

Seminar design: resource overview

Collection: Small group teaching

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.

Overview

Carrying out this activity represents a kind of laboratory experiment for something you will have to do a lot of in time. We cannot emphasise too strongly that you need to be very confident in yourself and a student group simply to risk going into the room knowing the text or subject well without having planned anything in particular. So this task is designed to enable you to draw a mental map of the things you would need to do to build a bridge between the demands of the subject matter or text and the needs of students at particular stages in their learning.

Constraints

One of the key things you are going to need to think about is working within institutional constraints. There are times and places when one might be favoured with a studio theatre for doing drama, or a three hour workshop for doing film or creative writing. On the whole, though, and given the nature of central timetabling and of university estates, we are all of us going to have to work with what we can get. Increasingly, that means one hour seminar slots in at best indifferently appointed classrooms. Unfortunately, this



is apt to mean that our default planning heads in the direction of unambitiousness. (I won't get them to move the tables because it takes too long; I won't try to show these digital resources because the web connection is unreliable; I won't ask them to engage in small group work because it disturbs the group in the next classroom) We don't want to counsel lack of pedagogic ambition, or going for the minimum. It is still worth thinking what matters most to you in terms of

- pedagogic space
- time
- resources (including internet connections, projection facilities, etc.)

To some extent there may be work-arounds for the problems. But also, if you are clear about what your seminar needs you will be in a better position to fight for it, or to take advantage of those opportunities that do arise.

References

- Some of the broader issues surrounding the relationship between 'English' and seminar teaching are explored in Ben Knights, (2005) '[A View from the English Subject Centre](#)'. *Cambridge Quarterly*, responding to Felicity Rosslyn, '[Literature for the Masses: the English Literature Degree in 2004](#)' *Cambridge Quarterly* 34.3. 2005.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Teaching Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell. 2003.

Activities within this resource

- Seminar design: individual activity
- Seminar design: group activity

Resources in the Small group teaching collection

- Small group teaching: introduction to the collection
- **Seminar design: resource overview (*you are here)**
 - Seminar design: individual activity



- Seminar design: group activity
- 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
 - 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

