

Tips for Student-Teacher Conferences

Both informal and formal student-teacher conferences can be useful for assessment of content and scientific inquiry practices.

Preparing for a Conference

- Establish the purpose of the conference well ahead of time. Some purposes could be to:
 - Check understanding of scientific concepts or practices
 - Monitor progress on a project
 - Encourage metacognition and self-direction
- Ask students to plan the conference and prepare an agenda. At first, some students may need templates or checklists to help them.
- Schedule conferences during group or individual work time. Ask students to sign up for a time, or assign students to times based on their needs and progress.
- Prepare all students for the conferences, including guidelines for when interrupting another student's conference is acceptable.

During the Conference

- Of course, you do not want to ignore the rest of the class when you are conducting a conference, but, as much as possible, focus on the student in the conference.
- Listen more than you talk. A conference is one of the few opportunities you have to hear what individual students have to say. The conference should be about what the student has to say, not about what the teacher wants to explain.
- Keep the conference on track and strictly observe time limits. If you cannot finish in the allotted time, and you feel continuing the conversation is important, schedule another conference time. This is especially significant in secondary classrooms where teachers have many students and limited time to meet with them.
- A conference should be meaningful, even fun, for a student. It is one of the few times when a student has your undivided attention. Stay relaxed and smile often. Use your sense of humor as appropriate.
- Ask a lot of questions:
 - Clarification questions—*Why do you think your experiment was a failure?*
 - Elaboration questions—*Can you explain more about how you found your information?*
 - Metacognitive questions—*How did you analyze your data?*

- End the conference with a look back and a look ahead. Discuss goals from previous conferences and set goals for future projects.

After the Conference

- Make notes about topics that may need to be addressed with the whole class, practices that may need to be assessed through observation, or modifications that may need to be made to instruction.
- Keep electronic copies of all documents for later reference.