Science Fair Projects: Keeping a Lab Book

The lab book is perhaps the most important part of your science fair project. Keeping a detailed lab notebook proves to the judges that *you* did the work you say you did, that your data actually exists and is valid, and that you followed the scientific method.

You should write in your lab book anytime and every time you work on, talk about, or even think about your project. It is critical that you:

- Write neatly in black or blue ink. Do *not* use pencil.
- Do *not* erase or white-out anything. If you make a mistake, simply line it out like this: ~~I made a mistake~~. Judges get suspicious if they see lots of have erasures or white-out. It makes them ask "What is this student trying to hide?"
- Record the date, time, and place where you are working. Make mention of any other people who you might be talking to or working with.
- Write down anything you observe, what you do, and any data you collect.

Here is an example of what a page in your lab notebook might look like:

Date: 2 December, 2005
Time: 4:03 pm
Place: Canoas Creek
People: me and my dad

Observations:
- Raining really hard; creek is about 5 feet deep.
- Birds and frogs are nowhere to be seen.

Procedures:
- Collected 5 water samples, labeled them 1 through 5.
- Measured turbidity of samples
- Put samples in cooler.

Data:
- Sample 1 turbidity: 12 JTU
- Sample 2 turbidity: 10 JTU
- Sample 3 turbidity: 15 JTU
- Sample 4 turbidity: 5 JTU
- Sample 5 turbidity: 7 JTU

Keeping a lab book isn't hard, and it can really pay off. Remember, you may have discovered a cure for cancer, but if you don't write down how you did it then who cares? Write down *everything* related to your project. You can even paste in pictures, photographs, charts, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, photocopied pages from a book . . . the list is endless. Moral of the story: the better the lab notebook you keep, the better the chance that your project will win!