

# A Plan for Paired Tutorials

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This plan is designed to make the most of paired tutorials – ideally, to make them even more effective than one-to-one sessions – by replacing the traditional “read essay and discuss” model with a pattern that encourages:

- well-informed dialogue between the pair;
- written summary and criticism;
- short and to-the-point analysis, in the style required for examination answers.

Each student writes four essays (around 2,000 words as a guide, though more is permitted) together with four “responses” (around 1,250 words, 1,500 maximum) whose main focus is an essay written by the other student. Both are expected to do the reading for all eight topics, and the respondent is free to introduce issues not mentioned in the essay if these are relevant (e.g. “Here Student 1 omitted to mention the suggestion of X, which would have provided a possible objection ...”). Tutorials will normally begin with the essayist starting out to summarise his or her paper, then the respondent is encouraged to intervene when objections arise, and the discussion proceeds ...

## Organisation of Fortnightly Tutorials

Tutorials can be organised either weekly or fortnightly. The “fortnightly” model is the more straightforward, with two “essay plus response” combinations being worked on simultaneously within each two-week period, as follows:

	<i>Topic(s) Set</i>	<i>Student 1</i>	<i>Student 2</i>	<i>Tutorial Topic</i>
<i>Week 0</i>	A, B	<i>(starts on Essay A)</i>	<i>(starts on Essay B)</i>	
<i>Week 1</i>		Essay A handed in	Essay B handed in	
<i>Week 2</i>	C, D	Response B	Response A	A, B
<i>Week 3</i>		Essay C handed in	Essay D handed in	
<i>Week 4</i>	E, F	Response D	Response C	C, D
<i>Week 5</i>		Essay E handed in	Essay F handed in	
<i>Week 6</i>	G, H	Response F	Response E	E, F
<i>Week 7</i>		Essay G handed in	Essay H handed in	
<i>Week 8</i>		Response H	Response G	G, H

It is obviously sensible to arrange a specific day on which the essays should be sent or handed in (both to the tutor and to the respondent) during the odd-numbered weeks, to ensure that the essayist leaves sufficient time for the respondent. But since the exchange at this point is mutual, this is relatively easy to coordinate, and the incentives of the students coincide (so, for example, they might mutually agree to allow 8 or 9 days for each essay, with less for each response). The response should be sent or handed in, both to the tutor and to the essayist, at the latest *on the day before the tutorial* where it is to be discussed (to enable it to be read in advance by all parties).

The main potential disadvantages of this model are the need for an alternating 0-2-0-2 pattern of tutorials from week to week (which could be inconvenient), and the impossibility of incorporating feedback from (e.g.) tutorial A into the work for tutorial B. In some courses this lack of sequential feedback might be a significant disadvantage, but in courses that consist of a series of relatively distinct topics, the relative simplicity of this model might well make it preferable.

## Organisation of Weekly Tutorials

The “weekly” model is designed to enable tutorials to fit into a regular one-per-week pattern (with the exception of the first and last weeks), but has a more complex structure which students can find a bit counter-intuitive, and which makes consistent monitoring desirable to ensure that the essayist always leaves enough time for the respondent. To enforce a rigid schedule, it is recommended that essays should generally be sent or handed in, both to the tutor and to the respondent, at the latest on *the day after the previous tutorial* (this enables points to be incorporated from that tutorial). The response should then be sent or handed in, both to the tutor and to the essayist, at the latest *on the day before the tutorial* where it is to be discussed (to enable the response to be read in advance by all parties). Hence usually the essayist will have 8 days to work with, and the respondent 5.

Adopting this scheme implies a greater gap than usual before the first tutorial, and hence tutorials start in week 2, with two tutorials in week 8 (as shown in the following table). There is room for flexibility in week 1, when it does not matter if one of the two essays is delayed a bit (in which case it becomes “Essay B” and the other is “Essay A”).

	<i>Topic(s) Set</i>	<i>Student 1</i>	<i>Student 2</i>	<i>Tutorial Topic</i>
<i>Week 0</i>	A, B	<i>(starts on Essay A)</i>	<i>(starts on Essay B)</i>	
<i>Week 1</i>	C	Essay A handed in	Essay B handed in	
<i>Week 2</i>	D	Essay C handed in	Response A	A
<i>Week 3</i>	E	Response B	Essay D handed in	B
<i>Week 4</i>	F	Essay E handed in	Response C	C
<i>Week 5</i>	G	Response D	Essay F handed in	D
<i>Week 6</i>	H	Essay G handed in	Response E	E
<i>Week 7</i>		Response F	Essay H handed in	F
<i>Week 8</i>		Response H	Response G	G, H