Recording Observations

Why keep an observing log?

- To keep track of which objects you have observed.
- You will observe more carefully and see more when trying to describe an object.
- Allows recalling details of past observations and comparing observations of an object made at different times, with different equipment, etc.
- To document your progress in the RASC observing certificate programs. Logs and sketches are reviewed to verify the program requirements have been met.
- Logbooks can be referred to later both for reference and for bringing back enjoyable memories of past observing sessions.

Logbook formats

- Chronological logbooks record observing sessions by date. Some people prefer to organize observations by type of object – galaxies, globular clusters, etc.
- Using a binder allows insertion of other materials and pages can be added out of sequence. Spiral bound or hardcover books are usually more compact.
- Pre-printed forms can be used in a binder. The blank fields remind you to record the relevant data and the forms give your book a neat and organized look.
- Plain lined paper allows you to develop your own format, only record details you wish and will usually take less paper. You also don't have to keep making copies of blank forms.
- Many people now use computer databases to keep logs and just take rough notes in the field for input. Even those who keep hardcopy logbooks usually use a computer to keep track of objects they have observed, especially progress on lists like the Messier list and the Finest NGC list.
- Some people use a type of shorthand using acronyms and abbreviations to provide very compact records. Consistency is then very important and a glossary of abbreviations may be necessary to decode the descriptions.

What to record

- Basic information about the observing session: date, start and end times, location.
- Observing conditions: temperature, wind, clouds, transparency, seeing, Moon location and age or phase.
- Equipment being used.
- Object observations:
    - Object designation (M, NGC, etc.) and type (open cluster, galaxy, etc.).
    - Magnification (or eyepiece used) and type of filter if relevant.
    - Visual description – use descriptive sentences or make rough notes to be transcribed later. See reverse side for suggestions on what to look for when describing different types of deep sky objects.
- Additional entries for things like aurora, meteors, and significant or unusual satellite observations.