

## JOURNALS

---

Journals are a personal space for students to communicate privately with you. Students can also use journals as a self-reflective tool to post their opinions, ideas, and concerns about the course, or discuss and analyze course related materials. You can create journal assignments that are broad and student-directed as your students reflect on the learning process and document changes in their perceptions and attitudes. Students can describe problems faced and how they solved them. Also, you can create instructor-directed journal entries that are more formal in nature and that narrow the focus by listing topics for discussion.

Journals are ideal for individual projects. For example, in a creative writing course, the owner of each journal creates entries and an instructor comments. In this manner, a student can refine a section of a writing assignment over a period of time, using an instructor's guidance and suggestions. A student can also comment on his or her entries to continue the conversation.

You can choose to make journal entries public, allowing all course members to view all entries. For example, you may choose to make a journal public when asking for opinions on how to improve the evaluation process. Students can read what other students wrote and build upon those ideas.

When used in the group area, members of a group can view and comment on each other's entries for the group journal. The group, as a whole, can communicate with you and all members benefit from the comments.

You can grade journal entries or use them solely for communication. In either instance, a student can make multiple entries for one journal topic.

## BEST PRACTICE: BENEFITS OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING

---

Students can use a journal to collect observations, thoughts, concerns, notes, progress, and opinions that may not be shared otherwise. Journaling can build rapport between instructors and students, contributing to a positive learning experience.

As stated in an online article in *Educause Quarterly*, "Reflective learning can aid learners in synthesizing new information, and it is often used to improve reading comprehension, writing performance, and self-esteem via self-examination."<sup>1</sup>



In the educational environment, journals need to be more than just a list of what a student did. The writing experience is used to communicate the thinking process: the how and why for each activity and thoughts about the activity at its conclusion.

The University of Worcester distributes a study skills advice sheet listing the benefits of reflective learning, which states: "Reflective learners are more likely to develop a deeper understanding of their subject and to achieve higher grades as a result."<sup>2</sup>

Reflective learners tend to:

- Be motivated—know what they are trying to achieve and why.
- Be proactive in extending their understanding of new topics and subjects.
- Use their existing knowledge to help them to develop their understanding of new ideas.
- Understand new concepts by relating them to their previous experiences.
- Understand that additional research and reading improves their understanding.
- Develop their learning and thinking by building on the critical evaluation of their previous learning experiences.
- Be self-aware, able to identify, explain, and address their strengths and weaknesses.

### **Sources**

<sup>1</sup>Phipps, Jonnie Jill. "E-Journaling: Achieving Interactive Education Online." *Educause Quarterly*. 28.1 (2005): n.pag. Web. 18 Nov. 2009.

<sup>2</sup>Learning Journals. University of Worcester, Aug. 2007. Web. 18 Nov. 2009.