

The Field Notebook

Field notes are one of the most important tools of a field ecologist. You should develop a habit of making careful ecological observations, and become proficient at recording, summarizing, interpreting, and reflecting on your observations.

Carry your notebook with you whenever you are in the field. Write in it regularly. You should have at least one entry in your field notebook for each class period. Write at the time you make observations or as soon as possible thereafter. Don't wait until the end of the day to record all of your notes. You can leave space or add pages to enter interpretations and reflections later.

Use a 8.5" x 11" 3-ring binder. **Do not** use a spiral notebook where you must rip out pages. You are required to use a standardized format for entries because it is easier to remember what you should notice and record. Also, this makes it easier for you to find things later. All entries must be up-to-date, legible, and concise.

GRADING.

The grades you earn on your field notebook will be based equally upon your *observations* (50%) and interpretations and *reflections* (50%).

- In observations, include the date and specific location, the purpose of the field exercise, the methods used, and the detailed observations.
- For *interpretations*, you are expected to discuss what you've learned. How is this relevant? What do your observations mean? How do your observations differ from those on other sites?
- *Reflections* should include how you react to and think about the observations and related discussion. What questions do you wish to explore in further discussion? How could you learn more?

FORMAT

Clearly mark the first page of the notebook with your name and the words, "229 Lab and Field Notebook." Also write your name, address, and phone number.

Use dividers to organize your notebook. You can add pages to sections as projects develop. For example, the section for the population growth and competition lab will include activities over several weeks. With the loose-leaf binder you can organize project notes together.

The first section should be for the TABLE OF CONTENTS where you eventually will enter titles of observations/reflections, their dates and page numbers.

Subsequent sections can be reserved for OBSERVATIONS/REFLECTIONS for different projects. You can record entries sequentially as they are made within each project. Note the project title on the divider tab.

Near the end of your notebook, create two sections for SPECIES LISTS, one for all

plants (trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs) and one for all animals (including birds, mammals, and invertebrates) you saw and identified. Include scientific name and the date and place of observation. For scientific name, list genus and species (or family if that's all you know). These are part of your observations.

Write only on one side of each page (so notes and comments can be added later).

In each observation entry, include:

- **The date and time of observation**
- **Specific location**
- **Purpose of field work**
- **Methods (where appropriate, but you can also refer to a specific handout)**
- **Detailed observations (these may be recorded on a separate data sheet). These will include both quantitative and qualitative observations.**

You are welcome to add into your notebook the forms on which you have recorded data, summaries of the specific procedure and purpose for exercises, maps, photos, and other documents as needed.

Write in ink. Don't erase. Just cross through words once where it's necessary to make changes. You may well need the crossed-out information later.

Make your observations as specific as possible. Both qualitative (descriptions) and quantitative (numbers) observations are appropriate. Choose your words carefully so that they explain as much as possible.

I expect your entries to be hand-written at or near the time of the observation. Record your observations while you are in the field. Along with your observations, record initial interpretations and reflections. After you have thought about your data and the field experience, you should later add to the Interpretations and Reflection sections. You should write as much as possible while in the field or immediately after returning to the lab. You may find it helpful to rewrite these initial notes or add to the Interpretations and Reflections sections after you've thought about the exercise.

Interpretations and reflections might include the following:

- a. the meaning these observations hold for you;
- b. what you are learning;
- c. how you could apply this learning to your field of study;
- d. your hypotheses about how observed ecological principles apply to specific observations;
- e. issues you might explore further; and,
- h. questions and comments this exercise might have generated in your mind.