Preparing a Wet Mount

There will be occasions throughout this course where you will need to prepare a slide for viewing on the microscope. These slides that you prepare are called wet mounts. This name differentiates these slides from commercially produced prepared slides. The steps to creating your own wet mount are simple.

1. Obtain a clean microscope slide and coverslip. A coverslip is a small square of plastic that will cover the specimen.
2. Add one drop of solution to the slide. For most specimens the drop of solution will be water, however in some cases other solutions such as isotonic saline may be used instead of water.
3. Add the specimen to the drop of solution. Make sure the specimen is transparent and submerged in the solution.
4. Pick up the coverslip. Angle the coverslip so that one side of the coverslip is in solution. Then drop the coverslip onto the specimen. By angling the coverslip and then dropping the coverslip, you decrease the chance of trapping air bubbles under the coverslip.
5. At this point you can either view the slide or stain the specimen.

Staining a Wet Mount

Most cells are not naturally colored. They are essentially small containers filled with a clear jelly-like fluid. Because of this, they have low contrast to the environment and can be difficult to see when viewed with a microscope. Biologists use stains to color cells and their internal structures. Staining increases the contrast of the cell to the background and renders the cells and their internal structures easier to see.

1. Prepare a wet mount as described above.
2. Add a drop of stain to the slide adjacent to, touching the edge of the coverslip. DO NOT place the stain on top of the coverslip.
3. Place a small piece of absorbent paper towel next to the coverslip on the opposite side from the applied stain. The paper will absorb fluid from under the coverslip and draw the stain across the specimen.

Do not worry if all of the stain is not pulled under the coverslip. Do not worry if the entire specimen does not appear colored.