Describing Deep Sky Objects

Describing objects in detail will make your observations much more relevant and rewarding. Below are some basic suggestions on what to look for in the main deep sky object categories.

Open Cluster

- What is its shape?
- Is there more star concentration in a specific part of the cluster?
- Is it fully resolved into its component stars, or are there any unresolved stars causing the cluster to appear nebulous?
- How many stars can you see (only if reasonable to count them)?
- Are there any bright stars within the cluster?
- What is your estimated size of the cluster (based on the field of view of your particular eyepieces)?

Globular Cluster

- What is the degree of the cluster star concentration (high, medium, low)?
- Are there any bright stars within the cluster?
- What is your estimated size of the cluster (based on the field of view of your particular eyepieces)?

Galaxy

- What is the shape of the galaxy?
- Does it have a bright nucleus?
- Is the galaxy uniform in brightness?
- Is it diffuse or stellar?
- Can any details or mottling be seen?
- Can it be seen with direct vision or is averted vision required?

Emission or Reflection Nebula

- What is the shape of the nebula?
- Is its brightness even or are there brighter/darker areas?
- Are the edges of the nebula well defined?
- Are there any stars within the nebula?

Planetary Nebula

- What is the shape of the nebula?
- Can you see any colour?
- Is it stellar in appearance or can a disk be seen?
- Are the edges well defined or diffuse?
- Are there any brighter/darker areas?
- Can a central star be seen?

If you are well beyond the Messier Catalogue and well into the New General Catalogue you will soon reach a point where most objects you view are at the limit of your telescope's light grasp ability, and just about every deep sky object will look like a "very faint fuzz with little detail". When you reach this point you may think recording your observations is pointless due to the lack of detail, however, as your observing skills improve, you will be able to write something about even the faintest object.