Engaging Students in Thoughtful Lab Report Writing: Lessons from 49 Do-Overs

Janice Bonner

Notre Dame of Maryland University Biology, 4701 North Charles St., Baltimore MD 21210 USA (jbonner@ndm.edu)

An ongoing challenge for laboratory instructors is how to best deal with lab reports, especially in an introductory biology course. Many students enter college with little or no experience in this area and are overwhelmed by the number of details to which they should pay attention. The instructor must consider how many lab reports the student should write over a semester, how detailed the reports should be, and how to incorporate the opportunity for students to edit their work. This mini workshop will present ideas developed from 49 attempts to teach an introductory biology course—25 years of trying with one semester off for sabbatical. It will suggest ways to present lab reports to students, to develop rubrics that encourage thoughtful engagement by students in lab report writing and editing, and to simplify the grading process for the instructor. Contributions to the discussion from participants will be encouraged.

Mission, Review Process & Disclaimer

The Association for Biology Laboratory Education (ABLE) was founded in 1979 to promote information exchange among university and college educators actively concerned with teaching biology in a laboratory setting. The focus of ABLE is to improve the undergraduate biology laboratory experience by promoting the development and dissemination of interesting, innovative, and reliable laboratory exercises. For more information about ABLE, please visit http://www.ableweb.org/

Papers published in Tested Studies for Laboratory Teaching: Peer-Reviewed Proceedings of the Conference of the Association for Biology Laboratory Education are evaluated and selected by a committee prior to presentation at the conference, peer-reviewed by participants at the conference, and edited by members of the ABLE Editorial Board.

Citing This Article


Compilation © 2015 by the Association for Biology Laboratory Education, ISBN 1-890444-18-9. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

ABLE strongly encourages individuals to use the exercises in this proceedings volume in their teaching program. If this exercise is used solely at one’s own institution with no intent for profit, it is excluded from the preceding copyright restriction, unless otherwise noted on the copyright notice of the individual chapter in this volume. Proper credit to this publication must be included in your laboratory outline for each use; a sample citation is given above.