The Whys and Hows of Photopoint Monitoring
## Grow a Great School Factsheet

Why take a photopoint? Photopoint monitoring can be an easy and fun way to watch your project grow! It's a quick way to monitor visible changes in your environment over time. When photos are taken in the same place over and over again, they will show changes in how the plants are growing. They can also show other changes to your project site, such as the addition of paths, birdbaths, logs, rocks, and other landscape features. When the photos are compared years later, you can see how your project site changed before your very eyes!

Photopoints can become a great way to easily show people how hard you've been working. They can also be used to promote your project when applying for funding to do more!

How to take a photopoint

The two most important things to remember if you want to take photopoint pictures are **(1) to write down exactly what you do for the first photo**, and **(2) make sure you do exactly the same things for the second and all other photos**. If a series of photographs of exactly the same area, taken from exactly the same place (in height and distance), in exactly the same direction and with exactly the same zoom level are viewed side by side, differences and similarities between the photographs can be easily compared. Even slight changes in the camera location, height or direction can make these changes hard to see, and this can make your photos less useful.

Changes to the way a photo is taken can happen either when the photopoint monitor changes to a different person, when the equipment changes (e.g. change of camera), or when there aren't clear instructions for the photographer to follow. For this reason, it's very important to **write down exactly how a photopoint is taken**, so that the next photo is taken in exactly the same way. The photopoint monitor should write down exactly where he or she stood, how high the camera was and which direction it was looking. With these detailed instructions and a copy of the previous photo, anybody can return to the same spot and take another accurate photopoint, even if they didn't take the original photo, or if they have a different camera.
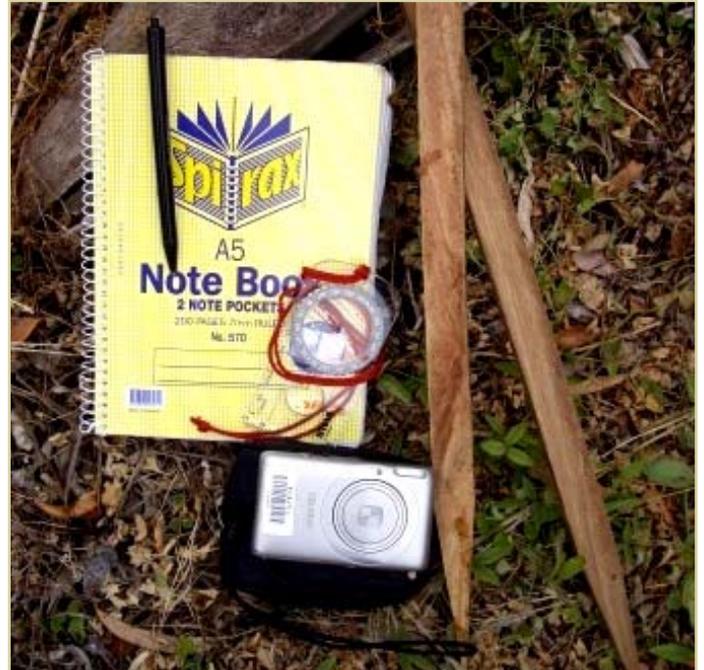
Tools you'll need to take a photopoint

What you'll need

These are the items you'll definitely need: Note book or data sheet, a pen, and a camera (preferably digital).

Sometimes these things can also be useful if you have them around: Tripod or other 'height post' (e.g. stake/star dropper), GPS unit, compass, marking stakes, and a tape measure.

An example of a signposted photopoint

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Step by Step Guide

Step 1: Ideal location

Choose a location that is **easy to get to** in wet or dry weather, and which looks over a **wide area** of your project site. View your subject area through the camera to make sure you're happy with the location, then if you have one, **mark the exact spot where you are standing to take the photo with a stake**, so that you or somebody else can easily find that exact spot again. Zoom all the way out or **record the level of zoom** of your camera before you take the first photo. Try to **include some features** in the image that aren't going to change over time, such as paths, fencelines, birdbaths, rocks or logs, together with a good view of what you expect to change, which will mainly be **the plants**. Also, try **not to** pick a location where plants will **grow too much in front of the camera** and completely cover your viewpoint. **Don't forget to write down your step by step methods so the next photopoint monitor will know <u>exactly</u> what you did!**

Optional: Signposted photopoint

If you want to, you can write the date and a number or name for your photopoint on a sign and place it in clear view within your photopoint (see signposted photo example other side). This number can be simple, (e.g. 1, 2, 3), or can be complex, (e.g. the compass bearing of the photopoint). Try to keep this in the same spot for each year's photopoint too!

Step 2: Record the location of the camera

Before moving your camera, record the location of the camera with a GPS unit if you have one, and/or write a clear description of where you stood, describing the locations of things around you, such as paths, large plants or trees, or fencelines. If you have a compass, you can also record the bearing (direction) that the camera is pointing.

Step 3: Record the height of the camera

Record the height of the camera from the ground when you took the picture. If you have a tripod, this height will be the top of the tripod, but if you have a tall stake/star dropper to mark your location, you can use the top of it to rest the camera on. The stake can then stay there for use in future photopoints, or store somewhere to use later.

Step 4: Record the date

Record the date you took the photo and the filename your camera gives the photo. Also, **don't forget** to record if this filename changes once you have downloaded and saved your photo onto a computer.

Step 5: Repeat the process

Repeat the process as many times as you need to from different locations, so that you have recorded most of the project site (or at least the most important parts) in your photopoints.

Example 1: Netherby Kindergarten project site

Before (photo by Catherine Mossop, June 2008)

After (photo by Catherine Mossop, June 2009)

Example 2: North Haven Primary School project site

Before (photo by Catherine Mossop, May 2005)

After (photo by Catherine Mossop, May 2009)

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