

Top Ten Tips for Taking Students Outside

1. Be prepared.

Look at the forecast, scout the location beforehand looking for potential distractions, places to get under cover in bad weather, and who else might be using the space.

2. Stay safe.

Have at least one other adult there as backup, carry a first aid kit and means of communication with the school office.

3. Bring what you need.

You won't have all your class supplies right at your fingertips when you're outside. Always take a portable whiteboard and marker, extra pencils, a pencil sharpener, and hard writing surfaces for each student.

4. Get creative with materials.

Lots of items can be repurposed for outdoor learning. Raid the lost and found for outdoor gear and create a classroom gear library. Use ziplocs to protect devices and trash bags as rain ponchos. Stiff, paper-sized cardboard with a rubber band around the top makes a great (and cheap!) clipboard.

5. Reframe the space in the student's minds.

Reframe the schoolyard as a place of learning. Leave through a different door than you do for recess. Make a title and sign for this door. Refer to the schoolyard as the "outdoor classroom" or "today's laboratory." Clipboards are really "portable desks." And when gathered as a group, for a "learning circle."

6. Practice inside first.

Practice skills for regrouping and using tools before you leave the classroom. Establish a call and response signal for regrouping and forming a circle.

7. Designate boundaries.

Before beginning any activity, let students know exactly where they can and can't go. Use landmarks like trees, sidewalks, or even backpacks to mark the edges. Have students point with you as you outline boundaries or have an active student "run" the boundary line so everyone can see it.

8. Distractions are "teachable moments."

Being outside is exciting! Encourage student enthusiasm for nature encounters, then channel it back into your lesson. It can be a great brain exercise to quickly think of a perfect segue from what's got students excited to the subject of your prepared lesson.

9. Set the tone for learning and observation.

Do a quick sensory or mindfulness activity to get students grounded in the new space. Donating five minutes to silent observations (they spread out and take notes of what they see, hear, smell, and feel) goes a long way to setting the tone for outdoor learning.

10. Keep it fun.

Don't be afraid to end it while everyone is still having fun. They will be that much more motivated to earn the privilege again!