Maintaining a Laboratory Notebook

Your laboratory notebook is your place to document all of your observations and activities when participating in BIOL 172L laboratories. This notebook should consist of pre-bound (NOT loose-leaf), standard-size (8.5” x 11”) pages, preferably with grid lines (for graphing) printed on them.

The basic function of this notebook is to provide you with a single repository to refer to when writing up laboratory summaries. The information you enter into this book should be detailed enough to be useful for writing such reports years from now, even long after you’ve forgotten what you actually did.

Your notebook should include a title page and a table of contents. So be sure to leave enough pages in the front to account for these (= 3-5 pages). I also recommend that you write your initial entries on just one side of a page. That way when you review your notebook, there will be blank pages available to enter additional information if needed. These notebooks will be collected, examined, and graded (for completeness and readability, but not neatness!) several times throughout the semester.

Before each laboratory activity, you should read the activity instructions (provided in advance) very carefully, making sure you understand the goals, objectives, and procedures of that activity. BEFORE arriving to the lab session for a particular activity, you should write (handwritten in ink) a paragraph (following the title of the activity) that identifies the goals and objectives of the activity, followed by a description or outline of the procedures or methods to be used. Finally, don’t forget to enter the date and time of the activity.

As the activity begins, usually your instructor will present some useful background information and, possibly, important details or modifications to the procedures to be employed. You should record this information as it is presented.

When carrying out laboratory activities, you should record all significant information and observations, including clear descriptions of the nature of the data (including units of measure) and any necessary modifications in the procedures. Drawn figures should be clearly labeled. You should also make a note of any problems encountered while carrying out the study. Any information included should be understandable to anyone who would pick up your notebook and read it.

Your notebook is also your location for carrying out and documenting calculations made on the data. Be sure to include units of measure in these calculations. Also be sure to include information about the purpose of those calculations.