trying out ideas without having to hang one's reputation on them (this primarily applies to seminars, or the relevant parts of seminars, where students' contributions do not count towards any summative assessment).

How to bring this solution about

1. *Encourage risk-taking:*

- Talk openly about the times you (the tutor) have made mistakes. Poke fun at yourself when you do this.

- Use this slogan at relevant points: you can't learn anything without making mistakes - so let's make some mistakes!

2. *Establish appropriate seminar etiquette:*

- Remind students to look at and respond to the person who last spoke, and not always to address the tutor. This helps students feel more like they're talking to each other as equals, rather than continually being assessed by the tutor.

- Use the students' names from the get-go, this relaxes the atmosphere considerably. Pass round a name sheet at the start so you can know each person's name in the room based on the name position in the list.

3. *Create a 'contribution expectation':*

- Establish a consistent pattern of seeking a contribution from everyone. If people aren't speaking up independently, ask them what they think. Once students know that they'll be asked what they think if they don't speak up, this can encourage unprompted participation.

John Donaldson, Philosophy

One technique that I have found particularly useful as a GTA is to make it obvious to the students that I am only a GTA, and not a lecturer. To do this I try and create a comfortable teaching environment so that students are not scared to say something they perceive as 'silly' and to let them know that we are in this learning journey together. I will approach difficult texts with students by highlighting the parts that I find difficult myself, and where I would have been 'stuck' if I was studying the text for the first time. This allows the students to see that I am not infallible, and that all of us find learning in higher education to be challenging at times. I might also pretend that I don't know the answers to some of the questions that the lecturers or students have posed, and invite the students to discuss what the answer might be amongst themselves. This makes it feel that we are arriving at the required knowledge together, rather than a 'teacher' telling the students what the answer should be. This means that students start to take ownership of their own learning, and begin to feel like all of us in the room are colleagues trying to find out the answers to interesting questions about the nature of the world around us. I have found that the best seminars I have taken are the ones in which students consider me as a colleague and facilitator of a group discussion, rather than their 'teacher'.

Catherine Robb, Philosophy

During the first few weeks of working as a GTA, it became apparent that my students were hungry for in-depth discussions of content they encountered in lectures. Many of them expressed concerns about asking questions during lectures, citing class size and the fast pace as the two most common deterrents preventing them from interrupting the flow of the lecture. They feared that lecturers might become annoyed if lectures were disrupted or sent off track. For many of them, the anxiety generated by speaking in front of a large group prevented them from even considering asking questions. I found that allowing the tutorials to serve as a space of open discussion allowed these students to engage with the material in a less pressured environment. I asked that the students jot down questions or concerns about course material during lectures, and we would spend the first ten minutes or so of each seminar discussing these directly. This gave them the opportunity to think critically about lecture material, rather than passively absorbing the information. I made it clear to them from the outset that the seminar was meant to a space of discussion and critical engagement, which alleviated their anxieties about speaking in front of others. The inclusions of these discussions also meant that I could deliver the seminar as planned, but allowed me to focus more intently on those aspects of the material they expressed less confidence about, and avoid repeating material that they had grasped rather easily.

GTA, College of Arts

Approaching academic texts as an undergraduate is very difficult, and usually a new experience; always bear this in mind. It can help to start the seminar by asking specifically about the reading assignments, and not just in relation to subject-specific content, but also about how the student found confronting them. This might be fairly light - 'did you enjoy this text?', 'I found this part quite funny, did anyone else find this?'. Or, it might be more serious - 'this text was tough, even I found it hard in places. Are there any particular areas that you found difficult?'. I find that this often makes the atmosphere much more relaxed and easy to engage in for the students. You don't want them to attend the seminar thinking that because of the experience-gap between tutor and tutee, there's nothing that they can ask about which won't appear obvious to the tutor or the other students who also read the text.

Given the time constraints on our classes, this also functions to narrow in on the areas of texts that students need explained further or found particularly interesting. It can be a daunting experience for the tutor trying to condense, say, fifty pages of reading on theory x, into fifty or so minutes, knowing that their students will be writing a paper on it the next week. But I've found that this method generally highlights areas that students find tough every year, and brings out problems particular to individual seminar groups.

Nathan Kirkwood, Philosophy

One of the great things about teaching in small groups is the possibility for discussion. Though many first-year students display a certain amount of nervousness at the prospect of public speaking, they also seem to have a desire to engage with course material more directly than lectures allow. One of the most difficult problems I encounter in the first weeks with a new group of students is getting them to participate in discussion. The most effective tactic I found was recognising the students who are less anxious about speaking in front of their peers, and initially drawing the discussion out from them. Over a few seminars, other students begin to participate as well, overcoming their fears once they realise that the seminar is an environment where discussion is welcomed and encouraged. I also found that some students require more a more directed approach to discussion. To facilitate their style of learning, I would set related readings every so often ahead of seminars, accompanied by a few notes directing them what larger concepts or ideas to keep in mind while reading. The students responded well to this practice, as it gave them a frame of discussion ahead of time, allowing them the opportunity to prepare their own discussion points. This meant that I did not have to make guesses on which aspects of the course material that the students felt less confident about, because they would bring these issues to the discussion themselves.

GTA, College of Arts

Something which I found really tricky at first, but which I think is important, is allowing silences to happen. Long silences make me feel really uncomfortable, and when I started teaching I always jumped in to break the silence after about three seconds. I assumed that the class was silent because no one had an answer, and I didn't want to make them squirm. Doubting myself, I always wondered if maybe I'd phrased the question badly, or asked a question that was just too hard. Later in the semester, I challenged myself to let silences drag out. It turned out that many of the silences were just the result of the most confident students not having an answer. When I allowed silences to continue, often one of the quieter students would be the ones to break the silence, and often with excellent ideas. Forcing myself to cope with silences opened up the room and let more of the students be heard. This really brought up the level of discussion in the classes.

Sadie Ryan, English Language and Linguistics

I always begin seminars with group work - either in pairs or in groups of three. I will pose a problem or a question to them and ask them to discuss it in their groups for 5 mins before coming back to feed into the class. I find that by discussing the questions in a small groups at the start, students are much more comfortable and confident to feed back into the larger seminar group after this. It is useful to have the question or problem up on a slide for them to refer to.

When feeding back into the group, I try to encourage quiet students to contribute without pressuring them. Rather than asking 'Rachel, what did your group talk about?', I find that phrases such as, 'What did Rachel's group talk about/think about', encourage the person named to then act as the spokesperson for the group, without putting them on the spot. This has been very successful.

GTA, College of Arts

2.1 Making the most of technology

Tips on enhancing good teaching practice through the use of classroom materials and equipment

The University of Glasgow offers an unique multicultural environment that must be explored. Since I started my work as a GTA, I notice that cultural diversity can be found even in small groups. In my seminars I try to make the students benefit from multicultural classrooms by sharing their view points and building up together with their colleagues a more broad and critical common knowledge. For all my seminars, I prepare slides with a brief summary of the content of the lectures and the answers to the tasks that they will perform in groups. In the task slides, there is a blank space to add students' own answers to the questions and their examples. Updating the slides is group work and they discuss the answers together. After each seminar, I send them the slides so they have their own database of examples. This technique builds a positive interdependence among students - they feel responsible for their own and the group's effort. In terms of specific knowledge, this technique helped international students to feel more encouraged to participate in the classroom. In sociolinguistics, international students provided examples of their own pronunciation in English and felt part of this linguistic community. In cognitive linguistics, international students shared with the big group how metaphor helps to understand their background culture. The result was observed in the essays of the entire group. The examples they used were rich and they were able to make parallels with other cultures in order to critically analyse the learned content.

Carolina Reolon Jardim, English Language and Linguistics

Doing brainstorming of ideas (or vocab if it's a language class) on the whiteboard and then make the students work in couples rather than individually.

Alessia Zinnari, Literature and Italian

In an attempt to spice up small group grammar teaching - traditionally, the aspect of language learning which students enjoy least! - I have been experimenting with Kahoot.it, an interactive, game-based learning system similar to the YACRS audience response systems sometimes used in lectures. Students participate using their smartphones, and all that is required is a room with internet access, a projector and a screen. I have been using this tool for the purposes of second language teaching, but it could be applied in any subject incorporating a multiple-choice element.

Like YACRS, Kahoot allows tutors to design quizzes containing multiple-choice questions with up to four possible solutions, from which students or teams of students select an answer. The number of students who have opted for each choice is displayed, so that tutors can see mistakes, identify which areas need most work and lead a class discussion of why these choices are incorrect.

Kahoot games take only a few minutes to create, but can hold the attention of a class for a full hour. Students enjoy the competitive element provided by the scoreboard, and can opt for an anonymous username or playing on paper if they wish. The quizzes are reusable - both as exam revision, and resources for future years - and have been very well received in my classes, stimulating some interesting discussion of an area of language learning often considered tedious!

Natalie, French/German

In my experience, and anecdotally from the experience of others, the traditional model of tutoring by planned discussion topics often has its challenges. The model is based on the GTA providing clarity and explanation where necessary. However, this only works when the students have an interest in the topic, feel engaged with the material, and have also read the required reading material. Often these conditions are not met, which poses a challenge for any GTA. Subsequently, it can be a challenge for GTAs to develop the interests and passions of students when preparation on the part of the student has been lacking.

When many students openly admit to falling behind on readings it can be difficult to develop a discussion-centered environment. I have found that using short video clips allows students to take time to relax in a seminar. The videos that I show will often relate to the course content indirectly.

By using video in this way it allows for students to have a discussion based on what they have seen in those five/ten minutes. The role of the tutor then is to moderate and relate discussion back to the course material. Such that, whether students come to the tutorial with or without preparation they are still able to be involved in the discussion at a higher level in the beginning but leave with not only an understanding of the material, but also have visual and aural references for the content they have learnt.

GTA, Philosophy

2.2 Contextualising learning

Engaging students by demonstrating that what they have learned may be applied in non-academic contexts

I found that providing as many varied opportunities for students to be able to actively apply the theoretical/historical/methodological concepts they had learned to visual material was the best way to encourage active learning and critical thinking. Off-campus learning in local museums allowed students to relate to the objects of study in a more embodied manner rooted in time and space. Providing print-outs of images for group work or spending time as a class deconstructing an image on the screen promoted conversation, analysis, observations and questions. It is important to me to be able to vary the manner in which students are viewing the work of art as it underlines the different kinds of relationships which can develop between the viewer and the object or between objects themselves. This strategy allowed me to act as a facilitator rather than a lecturer and revealed where the group had gaps in knowledge which I could revise and clarify with the class.

Hailey, History of Art

The use of unexpected 'pop culture' material. If, for example, you are teaching about rhetoric, which for many is quite a dry subject, begin the session with examples of rhetorical speech from popular culture (my personal favourite is Voldemort's 'bring me Potter speech'). Similarly, comparing the activities of Cu Chulainn to those of Doctor Who, Mort or the song 'Carry on my Wayward Son', raises the key themes of heroism as well as opening up the diversity of heroic material that exists. Doing things like this excites the pupils, making the subject matter relevant and more easily understandable as well as open discussion to the more complex subject matter that they are studying but through a medium with which they are more familiar. It relaxes the students and makes them realise that their subject matter and the skills they are learning are not confined to one 'box' but are interchangeable and relevant throughout their life. It is particularly effective early in the term as it bonds the students and eases the shyness of being in a new group as they can discuss something that they would talk about with their friends.

Zoe Bartliff, Classics/Comparative Literature

One of the advantages of small group work is that you can be mobile. Take advantage of the world-class institutions, collections and culture that surround us in the West End of Glasgow. This year, I took both my Scottish Literature and English Literature groups out into the city. For instance, in Week 10 my Scottish Literature students were focussing on the poetry of Edwin Morgan and Liz Lochhead, so I held the seminar in the Hunterian Art Gallery and we worked beside the Chardin paintings that Morgan and Lochhead had used as stimuli to write several poems. The advantage of holding the seminar in the gallery itself was that it not only familiarised first year students with the university's collections but it allowed them to see the paintings in context, as Morgan and Lochhead would have done. It was rewarding to hear the students constructively comparing the Chardin paintings to other artworks in the gallery, which prompted the students to consider why Morgan and Lochhead were particularly inspired by Chardin. In my experience, staff at cultural institutions are incredibly helpful and there is rarely any administrative process to worry about. Chairs are readily available too. When in public institutions, I've found that it's good practice to explain the situation to any stewards or staff there, so they feel comfortable, and to reassure the students that they are allowed to discuss as usual and move around. I was delighted to see my students enthusiastically projecting their ideas in a public setting.

Michael Shaw, English Literature & Scottish Literature

One of the best teaching experiences I have had as a GTA combined an example of good practice and innovative teaching. Two years ago I was taking a seminar on the topic of 'Silence' as part of the 'Aesthetics and Philosophy of Music' module. I asked the students if there were any composers or philosophers they wanted to cover in more detail, or if there were any ideas they wanted to further explore. One of the students mentioned that the University of Glasgow has its own anechoic chamber, which is a room constructed to dampen all extraneous noise and simulate silence. The students were adamant that they wanted to experience this constructed silence.

So, I spent the week in discussion with staff, trying to find a way to organise this visit, and during the next seminar we made it happen. Taking the students out of the classroom and highlighting the real-life application and first-hand experience of the philosophical ideas we were discussing in the seminar had a very obvious and positive impact on the way that the students engaged with the course material, and the seminars over the next few weeks were more animated and productive. I now make sure to always employ the good practice of asking and listening when students come up with ideas for how they want to learn, and I also, where possible, attempt to find innovative and practical ways to showcase the ideas that we are discussing in class.

Catherine Robb, Music

The Textual Chain:

In addition to set reading, students pick a short passage/poem/extract from a non-course text that they feel resonates with the core themes of that particular seminar. After outlining the aims of the seminar, if no one else volunteers first, I begin by reading out my extract and explain how it relates to the central themes of the set text and seminar. I then invite students to respond to my extract, and if they feel their piece resonates with mine, they can then jump into the discussion by reading their text and explaining the reason for their chosen piece. If another student feels their piece draws out similar issues they can then respond to their peer and share their chosen extract.

The seminar effectively becomes a chain reaction that encourages peer-to-peer discussion, allowing all students to personally engage with the set texts, while also giving depth and breadth to their understanding of the topic by encouraging individual research. Below is an outline of a seminar delivered earlier this year.

Seminar topic: Place in Scottish Poetry

Set Texts: Selection of poetry from Kathleen Jamie, Jen Hadfield, Sorley Maclean. Critical piece on Ecology and Scottish literature.

Chain: Kei Miller 'What the Cartographer Ought to Know' -> Elizabeth Bishop 'The Map' -> Henry David Thoreau 'Walden'-> Jonathan Bate 'Song of the Earth'-> Robert Burns 'My Heart is in the Highlands' -> etc.

Themes Discussed: Literary Geography, Ecology and Environment, Gender, Space & Place, National Identity, Land, Language, Form and Metre.

I've used this technique numerous times across various seminars on both specific texts and critical theory. It's a fun way to broaden the scope of the seminar and introduce students to new texts and critical pieces, while also encouraging collaborative discussion and analysis.

Alexandra Campbell, English Literature and Scottish Literature