



Teaching or learning in an outdoor environment is a new experience for almost everyone involved. Because of this, there is often an excess of excitement and poses some new challenges. Here are a few tips to help make your experience more worthwhile and enjoyable for everyone.

- **Choose one concept and focus on it.** Don't try to cram all of your wonderful knowledge on the subject into their heads.
- **Do something fun** or evoking curiosity right away...you will get their undivided attention.
- **Address your topic from many different angles.**
- **Use a variety of teaching styles** (experiments, games, pictures, etc...). Kids learn in many different ways and when they are outside it is not usually by listening. Get their hands on something!!!
- **Avoid using many "biologist words".** Teaching new vocabulary is great, but using a whole string of technical words will almost immediately lose their attention.
- **Encourage questions** throughout your program.
- **Go with the flow.** If many students seem curious about a certain aspect of what you are talking about....tell them about it!
- **Use "teachable moments".** If you are talking about a stream and an eagle swoops down and catches a fish 20 feet from you...the kids aren't focused on you anymore. Tell them about eagles or predators! Or just let the moments sink in for them.
- **Tell the students about yourself.** Both personal and career related. Why? Number one, you become more of a "real person" to them and number two, you may inspire them to become the next generation of wildlife biologists.
- **Make it fun but challenging!**
- **Have fun along with them.** If you look like you are having fun, they will get caught up in your excitement and learn without even realizing it.
- **Keep your opinions to yourself.** We all have personal opinions on wildlife and habitat issues. Conservation education is not about expressing our opinions though, it is about giving students facts and experiences and letting them develop their own values and opinions on issues that are important to them.



By Grade Level

Grades 1-3 (lower elementary: presentation length 20-30 minutes)

When working with the lower grade levels it is best to keep in mind that they have a very short attention span so make sure you have a variety of activities to break up your program. At this level, focus on observation skills, encouraging students to become aware of the natural world around them.

Grades 3-7 (upper elementary & middle school, presentation length 45 minutes)

When working with these grades, focus more on building knowledge and posing value questions. Make it fun though....most students will still be up for games. Role playing and hands-on experiments will combine both concept building and fun for this age group.

Grades 8-12 (middle school & high school, presentation length 45-60 minutes)

Students in this age group are almost adults, and like to be treated like it. Focus your teaching more on what they think or what they would do. It is more effective to act as a “guide” than as a “teacher, with this age group. Also, focus on some career and job related topics...they will be making decisions about what to do after high school soon. This group may be kind of intimidating to you at first. Don’t let it get to you! Once you gain their respect they will become very interested in what you do and seek you out as a positive role model!

Control Techniques

When coordinating with the teacher ahead of time, be sure to insist that he/she be present during your presentation to be able to lend a hand with any behavioral issues that may arise. However, it is always helpful to know a few tricks for “student management”. It not only boosts your confidence level in effectively reaching the kids; it is also critical for safety when teaching in the field.

- **Establish some rules right away.** Let them know your expectations for them and what they can expect from you. (Do you want them to raise their hands? What will be your signal for them to come back from whatever they are doing (collecting data, playing a game, etc...) “RESPECT” is a good simple rule; short and sweet. Respect nature. Respect each other. Respect the equipment and respect you.
- **Be consistent.** Let them know when they aren’t meeting your expectations. If you let someone break a rule once it is going to snowball and everyone will think they can get away with it.
- **Know names.** Saying “Hey Joe, listen up!”, is a lot more effective than, “Hey you!” Ask the students to tell you their names when you call on them before they ask their question or make a comment. This is a good way to learn names without spending too much time on it. If possible, ask the teacher to provide name tags for the class ahead of time.
- **Silence is sometimes best.** If yelling over a group of talking kids isn’t working; try standing their quietly...most often the students realize in a few seconds they are being disruptive.

Adapted by Kristen Romanoff, ADF&G from Forest Service EcoVan Program- Teaching Tips, Nellie Atkinson, 2003.

