

Keeping a Journal

Writing is one of the best ways to learn. A number of studies - together with many people's experience - have shown this to be true. A journal is a way to organize and examine one's experience in order to learn from it.

A journal is something between course notes and a diary. A journal is like course notes because it focuses on a single subject rather than ranging over all the problems of life. A journal is like a diary because it includes feelings, reactions, and speculations.

One way a journal helps is that it encourages you to think things through. When we write things down in a formal way, we usually have to think about them more carefully than if we just listen, read, or even take notes on them. Journal writing involves us as thinkers in dialogue with ourselves. It leaves visible evidence of where our minds have been.

Another way a journal helps you to learn better is in encouraging you to relate the details of your project to your everyday life. In order to learn something, people need to cross a bridge from what they know to the unknown. Your journal will help you take time to discover the "bridges" that connect your world with the new technology you're learning about. It also helps you add a layer of being your own manager of your learning process.

Two assumptions about journals:

- Each of us experiences life in a unique way that is worth writing about.
- We can increase our competence to know, value, and make choices in our life in a variety of ways; keeping a journal is one of them.

Some reasons to keep a journal are:

- To experiment with something new, to try a new behavior if you've never kept a journal before.
- To develop an internal feedback system, different from feedback received from others.
- To express feelings freely, to explore them, to reflect on them in private.
- To increase your awareness of inner dynamics, to become more sensitive to yourself and your own learning strengths and weaknesses.

When you make entries in your journal, you will:

- Describe the learning session--what happened?
- Record your reactions to what happened--what did you think, feel, want, do? (any or all of these) Describe your feelings and any questions that the experience raised. What was the most difficult part of the session? What was the most satisfying thing that happened? Are your initial expectations being met?
- Reflect on your learning--based on your reactions to what happened, what are you learning? These reflections may suggest issues to work on, progress made, new insights about the past, information for the future, etc.
- Assess whether you are on schedule with your learning plan.

To keep a journal, you will need to have a special journal notebook. Use the materials you're comfortable with. Do you want to use your computer? A spiral notebook? A regular bound book sold for journal-writing? A collection of loose-leaf paper? A stack of legal pads? An artist's sketch book? Something small and portable, or something significant and hefty? Do you want to use a ballpoint pen? A mechanical pencil? A fountain pen? Crayons? Colored pencils? Watercolor pens?

You will probably find it easiest to maintain the journal by jotting down notes at the end of each day you have a learning session.

The questions included here are offered only as suggestions to guide you as you begin to keep a reflective journal. The process is meant to enhance your learning experience, so use it in a way that will be most beneficial to you. You may also find that the journal is useful in classroom discussions and your final presentation.

Every 2 weeks you will turn in your journal to me. There are two purposes for this: first, to let me share in your insights and point of view. Second, turning it in gives you some incentive to keep the journal up. I will not give you a grade on what you write, but you will get credit toward your final project grade. The goal of your writing should be a high-quality expression of your progress and setbacks on your project, as well as the other elements that are explained in your journal entry format handout.

If you are experiencing difficulty keeping a journal, discuss it with me and I will provide you with additional suggestions and assistance.

BASIC JOURNAL WRITING TECHNIQUES

The essence of journal writing is learning to listen to, trust, and learn from your deepest self. This is where true creativity and intuition and reasoning spring from. So in one sense the basic journal writing technique is to listen to what comes up, and then reflect on it, learn from it. Just write, without editing, fixing, worrying, correcting. Write whatever comes to mind (or heart) and see where it leads you. Don't worry about quality. Experiment. Trust the process. Don't worry.

As you write, pay attention to your inner compass. Are you writing what you think you "should" write, what's acceptable and "good?" If so, you can probably tell because you'll either feel bored or smugly self-satisfied. If you're a little nervous or scared, or you feel excited, you're probably on the right track. Something that's true or real for you is on the way.

Write quickly, without worrying about spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc. Journal writing is for you first. So why worry about "table manners"? Your goal is to find ideas, learn about yourself, open the door to your intuition and creativity. You'll need your energy and finger speed to keep up with ideas, not nit-pick over grammar.