

# Preparation for an astronomical observation

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# Objectives

- How to choose a suitable time and place.
- What equipment should I bring?
- What kind of astronomical objects can I observe?
- How to plan the departure?
- Learning how to use the program Stellarium (an introduction).



# Place

- **Objects of interest when observing from cities: Sun, Moon, planets and constellations.**
- **Problems: Dark skies reduced by light pollution: streetlights, security lights, advertising signs and motor vehicles.**



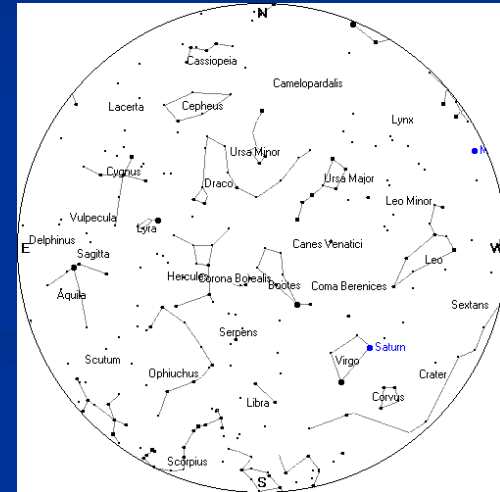
# Date

- Try to choose a time of good weather with no clouds.  
See for example: [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com).
- Moon Phase: Crescent?. Check the phase when planning the date of the observation.
- Arrive early enough to mount all the instruments during the daylight.



# Available Material

- Celestial Map (on paper, phone or computer)
- Red light flashlight
- Food, drink and warm clothes
- Binoculars, telescope, if available
- Alternatives if there are clouds:  
Stories, books, DVDs and web resources.



# Observations with the naked eye

- Applications for iPhone, iPad and Android
- Recognition of constellations
- Best with Moon between new and crescent



SkyMap

Star Map



# Observations with the naked eye

## Northern Hemisphere Constellations

Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Cassiopeia, Cygnus, Lyra, Hercules, Bootes, Corona Borealis, Orion, Canis Major, Auriga, Pegasus and the zodiac

## Stars, Clusters, Galaxies

Polaris, Sirius, Aldebaran, Betelgeuse, Rigel, Arcturus, Antares, Pleiades and Andromeda

## Southern Hemisphere Constellations

Southern Cross, Carina, Puppis, Vela, Orion, Canis Major and the zodiac

## Stars, Clusters, Galaxies

Alpha Centauri, Omega Centauri, 47 Tucanae and the Magellanic Clouds (there is no "southern pole star")



# Observations with the naked eye

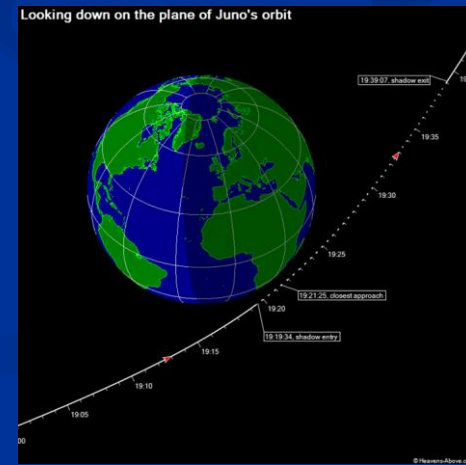
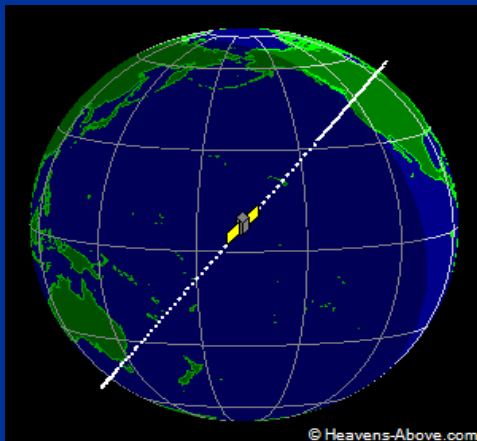
- Change of the Moon's phases and its motion through the constellations for one month.
- Movement of the planets: Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn for one month and one year.
- Shooting stars – best a few hours after the sunset (sometimes every 5-10 minutes).
- Meteor showers: Perseids, Quadrantids, Leonids, among others depending on the date and the hemisphere.





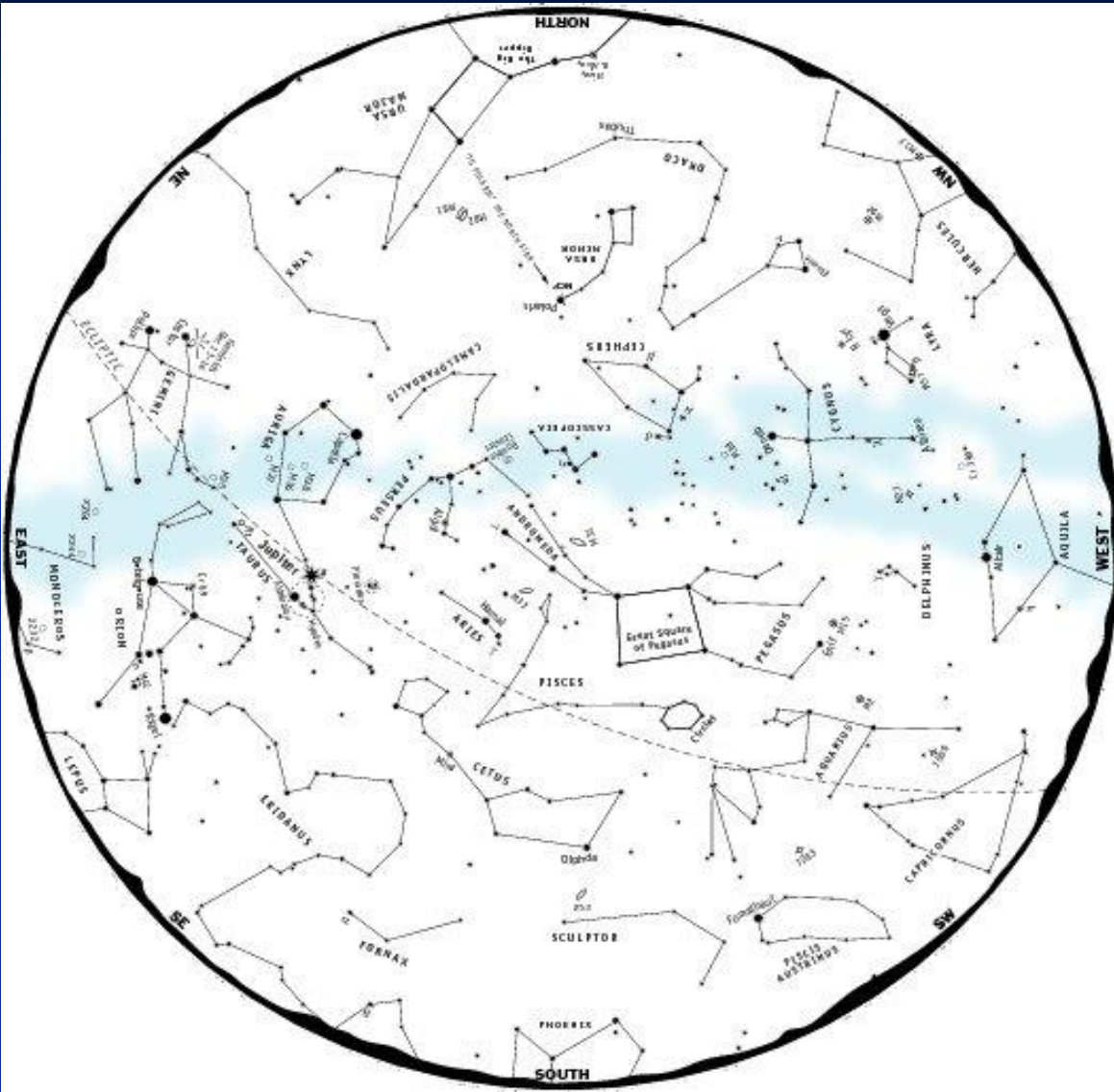
# Observations with the naked eye

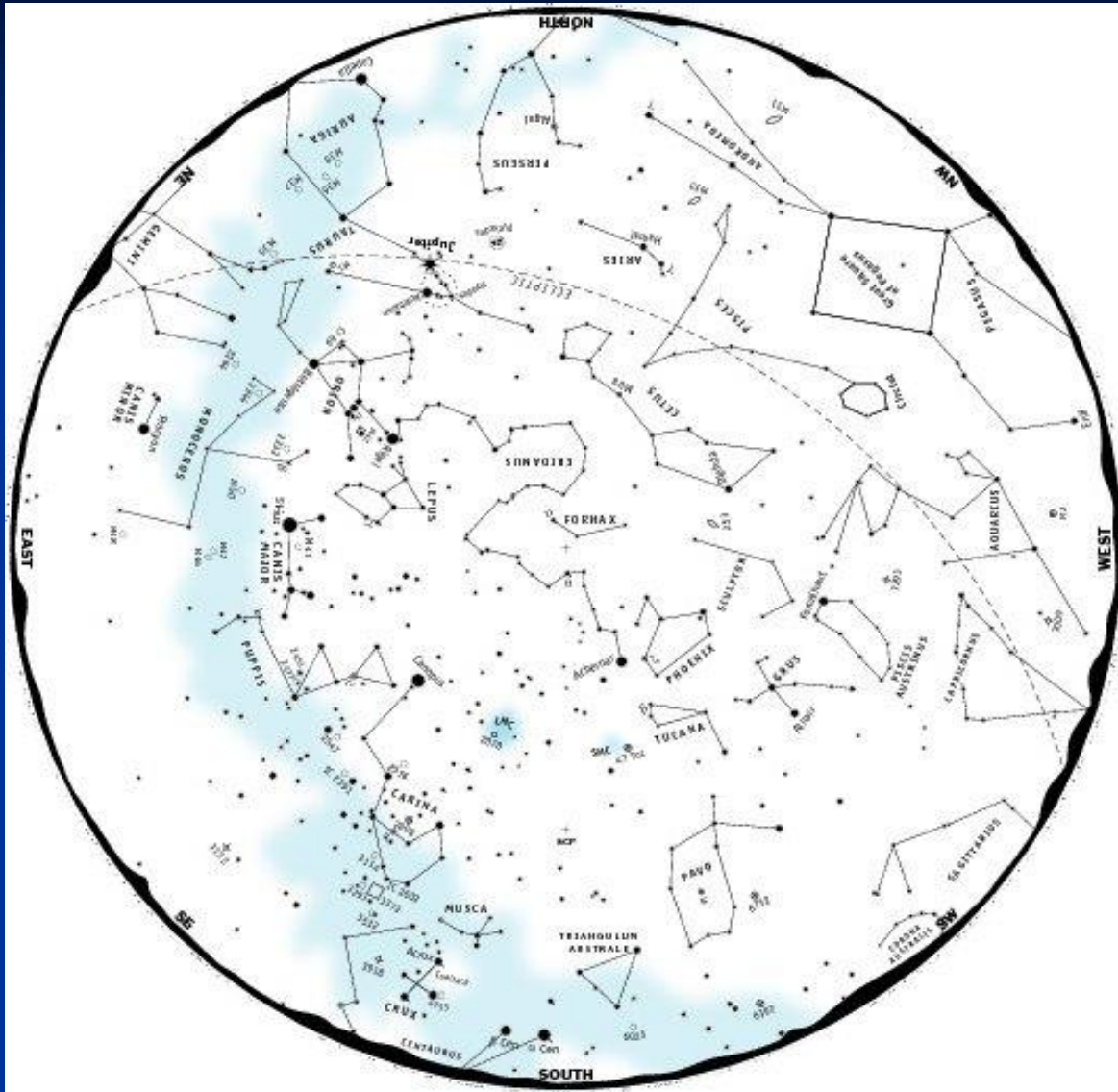
- It is helpful to have sky charts or maps.
- Observe artificial satellites. Best 1-2 hours after sunset: ISS, Iridium, etc.  
See [www.heavens-above.com](http://www.heavens-above.com)



# Example of Sky Map for the Northern Hemisphere

The map must be prepared for the observer's location and the date and time of the activity.





## Example of Sky Map for the Southern Hemisphere

The map must be prepared for the observer's location and the date and time of the activity.

# Observations with binoculars

- Low magnification, but collects more light
- Recommended: 7x50 (7 times magnification and 50mm aperture, i.e. the diameter of the objective lens)



# Observations with binoculars

## Northern Hemisphere

Andromeda Galaxy - M31  
(Andromeda),  
Orion Nebula - M42 (Orion),  
Globular Cluster - M13  
(Hercules),  
Pleiades Open Cluster - M45  
(Taurus),  
Praesepe - M44 (Cancer),  
Crab Nebula - M1  
(Taurus),  
Whirlpool Galaxy - M51  
(Canes Venatici).

## Southern Hemisphere

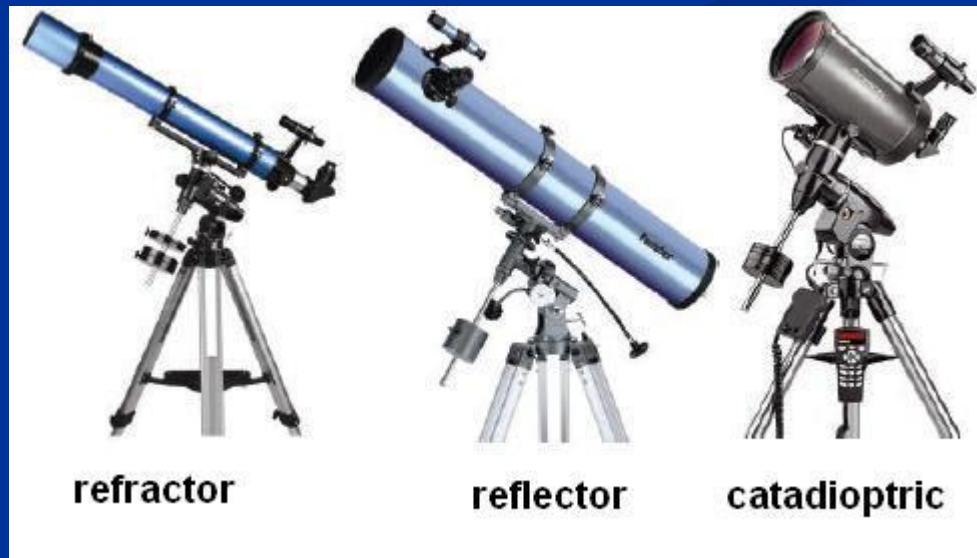
Large Magellanic Cloud  
(Dorado),  
Small Magellanic Cloud  
(Tucana),  
Eta Carinae - NGC 3372  
(Carina),  
Centaurus A - NGC 5128  
(Centaurus),  
47 Tucanae Globular Cluster  
(Tucana),  
Jewell Box Open Cluster -  
NGC 4755 (Crux).





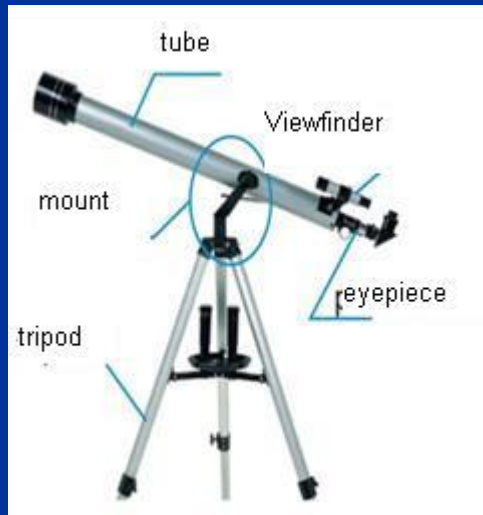
# Observations with a telescope

- ❑ Mission: To collect more light
- ❑ Optics: Objective and eyepiece
- ❑ Types: Refractor and reflector; Newtonian, Cassegrain and catadioptric



# Observations with a telescope

- ❑ Image: Could be inverted
- ❑ Telescope mount: azimuthal, equatorial or Dobsonian.
- ❑ Sky charts are required for proper and easier identification of the field to be observed



# Commissioning of a telescope

## Axes of an equatorial mount

Polar axis

Declination axis





# Commissioning of a telescope

- Leveling of the mount
- Balance the tube



# Commissioning of a telescope

- Balance polar axis
- Set latitude



latitude

horizon

# Commissioning of a telescope



**Aligning the polar axis to the North**  
Orient the base of the mount to the North:  
"Turn right or left  
the base of the mount or tripod"



# Commissioning of a telescope



**Aligning the polar axis to the North**

“test the aligning turning the tube around the polar axis  $360^\circ$  without loosing the polar star”

# Commissioning of a telescope

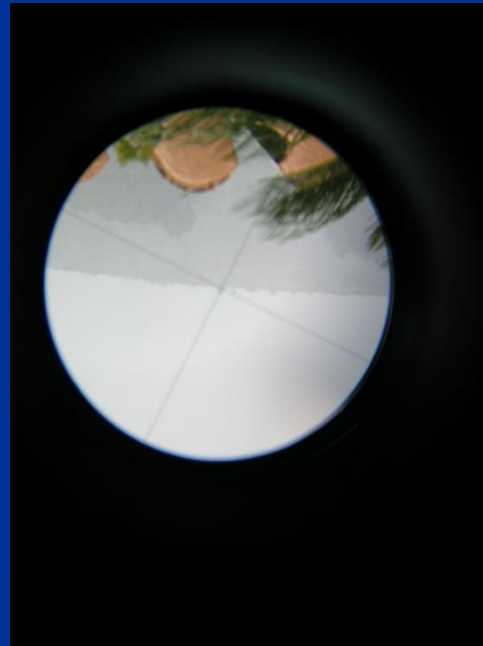
Finder alignment on  
a terrestrial object



Naked eye  
vision



Vision through  
the finder



Vision through  
the telescope



# Commissioning of a telescope

Telescope oriented  
east of the meridian

Telescope oriented  
west of the meridian



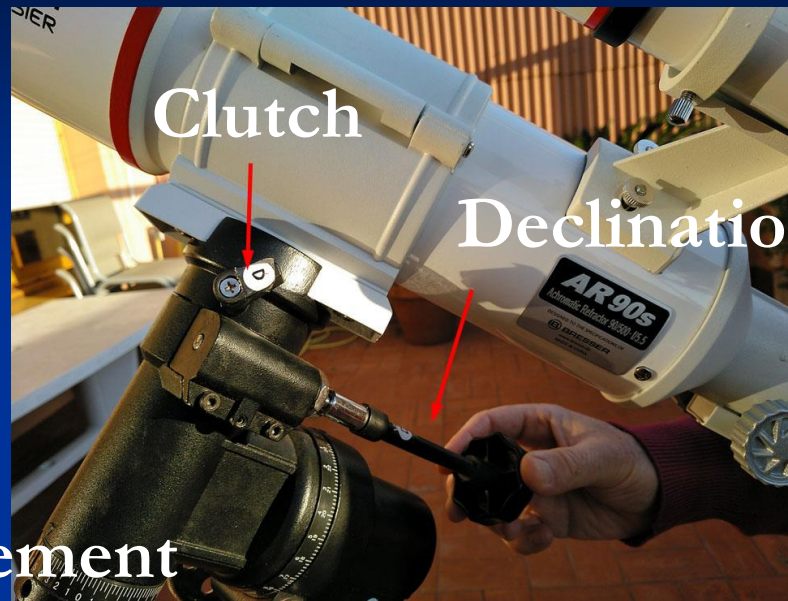
Tracking using the flexible  
control of the polar axis

Tracking using the wheel



# Commissioning of a telescope

Declination  
axis



Eyepiece placement

Focus



# Commissioning of a telescope

To locate and track different objects you only have to operate the polar axis (Right Ascension) and the declination axis (Declination)

*Don't misalign the telescope during the observation!*





# The sky's movements

The movement of the sky that we observe corresponds to relative motion of rotation and translation (orbit) of the Earth.

Diurnal movement: Fast, the Earth rotates around  $360^\circ$  in 24 hours; this is  $15^\circ$  every hour.

Translational motion (orbit): Slow,  $360^\circ$  every 365 days, about one degree each day.

# The sky's movements

- ❑ Imagine that the Earth did not rotate.
- ❑ We would see the same night sky from one night to the next.
- ❑ The same star would be in almost the same position each night.
- ❑ It would have moved by only about one degree (i.e. the thickness of an index finger at the extended arm) compared to the previous day.

# The sky's movements

The translation movement of the Earth is almost negligible. If we do not have a reference it is not visible to the naked eye, but what we do notice is that the sky from one night of the year is completely different after three or six months.

After three months the translation corresponds to  $90^\circ$ , or about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the sky. In half a year it is  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the sky, that is the other side of heavens, diametrically opposed to our starting point.

# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

## Objectives

- Understanding the translation movement of the Earth and compare it to the rotation movement.
- Display the translation movement “without rotation movement”.
- Consider some constellations in the opposite hemisphere - North/South umbrella.

# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

Draw the umbrella of one Hemisphere

❖ North Pole Environment:  
Ursa Major and Cassiopeia

❖ Outermost area:

Leo (Spring)

Cygnus (Summer)

Pegasus (Autumn)

Orion (Winter).

❖ South Pole Environment:  
Southern Crux

❖ Outermost area:

Aquarius (Spring)

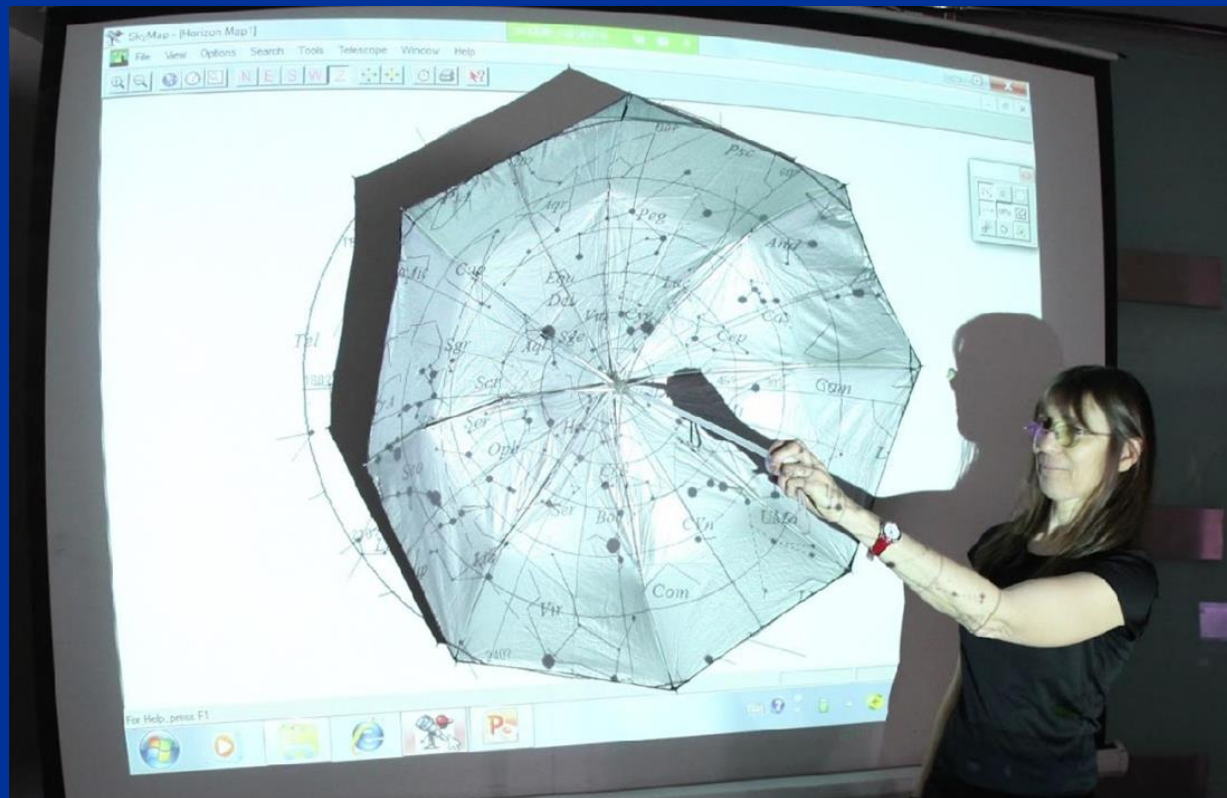
Orion (Summer)

Leo (Autumn)

Scorpius (Winter).

# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

Locate the constellations by projecting a planisphere hemisphere using Stellarium



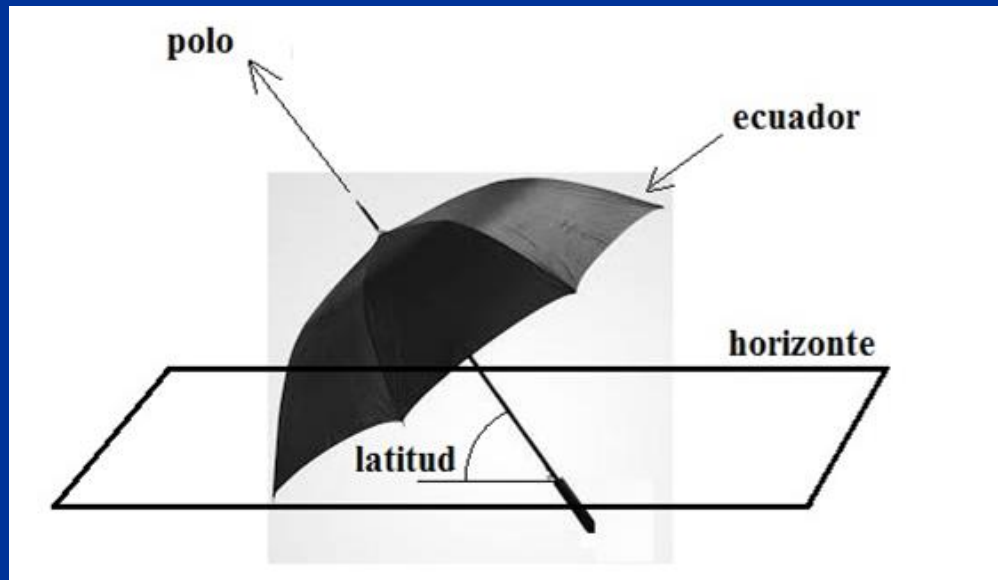
# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

Use a black gentleman's umbrella and draw the constellations on it with white paint, chalk or corrector fluid.



# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

Use the umbrella over our heads with the stick of the umbrella directed towards the pole (inclined at the latitude of our location).





# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

## Using the umbrella in the Northern Hemisphere

### Northern Hemisphere and Northern Horizon

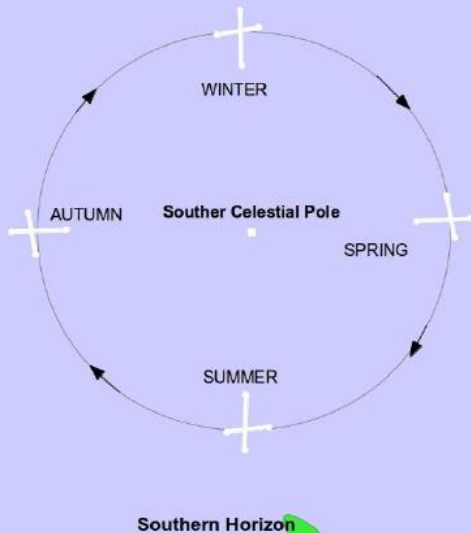


- ❑ **SPRING:** Looking to the North, the Big Dipper is above the Pole Star, Leo is to the South.
- ❑ **SUMMER:** Looking to the North, the Big Dipper is to the left of the Pole Star, Cygnus is to the South.
- ❑ **AUTUMN:** Looking to the North, when the Big Dipper is below the Pole Star, Pegasus is to the South.
- ❑ **WINTER:** Looking to the North, the Big Dipper is to the right of the Pole Star, Orion to the South.

# Activity 1: Celestial Dome Umbrella

## Using the umbrella in the Southern Hemisphere

### Southern Hemisphere and Southern Horizon



**SPRING:** to the South Horizon, when the Cross is to the right of the pole, Aquarius is to the North Horizon.

**SUMMER:** to the South Horizon, when the Cross is under the pole, Orion is to the North Horizon.

**AUTUMN:** to the South Horizon, when the Cross is at the left of the pole, Leo is to the North Horizon.

**WINTER:** to the South Horizon, when the Cross is above the pole, Scorpio is to the North Horizon.

# Dark skies and light pollution

- We need a dark sky to see more stars
- This is only possible if we move away from the built-up areas
- We have forgotten how the night sky looks since we cannot see it clearly from the cities
- Light pollution is one of the least recognised forms of pollution. It prevents us from seeing the stars, affects the nocturnal ecosystem, human health and represents a waste of energy.

# Forms of light pollution

There are three types of light pollution:

- a) **Glow:** Associated with public lighting projected toward the sky. It looks like a bubble of light above the city.
- b) **Trespass:** The external light that spreads in all directions and into houses and gardens.
- c) **Glare:** Related to the illuminated signs or vehicles that affects the eye directly and also by surprise.

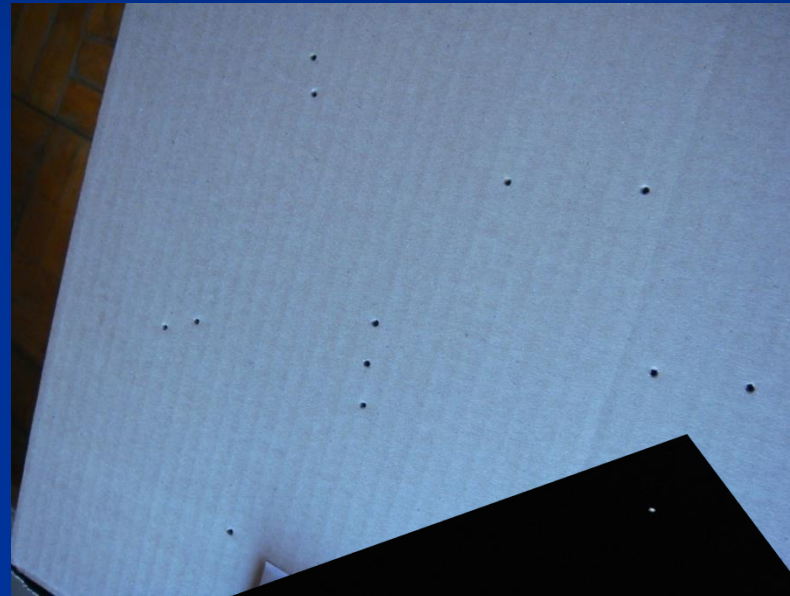
## Activity 2: Light pollution - Glow

### Objectives:

- Show the polluting effect of unshielded lighting.
- Recognize the beneficial effect of a well-chosen lamp.
- Recognize the possibility of improving the night sky observations, even then there is some artificial light.

# Activity 2: Light pollution - Glow

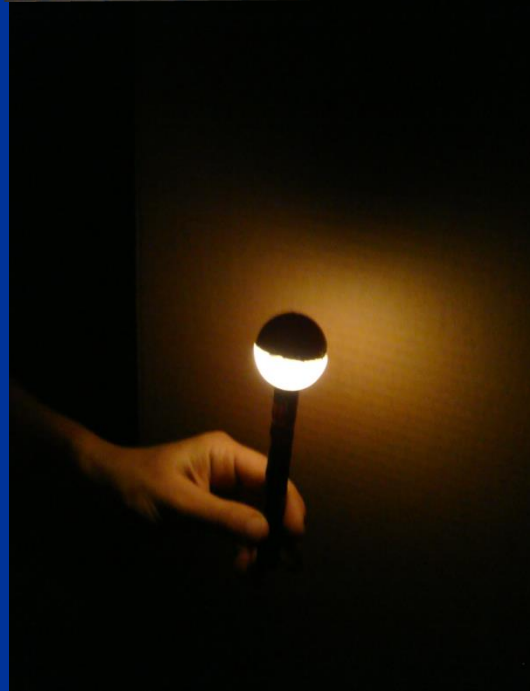
## Procedure



Preparing the black box



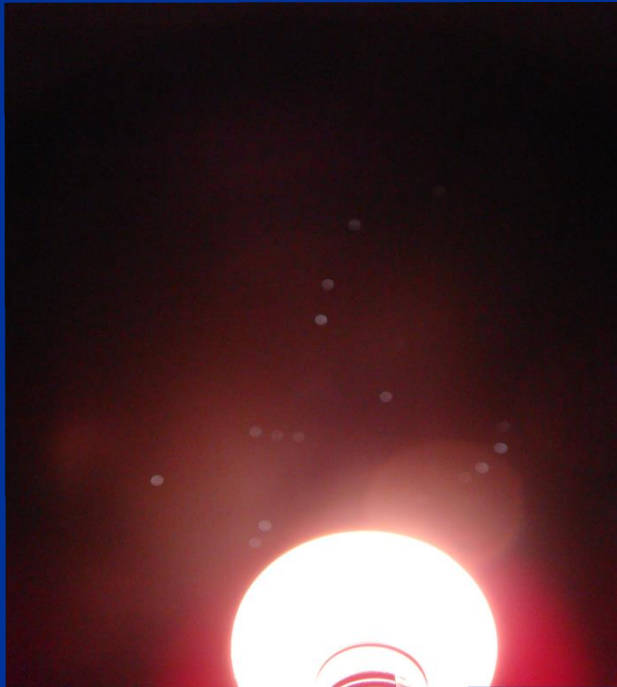
## Activity 2: Light pollution - Glare



Test the streetlights with and without shielding, special for controlling the glare

## Activity 2: Light pollution - Glow

Proof: Pictures are taken inside the box



Appearance of the sky  
with lantern unshielded



Appearance of the sky  
with lantern shielded









# The Stellarium Program



[www.stellarium.org](http://www.stellarium.org)
















# Stellarium Resource Guide

Help Window		F1	Show the help window, which lists key bindings and other useful information
Configuration Window		F2	Show the display of the configuration window
Search Window		F3 or CTRL+f	Show the display of the object search window
View Window		F4	Show the view window
Time Window		F5	Show the display of the help window
Location Window		F6	Show the observer location window (map)

# Stellarium Resource Guide

Table below describes the operations of buttons on the main tool-bar and the side tool-bar, and gives their keyboard shortcuts.

Feature	Tool-bar button	Key	Description
Constellations		c	Draws the constellation lines
Constellation Names		v	Draws the name of the constellations
Constellation Art		r	Superimposes artistic representations of the constellations over the stars
Equatorial Grid		e	Draws grid lines for the RA/Dec coordinate system
Azimuth Grid		z	Draws grid lines for the Alt/Azi coordinate system
Toggle Ground		g	Toggles drawing of the ground. Turn this off to see objects that are below the horizon
Toggle Cardinal Points		q	Toggles marking of the North, South, East and West points on the horizon
Toggle Atmosphere		a	Toggles atmospheric effects. Most notably makes the stars visible in the daytime
Nebulae & Galaxies		n	Toggles marking the positions of Nebulae and Galaxies when the FOV is too wide to see them
Planet Hints		p	Toggles indicators to show the position of planets
Coordinate System		Enter	Toggles between Alt/Azi & RA/Dec coordinate systems
Goto		Space	Centres the view on the selected object
Night Mode		[none]	Toggle "night mode", which changes the coloring of some display elements to be easier on the dark-adapted eye.

Thank you for  
your attention!

