



## Keeping a Fishing Field Journal

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### Objectives

Participating young people and adults will:

1. Record fishing experiences in a journal
2. Practice writing observations and outcomes
3. Practice a scientific communications skill
4. Enhance observation and reporting skills
5. Have fun while learning

### Youth Development Objectives

Participating young people will:

1. Practice written communication skills

**Best Time:** During or after any fishing outing

**Best Location:** anywhere

**Time Required:** 10 to 40 minutes

### Equipment/Materials

paper (100% cotton fiber is most waterproof)  
pencils or permanent (waterproof) pens  
clipboard or small 3-ring notebook  
newsprint and markers

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2. Learn the value of self-reflection
3. Develop planning and analytical skills
4. Enhance enjoyment of fishing and outdoor recreation
5. Enhance relationships through shared experiences

#### Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders

1. Share examples of their journal entries with members
2. Assist members with spelling or sketching entries
3. Share uses they have found for their journals

#### Potential Parental Involvement

1. See ARoles for Teen and Junior Leaders@ above
2. Assist members with making journal entries
3. Reinforce use of fishing journals at home
4. Encourage use of journal information to answer questions about fishing and fish

#### Evaluation Activities/Suggestions

1. Have youths read aloud from their journals if they are willing to share what they have written. Discuss each angler=s journal entries.
2. Encourage (but don=t require) members to share parts of their journal entries with parents.
3. Observe changes in journal entries with practice.

#### Safety Considerations

Some youths, particularly early adolescents, may record personal information they would rather not share. Respect their privacy, and encourage them to find some small part of their journal they are willing to share, or to share parts of entries with just one or two other teens.

#### References

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#### Lesson Outline

Presentation	Application
<p>I. Why keep a field journal</p> <p>A. Fishing related</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Record of catch</li> <li>2. Record of effort</li> <li>3. Record of fish kept, released</li> <li>4. Record of methods tried and results</li> <li>5. Record of habitats fished</li> <li>6. Basis for understanding changes in an area</li> </ol> <p>B. Fishery science or management related</p>	<p>Ask youths to <b>BRAINSTORM</b> reasons that an angler might want to record information about their fishing trips? <b>LIST</b> their responses on newsprint or on a blackboard, grouping them in a manner similar to the outline. Be prepared for youngsters to list a variety of ideas, mostly concrete ideas such as Ato be able to find a good fishing hole over and over,@ and Ato remember where the big fish are.@ <b>USE</b> probing questions (for example, AWho else might use written notes...and why?@) to encourage youths to see other good reasons for writing down information about their fishing outings.</p>

1. To assist fisheries managers with data
  2. To better understand an area
  3. To provide historical data describing fisheries from journal entries
- C. Personal enjoyment
1. Recording experiences
    - a. Ease of recalling
    - b. Accurate record of experiences
  2. Sharing experiences with others
- II. What should or could be written about your fishing experiences?
- A. Working from memory
1. Forgetting important things
  2. Losing lessons learned and experiences gained
- A. Heading information:
1. Date
  2. Name(s)
  3. Location (in detail)
- B. Body of entry:
1. Anyone who was with you
  2. Time of day (and time zone information)
    - a. Often written in the left margin
    - b. Show time events occurred
  3. Weather conditions
    - a. Temperature
    - b. Wind conditions
    - c. Cloud cover
    - d. Precipitation
    - e. Previous weather influences
    - f. Weather changes during outing
  4. Water conditions (as applicable)
    - a. Water temperature
    - b. Depth
    - c. Current or tide conditions
    - d. Wave conditions
    - e. Water clarity (e.g. Secchi disk depth)
  5. Purpose(s) of your outing.
  6. Time progression

One-minute field notes exercise B [**NOTE**: This must be done after a fishing outing or other outdoor experience.] **ASK** youths to think privately (without talking) about their most recent fishing outing or outdoor experience. **TELL** them that they will have 1 minute to write down as much as possible about where they went and what happened. **NOTE** that spelling and grammar are not important for this exercise -listing everything they can remember or using running phrases is fine. Let them **WRITE** for 1 minute. Have each youth **SHARE** their writing with one or two others. **ASK** how easy it was to remember the details of the fishing experience. **QUESTION** if they have captured enough information to be able to return to the same place and fish in the same way just by reading what they had written 10 years from now. Lead them to **DISCUSS** their perspectives, emphasizing how important it is to record the details of our experiences while they are fresh in our minds. **STRESS** that the field journal is a structured way to keep certain records of our experiences, in order to enable us to return to the same spot time after time, or to remember our experiences and our enjoyment.

Ten-minute field journal exercise -- Ask youths to **BRAINSTORM** the types of information they might want to record after going fishing to remember details of their experiences. **RECORD** their responses on a newsprint pad or chalkboard. **HELP** them develop a list that includes:

- Where** they were fishing
- What** they did and observed
- Where** the fish were located and reasons for their being there
- What** methods and other tackle were used
- Any **likes or dislikes** about the experience
- Reflections** on the experience and things that might alter outcomes under similar conditions
- Things** to be tried next time

After the group develops their own list of what could be included in field notes, let them take 5 minutes to **WRITE** a journal entry about their last experience. **Optional**: have each youth share parts of his/her entry with one or two other youths.

Twenty-minute journal -- Full scientific format  
**TELL** youths that many anglers choose to keep notes in something called a field journal, a way of keeping notes that is sometimes called a log, a logbook, or an angler's diary.  
**REVIEW** the format and components of a field journal with them

7. Habitat descriptions
8. Appearance of fish or wildlife
  - a. Markings
  - b. Size
  - c. Age and sex (if known)
9. Numbers of fish/wildlife
  - a. Observed - seen, heard, etc.
  - b. Caught or lost
  - c. Kept or released
10. Wildlife behavior and surroundings
11. Fishing methods used
  - a. Baits or lures
  - b. Tackle
  - c. Other equipment
  - d. Techniques
12. Sketch maps or drawings
13. Notes on the activities of the day
  - a. When did most fish hit
  - b. Where were most fish caught
  - c. What bait, lure, technique was most effective

(see Lesson Narrative for additional information). **SHOW** them your field journal, or a few pages of your field notes! (Nothing encourages kids to write like having role models reveal and share their own writing!) **TELL** them that now they will have a chance to write their own notes in full, scientific form. Let them **WRITE** a complete journal entry and **SHARE** their writing with one or two other youths.

**CLOSE** the session by reading from your own fishing journal entries, and discussing what they mean to you, or by reading from another writers= work (see References).

## Summary Activity

1. Do a One-Minute Journal as a group or in small groups (see instructions, above, for the 1-minute field notes exercise.)
2. Do a Memory-Walking sketch of your fishing experience. Have youths recall where they started on their fishing excursion, and draw a simple line sketch of that place in their notes. Then, have them draw the other places that they visited during this excursion (as though drawing a sketch map). Finally, for each place that was drawn, have them add a few words to describe the place and their experiences there. This exercise is described in more detail in Hannah Hinchman's book: *A Life In Hand: Creating the Illuminated Journal*. It is a good teaching strategy for starting someone in the practice of journal-writing, and a good strategy for people who are visual learners or who enjoy sketching or drawing.

## Lesson Narrative

### Keeping a Fishing Field Journal

**Why Should I Keep a Journal?** - The strongest memory is weaker than the palest ink. This statement, by an unknown source, sums up one value in keeping a field journal, or a fishing log, or diary. As we all know, memories of pleasant events fade with age! Recording observations, feelings, successes and failures, techniques and companions provides both information and enjoyment that cannot be retained from memory alone.

A field journal serves several purposes. First, it provides a detailed record of a field experience. (Of course, the level of detail must be provided by the person recording the experience.) The journal keeper may want to return to a specific, favorite outdoor location and may want to remember the exact conditions of the site and the exact observations of fish or wildlife. The journal keeper may also want to communicate his/her observation, so that any reader can return to the site and make additional observations for comparison. For example, an angler might use the journal to describe fishing conditions, to keep a checklist of fishes caught and methods used, and to make decisions about where and how to fish in the future. He or she also might wish to refer to the field notes to monitor changes in fish catch rates over time in an area. Finally, the angler may wish to share the journal with researchers and fisheries managers. Sometimes, biologists collect and read anglers' notebooks to monitor fish populations, or to learn about the amount of fishing effort on a given body of water. Natural history museums or public libraries may even accept donations of well-written, organized field journals for their permanent files. Journals by early explorers, traders, settlers and travelers can provide both historical information and early observations of previously unknown fishes or records of fisheries resources available at the time of their writing.

Finally, and most importantly, a field journal can provide enjoyment for you. You can relive your experiences by reviewing your old field journal entries. By reading a journal entry (yours or someone else's) you can recall a pleasant summer fishing trip even in the midst of a stormy winter day! You'll be amazed, too, at how just writing the journal sharpens your observational skills; you'll see more while you're afield, and you'll have more to reflect upon after your experience.

### How Do I Keep a Field Journal?

The style of recording field observations depends mainly on the purpose for which they will be used, and on the preferences of the writer! Above all, the notes should be clear and to the point. The format should be convenient for field use and easy to file and retrieve later. A few tips might be useful to help in maintaining a field journal.

- Use a looseleaf notebook (3-ring binder) for easy filing. (Some prefer file cards or bound notebooks.)
- If possible, use 100% cotton fiber paper (100% rag content); it doesn't disintegrate when wet.
- Try to leave completed journal pages at home. Some of your notes may not be replaceable if lost! You can never reconstruct complete notes from memory, and you may never witness the same event or catch the same fish!
- If you can, use waterproof ink and a drafting pen, not an ordinary ball point pen. (A pencil is a good second choice.) That way, you won't see your notes disappear when you take an accidental dunking or get caught outside in the rain.

- Reread old entries periodically. Besides being entertaining, this activity serves to motivate one to get outdoors more often and to continue keeping field notes!

### **Tips on Field Journal Format**

In order to be useful, field journal notes need to be complete. Yet, the field journal is simply a series of brief entries, like in a diary. Two major components of the journal entry include 1) the heading and 2) the body. The heading should describe the location of your observations very specifically. The description should be detailed enough to allow someone unfamiliar with this area to locate it, now or in the future. Each time you change locations or start a new day or entry in the journal, you should record the following basic information in the heading:

- your name
  - the date (written so it is not ambiguous)
  - a page number (in case pages become separated) - usually written in the upper right hand corner of the page
  - the specific location (distance and direction from nearest town or village, road names, and Areal@ name for the location such as the name of the body of water fished -- not a name that is used among your friends, or family members which isn't commonly known).
  - the general location (county, state or province, and country if outside the U.S.)
- Put this heading in the center of the page, and underline it (some use a wavy underline.) It should look something like this:

Journal

536  
Shari Dann  
13 May 1995

Ovid Lake, Sleepy Hollow State Park,  
1/4 mi. NE of corner of Price and Shepardsville Rds.,  
Ovid Township, Clinton Co., MI

The body of the journal entry should contain other background information, as well as your observation notes. First, be sure that you have included this information:

- describe who else was there with you
- time of day (and time zone information) - often written in the left margin, showing the time certain observations happened
- weather conditions (your observations might be influenced by such things as weather or amount of daylight)
- water conditions: water temperature, water depth, current and tides (if applicable), wave conditions, pH and secchi disk depth (if available)
- purpose(s) of your outing.

Then, write your observation notes as running phrases. Don't worry about grammar, but be sure you have recorded complete ideas. Make note of these types of things:

- time progression, weather changes
- habitat descriptions
- appearance of fish or wildlife: markings, size, age and sex (if known)
- numbers of fish/wildlife observed, caught, heard; numbers of fish kept or released (by species)
- behaviors (and the surroundings of the fish or wildlife as they behave in a certain way)
- fishing methods used: bait, lures, rods, reels, other equipment
- sketch maps, drawings
- notes such as: When (what time of day) did you catch most fish? Where were most fish caught? What bait(s) or lure(s) caught the most? How did you use baits or lures?

Record your notes carefully, and try to avoid changing them once they are recorded. If you change your notes, or try to copy them over, you might re-think your observations, and they may be less accurate! [If you do change something, be sure to record the date and time and to initial it, leaving the original notes as

well.] Record your observations as soon as possible, in detailed phrases, ideally while in the field. And enjoy reading them.

### **What To Do With Younger Writers**

Younger writers (and even some older writers) may prefer not to use the usual field journal format. Another popular format for recording field experiences is the checklist. Decide what information you want to record, and design your own checklist.

Birders, anglers, and other naturalists use a variety of types of notes. Some separate their angling or hunting experiences into a separate set of sporting notes. Another format is to write species accounts (observations of particular species of interest); yet another format is a specimen catalog (a listing of the locations, measurements, species and other information about specimens collected). All of these formats are useful. It is up to you to decide what format will be most useful to you and to any readers who see your writing! And, it is up to you to make field journal writing a fun part of outdoor enjoyment!

### **Exhibit or Sharing Suggestions**

1. Publish a community or a club fishing Anewspaper@ or submit an article to a local paper, based on your field journal entries and those of other club members.
2. Display your field journal at a local fair or science event. Consider making a poster to accompany your field journal; include such things as fishing techniques used, habitat type fished. Display actual tackle used, too.
3. Type your journal entries into a computer, word-processing file. Add graphics, video, information you collect (from doing readings) on fish species, habitats, etc. Create a multimedia show which is based upon your field notes!

### **Community Service and “Giving Back” Activities**

1. Visit a housing facility for older citizens. Read your journal entries to someone who once fished or hunted. Share in listening to their memories of outdoor experiences. Help them to record their memories (see Activity entitled “Fishing for Stories”).
2. Write a thank-you note to those who have taken you fishing or who have provided access to a fishing site. Refer to your journal to share your experiences.

### **Extensions or Ways of Learning More**

1. Make your own book for use as a journal. Develop some way to bind your journal pages together. Decorate the cover with sketches from your fishing trips, photos, or a “fish print”. Add quotes from anglers, outdoor and environmental writers, or sketches to some of the pages. Design your own format for journal pages.
2. Contact your state fisheries management agency. Find out if you can participate in an angler diary program. These programs involve anglers in keeping records of fishing effort, fish caught, water quality conditions, and other important information. Fisheries agencies then use this information to make decisions about managing fish populations and habitats.
3. Read journal entries of other writers (see books by Aldo Leopold, Jimmy Carter, and others in References section of this lesson plan). Learn more about sketching techniques, and incorporate sketches into your journal entries. Set up a pen-pal correspondence with an angler from another part of the world. In your letters, use segments from your field journals. Ask for them to share their fishing field notes. Exchange videos along with your written field notes.
4. Invite a local outdoor writer to speak to your club or interview him/her. Ask about how, as a writer, this person keeps notes on outdoor experiences. Read the writers= articles and/or books.
5. Find out if any local museums or libraries hold journals of early settlers or recreationists. Visit to view and read these materials.

**Links to Other Programs**

Journal keeping is a valuable, common record keeping skill. Check other 4-H projects for activities which make use of journals for making observations and reflecting upon experiences.