

German Academic Culture

Handout for exchange students at Paderborn University

Academic Quarter (“Akademisches Viertel”)

Classes at many German universities often start fifteen minutes after the hour - the so-called “academic quarter”. This gives students and professors enough time to make one’s way from one classroom to another, or to get a cup of coffee.

Classes that start fifteen minutes after the hour as opposed to classes that start exactly on the hour, can be distinguished by the “c.t.” (latin: cum tempore) or “s.t.” (latin: sin tempore) written behind the time.

Example:

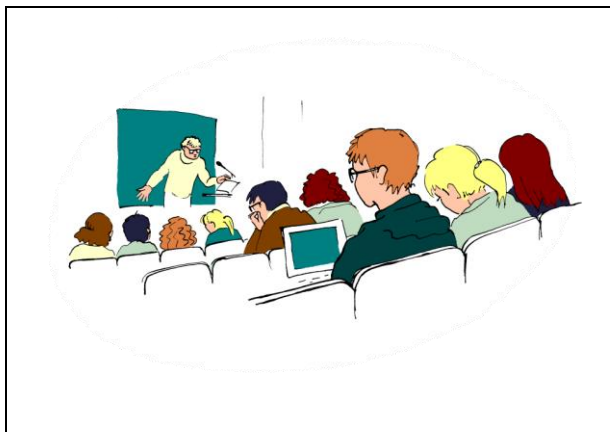
- 9 Uhr c.t. → starting time will be 9.15 am
- 9 Uhr s.t. → starting time will be 9.00 am



Types of classes at German Universities

There are mainly two types of classes at German Universities – lectures and seminars:

Lectures



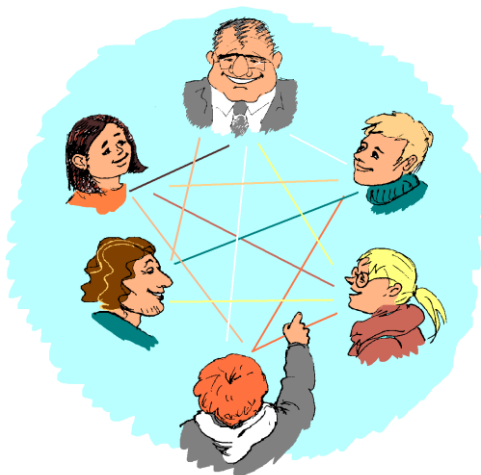
- **Class is focused on lecturer**
- Typically an introduction to a study/scientific field
- Lecturer:
 - Presents
- Students:
 - Listen
 - Take notes
 - Ask questions when asked or where appropriate
- Necessary skills for students:
 - listening
 - note taking

Seminars



- **Discussion between students and professor**
- In-depth dealing with a topic
- Scientific discussions
- Students:
 - Are expected to actively participate in discussions
 - Work in groups
 - Give presentations
- Lecturers
 - Support the students in learning
 - Encourage discussion and group work of students
- Necessary skills for students:
 - Active participation in discussion
 - Contribute to group work and presentations

Group Discussions



A discussion allows students to gain a deeper understanding of a subject or topic area by

- exploring ideas with others,
- exchanging information,
- expanding and clarifying knowledge.

Participating in a group discussion helps to

- improve one's ability to think critically
- improve one's language skills
- become more confident in speaking up in public

How to participate in a discussion:

You can:

- answer questions from the teacher and other students.
- ask questions about what you didn't understand.
- give your own opinion:
 - about what the teacher says and/or what other students say
 - about texts you have read for the seminar

Group Work



Group work has many advantages:

- You learn more actively
- Work can be divided
- More ideas can be collected
- The gained knowledge can be mutually extended, controlled, and corrected
- Group work provides a supportive environment for challenging work
- You have less fear of speaking
- You have more opportunities to speak
- You will develop communication and interpersonal skills that you need in the workplace throughout your career

Key stages in group work:

Step 1: Group formation

Step 2: Planning

Step 3: Implementation of plan

Step 4: Completion of activity

Step 5: Evaluation of group performance

Things that should be clear when working in a group:

- Who is the group?
- What individual strengths do you have and how can these be used effectively?
- What ground rules do you need to set in order to work effectively?
- What is the aim of the group activity?
- How much time do you have to do it?
- Who will do what?
- How will the group members communicate throughout the process?

Source: www.mumis-projekt.de