

## Physics - Guidelines for Summarizing Lab Activities

Mr. Cote'

Throughout the year we will be doing activities that are somewhat informal in nature. Unlike formal labs, these activities are often done with minimal instructions (sometimes verbal only), and may require little or no note taking. In these instances you will not be asked to produce a formal lab report. Instead, you will be asked to write a one-to-two-page summary of what you did and what you learned. It is sometimes only through such reflection that you will truly know what you learned.

When writing a summary of an informal lab activity, keep in mind that what I am looking for from you is **insight** and **critical thinking**. I do not want a simple regurgitation of things that I have said, or a cookbook-type procedure of things you did. Rather, I am looking for the following things in your writing:

- 1) Give me some background information. Discuss the underlying physics required to understand what you did in the lab. Show me that you *understand* it. Identify the fundamental principles involved. Most often an activity is aimed at clarifying one or two key physics concepts.
- 2) Describe in detail what you did, using pictures and/or graphs where appropriate. Focus on the important details, and leave out the trivial ones.
- 3) Discuss the importance of any tools or equipment you might have used. Often the tools themselves require substantial explanation.
- 4) Tie what you learned during the activity to broader concepts. Make connections. Draw conclusions. Usually an activity is meant to complement the work you are doing day-to-day in the classroom. Discuss these connections.
- 5) Be sure to discuss what you did in such a way that you could read your description a year from now and know exactly what you did and why.
- 6) At the end of your summary attach your original data, observations, and/or calculations (this may be a photocopy of your notes, if you don't want to tear the pages out of your notebook).

Your summaries must be word-processed, be neat, and show careful attention to spelling and grammar (pictures, equations and calculations may be done by hand). They will be graded, and will count toward your lab average. You might be surprised how much more you learn just by writing it down.