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Some Things We Have Learned the Hard Way So That You Don't Have To

1. Read labels carefully.
2. Read labels carefully.
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4. Label tubes, vials, etc carefully.
5. Read protocols carefully.
6. Take Clear and Detailed Notes.
   - It is most useful to do this BEFORE you start something. You should make any necessary additional notations as you go along, and when you are finished.
   - It is particularly important to write down whenever a NEW item is being opened and used for the first time (write down the lot number from the label). There are sometimes 'bad' batches of reagents and batches can vary in their concentration. If an experiment or assay fails, and we know that we have just used a brand new reagent, then we have an easily identified prime suspect.
   - Write down any unusual things or mistakes. Don't be afraid to own up to mistakes; check out the lab notebook to see how many mistakes we have all made.
7. Always ask questions. No question is ever dumb or will ever make you look bad! It could save your life. Or your grade.
8. Ask someone to double-check your notes or plan BEFORE you proceed.
9. Make sure you have enough of everything BEFORE you start something. Make sure you first calculate how much you will need, that you have done all your calculations correctly, and then make sure that there is in fact enough of each item required. It helps to write these kinds of things down in your "Before" notes (see above).
10. When taking things out of or putting things into the refrigerator, or when working with reagents at the counter, *please make sure that there is absolutely no risk of the items tipping over or being spilled or of contamination occurring,* while you are using them, or while they are being stored on the counter or in the refrigerator. Reagents are expensive or irreplaceable so please be very careful when handling them. Always handle reagents and microtiter plates very gently and carefully.
11. Never have more than one container of a reagent or buffer open at a time.
12. Check the date on reagents before using them, and check that concentration agrees with the concentration listed in your protocol.
13. Clean up after yourself and put protocols and reagents back where they belong, so the next person can easily find them.
14. Do not leave refrigerated or frozen reagents at room temp for longer than a few minutes! Use them and put them away as quickly as possible (or use ice in a bucket to keep them cold)
15. No talking while pipetting. In general, people should have the peace and quiet they need to concentrate on their tasks. Some of us can talk and pipette at the same time, but others cannot. Some talking is of course fine, but it is important to keep in mind that work takes precedence and requires concentration.
16. If you stop in the middle of a task to talk to someone, make sure to remember, or make a note of, exactly where you stopped.
17. Put the path and file name of a document in the header or footer of the document, so that we/you can easily find the file on the computer.