



## Tips and Tricks for Outdoor Classroom Management

**Establish ground rules and outdoor routines.** Develop Outdoor Classroom Rules with your students to refer back to as needed (e.g. No running. Quiet voices. Touch gently).

- Establish a set of Outdoor Classroom protocols for collecting tools, lining up, walking through the halls, and returning to class that you use each time the class goes outside.
- Go out a different door than you use for recess.
- Identify an outdoor “gathering spot” where students assemble for initial instructions, mid-lesson check-ins, or a closing discussion.

**Plan a “sacrificial” lesson.** Your first several times out, students will be learning *how to work outdoors* more than any particular science content. Have an alternative in mind in case you have to go back in because of behavior problems.

**Get to know your schoolyard.** Before setting out to do science, spend a couple of sessions walking the site; mapping schoolyard areas; practicing routines; identifying harmful plants; and making some observations. Let students poke around, freely explore and “play” with the outdoor materials before getting down to studying them.

**Be clear about the purpose of going outside.** This will help you direct students’ attention to what you want them to notice, and assess when they are ready to return to the classroom.

**Give students a clear task.** Having a concrete task helps students focus their observations, and their thinking.

**Every student should have something to carry.** Having a notebook or “tool” in-hand helps students remember why they’re outside. Clipboards, measuring instruments, and other tools can be crucial in keeping students on-task.



## Tips and Tricks for Outdoor Classroom Management *continued*

**Go out often.** The more you go out, the easier it gets. Students' ability to work purposefully outdoors increases as they learn what to expect, experience the comfort of a routine, and develop confidence in their own outdoor science skills.

**Keep it short.** An outdoor experience may be only ten minutes, just long enough to collect the needed data. Begin with short trips out and increase the time spent outside as students' skills and stamina increase.

**Learning looks different outdoors.** Recognize that voices may be louder, and body movements larger outdoors. Excitement is likely to be high, and expressed more physically than in the classroom. Even so, many teachers have found that students tend to be more on task, more focused and calmer when working outdoors.

**Model outdoor skills.** Show students how to take field notes by sitting down (perhaps near a student having trouble) and recording your own observations: drawing, labeling or writing about the same subject as your students in your science notebook. Your engagement can also help keep the class quiet and focused.

**Believe in your students.** All students from the highest achieving to the most challenged can work outdoors. Sometimes the most difficult students are the most focused outdoors. You may surprise yourself at the results if you persevere.