

Valerie's Helpful Hints: How to Keep a Lab Notebook

Scientists use lab notebooks to keep track of their observations and data in the same way that clinicians use charts to keep track of patient information. In this class you will learn how to keep organized, informative notes while you are performing other tasks. It is not easy. Like everything else, it takes practice. Which is why you're here!

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Use a composition book with GRAPH PAPER. Do not spend a fortune on those big 8.5 x 11 ones with the carbon paper... please use this lab notebook exclusively for your lab exercises in this course and please PRINT YOUR NAME CLEARLY on the front cover.
- Keep the notebook neat and in chronological order. A good system is to write only on one side of the page, and use the other side for clarifying comments and/or questions as you review your notes after class. This is only a SUGGESTION.
- The first page must be a Table of Contents:

Lab Title	Date	Page Numbers
- Number the pages in your lab notebook as you go. Please number each page in the lower right hand corner.

BEFORE THE LAB

- Pre-labs will include the following information:
 - Title and brief description of the lab
 - Your supply list (what YOU need to bring, if anything)
 - Summary of procedures (not specific, but a general description of what you will be doing). Use flowcharts or simple lists to make it easy to follow. Writing long and complete paragraphs is DISCOURAGED.
 - Safety issues. Will you be using hazardous materials? If so, what kind?
 - Make data tables and outline graphs so you can easily fill them in during the lab
- Students coming to lab without a pre-lab may be asked to leave

- BE ON TIME. Lab tardiness creates extra work for your labmates because you will have missed all of the pre-lab instructions. THIS IS NOT GOOD LAB ETIQUETTE, but I will leave it up to your labmates to decide if you may participate in the lab activity or not if you are late to lab.

DURING THE LAB PERIOD

- Take note of any procedural changes your instructor gives you.
- Make notes as you go through the lab. Enter data into tables and graph it as soon as you can. Don't worry about neatness!! Lab (and life) is messy. Don't waste precious study time re-copying your lab notebook – it's just not worth the effort. Write as you go in class and you'll be fine.
- Use a full page for each graph. Leave room for a complete title, legend, axes, etc.

AFTER THE LAB IS OVER

- Summarize your results. Do your findings make sense? Did the results help you to understand the physiological process being investigated? In a paragraph, describe what you learned.
- Clean up graphs and add descriptive titles, legends, axes, etc. Graphs should "stand alone." That is, when you look at a graph, you should be able to understand what kind of relationship is being depicted. The titles below have actually been submitted to me. DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU:
 - Graph 1
 - Graph
 - vs. Time
 - Concentrations in Vials
 - Spectrophotometer Numbers
 - Rate of Change of Variable With Respect to The Other Variable
- Describe sources of error or what you might do differently if you were to repeat the experiment.
- Answer required questions from the lab manual or your instructor.