

ASTRONOMY JOURNAL

The course handout at the first class said

Keep an astronomy journal in which you write notes about the appearance of the night sky, especially the moon and planets, with the date and time of each observation. This journal will be due at the class on May 27, and returned at the last class.

What should be in your astronomy journal? The purpose is to encourage you to pay attention to the sky and notice how the sun, moon, planets, and stars move across it.

As you start looking at the sky at around the same time each night, you will first notice how much the **moon** changes every few nights. More or less of the moon is illuminated, and it appears farther to the east each night. Notice that it always moves across the same path in the sky, essentially the same path that the sun and planets move along – the ecliptic. This is because the sun and the planets' orbits all lie in the same plane, and the moon's orbit is almost in the same plane (it is tipped about 5 degrees, so the moon can be no more than 5 degrees from the ecliptic).

You should also notice where in the night sky are several of the most familiar **constellations** – including Orion and the Big Dipper – and **stars** – including Sirius and Polaris (the North Star). Also notice where **Saturn** is – it is the only planet visible from early evening until late at night now.

As you watch the sky over several weeks, you will start to notice that the constellations are not in the same positions at the same time of night. You may also start to see that the **planets** appear to move somewhat differently from the stars. On the night of April 21/22 the **Lyrid meteor shower** is expected. **Jupiter** rises about 4 am, and **Mars** and **Venus** are visible after about 5:30 am. On the night of May 5 look for the **Aquarid meteor shower**.

I hope you get to see the sky from a spot dark enough to see the Milky Way. And that you get to look through a telescope and see nebulas, star clusters, galaxies, and Saturn's rings – all of which people saw at the Star Party last Thursday night.