

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...

Demonstrator Responsibilities (Inf Teaching Support Policy)



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

Demonstrator Responsibilities (Policy for the recruitment, support and development of T&Ds)



- You are expected to carry out work which is in line with your job description, pay grade, time allocated.
- For development, you may be given limited tasks which are not applicable to your grade; the course organiser (CO) will provide supervision and feedback.
- **Pastoral support: direct students to more specialised sources (e.g. student support officers)**
- You must not start work until provided with formal induction and cleared to do so by Teaching Support
- You must attend mandatory training/ complete Learn module.

Demonstrator Responsibilities (Inf Teaching Support Policy)



- Monitoring your hours of work and submitting online weekly timesheets to the Informatics Student Services (ISS)
- **Lab hours + hours for other roles = hours paid**
- **You will additionally automatically be paid for all attended hours in Informatics training**
- If you think you might exceed your allocated hours, raise this with the course lecturer who will report to the ISS
- **DO NOT work extra hours until you get permission from the ISS (normally for max 15% extra) as you may not get paid for them!**

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 or Learn
- Clarify your roles and responsibilities
- Participate to the initial briefing session
- Get to know the structure of the course team and who to approach for different problems; speak to the teaching support team if unsure
- Check with the CO and student support team about students who may need special attention and have learning adjustments.
- Read the “Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy” and about mainstreaming learning adjustments (see references)
- 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; run through “house keeping” before each lab
- Read “Evacuating disabled people” from the references

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
- **Be mindful of learning adjustments!**
- 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, personal tutor or student support officers
- Be mindful about learning
- **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
- Knowing the needs of any of your students who have disabilities, offer appropriate help in their evacuation (see “Evacuating disabled people” from the references)

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

In a future session (Week 3), 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

Important contacts



- Teaching support team: teaching-support@inf.ed.ac.uk
- Student support team: inf-sst@inf.ed.ac.uk

Resources



- Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators
- Informatics Teaching Support
- Informatics Teaching Support Staff Policy
- Informatics Teaching Support training webpage
- Informatics Student Support
- **On learning adjustments:**
 - The “Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy”
 - Disability Service Implementing adjustments for students
 - Mainstreaming learning adjustments
- “Evacuating disabled people”, especially the **Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan**

Resources



- **“Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook” chapter 5** (“Demonstrating”)
- **“Laboratory demonstrating” material on the “IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn**