

FAQs on SCIENCE NOTEBOOKS

A Collection of Thoughts by SE WA LASER's
ELEMENTARY AND INTERMEDIATE Teachers

Grade Level	Frustrations/Frequently Asked Questions	Strategies (These are statements made by teachers using the student science notebooks)
All levels	TIME!!!	I make them a part of the lesson each and every time we do science. One of the classroom jobs is to hand out Science Notebooks. The notebooks go out before we begin a lesson so they are always handy and not as forgettable.
Primary	The lessons take so much time, I don't have any left for notebooks. Where do I find the time?	We do the lesson on one day and write about it on the next. They seem to be more reflective if they have had some time to think about our experiences.
Primary	ESL students find the notebooks very difficult. How do I work with second language learners to get them started in their notebooks?	The best way for second language learners to learn science vocabulary is to allow them to move through their notebook like you would with a child just learning to read and write. They should have the opportunity to draw about their experiments and label drawings using a word bank or glossary. They can dictate to someone who can translate the writing for them initially.
All Levels	I have a high absentee rate . What do you do when someone has been absent?	Some teachers have the partner at least place handed out data sheets inside the notebook for the missing student. "Science specialists", chosen to assist the teacher that week or month, can meet with the student during a lunch period, before school, or after school for extra credit. A separate set of materials is kept in a science center in the room for use with students who have been absent.
Primary	I find that I am not using them daily . Should I be?	Notebooks need to be used daily. Sometimes it can be just attaching a data sheet that was used during the lesson. Sometimes it is a summary statement about the lesson itself. Sometimes is it an extensive piece used for both data and reflection.

Primary	How do you get around to grading them?	I do a visual survey and use a teacher observation sheet with just a couple of things you want to watch for put on a clipboard as I roam around the room. I have to be intentional about getting to everyone.
Primary	My perforated spiral notebooks are falling apart . What should I be using instead?	Use a notebook for each new unit so that they are not used for such a long time. Also, purchase a two pocket folder to keep the spiral in. Use the theme notebook or the composition book with wide rule - even young children can use these. Contact a local printshop and ask to have notebooks created with a space at the top for pictures and lines at the bottom for the writing.
Primary	My students get very lost in their notebooks . It seems to take them forever to find the right place. Is there some way to mark the pages or something?	I number the pages for the students and they stay all on the same page at all times. I have the student either tie a ribbon onto the spiral or tape a ribbon to the back page of the notebook and they use the ribbon to find their place like in a bible. Some folks laminate a bookmark that the students can put on their last page. The kids can lose these as they are loose, however. I make sure that my students are always on the same page. Then we can talk about what page they should be on. This helps make the Table of Contents work better too. For my little ones, I write what the table of contents entry should be for the day on a transparency that looks just like the Table of Contents page they have in their notebooks. Date, Entry, Page.
All levels	How do you write critical comments to students who can't read those comments?	You must do an oral conference with them so that you can make sure they understand your expectations. You might have to have an interpreter present when you do this if English is the second language.
All levels	Where do you get your notebooks?	WalMart has the composition type for .50 at the beginning of the year.

		<p>ESD 105 in Yakima orders through a local printer they made a deal with. The notebooks are 8 ½ X 11" and are made of a stiff paper cover not cardboard.</p> <p>Classroom Direct has notebooks with a smaller number of pages.</p> <p>Shopko has spirals at the beginning of the year but they are not sturdy so you need some sort of two pocket folder for a cover.</p> <p>Use the notebook that is actually available with the primary level STC units. Recopy the pages so that they are on a single sheet with a blank back. The data sheets are then always on the right side and the left side if available for the teacher to write on, pictures for the children to paste in, etc. When the unit is done, all pages can be bound with the spiral plastic binders with the cover run on tag board so that they become a final product. The tagboard cover can be something the children have added a final picture to.</p>
Primary	<p>Little ones have such a difficult time writing in notebooks about anything. Can you suggest a way to make it easier for kindergarteners and first graders?</p>	<p>Use pictures at first to tell the story. They can dictate small captions for the pictures.</p> <p>Next, ask them to label their drawings and provide them with the correct labels for these on a word wall or word bank.</p> <p>Ask a few students to dictate verbally to a parent partner to increase their confidence and to create a notebook entry that they are really proud of and can read to themself or to others.</p> <p>Do some shared writing.</p>
Intermediate	<p>I don't feel that I know how to give critical feedback. Could we have an inservice on this?</p>	<p>We need a workshop that allows us to practice on sample student notebook entries. Also, we need to see examples of high quality critical feedback. Sentence starters are a good thing to get us off the starting</p>

		block.
All Levels	How do you get students to write reflections in their notebooks?	Learning how to be reflective is not easy. Adults have difficulty with it too. Have the students use the words "I wonder..." or "It reminds me of..." to begin a more reflective notebook entry. Post sentence strips around the room with the sentence starters.
All Levels	How often should I be scoring or commenting in notebooks?	Lessons in a full curriculum need to be examined for the four or five times when a "gate keeping" lesson can be determined. These are the times when you would not want your students to move through the gate to the next level of the material if they do not have some mastery of the content. These are important times to tune into their progress and a time when you must commit to examining them.
All Levels	How important is the glossary ?	Many folks are having difficulty with the student generated glossary in the back of the notebook. The other option is to have the students glue in the glossary from the unit and underline the words or highlight them when they have encountered them in the course of the lesson.
All Levels	I have the worst time trying to keep the Table of Contents current. What can I do to make sure the Table of Contents is done by students each day?	This is something that just has to be done each day. Assign the task of remembering this to one of your students to nag you into remembering. Doing it each day and circulating around the room to make sure everyone does it is the best way to keep current. I like to have my students do a "partner check". This is when I need to get around the classroom quickly, the students can check each other.
All Levels	Should I use post-its ? Should I write right on their page ?	Teachers do all different types of things and sometimes it looks different from year to year depending on the students in the class. One strategy is to write critical comments that praise a target reached that are written directly on the page but the portion of the comment that challenges the student to go further can be written on the post-it because it needs dealing with. Place it on the edge so the tab sticks out. When you had the notebooks back to the student, it indicates that there is something they need to deal with and when they have completed the task sufficiently and shown it to you, you will remove the post it.

		Another strategy is to write on the left side and put a post-it on the page so it sticks out showing where there is something that the student needs to take care of. When they have completed the necessary task, they turn the notebook in with the post-it still present. I take the post-it off when I have checked their new work and ok'd what they have turned in.
All Levels	I'm getting lost in a sea of notebooks. I have one for each subject and it is killing me. Can you help?	You can color code them for the students so they know which is which. Ask yourself if it is really necessary to have one in each subject or can some topic areas be combined into the same notebook.
All Levels	Where do I find scoring guides for notebooks?	Several folks have created them so ask colleagues. Rubistar.com is a website that allows you to create your own. Pasadena, California has one that is commonly used by early notebook users.
Intermediate	The entries are getting sloppy . How do I continually raise the bar?	I use fake journal entries that are reflective of the types of entries I am beginning to see in their own notebooks but they are written by "Sandy Scientist". I type them on the computer in a handwriting font and make a transparency of them. The students tell me how I should score the entry and what the student could do to improve the quality of the entry using the rubric we have agreed upon. You can use peer editing just as you would do in a Language Arts class. Before putting the notebooks away, kids can edit each other's. Powerful way to improve their own writing.
Intermediate	Should everything be on a copied data sheet ?	The decision needs to be made whether a certain skill could be reinforced by having students make their own chart or create their own graph. Other times, you need to decide whether it is important to practice that skill or to get the information down and in a complete format so providing that predone sheet is best. Maybe this is something that could be discussed at an inservice presentation when learning about the unit.

CELEBRATE OUR SUCCESSES:

- We are actually doing notebooks with our students in science!
- I find it helpful that the students can use them to share what they are confused about.
- I am perpetually optimistic with each new unit.
- They are fabulous to share with parents at conferences.
- Everything is in one place so the kids don't lose papers like they used to. I see students really liking that.
- They take such ownership in them and that ownership grows as they grow and grow.
- The notebooks really show that the students are learning something. This seems to be a great way to track a student's growth over the course of the school year.
- The notebooks show what I, as the teacher, must do to reteach what it is that is not getting across.

BUT WE STILL HAVE NEEDS:

1. We teachers need time to work the notebooks and learn more about what works for each of us but we most significantly need inservice on how to make critical comments in the notebooks and how to score them.
2. Keep adding to these types of documents to give us information that other teachers say about how to manage notebooks. This type of document is very helpful to all of us.
3. We need to print out the Essential Learnings that a unit covers and attach them to one of the upfront pages to communicate to parents and anyone else who examines the student's notebook what the unit is intending to cover.

4. We must KNOW the connections in reading, writing, and math that the notebook demonstrated.