

Use of lab books

Students do **not** need to write up every practical that they do in detail. However, it is good practice to have a record of all they do. A lab book could contain this record. It is a student's personal book and may contain a range of notes, tables, jottings, reminders of what went wrong, errors identified and other findings. It is a live document that can function as a learning journal.

The purpose of a lab book

A lab book is a complete record of everything that has been done in the laboratory. As such it becomes important both to track progress of experiments, but also, in industry and universities, to prove who developed an idea or discovered something first.

A lab book is a:

- source of data that can be used later by the experimenter or others
- complete record of what has been done so that experiments could be understood or repeated by a competent scientist at some point in the future
- tool that supports sound thinking and helps experimenters to question their results to ensure that their interpretation is the same one that others would come to
- record of why experiments were done.

Style

Notes should be recorded as experiments are taking place. They should not be a "neat" record written at a later date from scraps of paper. However, they should be written clearly, in legible writing and in language which can be understood by others.

Many lab books are used in industry as a source of data, and so should be written in indelible ink.

To ensure that an observer can be confident that all data are included when a lab book is examined, there should be no blank spaces. Mistakes should be crossed out and re-written. Numbers should not be overwritten, erased, nor should Tippex be used. Pencil should not be used for anything other than graphs and diagrams.

Each page should be dated

Worksheets, graphs, printed information, photographs and even flat "data" such as chromatograms or TLC plates can all be stuck into a lab book. They should not cover up any information so that photocopying the page shows all information in one go. Anything glued in should lie flat and not be folded.

Content

Generally, lab books will contain:

- title and date of experiment
- notes on what the objectives of the experiment
- notes on the method, including all details (eg temperatures, volumes, settings of pieces of equipment) with justification where necessary
- sketches of how equipment has been set up can be helpful and photographs pasted in are also acceptable
- data and observations input to tables (or similar) while carrying out the experiment
- calculations – annotated to show thinking
- graphs and charts
- summary, discussions and conclusions
- cross-references to earlier data and references to external information.