

NRCM - Field Notebook Format

Please write your name on the front cover of your field notebook using a permanent marker.

We require that students acquire a field notebook early in their career at Western and use it in all of their classes that have outdoor labs or other field components. Most NRCM students should purchase a field notebook during NRM-210 or GEOG-150. If field notebooks are used correctly, then students will accumulate a wealth of information on sampling and field techniques, as well as, actual data and results. This information will serve as a valuable reference as their academic and professional careers advance. Your field notebook will serve you best in the long run if you do not tear out pages to turn in with labs and other assignments. Instructors will not require this, instead you can turn in photocopies of these pages when necessary.

Field notebooks to be used are the “Rite-in-the-Rain” variety, which use waterproof paper. The best results are achieved using a fine point, mechanical pencil with hard lead. This will provide dark markings without having to be constantly sharpened in the field. Soft lead, ball point and felt tipped pens WILL NOT write legibly and will smear in wet conditions.

The intent of good field notes is to provide the context to be able to go back to the notes and mentally reconstruct the data collection environment, or to revisit the site for future data collection. In some professional situations they can be and are used as evidence in a court of law. The following information must be provided for each field project or day in the field:

1. Date and time:
2. Project Overview: Identify the class and give a brief description of the activity. Why data are you collecting the data and how will they be used.
3. Who did you work with, and what did they do?
4. Location: Describe the location well enough so that you could easily return to the site if necessary. This could include GPS coordinates if available. Include a rough sketch/map if necessary.
5. Weather conditions: Weather conditions may have an affect on the quality of the data collected. Describe conditions at the beginning of the project and note any weather changes that may affect data quality.
6. Short description of site: Note any particular conditions that may effect data collection or quality (extremely steep slopes, or very heavy understory vegetation, etc.)
7. Equipment and techniques: What equipment and techniques did you use? Did you adjust equipment in any way? For example, did you set the declination on your compass?
8. Data: Organize data in tables according to what is collected. Include rough sketches of boundaries, plot locations, etc. **DO NOT CRAM YOUR DATA INTO TOO SMALL OF A SPACE. ALL DATA MUST BE CLEARLY LEGIBLE.**
9. Comments/Problems: General observations about the site(s). Problems encountered with the data collection, instruments, etc.

Neatness and organization count. Your field notes must be legible. Students commonly try to cram too much information into too small of a space, which often makes their writing indecipherable. Organize your data collection tables, etc. so that you have plenty of room for the data and any additional comments you may need to make.