Essentials of Being a Demonstrator in Informatics

Cristina Adriana Alexandru
Cristina.Alexandru@ed.ac.uk
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
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
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 to 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

Also see slides of ‘Gathering Feedback’ workshop in Sem 1
In a future session (Week 4), we will...

• Discuss about possible challenges in labs, in terms of:
  o explaining things
  o students not behaving as expected
• Propose ways to tackle them, and learn from one another’s experience
• Get advice from a more experienced tutor/demonstrator
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
- Slides of “What Makes a Good Tutor and Demonstrator in Informatics?”, “Supporting Students” and “Gathering Feedback” sessions in Sem 1
Resources

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