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**Studying for a degree in a pure or applied biological science?
"What makes the best learning experience for you?"**

The clock ticks slowly. You shift uncomfortably in your seat. Your concentration wanders, and you find yourself day dreaming about what it'd be like to have a real job and real money to spend instead of an overdraft. You will the clock to move faster, but somehow only succeed in slowing it down. And you're only five minutes into the first lecture of the day...

Despite universities' best efforts, degrees can often fall flat. Just like a cake failing to rise, even when all the right ingredients are involved, that certain 'je ne sais quoi' seems to be missing. No matter how highly rated the department or how many hefty biology textbooks you immerse yourself in, somehow this hugely expansive and fascinating area of study fails to captivate. But if all the right ingredients are there, and the best equipment available, maybe it's just a case of using a good recipe...

Take one cup of experience, mix with a big dollop of enthusiasm and stir with a well-humoured lecturer...

Lecturers can make or break a module, whether they like it or not! Experience is a prerequisite and certainly only someone who is thoroughly knowledgeable in their field will be able to earn the respect of their class. But without effective communication, this knowledge becomes obsolete. To command the attention of a class, a good sense of humour is vital, as is approachability, patience and reliability. A relaxed atmosphere helps students feel at ease, and a lecturer who is punctual and well prepared will gradually instil the same ethos into their students. Enthusiasm is also key to success. If a lecturer is truly passionate about their subject it becomes infectious, and can spread through a class faster than MRSA through the NHS! You can't help but listen to an enthusiastic lecturer and when combined with knowledge, experience and a little humour can provide one of the most memorable learning experiences in university life.

Add several lab practicals and mix well by getting your hands dirty...

Labs can seem daunting at first. The prospect of spending hours and hours following protocols can seem overwhelming, but labs are often a great way to demonstrate a point, especially when they relate to us personally. Helping students to associate their studies with their own experiences makes for better understanding. Recently, we were lucky enough to map part of our own genome and with the help of research staff, establish our own ancestral history. It was truly fascinating and really enlivened our genomic studies. We all love getting our hands dirty, and by taking a 'hands-on' approach theories are better explained and easier to remember. Some of our most noteworthy practicals have involved live specimens and dissection, and certainly once you've artificially inseminated marine polychaete worms, you don't forget it in a hurry.

Add a pinch of the unusual and a dash of the unexpected...

Utilising the unexpected and even so-called 'shock tactics', can break the daily humdrum of lectures and really make a point stand out. The use of the new and unusual is also a very effective tool in helping ideas and concepts stick in students' minds. To demonstrate the use of alternatives to antibiotics, our microbiology lecturer brought in young live maggots (much to the horror of some members of the class) and free probiotic drinks. Students are certainly never known to turn down a free drink, and after that lecture the whole field of alternative treatments seemed easier to visualise.

For an extra exotic spicy taste, add field trips to far-flung places...

Being able to see Biology in action is a dream come true for many students and provides a welcome change to lectures. By maximising students' time in the field and their exposure to a range of different habitats and ecosystems, they are better able to relate what they're studying to the world around them. This can be a powerful tool indeed. In fact, many students who complete these field trips often continue the projects into their professional career. And with opportunities to study in such exotic destinations as Russia, the Bahamas, and even sunny Cornwall, we are well placed to escape the lecture theatre occasionally.

Combine with a splash of opportunity, and serve with excellent career prospects...

Biology degrees have a fundamental flexibility that sets them apart from other sciences. Being such an immense subject that covers hugely different areas, it is exponentially helpful to be able to specialise. The versatility that the degree provides means that every student has a unique learning experience, tailor made to their preferences and expertise. Consequently, this leads to a massively diverse range of careers to which a Biology degree can be applied. No longer are we confined to the microscope, and now many graduates go on to be lawyers, doctors, engineers, financiers, and journalists. This proves to be a massive motivation to learn.

Although quality ingredients are fundamental to a good learning experience, much more is needed to make a fantastic one. It is not merely the departmental resources or quality of teaching staff that makes a degree exceptional, but the extra touches of spice and individuality that can personalise studies and make them relative to people's own experiences. As with life itself, a Biology degree needs to constantly evolve and adapt to meet the needs of its students. And like a good meal, it can completely awaken all of the senses. It can provide an enriching and fulfilling experience that just like a satisfying dinner, can provide enough intellectual sustenance for a memorable learning experience, and ultimately, a rewarding career.