

#1 - Getting Things Started and Our First Attempts

Science Engagement? What's that? Is it something I can do? These were the questions I was asking not too long ago to my friend who was taking the course. It was something that definitely sparked some interest in me. The idea of being able to complete a placement sounded like it could be a really special experience. I soon found myself, and my friends Donald and Natalia, consulting Dr. Svetlana Mikhaylichenko about the in-reach placements they usually have for CHMB42. Before we knew it, we were accepted to be the mentors that will run the lab skills seminars (LSS) every week, along with one other student...

Now, where to start? Well, near the end of November, Prof. Wanda Restivo emailed us so that we can pick up the lab manuals when we get a chance. Donald and I thought this would be a good chance to meet with her to get some more details. Wanda told us about how there would be two LSS every week, and since there were five experiments plus the lab test, we would be running LSS's about the same lab four times. Regarding how they would be structured, however, was completely up to us. It looked like we had some planning to do!

Wanda said the fourth student would be Aasma and suggested that we split into two pairs, one presenting on Tuesday evenings and the other on Friday afternoons. Donald and I began to wonder who would be in a pair with this younger student we haven't even met yet. I thought a lot about how all this can be done properly and successfully. Should we use PowerPoint presentations? Will we have access to actual lab equipment for demonstrations? Who would work with whom? When will we meet to get things ready? I felt rather undecided for a while.

We then realized that I will only be available on Tuesday's and Natalia on Friday's. Donald could present on either day, so it was up to Aasma to determine how we will divide ourselves. However, after emailing her, we found out that she won't be doing them anymore—Taleen will be joining us instead. I knew Taleen from my CHMC47 lab section, but Donald and Natalia have not met her yet. I thought maybe I should present with her since I already knew her... Well, it didn't turn out that way. She said she'd prefer to present on Friday's due to her schedule, so I guess I would be presenting with Donald. This showed me how I should be ready for change, because things won't always happen the way you think they will.

Due to our busy holidays, it wasn't until the actual course (SCIB03) began on Monday, January 9th that the four of us met up. We were to present the first LSS that Friday! Will we be ready on time? We planned to meet that Wednesday to create our PowerPoint and get completely coordinated (hopefully).

By Friday, we had our contracts signed and our slides completed and posted up for the CHMB42 student on their Blackboard page. We decided that the student version of the slides will contain missing information that they could only obtain by attending the seminar. It was now time for the very first LSS! Donald and I agreed to attend since we could learn a lot to prepare ourselves for next week. I felt a bit nervous even though I wasn't presenting this one!

As Taleen and Natalia went through the presentation, Dr. Lana supervised (as Prof. Wanda will be doing so on Tuesday's for now) and added other important points that we took notes on. Were these points that we failed to include in our slides? Personally, I was actually learning new tips and strategies that I didn't know before. I also felt most of it was important information to include next time. We also noted other points that we could correct when we present: give students time to write the missing information and keep the presentation within an hour!

The following Tuesday, it was Donald's and my turn. I was feeling rather confident, especially after adding/fixing the presentation according to the one last Friday, but maybe a bit too much. I'd say we did alright; we went through a lot in an hour and explained many things pretty well. However, we ended up getting a bit stuck a couple times with specific questions regarding the theory of SN2 reactions and the TLC technique. Thankfully, Wanda made sure we got back on the right track. This taught me the importance of being completely prepared! I'm sure we will be able to do better next time!