

Authentic Assessment

Reflective Journal



DEFINITION

As a means to record ideas, personal experiences, and thoughts, a reflective journal allows students to reflect on and gain insight from their various learning experiences. It requires students to think deeply, evaluate and challenge their previous thoughts and ideas, synthesize any new knowledge learned into their worldview, and integrate them into daily experiences and future actions.

Reflective journals can be used in all disciplines. They can be briefly classified into two types, namely (1) structured journals and (2) unstructured / free-form journals. Students are usually asked to submit a reflective journal in written format.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

To design a reflective journal assessment, teachers should take the following steps:

1. Consider and decide on the type of reflective journal that will be appropriate for your course and learning outcomes.
2. Inform students about the learning objectives of the reflective journal assessment.
3. Inform students about the assessment criteria of the reflective journal.
4. Discuss issues of privacy and confidentiality of information with students, and any relevant policies in these areas.
5. Decide how regularly students should to create journal entries.
6. Provide feedback to students in a timely manner.

BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

Benefits

- Students are encouraged to be active in the process of reflection.
- Reflective journals offer good opportunities for teachers to gain a better understanding of students' thoughts and feelings about and throughout the course.
- Reflective journals can improve students' writing skills.
- Reflective journals allow self-reflections which can enhance students' critical thinking and creativity, as well as enhance the level of authenticity of students' work.

Challenges

- It is difficult for assessors to mark reflective journals due to their subjective nature.
- It can be time-consuming for assessors to grade reflective journals.
- Some students may feel uncomfortable with disclosing private and personal views in their reflective journals.

CASE SAMPLE

Reflective journal assessment in Objects and Algorithms at the University of South Australia

Design of the assessment:

Reflective journals were used as an assessment method in a core undergraduate computing course ('Objects and Algorithms') at the University of South Australia. At the beginning of the semester, students were informed about the inclusion of reflective journals as an assessment (among an examination and programming assignments), as well as the expected format of the journals. A reflective journal sample, showing the elements expected to be included, and a detailed breakdown of how the journals would be marked were provided to students.

The learning objectives of this course included gaining a mastery of the content and developing generic skills like problem-solving and lifelong learning. The reflective journal was designed to align with and embed these learning outcomes. There were two components of the journaling which were (1) reflections on declarative knowledge (i.e., lecture materials), and (2) reflections on procedural knowledge, in which students reflected on the crucial knowledge learned in the course's practical exercises, as well as their problem solving process in those exercises. Additionally, students were required to evaluate how the reflective journal writing influenced their own learning experiences.

Students were required to submit journal entries every four weeks throughout the semester, though they were encouraged to make regular weekly submissions.

How are students assessed?

The reflective journal component was worth 20% of the overall course. Of this, there were three periodic journal submissions that were marked by tutors: the entries submitted at week 5, 9, and 13. These submissions made up 4%, 8%, and 8% of the reflective journal assessment respectively, with the first periodic submission given less weighting to allow students room to improve in their subsequent reflections.

Levels of reflection were distinguished in the reflective journal's marking scheme. No marks were given to entries that merely repeated questions or knowledge without identifying problems; full marks were given to reflections that demonstrated thought, accurate knowledge, and/or the seeking of understanding. Half marks were given to reflections that fell in between, as well as to those that contained misconceptions or errors. Tutors were asked to correct any misunderstandings in students' journals, and give suggestions on improving reflections if the student did not receive full marks.

Reference

George, S. E. (2002, January). Learning and the reflective journal in computer science. In ACSC (Vol. 2, pp. 77-86).

TIPS FOR DESIGNING

- An effective reflective journal assessment should allow students to develop a critical attitude towards integrating learning into their real-life experiences.
- Students can be given options to decide on the mode of reflection (e.g., audio, written, video) they are most comfortable with.