

Personal Reflective Journals

Journal writing is a way to actively engage in your own learning and have the opportunity to clarify and reflect upon your thinking. Writing a personal journal gives you an opportunity to reflect on what you are learning and experiencing as a student and is a useful way to document how you feel about it in the moment. You can use the writings to reflect on your personal values, goals, and ideals and to summarize ideas, experiences, and opinions before and after classes. These journals are very also a way to be able to look back on these experiences over time and see how you have changed and developed.

You may also share those reflections with others, such as a Learning Strategist, for feedback. Personal journals are not marked for a class and may just be your private thoughts. Journals also differ from class notes because they are your thoughts on your experience and your feelings about your learning rather than the content of the class.

There is strong support that this is an effective approach to improving your learning and writing skills as well as increasing your ability to take control of your learning. Malcolm Knowles (1975) introduced the idea of personal reflection through activities such as self-assessment and proactive reading of materials. Another educational theorist, Christensen (1981), describes how a diary can be used as a learning tool for adults. Brookfield (1987, 1995) gives a number of ways that critically reflective writing can be used through tools such as autobiography, critical incident analysis, and seeing ourselves as others see us. You can use these tools in a variety of ways, starting with personal journaling.

Schedule time for regular journal writing. You want to write at least one entry after each class, preferably within 24 hours of your learning experience. Pick a topic that stands out from your experience. Keep the entries short at the beginning (unless you have a lot of information that you want to record).

Start each entry with the topic you have picked and the date at the top of the page. Then write out your own thoughts about what is happening.

The following are a few ideas of areas you might explore.

- I am at my best as a learner when I...
- I discovered this new idea today...
- My interactions with others today were...
- Something that went particularly well today was...
- Something that I wish I could re-do about today...
- If I had the chance, I would change...
- What I learned today impacts on my day to day interactions by...
- Something I would change about my learning today is...

These are only a few of the things that you might write about in your learning journal.

Set your standards high and start writing your personal learning journal today!

References

Christensen, R.S. (1981) "Dear Diary -- A Learning Tool for Adults." *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, 5(2), 4-5, 23
Brookfield, S.D. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.