

# Peer review: individual activity

**Collection:** Small group teaching

**Resource:** Peer reviewing a seminar: Oliver Twist

## Approximate duration

1-2 hours

## Learning outcomes

To be able to stand back from the urgency of the process in order to read and reflect upon the patterns of seminar behaviour. To be able to plan for seminars in the light of process as well as the substantial points you as tutor want to make.

## Introduction

A piece of video like this is not a substitute for reflection upon real 3D experience. It provides an opportunity for you as a tutor to be able to read and reflect upon the whole situation in a way you might not be able to if present, let alone if trying to lead the seminar. Please note that this and other videos of teaching situations are not offered in the spirit of judgment: we are not asking you to say whether this is a 'good' or a 'bad' seminar. (Apart from anything else this would be unjust to the tutors and students who have generously allowed us to film them.) But it derives from the tradition of close reading the invitation to look hard at the details (even or especially the surprising details) and their dynamic relationship to the larger flow of the occasion.

**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.*

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## The activity

Watch the video of the seminar. As you watch, make notes under the following headings:



*Checklist for Peer or Self-Review (you won't be able to concentrate on all these: they're offered as a checklist you might use on other occasions, as well).*

1. How did the session start?
2. Off the top of your head, how would you characterise the emotional climate of this group? (Try a hot ... cold spectrum if stuck.)
3. How would you characterise its intellectual tone?
4. What did you find most surprising about this session?
5. How many people spoke during the session you observed?
6. What do you notice about the typical patterns of interaction in this group? For example, is it dominated by a few individuals? Is there a sub-group of students who appear to be at sea or have withdrawn from the action?
7. Do you notice anything particular about the non-verbal interactions?
8. Who initiates changes of direction? Are these always initiated by the lecturer / tutor?
9. What did you notice about the pace of the seminar? What were the most energetic moments? And what its most listless?
10. If the lecturer / tutor talks a lot, why do you think this is?
11. How does a topic emerge? Who is responsible for its emergence? Does the tutor plan ahead with the group?



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12. How does the class scaffold or prepare the way for individual study?
13. How did the tutor handle difficulties, for example, interruption by latecomers? Irrelevant observations? Students without copies of the text, or who hadn't done the preparation? Reluctance to carry out a specified task? Silent students? Over-bearing or dominant students?
14. How effective were any pre or post seminar activities in terms of participation, interaction etc?
15. What about the use of physical space? How is the room arranged, and what is the effect of the way it is arranged? Who is allowed to stand or move around? How do the sightlines work? Who can see whom?

## Example

We wondered about focusing on the part of the discussion about Oliver as 'empty centre' (18 mins. 41 seconds), as vicarious substitute for the reader. How does the tutor lead up to and guide this discussion? How far do you think he is controlling the discussion, and how far taking advantage of material and suggestions volunteered by the students? Is he providing the terms of the discussion? or re-framing those the students offer? Or again, look closely at the the management of the earlier discussion about 'round' / 'flat' characters, around 16 minutes in.

Another thing that interested us was how the tutor expresses approval, or gives positive affirmation to the points students make. How similar is this to what you would do yourself? Is there a danger that in trying to be affirmative, a tutor may give away signs that you actually don't think as highly of a contribution as you are trying to pretend so as to be encouraging?

## Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

How can the relationship between this resource and the Professional Standards Framework be evidenced? Reading and analysing the Creative Writing Benchmark statement relate to the following sections of the Professional Standards Framework:

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the le



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- vel 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
- Peer reviewing a seminar: Oliver Twist : resource overview
  - **Peer review: individual activity (\*you are here)**
  - 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

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