

Teaching in the Biosciences: an introduction for postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows

Small Group Teaching: 10 Pointers for Successful Sessions

1. Do all of your students know each other? “Icebreakers” can be useful if applied tactfully, but judge the mood of the group before trying this.
2. From the outset ensure that all participants know what is expected of them in the session. Remember that most newcomers have never been in a small group tutorial situation before. Perhaps they have a different view of what a tutorial is from your own.
3. Attempt to learn the names of your students. Use name cards if you can't remember easily.
4. What lines of communication are open between yourself and your students? Can they email you for example? Do you encourage your students to contact each other outwith the class?
5. Consider trying different seating arrangements, depending upon your objective of the session. Remember sitting at the 'head' of the table will give you authority but you will also tend to do most of the talking.
6. Ensure you have prepared for the session. Do all students have access to the information required for the session? Do you need to keep a record of attendance? Are there extra resources that you need to take to the session?
7. Ensure that all members of the group are included in your session. Aim to distribute your time equally between groups or individual students.
8. Towards the end of the session, it is often a good idea to include a summing-up session, highlighting any new work that needs to be completed, together with a deadline.
9. Remind students when work for assessment is set about the learning outcomes of the assignment and the relevant marking criteria. Remember to meet the deadline for marking and returning work to students.
10. Aim to provide quality written feedback to enable students to improve. Use feedback to give encouragement to students and to help them to strive to improve their work in the future.

Further Resources

General points to consider when teaching students (lectures, practicals, fieldwork, tutorials...) 'Resources for New Lecturers' www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/resourcepack.aspx

Supporting inclusive learning and teaching in the Biosciences
www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/resources/shortguides/inclusivelandt.pdf

The Bioscience Centre also has a Short Guide for Postgraduate Teachers and Demonstrators, with hints and tips on demonstrating in practical classes, assessing student work and supervising final year project students.
www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/resources/shortguides/demonstrators.pdf