Botany **Name: _____**
Date: _____ Period: _____

Tips for writing a Science Report

First things first: The most important rule to remember when writing a paper is to follow the instructions your teacher provides. Teachers always have the prerogative to decide what rules, formats, or procedures they prefer for any paper, so the teacher's guidelines for any assignment will overrule instructions you find on the Internet or in a style guide.

If your teacher did not assign specific guidelines for your science paper, however, or if your teacher did provide guidelines but you've left them at school and you're now stuck at home—then you can feel safe in following the general practices and preferences for writing science papers.

1. **Use headings.** Science papers are very structured and typically contain sections with headings. Common sections for science reports--those that involve the results of a study or experiment--are abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion.

If your paper is a response paper (responding to a prompt or question posed by the teacher) you may divide your paper into any appropriate sections and provide headers.

2. **Use concise statements.** Science writing is more straightforward and concise than other types of writing. Avoid using clever, flowing, or poetic phrases in your science paper—you can save all that for your literature classes. Dramatic or emotional statements sound out of place in science class. Don't worry--you can use factual statements and still write an interesting, engaging paper.

3. **Use supporting details.** A science report should explain exactly what happened during a project or experiment. Any time you address a cause and effect in this sequence, you must provide details to support your claims.

4. **Use your opinions wisely and appropriately.** If you are reporting the results of a project or experiment that you have conducted, you should avoid asserting your opinion about what *should*

have happened or why something *did or did not* happen. Once again, you must always back up your statements with supporting details.

On the other hand, when writing a response paper you may be asked to give your opinion about why something happened. You can certainly state your opinion if your teacher prompts you to.

5. **Avoid absolute statements.** Be careful about using absolute statements like "always" and "never" in science writing. Remember that all claims must be supported by evidence and very few things are absolute.

6. **Do not use contractions.** Science writing is formal and concise, much like business writing. No room for frivolity! Contractions are acceptable in less formal writing, but should be avoided in report-type writing.

7. **Avoid slang.** Teens today are more vulnerable than ever before to slipping into the trap of using slang in their school papers. A whole generation of text-messaging teens have grown so accustomed to using informal language that they sometimes don't realize exactly what constitutes slang. This will be a big challenge for you! One way to learn formal writing is by reading the newspaper every day.

8. **Use the proper tense.** If you are writing a report, you should use the past tense to explain what happened.

9. **Use active verbs.** Avoid using passive verbs. For instance, instead of saying
"When the lights were turned off, the mice reacted…
you could say
"The mice reacted when I turned off the lights."

10. **Do not misuse scientific terms.** Some words, like "variable" and "significant result" have very specific meanings in the science world. Be careful not to repeat scientific terms (if you've seen them in a report or book) in your paper unless you have a clear understanding of what they mean.

Taken from Grace Fleming, About.com (March 2009)