



# Michigan Nature Association

*Protecting Michigan's Natural Heritage Since 1952*

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## **Field Journaling**

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Journals are an excellent way for you to obtain tangible evidence of what you learn during an experience.

Each journal entry should include the following:

- Date, location, habitat type, weather conditions.
- General observations: topography (general lay of the land), wet/dry, habitat complexity and other relevant physical characteristics you may note. Describe in detail what you see. Note microhabitats, stratification, natural disturbances, soil, etc.
- Make a note of species seen (animals, plants, fungi) and the relative species diversity. The *general types* of organisms are more important than lists of species. Are there lots of wildflowers? Many songbirds? Are trees dominant? Is there much understory? Many insect pollinators? Etc. Speculate on species that may be present but not observed on your trip. Also make note of habitat-specific and generalist species.
- Make other commentary – degree of human disturbance observed (this means how much have humans altered/affected/impacted the particular area and how), general habitat quality, links to topics and concepts from other sources, and any other observations.

Journals should not be just a list of plants and animals that have been identified during the field trip, but also include original observations and feelings.

### **Concepts which may be addressed in Journal Entries:**

#### **General Ecosystem Concepts**

- a) Definitions, theories and ideas
- b) Water, climate and light; hydrologic cycles and climatic factors of ecosystems
- c) Nutrient and energy cycling; soil and decay
- d) community structure; biodiversity
- e) Succession and disturbance; resistance and resilience
- f) Habitat fragmentation

**Major Types of Ecosystems**

- a) Forests – old growth vs. second growth; hydric, mesic, xeric
- b) Grasslands – prairie, savanna, successional fields
- c) Wetlands – marsh, swamp, fen, bog
- d) Freshwater ecosystems – lotic, lentic
- e) Great Lakes dunes

**Ecosystem Threats**

- a) Habitat protection, restoration and maintenance
- b) Non-native species – problems and control

Have fun reflecting on what you saw and the things you have learned from your natural surroundings!