

# University Ringing



## How to Run a Taster Session

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# 1. Preparation

Before you run a taster session, it's important to do some preparation and planning. Here's what you need to think about:

## 1.1 Set a Date

Freshers week is usually the best occasion for this, as lots of students will be keen to find something new. However, you might also want to run one or two extra taster sessions in the following week, to give more people a chance to come along – freshers week itself will be full of societies fighting to promote their taster sessions, so the more opportunities you can provide for people to give bell ringing a try the better!



### TIP

Arranging your taster sessions when your regular practice night would be is especially effective as the people that attend are likely to be free at that time every week, making them much more likely to come back.

## 1.2 Promote the Session

You can do this in a few ways. The first is by adding details of taster sessions to any [leaflets or posters](#) that you are using to promote your society. The second is through [social media](#) – pin the post to make it really obvious for anyone hoping to find this information! Also make sure your current ringers invite their friends to the taster sessions! Not only are they likely to make great recruits, but simply having more people attend your taster session can make it a more vibrant and enjoyable experience for other prospective ringers.

## 1.3 Spring Clean?

Nobody likes a groggy ringing chamber. But those of us that ring regularly are willing to put up with a lot more for the delight of ringing; for a student who's never rung before, this could be far more off-putting. In the week before the taster sessions, get as many members of your society as possible to give the tower a thorough clean. People might choose not to take up bell ringing for all sorts of reasons - the least you can do is make sure it's not cleanliness!

## 1.4 Teach your Ringers to Teach

In advance of your taster sessions, consider how many experienced ringing teachers your society has. It can be hard to predict just how busy your taster session might be and you

might want to arrange for some of your ringers to attend an ART M1 course on teaching bell handling beforehand. You can find more information about this in our [ART article](#).

**TIP**

Consider asking for help from local ringers or past members if your society has particularly few experienced teachers, or even just for general support at taster sessions. That said, try to strike a balance – if a significant number of graduated local ringers attend your taster sessions, this might not present your society as a student-based group.

## 2. Running the session

How you run your taster session will vary massively depending on the size of your tower, how many members you have and how many people come along. The headings below are things that all societies should benefit from including in their taster sessions.

### 2.1 Registration

Make sure everyone signs their name on arrival at the tower. This is important for keeping a record of who has rung at the church, but beyond this it can also be useful for reaching out to people after the session. Asking people to fill out a form on a laptop, for instance, which includes details such as email addresses and/or phone numbers will mean you can remind people about future practices easily.

**TIP**

Add a question onto the form about how they found out about you or what made them attend the taster session - this will be useful information for improving your approach in future years.

### 2.2 Demos

One of the best ways to introduce people to ringing is of course by giving a demo! This should be simple enough for your band to execute it effectively and for the new students to understand what's happening – for instance, a few call changes followed by some plain hunt. Have one ringer stand with anyone watching on to explain what's happening as broadly as possible. This can be as simple as "These are call changes, where we change the order of the bells individually" and "This is plain hunt, where every ringer has memorised a

predetermined pattern,” just enough to convey the gist of it. If you have a particularly captive audience, you could also go further, explaining what a row is and pointing out musical rows, such as queens or back rounds.

## 2.3 Tower Tours

The concept of full circle ringing can be quite difficult to understand without actually seeing the bells in person. Based on the logistics of your particular tower, consider giving tours to see the belfry for each visitor. This might involve ringing down certain bells, if not all of them, for this to be safe. Ensure this is arranged and led by an experienced ringer who can give a quick explanation to any visitors. If tower tours are not possible, having a model bell, photos or a video to show are a great alternative, just so everyone has some idea what’s going on!

## 2.4 Have a go!

You should also, of course, give everyone who comes along to your taster session the chance to have a go at bell ringing! Depending on how busy your session is, this could just be a few goes at backstroke. Ensure any prospective learners are familiar with the relevant safety advice, for instance keeping feet on the floor, no loose items, and crucially, if you get told “let go,” let go!

## 2.5 Keep People Engaged

Bell ringing practices in general often involve a lot of waiting around and this can be especially true of taster sessions, particularly if the session is very busy or you have limited space in your tower. Try to find ways to keep everyone as involved as possible, be that through conversation, having a cake-breaks, or even just rotating the activities above frequently. Remember, a good brownie will always leave a good impression.



### TIP

If you have space at your tower and a set of handbells handy, consider organising a basic handbell session for those who aren’t ringing. This can be a great way of involving as many people as possible, while also teaching change ringing theory in an accessible format. I’m told some people even find joy in the handbells themselves. At towers with limited space, some societies use the church or the hall for this, with only half the group in the tower itself.

## 3. After the Session

So, you've managed to get people to come to your taster session and you've run it effectively and engagingly. Great! But what you do next might just decide who comes back.

### 3.1 Post-Taster Session Pub

This doesn't have to be a pub trip – the point is you should have an opportunity after the sessions to speak to those who came along in a non-ringing context. This allows you to explain more about what ringing is, answer any questions, and just generally get to know them better.

### 3.2 Send a Follow-up Message

After a taster session, it's very easy to forget it ever happened. Days pass; you attend other sessions where you become superficially acquainted with numerous other people that you will never be obligated to interact with, partaking in activities you will never be obligated to take to heart; ringing becomes just another bizarre thing you once tried. Just one follow-up text or email might set you and your society apart in this. This can be as simple as "Thanks for coming, you'd be welcome to attend our practice next week!" or an invite to a group chat where they can receive updates about further practices – just a simple reminder that you would actually appreciate it if they came back! Pairing this with a reminder on the day of the practice can also help make sure people haven't forgotten.

## Conclusion

Every stage of a taster session is crucial for determining how many people you recruit. Preparing effectively ensures people will attend the session and allows it to be an enjoyable experience for you and your current ringers. Running it efficiently means you give new ringers the best possible experience. Finally, following up your efforts by getting to know anyone who attended and inviting them back can help you retain any new members. Taster sessions are exhausting throughout, but putting as much effort in as possible will prove hugely rewarding for your society across the year!