



ILRI Guidelines for use of Laboratory Notebooks

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Introduction

The process of documenting experiments, theories, ideas, and actions on a regular basis is very important when conducting research. It is especially crucial that the documentation process be followed by all parties involved in any technology transfer initiatives.

Importance of Laboratory Notebooks

1. They provide proof of the first inventor. (The need to maintain good records is also influenced by the unusual United States patent practice of “first to invent” rather than “first to file” as in most other countries.)
2. They demonstrate the novelty of the invention by proving that it was discovered before any prior public knowledge of development of the concept.
3. They demonstrate that the invention was not obvious. Properly recorded notes will reveal successful, as well as unsuccessful, attempts at the invention. It will show that some conclusions were tested and found to be untrue before the discovery of the finished product. As the US can be a key substantial market for many inventions, this is an important consideration as in a dispute, laboratory notebooks may be required to be presented as legal evidence.
4. They help ILRI to demonstrate to its collaborators in both the public and private domain that ILRI maintains a high standard of documentation that is open to scrutiny.

General Principles for use of Laboratory Notebooks

1. Only laboratory notebooks issued by the IP & Legal Unit are acceptable. These laboratory notebooks are numbered, bound, and have pre-numbered pages.
2. Each researcher shall have only one laboratory notebook at a time.
3. All entries must be made consecutively and written in ink and must be recorded contemporaneously to the extent possible.
4. Entries should be signed and dated promptly and absences for a period of time noted appropriately.
5. All ideas should be expressed in clear narrative style. Each individual entry should be intelligible to another investigator without specific explanation.
6. All ideas, experiments and tests as well as related activities such as conferences and the making of test equipment should be recorded.

7. Any additional drawings, charts or computer printouts should be permanently attached to the laboratory notebook, clearly identified and have reference made to them in the notebook.
8. All affixed material should be signed and dated such that the signature is partially on the laboratory notebook page and partially on the affixed material that cannot be entered directly.
9. All calculations must be documented in logical progression using standard units.
10. To make corrections on errors made, draw a single thin line through the error, enter the correct information as close to the original entry as possible, initialize and date any corrections and enter a brief reason for the correction.
11. All project related or other activities such as breaks in research due to secondment or holidays etc should be recorded factually.
12. Joint work should be signed by all of the contributors, and the text should indicate which work is applicable to each inventor.
13. No pages or spaces should be skipped. If blank spaces are left on a page or pages skipped, then a line should be drawn through them to demonstrate that the blank spaces are intentional.
14. Separate sheets describing an important idea, experiment, or test should be witnessed.
15. Data must be recorded directly into the laboratory notebook and notes should not be made on loose paper to be recopied.
16. The laboratory notebook should be reviewed regularly by someone who understands the technology involved. Each page should be signed and dated by a witness. The choice of witness is important – it should preferably not be someone who may be nominated as a co-inventor. Witnesses who have observed and understood the performance of an experiment or test should sign their signatures under the caption “performance observed and understood by”.
17. Entries that relate to an invention that is potentially patentable should be signed and dated by two witnesses with their signatures under the caption “disclosed and understood by”.
18. To proof conception of an invention, disclosure of a complete and operative method or means to accomplish a particular purpose or result is required.

19. To show reduction to practice of an invention, an entry should describe the purpose of an experiment or test, the method or means chosen to perform it, and the results obtained from the performance – both favourable and unfavourable.
20. Laboratory notebooks are the property of ILRI. Should the researcher wish to maintain a record they may photocopy the contents of their notebook.
21. When a laboratory notebook is full, the researcher shall present the notebook to their Program Coordinator, who will inspect the notebook. If the laboratory notebook has been kept at acceptable standards the Program Coordinator will sign the notebook on the last used page and indicate that a new laboratory notebook should be issued to the researcher. The signed completed notebook is returned to the IP & Legal Unit and a new laboratory notebook is issued.

Don't s in the use of Laboratory Notebooks

1. Do not tear out pages from the laboratory notebook.
2. Do not leave blank pages or spaces. Cross out blank pages and draw a line through any blank sections.
3. Do not erase data, black out data, or paste new data over original entries. Draw a line through the material to be deleted.
4. Do not change drawings in the notebook – make new ones.
5. Sign and date every page as completed.
6. Separate sheets and photographs affixed to pages should be referred to in an entry.
7. Use pages in consecutive order.

ADOPTED by the Institute Management Committee on THIS [.....] Day of [.....]
2014