



Reflective Journal

What is Reflective Journal?

A reflective journal is a means of recording ideas, personal thoughts and experiences, as well as reflections and insights a student have in the learning process of a course. In addition to the demands of a typical written assignment (e.g. able to give definition on concepts, demonstrate basic understanding of course materials), reflective journal requires the students to think more deeply, to challenge their old ideas with new incoming information, to synthesize the course materials they have learnt into their personal thoughts and philosophy, and also to integrate it into their daily experiences and future actions. The benefits of the reflective learning process are usually accumulated over a period of time, in which the students usually show a series of developmental changes, personal growth and changes in perspectives during the process.

Structure of Reflective Journal

Basically, there are two standard forms of reflective journals: (From [Using Journals to Promote Reflective Thought, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Park University](#))

1. Structured journals: students are given a specific question, target, or set of guidelines to base their writings on
2. Unstructured journals/free-form journals: students are required to record thoughts and feeling with minimal direction

However, both structured journals and unstructured journals are expected to get through some of the following aspects:

1. To discuss or argue a journal paper/report/an issue from a private standpoint or from various perspectives
2. To synthesize or analyze some materials or resources for building up an argument
3. To compare and contrast a particular issue with prior or new knowledge
4. To generate questions and think deeply as a result of perception of the resources
5. To describe personal experiences and integrate them into the issues in concern
6. To express freely for or against the specific questions given by teachers
7. To develop the ability and critical attitude to integrate learning into real-world experiences

Although reflective journals are often presented in a written format, they are not necessarily written. Some reflective journals can be tape-recorded or presented online. The presentation format of reflective journals is flexible. It is suggested to be applicable to a broad range of disciplines.



Y	Declarative	CHARACTERISTICS
Y	Functioning	
Y	Take Time to Set	
Y	Take Time to Answer	
Y	Take Time to Correct	
Y	Take Time to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
Y	Can substitute with Computers	
	Passive	
Y	Active	
Y	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly Y =Yes

Advantages of Reflective Journal

- **Active learning** - The process of reflection encourages the students to take the initiative to be active, self-driven; allows individual learner to explore concepts and ideas in relation to their thoughts and feelings from different perspectives. Students can become independent thinkers through the practice and to enable themselves to solve various problems on their own.
- **Understanding the progress of students** - Reflective journals provide good opportunities for teachers to gain better understanding into how the students think and feel about the course, and the learning progress of the students throughout the course, which will eventually enhance the students' learning process.
- **Improving writing skills** - Writing reflective journals can involve students in a new form of writing which they may not have a chance to experience in the past. This exposure can bring out improvement in students' writing skills.
- **Freely expressing personal views and criticizing of one-self** - Reflective journal assignments provide the platform for students to freely express what they think and feel about the course and their learning process, and also promote their expression of ideas, personal experiences and opinions. This is an ideal place for students who are generally not willing to speak up in classes and tutorials to express themselves.
- **Enhance critical thinking and creativity** - The process of self-reflection enhances the development of critical thinking skills among students when they relate their knowledge to real world issues. It can help students develop their creativity and a questioning attitude towards different issues and problems.

Disadvantages of Reflective Journal

- **Difficult for objective marking** – Due to the subjective nature of reflective assignments, it is rather difficult for assessors to be objective and have consistent grading. Different assessors when marking may have quite a large discrepancy in their judgment of different types of work.
- **Time consuming for grading** – The context of reflective writing can often be very wide, and involves a wide range of concepts, issues, and perspectives. As a result, it often takes considerable amount of time for assessors to read and grade students' works.



- **Confidentiality** – As students have to disclose their personal and private views and information in their reflection, some of them may be unwilling to honestly disclose their real perspectives. They may be concerned that what they wrote will significantly affect the grade they receive.
- **Clear guidelines needed** – Many students may not be familiar with the procedure of writing reflective assignments and may feel very lost when working on it for the first time. Teachers have to give clear guidelines to students about what should be included in the reflective journals, what can be learnt from writing it, as well as how they will be graded.

How to design a good Reflective Journal Assessment?

1. Consider the types of reflective journals that fit your course (if students are inexperienced with reflective journals, the structured form would be more 'student-friendly' because specific questions and guidelines are available)
2. Make sure there are clear ideas about expectations and assessment criteria given to the students. (e.g. What can students put in their journals? What is the definition of 'reflection'? What is the approximate length for each journal entry?)
3. Try to make students understand the purpose and benefits of reflective journals at the very beginning
4. Make sure that teachers have explained and discussed the policies concerning privacy and confidentiality of information with students
5. Decide the regularity of journal entry (e.g. weekly, monthly)
6. Provide timely feedback to students

Marking Rubrics

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
<p>Reflections: Ability to integrate learning into real-world experiences and analyze issues with a critical attitude</p>	<p>Ability to proficiently demonstrate reflection and deep thinking of acquired knowledge and concepts, and integrate them into different issues from wide range of perspectives (e.g. different contexts, cultures, disciplines etc.); creative solutions and critical thinking skills demonstrated in the writing</p>	<p>Showing satisfactory ability to relate acquired knowledge to previous experiences; demonstrating attempt to analyze the issues from a number of different perspectives</p>	<p>Includes description of events, and a little further consideration behind the events using a relatively descriptive style of language; no evidence of using multiple perspectives in analyzing the issues</p>	<p>Only includes mere descriptions of theoretical knowledge; no reflection is demonstrated beyond the descriptions</p>
<p>Presentation: Articulation and organization of ideas and perspectives</p>	<p>Writing is well-focused; arguments or perspectives are precisely defined and explained; coherent flow in developing an insightful idea</p>	<p>Arguments or perspectives are clearly stated; organized flow in writing but not deep enough to be very</p>	<p>Arguments or perspectives are vaguely mentioned; the writing lacked an organized flow and the ideas were hard to</p>	<p>Do not show any original thinking or perspectives; chaotic in organization and presentation of ideas</p>



	demonstrated	insightful	follow	
Completeness: Incorporation of the journal entries into a whole, demonstration of the learning process	Concrete connections between journal entries into a whole; demonstrating clear steps in the developmental learning process	Journal entries can be generally connected; still able to observe how the student develops during the learning process	Weak connections between journal entries; development gained from the learning process is hardly observed	No connections between journal entries; The entries are mere descriptions of events rather than showing a sequence of learning steps

Web References and Resources

- All Ireland Society for Higher Education, Case Studies of Good Practices in Assessment of Student Learning in Higher Education: Case 7 - Where are the Examinations? Using Learning Journals in Mathematics Assessment
<http://www.aishe.org/readings/2007-1/No-07.html>
- All Ireland Society for Higher Education, Case Studies of Good Practices in Assessment of Student Learning in Higher Education: Case 16 - The Use of Learning Journals in Assessment
<http://www.aishe.org/readings/2007-1/No-16.html>
- An Evaluation of Student Diaries as Tools for Learning and Assessment, Julia Connell, Graduate School of Business, University of Newcastle Australia
<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/teaching-learning/teachingreview/connell.html>
- Institute for Interactive Media & Learning, University of Technology Sydney
<http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/assessment/types/journals/index.html>
- Learning journals and logs, Reflective Diaries, Good Practice in Teaching and Learning, Centre for Teaching and Learning, University College Dublin
<http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/printableDocs/Good%20Practices%20in%20T&L/learningJournals.pdf>
- Uses and Benefits of Journal Writing
<http://www-distance.syr.edu/journal1.html>
- Using Journals to Promote Reflective Thought, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Park University
<http://www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/journals.html>

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Chan C.(2009) Assessment: Reflective Journal, Assessment Resources@HKU, University of Hong Kong [http://ar.cetl.hku.hk]: Available: Accessed: DATE