

MY ADOPTED HOME

Tutorial 101

Wednesday, April 18 2012

Marcella Purnama

It was Friday, 9am. I was a first year student, in the first week of my first semester. I held the university map and studied it like the Bible, and brought four different subject guides to every class. So what could possibly be a worse way to enter your first tutorial? Oh yeah, being the only Asian in the room.

The subject of my first tute was 'From Homer to Hollywood', and frankly, I only took this subject because it was compulsory for Arts student. And having the word 'Hollywood' made me thought that it would be an interesting subject. Well, it turned out to only be half- interesting, but that's a different story.

So imagine me, a 17- year- old girl who has never spoken in English for more than ten minutes, let alone for a full one hour, being stuck in between another 10 or so Westerners.

It was a nightmare.

Luckily, my other tutorial classes were better. Well, at least, I was not the only Asian- looking girl in class. There were some ABCs, and that also counted, right? Wrong. The ABCs are Westerners in different skins. They may look like Asians, but they have Western heart and soul, plus a very good Western tongue.

So here's the million dollar question: what's so hard about speaking up in tutorial? Well, as an international student, sadly English is not my cup of tea, and I need to do constant translation in order to utter a seven- word sentence.

During my first year, it took me double the effort to actually listen to the tutors, let alone to speak up my opinions. Others need to listen, to think and to speak. I need to listen, to translate, to think, to translate back, to grammatically check the words that I'd like to say, and to speak. So I did what I do best - I diminished my work by not asking questions or saying comments in class.

In sum, here are my seven good reasons of why international students don't really want to talk in tutorials:

1. Because English is not our first language, and as I said, it is hard to even speak in broken English, let alone speaking in proper English for others to understand.
2. And when you do want to talk, you start rehearsing the sentence about three times before you actually say them. By the time you finished rehearsing, another student has spoken up about something else and your momentum is gone with the wind.

SEARCH

MORE BY THIS AUTHOR

[A- is an Asian F](#)

[Now, it feels like home](#)

POSSIBLY RELATED ARTICLES

[A- is an Asian F](#)

[Now, it feels like home](#)

BLOGS

NAKED KITCHEN

[Gourmet on a Budget](#)

Julia Matthews

Ever wanted to host a fancy dinner party but held back because you couldn't afford the duck or you couldn't master whipped cream? If you've just moved out, you should be showing off your new place to friends and family, not be locked up alone with a sad plate of mushy peas with an empty social calendar. Here are ten top tips for hosting a fancy feast whilst sticking to a budget:

ACROSS THE SEE-THO

[Partying in the USA: Fraternities, college bars and the American drinking culture](#)

Michelle See-Tho

More often than not, the phrase "American college experience" evokes scenes from Animal House, Road Trip and Old School, of frat parties where doing keg stands, playing beer pong and chugging out of red party cups are standard must-dos.

MY ADOPTED HOME

[A- is an Asian F](#)

Marcella Purnama

You speak Glee? I know you know this infamous quote already. You don't speak Glee? It's okay, I know you know this prognosis already.

TRYALL AND ERROR

[Golf](#)

Carlynn Nunn

The aim of it, right, is to hit a ball into a hole with a club like device. Deceptively simple. In actuality, the ball is tiny and you're hitting it with an orange on a walking stick and the hole is on the other side of the world.

NEWS AND EVENTS

ARCHIVES

Farrago 2011

CONTACT US

farrago@union.unimelb.edu.au

SUBSCRIBE

RSS Facebook Twitter 

3. Frankly speaking, it is quite embarrassing if people ask you for the third time of what you are trying to say.

4. Because it isn't our (or specifically saying, my) culture. My culture says to listen to the nice teacher and to believe in him - we are not really taught to dispute or to have a debate of what being taught. Blunt memorisation is our best friend.

5. Laziness - we don't really see the point of talking in tutorials. Not commenting on certain things doesn't mean that we lack the understanding of the subject. And hey, we still got decent marks.

6. Because we are way too much comfortable in our own skins. Speaking our own languages with people who share the same culture is our heaven, and one thing that most people hate is getting out of their comfort zones. That's why we tend to sit in groups in tutorials. That's why we have arranged to be in the same tutorial class beforehand. We are interdependent beings, not independent ones.

7. Because we literally don't have anything to say.

And what do my international friends think? They pretty much share the same thoughts. Some of us even have that 'I only need to fill the attendance thingy in tutorials' attitude.

Okay, I admit that not speaking up does make you invisible. For four straight semesters, not even a single tutor remembers my name (well, maybe one tutor does remember me). They mispronounce my name every single week (yes, it's Mar- sel- la, not Mar- khel- la or Mar- chel- la). When addressing me, they don't call my name, instead, they have one of those blank looks and politely use their hand gesture to indicate that they want me to answer the next question. What a sight.

Two Australian academics, Jeremy Novak, a lecturer with the South Cross Business School, and Michael Cowling, from Central Queensland University, have found that Twitter could actually help shy international students to speak up. Clearly, not speaking up in tutorials has a bit of negative stigma; it is an issue that needs to be addressed - something to be helped, or fixed even.

But not speaking up in tutorials doesn't necessarily mean that you are not able to practice English. You can do this with your other friends who have different nationalities. And it doesn't mean that you're academically disadvantaged either (except for that 5% class participation mark).

Rather, not speaking up just makes you stay at a stagnant point on which disables you to go to the next level. At least, that's what happens to me, and I know that if I want to upgrade my personal skills, I actually need to get myself into that vulnerable state and practice.

Should international students be forced to speak up in tutorials? Maybe. Maybe not. Of course each student has a different case - some actually could talk but wouldn't, others would like to talk but couldn't, while the group that I'm usually in is would like to talk but don't actually have anything to say. Whatever it is, encouraging students to speak up is the best people can do, but I believe the change needs to come from within. Students have to understand why they need to speak up in tutorials.

I always think of speaking up as a plus point for it builds your confidence, and not doing so is not necessarily a minus point. If you want to challenge yourself, speaking up will be a very great asset when you go into the workforce. After all, you are the one who needs to approach the employers, and not the other way around.

COMMENTS

Comments are turned off for this article.

COMMENTS

Whoever wr... - **Tony Walton** on *Who's Coming to Dinner?*

Great arti... - **Sadgirl** on *How Not to Die After a Breakup*

Very effic... - **A G McCall** on *Still Off Air*

An informa... - **Lachlan** on *Japan: One Year Later*

I may have... - **Elsa** on *Earmuffs*

TWITTER

ABOVE WATER

[Above Water](#) is the annual creative writing anthology published by the Student Union's Arts and Media (Farrago) Departments. All Melbourne University students are invited to submit.

Submissions are now open and close at 5pm, Friday 25 May 2012.

CONTACT

farrago[at]union.unimelb.edu.au
(03) 8344 6957
Farrago
UMSU Inc
First floor Union House, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010

ADVERTISING

Sara Bosch
+61 3 8344 8869
farrago.ads[at]union.unimelb.edu.au
[More Information](#)

DISCLAIMER

Farrago is the newspaper of the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU). Farrago is published by the **Secretary of the Union, Samuel Vero**. The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Student Union or editors.

All writing and artwork remains the property of the creators. The collection is © Farrago and Farrago reserves the right to republish in any format.

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE STUDENT UNION

UNION HOME

[About the Union](#)
[Union House](#)
[Calendar](#)
[Contact us](#)
[Board](#)
[Green initiatives](#)
[Advertising and promotions](#)
[Jobs](#)
[Terms and conditions](#)
[Filming policy](#)
[Privacy policy](#)
[CCTV policy](#)

SERVICES

[Overview](#)
[A-Z of services](#)
[Computing Centre](#)
[Rowden White Library](#)
[Police laptop and bike register](#)
[Student employment](#)
[VCE Summer School](#)
[Functions @ Melbourne catering](#)

SUPPORT

[Advocacy](#)
[Orientation](#)

ART + LEISURE

[Arts Lab](#)
[George Paton](#)
[Gigs and events](#)
[Union Theatre](#)
[Mudfest](#)

REPRESENTATION

[Elections](#)
[President](#)
[Secretariat](#)
[MUOSS](#)
[VCAM](#)
[Activities](#)
[Arts](#)
[Ed Academic](#)
[Ed Public](#)
[Environment](#)
[Indigenous](#)
[Queer](#)
[Welfare](#)
[Womens](#)

PARTICIPATE

[About clubs](#)
[Complete list of clubs](#)
[Farrago](#)
[Counter Course Handbook](#)
[Facebook](#)
[Twitter](#)
[List of online communities](#)

SHOPS + HIRE

[The Uni Store](#)
[Camping equipment hire](#)
[Regalia hire](#)
[Theatre equipment hire](#)
[AV@Melbourne](#)

THE UNIVERSITY

[Library](#)
[Sport](#)
[Bookshop](#)
[Graduate Student Association](#)