

Archaeology Field Journal

(Adapted from the American Museum of Natural History Ology website)

Being an archaeologist is a lot like being a detective: we decipher clues to learn about people of the past and the way they lived. Think of all the things archaeologists have discovered about ancient cultures. For example, today we know a lot about the Aztec religion because archaeologists uncovered their most important temple under modern Mexico City.

But how do archaeologists find out things about people and cultures that disappeared hundreds or even thousands of years ago? We examine the objects they left behind. Every object, or artifact, provides important clues about the people who used it long ago. We closely observe every discovery, record important information, and think about what each artifact tell us about the people who used it.

How to Start Your Field Journal

- Choose an object that represents your interests or personality. For example, you might select a ball, a book, a piece of jewelry, or a school t-shirt.
- Have a friend choose an object too.
- Switch objects with your friend.
- Use the field journal template provided here.
- Look at how a real archaeologist would describe an object that is being studied in the sample provided.
- Closely observe your friend's artifact and record your "Artifact Observations" in the field journal.
- Next, use your observations to complete the "Artifact Analysis."

Keep Filling Up Your Field Journal

Explore lots of other artifacts and keep adding new pages to your journal. Create a cover for your field journal that reflects the place or themes behind your artifacts. For example, you might draw a map marking the city where your artifacts were found. Be sure to include your name and the date of your discoveries. Here are some ideas to help fill your journal:

- Find other artifacts that reflect different parts of your life. For example, find an artifact that represents your school, your community, or sports team. Instead of trading with a friend, examine each object yourself.
- What other kinds of artifacts was it used with?
- Look for an object that comes from a different place, such as a souvenir from a trip. (If you don't have the object in front of you, print a picture from a book or Web site to help you describe it.)
- Describe an artifact from another time, such as an old-fashion phone, an arrowhead you found at the park, or a piece of clothing from your parent's childhood.

Take a Closer Look

Chances are, the objects you choose are ones you've seen many times. But take a closer look and you might see new details you've never noticed before. Use a magnifying glass if you have one. Is the object worn in certain places? Does it have any small words or inscriptions? As you describe your object, be very specific and include these little details. Imagine describing the object to someone who doesn't know what it is or can't see it.