MSEF
Massachusetts Science + Engineering Fair

Project Component – Project Notebook

What is a Project Notebook?

Using a project notebook is essential for conducting any type of research. Keeping notes on their project in a single place will help students stay organized on their journey, from recording initial ideas all the way to sharing their results at the fair. It is also a place to record data, observations, and anything unexpected that happens during the project. Project notebooks are similar to "logbooks" or "science notebooks", but the project notebook is dedicated to this single project and is useful for science, engineering, math, and computer science projects.

We recommend handwritten notebooks for most projects because studies show it builds understanding and mimics the process often used in labs. However, since 2021, MSEF has allowed digital notebooks as well.

Why should you use a Project Notebook?

A notebook helps organize the development of your ideas and information, which are recorded chronologically as your project grows from an initial idea to your completed investigation. By taking detailed notes throughout your project, you can make sure that you are collecting all the data that you need as well as documenting any challenges that you encountered. Your notebook is a place to highlight your thought process, which could include reflecting on ways to improve your experiment or design to make it more reliable.

Setting Up Your Notebook

Basic Requirements:

- Bound notebook is suggested (not loose pages in a binder) or digital notebook
- Write in blue or blank ink (not pencil) using neat and legible writing, OR digital notes must be printed & pasted/stapled/taped into your notebook
- Data tables, graphs or diagrams may be written into the notebook or printed & pasted/stapled/taped into your notebook
- Mistakes are not scribbled out, but only have a single line drawn through it. You can do this in digital notebooks with the 'strikethrough' feature.
- Do not tear out or delete any pages from your notebook
- Add a date to every entry
- Keep notes in chronological order

- Add pages numbers to one corner of each page (except for *Table of Contents* page)
- CONSIDER: Add your signature to the bottom corner of every page. This verifies that these are your notes. If your project is conducted with a mentor, their signature should be included.

Front Cover: List your full name (and names of partners if you worked with other students) and the title of your project (you can add this later!)

Table of Contents: Use the first page of your notebook as a *Table of Contents*, which organizes your project into different stages.

- You will add to the *Table of Contents* as your project moves through the phases of *Observe*, *Plan*, *Explore*, and *Explain*.
- Include the page numbers for each section to the right of where they are listed in the Table of Contents.

Example of a Digital Notebook can be found here.
Example of a written Notebook can be found here.