Essentials of Being a Demonstrator in Informatics

CRISTINA ADRIANA ALEXANDRU
CRISTINA.ALEXANDRU@ED.AC.UK
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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 (Informatics 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

1. Understand the course aims, objectives and requirements from the course website or Learn.
2. Clarify your roles and responsibilities.
3. Participate to the initial briefing session.
4. Get to know the structure of the course team and who to approach for different problems; speak to the teaching support team if unsure.
5. Check with the CO and student support team about students who may need special attention and have learning adjustments.
6. Read the “Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy” and about mainstreaming learning adjustments (see references).
7. Find out how to get in touch with technical support.
8. Identify fire exits/notices, emergency phone numbers, first aiders, rules and regulations, risk assessment forms and processes; run through “house keeping” before each lab.
9. 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