Essentials of Being a Demonstrator in Informatics

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Schedule

• What are the responsibilities of a demonstrator?
• What are labs for? Advantages for students
• What should be the steps of preparing for a lab?
• What are the possible activities?
• Some practical suggestions
• How can we get a sense of how well we are doing as demonstrators?
What are the responsibilities of a demonstrator?

Take a few minutes to discuss your responsibilities in small groups...
What are the responsibilities of a demonstrator? (Inf Teaching Support Policy)

- Hosting lab session
- Answering to student queries
- Providing oral feedback to students/ feed forward during the scheduled lab session
Changes to University Documentation

- The “Code of Practice on Tutoring and Demonstrating” (CoP) included clear responsibilities for demonstrators
- CoP recently replaced by a “Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators”
- This policy focuses on university and school responsibilities, and has very little on your responsibilities
- The implementation of the policy will be phased, with full implementation expected in 2018/19
- The responsibilities from the CoP still common sense, so I will still describe them
What are the responsibilities of a demonstrator? (old CoP)

- Take teaching and related duties seriously
- Participate to **briefing sessions/training** that you and course organiser (CO) decided is appropriate
- **At the lab:**
  - **Be on time!** Notify if need to miss/rearrange lab
  - Take note of and report **attendance** (now required for all years)
  - Complete any **assessment duties** by agreed deadlines
  - Refer students who approach you for help on other course aspects to other members of course team (**know the team!**)
  - **Limited pastoral role** as convenient first point of contact
  - Familiarise yourself with lab **safety** profile, to know what to do in case of an emergency
  - No obligation to provide help outside formal contact hours
Safety related responsibilities (old CoP)

- You should know:
  - how to call for help
  - the location of the nearest First Aid cabinet and how to find a first- aider
  - how to evacuate the laboratory
  - the locations and mode of operation of extinguishers
  - the locations of the technical staff on duty.
Pastoral responsibilities (old CoP)

- Respond sensitively to personal matters, be discrete
- Do NOT promise absolute confidentiality, advise about need to consult other staff members (e.g. Personal Tutor-PT)
- If there may be implications on student performance, encourage him/her to contact the CO and/or PT.
- The CO/ITO will inform you about students with disabilities for whom additional support has been agreed
- Not appropriate to get involved with students on matters not directly related to coursework-> be aware of PT system and other available support
- Direct students to more specialised sources of pastoral support
Relevant points in new policy

- You are expected to carry out work which is in line with your job description and pay grade.
- CO may occasionally request you, for development reasons, to do limited tasks which are not applicable to your grade, in which case he/she will provide supervision and feedback.
- **Pastoral support: direct students to more specialised sources of pastoral support.**
- You must not start work until you were provided with formal induction on core aspects of your role.
- You must attend mandatory training.
What are labs for?

- In small groups, discuss the advantages labs bring (both in general and in comparison with lectures and tutorials) in terms of:
  - The type of learning
  - The social context
  - The available material/technology
  - The fit with course outcomes (e.g. assessment, learning, future prospects)
  - The relationship with the demonstrator
What are labs for?
- Some answers -

- Differences to lectures:
  - Practical and active learning
  - Learning by mistakes, discovery and practice
  - Chance to test theories, think critically, formulate questions
  - Chance to ask questions and get (more) feedback
  - Relationship with real-life practice ("real thing")
  - Chance to try out technology

- Differences to tutorials:
  - More personal/ individual, focused on needs
  - More informal, using own style
  - Demonstrator focused on answering questions

- Demonstrator approachable (enthusiastic/close in age/ has time for questions), even role model
What should be the steps of preparing for a lab?

Take a few minutes to describe to your neighbour how you prepare/would prepare for:

- Your first lab
- Any other lab
Some steps for preparing for your first lab

- Understand the course aims, objectives and requirements from the course website
- Clarify your roles and responsibilities
- Participate in the initial briefing session
- Get to know the structure of the course team and who to approach for different problems
- Find out how to get in touch with technical support
- Identify fire exits/notices, emergency phone numbers, first aiders, rules and regulations, risk assessment forms and processes
- Check with the CO/ITO about students who may need special attention
Some steps for preparing for a lab

- Familiarise yourself with the tasks and any relevant material (lectures, other reading)
- Solve the tasks yourself before checking sample solutions!
- Participate to any briefing sessions or training
- Contact the course team with any questions
- Plan your support in the lab by:
  - Thinking of possible questions from students
  - Preparing different ways of explaining things (e.g. verbally, diagrams)
  - Preparing a set of motivating real-world examples
  - Thinking of resources that you may point the students to
  - Preparing for challenging situations (e.g. student taking too much of your time, student being disruptive)
What are possible activities in a lab?

Take a few minutes to describe to your neighbour the different activities that you may conduct in a lab.
Possible activities in a lab

- Taking attendance
- Setting up computers
- Giving instructions on objectives, tasks to whole class
- Going round the room to identify students who need help
- Advising students working individually
- Advising a group of students
- Explaining a common problem at the whiteboard (planning required, do not overdo!)
- Solving technical problems (may need technical support)
- Tackling other emergencies
- Summing up to the whole class
- Feeding back any observations to course team
Some practical suggestions

- Actively identify students who need help
- Don’t provide solutions, but guide students in reaching them themselves!
- Listen first! Wait for answers!
- Prompt to check understanding and progress
- Repeat, rephrase, break down questions/ ask students to explain or rephrase
- Use visuals/different material in explanation
- Treat students equally
- Try to encourage, motivate and inspire
- Be honest about not knowing the answer to a question, promise to look it up
- It’s never a stupid question!
Some practical suggestions

- **Be friendly and approachable**: students should feel encouraged to ask you questions
- **Express enthusiasm** about the subject
- **Be understanding** if students tell you about their difficulties, relate them to your own
- Take time to chat informally with the students, to see how they are getting on
- **Show empathy to personal problems**, and direct students to their CO or personal tutor
- **Be strict about course requirements and ground rules!**
In case of an emergency...

- Remain calm!
- Take immediate action to remove danger and prevent further danger
- Avoid becoming a casualty yourself
- Summon help
- Note and report hazards and incidents for follow up
How can we get a sense of how well we are doing as demonstrators?

- **Informal feedback can be obtained by:**
  - Chatting informally with students before/after session
  - Scrutinising faces- have they understood?
  - Observing preparation, motivation, attitude
  - Checking attendance rates, coursework marks

- **Formal feedback can be obtained from:**
  - The students (questionnaires, quizzes, post its etc.) **BUT more difficult than in tutorials**
  - Colleagues (advice about sessions, how to explain, etc.)
  - Self (diary, notes, pro formas, etc.)

- **Important to get feedback through different means, and not just once**

MORE in ‘Gathering Feedback’ workshop in Week 10
In a future session (Week 4), we will...

- See examples of good and bad demonstrating
- Discuss tips and tricks for checking for understanding, providing explanations and feedback
- Discuss how you could tackle some frequent challenging situations
Resources

- UoE old “Code of practice on tutoring and demonstrating” and “Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators”
- Informatics Teaching Support Policy
- Resources on Informatics homepage – Staff Intranet – Student Services – Teaching Support – Training
- “Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook” chapter 5 (“Demonstrating”)
- “Laboratory demonstrating” material on the “IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn
Resources

- IAD course “Introduction to Laboratory Demonstrating”, Wed 4 Oct