



English  
Subject  
Centre

# Seminar design: group activity

**Collection:** Small group teaching

**Resource:** Seminar design

## Approximate duration

40 minutes

## Learning outcomes

After this activity lecturers will have

1. gained knowledge of a wide range of different seminar structures useful for teaching the discipline;
2. gained experience of detailed seminar planning;
3. thought about the links between the characteristics of particular seminar groups and seminar structure.

## Introduction

Alongside other parallel activities in these collections, this task should help lecturers to think of a repertoire of activities geared to specific needs rather than mechanically applied. So it is also aimed at a higher pedagogic level: as an invitation to lecturers to articulate to themselves the principles involved in thinking up group activities, and the need for sensitivity to particular situations.

## The activity

1. Use [Chapter 3 of the Subject Centre's \*Small Group Teaching in English Literature: A Good Practice Guide\*](#) as the basis for a discussion of the range of different approaches to seminar design possible in English Studies. You can download a PowerPoint or a Word document handout to anchor the discussion.



1 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project. This work by the English Subject Centre is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License.

2. Divide the class into four groups.
3. Give each group one of the teaching situations listed below. You can download Word files of each situation (link to be added). Each group should have a different situation.

## Situations

### **Situation 1**

A first-year seminar group of eight students you have never seen before on a compulsory introductory module taught by several different lecturers. This is the first seminar of their degree. They will have been sent information about preparation for the session before their arrival at the institution.

### **Situation 2**

A second-year seminar group of fifteen students in the middle of a compulsory module taught by several different lecturers. Three of the students are very highly-motivated and vocal in class. The others seem exhausted and faintly bored. The course is on a wide range of topics, so not all students on the module will be writing on the topic of this seminar.

### **Situation 3**

A group of four students on a third-year option course focused on a topic in which you have strong research expertise. All students are very bright and interested in the topic.

### **Situation 4**

A group of 12 students on a popular second-year core module, attended by students majoring in other disciplines as well as by English students. Your group is enthusiastic but very varied in ability. One student in particular tends to be very talkative, not always in a helpful way.



4. Ask everyone to think of a topic they are currently teaching. How would they structure a seminar on that topic to address the context they have been given? Ask everyone to write a short paragraph on this.
5. Ask each group to discuss amongst themselves the way they have approached their given context. Have different members of each group come up with different seminar structures? Why?
6. In a concluding plenary, go round each group in turn, asking them first to read out their given context and secondly to tell the rest of the class about their in-group discussion.

## Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>

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## Resources in the Small group teaching collection

- Small group teaching: introduction to the collection
- Seminar design: resource overview
  - Seminar design: individual activity
  - **Seminar design: group activity (\*you are here)**
- Peer reviewing a seminar: Oliver Twist : resource overview
  - Peer review: individual activity
  - Adjusting the level
- Peer reviewing a seminar: The Bonesetter's Daughter : resource overview
  - A complex dialogue



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- Negotiated authority
- Thinking about seminars: resource overview
  - Relevance and red herrings
  - Weighing up the elements
- Nightmare scenarios: resource overview
  - Facing up to nightmares: group activity
  - Comparing notes
- Transformative writing: resource overview
  - Transformations: individual activity
  - Transformations: group activity



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