

Guidelines on maintaining a laboratory notebook

Using a Notebook to record inventions, observations, and work details is extremely important for all researchers. This guide is designed to help you keep accurate and up-to-date records, because doing so: a) supports the validity of results reported; b) provides evidence for proving inventorship or “first-to-invent”; c) proves the actual time of completion of an invention process.

General principles

- Always record entries **legibly** and in **permanent ink**.
- **Immediately** enter into your notebook and date all original concepts, data and observations, using separate headings to differentiate each, in a systematic and orderly manner.
- It is acceptable to make your entries brief. Always, however, include enough details for someone else to **successfully duplicate the work** you have recorded.
- **Label** all figures and calculations.
- **Never, under any circumstances, remove pages** from your notebook.
- The Notebook stays in the lab (you may bring photocopies with you when you leave, but **the Notebook is property of the host institution**)

Specific instructions

Remember to treat your Notebook as a legal document. The following guidelines should help you maintain consistent and accurate entries, usable for legal purposes.

1. Start entries at the top of the first page, and always make successive, dated entries, working your way to the bottom of the last page.
2. After completing a page, **sign it** before continuing to the next page.
3. Make sure that you record the **date** of each experiment clearly and unambiguously.
4. After completing a set of experiments, insert an **index entry** in the Summary section at the beginning of the book, with the corresponding page numbers.
5. Never let anyone other than yourself write in your Notebook (excluding witness signatures, discussed later).
6. Never leave blank spaces, and never erase or remove material you have added. Simply draw lines through any blank spaces at the same time you are making your entries.
7. **Do not erase errors.** Just draw a single line through any erroneous entry, then add your initials. Enter the correct entry nearby.
8. You can supplement your entries with supporting material (e.g. instruments printouts, films, photos). But you must **permanently affix the material** onto a page in its proper chronological location.
9. Never rely solely on supplemental attachments. Always **include your own entry** describing the attachment and add any conclusions that you might draw from its substance.

10. Often, supporting materials can be too large or inappropriate to attach directly to your notebook. In this case, you can add all secondary sources to an ancillary record maintained precisely for this purpose. However, always remember to **write a description of these secondary sources**, clearly and unambiguously, in your notebook.

Documenting Patent Activities

A primary purpose of a Notebook is documenting work that may be patentable. To support patent activities, it is necessary to provide clear, concise, chronological entries with specific dates. To rely on these dates, you must have at least **one non-inventor corroborate that the events actually happened**, and that she/he understood your invention.

Your Notebook should help you document and prove:

1. *Conception Date*--The date that you knew your invention would solve the problem.
2. *Date of reduction to practice*--The moment that you made a working embodiment of your invention.
3. *Diligence in reducing your invention to practice*--Diligence refers to your intent and conscious effort to make a working embodiment. You are not required to rush, or even to take the most efficient development strategy. But your Notebook must include details relating to your diligent activities. These are dates and facts that show what activities you have conducted to reduce the invention to practice, and when such activities were conducted. Since you may still be diligent despite periods of not working on reducing your invention to practice, always remember to provide reasonable excuses for these periods of inactivity by supplying facts relating to why there was no activity during the period in question. (e.g., unavailability of test conditions or equipment).
4. *How to make and use your invention*--provide documentation details sufficient to teach a colleague how to make and use your invention.
5. *The best mode of practicing your invention*--document the best way to practice your invention.

A non-inventor colleague should corroborate each of these events/facts by writing and signing a "Disclosed to and Understood by" statement on the relevant pages.