Sure Fire Method for Setting Up Science Lab Stations

Step by Step Set Up!

Looking for an easy way to do science lab activities? A little scared to dive in to the resultant chaos and uncontrollable student behavior?

I feel your pain! Labs were very scary to me starting out. BUT I wanted to do labs with my students, so over the years I developed methods that would work for me. My goal was to have an orderly lab activity in which all my students would know what to do next and even with busyness everywhere in my classroom, I would be confident all students were behaving or controllable, to say the least!

NOT an easy thing to pull off! In fact there are multiple steps to getting ready and multiple ways to pull off a good lab activity with your students. This tutorial deals with the lab station itself. Later I will discuss how to run a lab without tearing your hair out!

Marcia’s Science Teaching Ideas was founded by Marcia Krech, a retired Earth Science Teacher from Missouri, who believes passionately in passing on what she knows about good science teaching. I encourage teachers to use the active learning model including team games and foldables which puts the student to work and assigns the teacher the role of facilitator.

Email me with questions!

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How to Set Up Science Labs

Step 1:
Start by figuring out how many lab stations you will need. Every science room is set up differently. Is your room actually designed for science? If so, then you might have sinks scattered around your room and the SINKS will establish how many stations you can have.

My room had cabinets around the outside of the room with six sinks spread out along the countertop. If I needed eight lab stations, two groups would have to share a sink.

You might have lab tables with attached sinks which would define your stations, or you might have lab cabinets without sinks and one or two large sinks for all to share. Deciding how many stations is determined by the maximum number of students you will have in a class.

Step 2:
Once you know how many lab stations you will have, then you figure out how to indicate where each lab group goes. If you read Tutorial #1, I suggested you set up the tables with team colors. These will also be your lab stations if you have no where else to send your students for labs.

If you have labs AND tables/desks, then you can use the same colors for your lab groups. I have a set of lab station signs you can printout, laminate, and post next to each station. (See box for details.)

Step 3:
What goes in the stations? This is a real sticky wicket, if you know that saying. My school had years where we couldn't leave triple-beam balances out on the counter because they had legs and disappeared so we had to put them away every day.

You will have to decide what to do with lab equipment. A "real" chemistry lab has equipment at each station in drawers or on shelves. A middle school lab can do that or you can keep all your supplies at one central area and distribute only what would be needed for a particular lab. I recommend that method if you are just starting out. Middle schoolers are easily distracted and extra equipment can be used for goofing around! However, you can decide for yourself, of course!

Step 4:
Post your lab rules at each station! This should include all the usual rules plus a clean-up requirement! (See box for details.)