

Tips for Salmon Watch Volunteers

You have a fun experience ahead of you! Being a Salmon Watch Volunteer is a challenging and rewarding role. Jump in! Get involved! Above all, have fun! You have much to give and enthusiasm is contagious. Here are a few suggestions to help you:

What is my role as a volunteer?

You will be working with students in the field, sharing your perspective and maximizing their learning experience. Please demonstrate exemplary behavior and attitude in the natural environment. Your curiosity will lead others to follow suit. Encourage your students to:

- Ask questions.
- Investigate their study area, while minimizing disturbance.

How can I help students get the most out of their field trip?

Talk with the teacher about their goals for the trip. Be sure you understand the plan for the day. Review your Salmon Watch Volunteer Resource Packet before your trip. Utilize the “learning moments” during the day; be alert to unique opportunities that may seem like tangents to the activity, yet offer a springboard for further discussion of the original topic.

How do I lead the group?

There are many effective techniques for getting students engaged in the planned activities. Here are a few suggestions:

- Ask students to describe their observations.
- Choose a plant, animal, or other physical object they can touch and examine.
- Offer positive comments for their answers; keep a positive attitude.
- Provide interactive activities to engage the students in learning. **Avoid a lecture format.**

How do I involve everyone in the group?

Be sure to try to connect with all the students in the group. There will always be a few who have all the answers. Encourage the shy or quiet children to share their ideas too. When an answer is given ask the group to offer comments: agree/disagree, elaborate, find relationships.

How do I deal with questions I don't know the answer to?

Don't be embarrassed to admit you don't know the answer to every question. You are not expected to. Also, there often isn't one simple explanation, or any correct answer. There are many ways to deal with this predicament. For example, you can:

- Reason aloud. Go through the process of how you would find out an answer.
- Show students the resources available. Have students look through field guides, or other resources. Knowing where to find an answer is as important as knowing the answer.
- Turn the question back to the group as a whole. Encourage brainstorming.
- Turn the question over to the agency expert.

Techniques for Working with Students

A Note on Lecturing

Many educators rely too much on lecturing. Most individuals, both youth and adults, find they learn better when using a hands-on, discovery approach. By breaking up the lecture with activity, one can appeal to as many senses as possible.

Research suggests that there are different types of learners. We find that a large percentage of the population does not learn easily from lecture. Most adults tolerate lecture better than children do.

Environmental education programs usually emphasize hands-on activities, and the learner is exposed to the subject over many sessions. Interpretive programs often rely more on lecture, because the entire program fits into a short time frame, thus we have included tips for effective public speaking.

Again, the best advice is to resist the urge to lecture and to use a variety of teaching methods. (Note, however, that lecturing and storytelling are different. Almost everyone enjoys a *well-told* story.)

Public Speaking Techniques

1. Be sure to make your presentation age and knowledge level appropriate.
2. Try to NEVER JUST TALK. Hands-on learning can and should be woven into every presentation.
3. You make presentations with your body as well as with your words, and body frequently has greater impact. Be sure to make your body language consistent with your words.
4. Get animated, be dynamic, move, gesture, use vocal variety. Don't stand in one place. Be aware of what your group can see and hear.
5. ALWAYS speak to the whole group (beginners sometimes address only part of a group.) Yet try to have a one-on-one encounter with each person at the same time by using good eye contact.
6. Use a few, gripping, "pungent" facts and use analogies the listener can relate to easily.
7. Information should flow and be logically organized. Use repetition and internal summaries.
8. Use impact words, simple sentences, personal statements and stories. Let them know WHY this information is important, or what it relates to.

9. **ENGAGE THEM WITH QUESTIONS.** Size up your group, read their body language. Pacing is very important. Make sure you keep it varied and interesting. Get intense and focused with a scattered group. Adjust your pace to their responses.

Group Management

1. The most important thing to remember is to set clear expectations at the beginning of your session.
2. If you anticipate the group may not be focused, mention the expectations set by the teacher.
3. Always set limits. Always focus their attention. Always break into small groups.
4. Sometimes when leading a nature walk, students compete to walk near the leader. There are several techniques for dealing with this. Tell them to keep their attention focused outward from the trail, not forward. Or, let them take turns leading.
5. Dealing with wet and cold:
 - Accept the weather.
 - YOUR ATTITUDE will make a difference.
 - Be prepared, extra hats, sweaters and garbage bags.
 - Get under trees if it is raining hard.
 - Move around to keep warm.
 - Frequently check in with students on their comfort level and intervene when necessary.
6. Dealing with a "special" child, one who really wants your full attention, get them to focus by assigning him or her small tasks and/or enlisting their support in other meaningful ways.

Principles of Teaching

1. Remember that you represent a powerful role model for young people. Model awareness, respect for living things, and curiosity.
2. Enthusiasm is contagious. Feel upbeat, love your topic, and you will help your group to enjoy the field trip experience.
3. As much as possible, the children should be the ones doing the activity. Find ways to involve them even when you are talking and demonstrating. For example, if you cast a track, let one child mix and another pour, rather than you doing any of it.

4. You are responsible for the health and safety of these people when they are engaged in activities led by you. Safety must be a top priority. It's better to be too conservative than to have an injury. Don't let kids climb on logs. If you have a student and/or adult along who is not surefooted, make sure they get assistance. If the group samples wild foods, make sure they show you what they have picked before eating it.
5. This is a multi-cultural world. Check your comments for bias in assumptions of experiences connected to economic class or ethnic background and for possible sexist behavior (e.g. calling on males more than females to answer questions.)
6. It is not our job to convince kids of any one point of view (including environmentalism). It is OK to define the environmental ethic, say what you believe, express your point of view.
7. Understand that developmental stages exist and what they are. Make sure the activity is age and developmentally appropriate for the group.
8. We try to make sure each program has a theme. Students seem to learn best when the lesson fits together. For example, in the ancient forest, we keep coming back to diversity.
9. Always take advantage of the "teachable moment". It is perfectly okay to be upstaged by an earthworm, otter, or eagle during your presentation.