

making the case

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I was first introduced to PebblePad as an electronic notebook for recording experimental data during undergraduate laboratory classes. The project leaders wanted to emphasise that the eNotebook was to stimulate reflection and imagination and not just serve as a repository of data files. I was recruited as a **graphic designer** to create a fun, but academically accurate, branding for each course.

The slick, clean appearance of webfolios made it easy for me to design custom banners which not only add colour and interest, but also give a sense of identity to each course and session.



Fig 01: Distinctive characters associated with each unit of study promotes a sense of identity and engages student interest in practical classes.

Different units of study are represented by unique, immediately identifiable characters. They engage in activities related to the key concepts in each practical session. Students' curiosity is aroused and this leads to increased engagement both *before* and after class.

In addition to the fun characters, professional themes were also designed to serve as backgrounds. Since students have access to the individual components of each banner, they can customise the appearance of their eportfolios whilst remaining in theme.



Fig 02: Students can adapt the banner to their own preferences, whether it be colourful and fun or professional and minimal.

As a **tutor**, my role was to restructure the information in existing paper lab manuals and develop a framework for the eNotebook. Microbiology is a visual discipline (e.g., growth on plates, microscope slides, etc) and the incorporation of images rather than stylised subjective interpretations changes the way in which we teach.

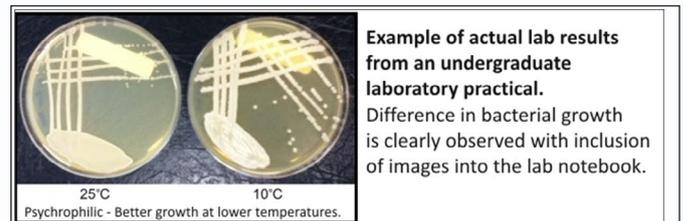


Fig 03: Example of actual lab results

As a postgraduate **student** I have often been frustrated by the classic paper notebook. My project consists of several concurrently running sub-projects, each involving different techniques and overlapping schedules. Chronological recording of these experiments in a paper book results in fragmentation of experimental themes. These days, results in my research field are almost entirely captured electronically – images, spreadsheets, data sets, etc. Paper notebooks have become inappropriate for storing these data.

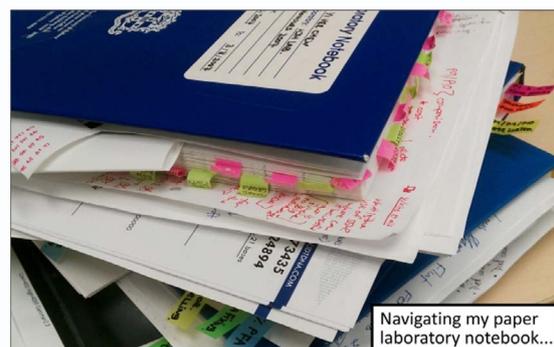


Fig 04: Navigating my paper laboratory notebook

By using PebblePad, I have the freedom to organise experiments and data in a way that makes sense to me. This makes it easier to reflect on the outcomes and the approaches and plan for follow-up experiments. The iPhone app is also extremely useful for making notes on the go!

PebblePad also allows me to share my experimental methods (including observations and modifications) with my supervisor and other post-graduate colleagues. Methods are shared using a “Protocol Hub” which is especially useful for new lab members. Issues are posted as comments, and colleagues offer advice or sympathy, thus building the corporate memory of the lab.

Fig 05: Webfolio used as a “Protocol Hub”

I now have a record of the experimental and trouble-shooting skills learnt through-out my PhD. And, while paper books are kept by the University, they cannot take my eportfolio!

As more postgraduate students engage with PebblePad as tutors, they will, like me, adopt it for their own research. Whilst my supervisor can see the benefit of being able to check my notebook as he sips cocktails on Bondi Beach (!), I hope that the use of PebblePad becomes widespread across my entire field to further facilitate research collaborations.

1. Describe one thing that you are able to do in PebblePad that you were unable to do in other tools that you had access to?

By virtue of storage in an online space, PebblePad provides easy access to a safe and permanent record of my postgraduate research and achievements. This is a resource I can easily share with students, advisors and collaborators as well as future employers.

2. If you had to encourage other students to start using PebblePad, how would you ‘sell’ it to them?

Through PebblePad, each student has the ability to organise information in a fashion that makes sense to the individual, rather than forcing students to conform to a predetermined mould. Your learning space as a student is uniquely yours and there is a sense of ownership and achievement to that!

3. What advice would you offer to lecturers (or course designers) thinking of using PebblePad?

PebblePad represents an excellent space for students to reflect on and further their understanding of concepts introduced in class with the added benefit of increasing engagement between student and educator - definitely something to be provided for and encouraged by lecturers or course designers!