

Writing A Foods Lab Report

The purpose of assigning students to write a report of a foods lab activity is to:

- Motivate students to be precise and accurate in the completion of the lab activity.
- Persuade students to be observant during the lab period.
- Encourage students to correlate the concepts discussed in the classroom with reactions that take place during the food preparation process.
- Provide a setting in which students are required to analyze the results—including mistakes—of their actions in the foods lab.

The lab report is a test to see if students performed each step of the recipe preparation process correctly and if they understand why the product turned out as it did. Applying the scientific method to the foods laboratory calls for recipe preparation to be precise, accurate, and the evaluation of the product to be objective. Because this takes away somewhat from the creative aspect of food preparation, I don't think it's advisable to require students to write a lab report for each product that the lab group prepares. However, that decision is up to each individual teacher's discretion.

The first step in preparing to write a lab report is to understand the purpose of the lab. Each recipe that I use in my foods labs have a clearly stated objective. This objective is the purpose for the lab. Before students go into the lab to cook, we discuss the recipe to be prepared and why we're preparing it. We also discuss chemical and physical changes that students should be prepared to observe during the lab.

The second step in preparing to write the lab report is to take accurate notes. The form that I provide to my students is included in this manual. It provides space for ingredients and utensils used, the preparation method followed, a description of the product and conclusions that the students can draw from this activity. (*Ex. Reduced fat margarine used in baking produces a dense, compact product.*) I also provide a space for students to consider variations that could successfully be made in the preparation of the recipe that might make it more appealing, less expensive, more nutritious, etc.

The final step in this process is to actually write the lab report summarizing the observations made during the laboratory period. The lab report should be four paragraphs in length. It should be no more than 500 words and must follow this format:

Paragraph 1—The purpose of the lab (Objective, scientific principles, classroom concepts)

Paragraph 2—Summary of materials used (Ingredients, utensils & equipment)

Paragraph 3—Summary of preparation steps

Paragraph 4—Description of product, conclusions drawn about preparation process, suggested variations.

I have found it helpful to have students complete the activity *Saga of a Salad* as an introduction to writing a foods lab report. Encourage students to keep a copy of the handout *A Sampling of Food Descriptors* as a reference for future foods lab reports. They should also add other adjectives to this list as they use them in subsequent lab activities.