

JOURNALING

What is a journal?

A journal is a record of your thoughts and views. Your journal documents your reactions to people, ideas, situations, and what you read or see. Journaling allows you to record and preserve the intellectual and emotional events of your life; however, a journal is not a diary. You are not writing about every thought or event; you are choosing those you feel may have worth to you later. Sometimes we don't know how an experience will affect us. A trivial incident today could spark a thought that years from now may influence career decisions or personality. On the other hand, today's traumatic experience may be a vague memory tomorrow.

What are the benefits of keeping a journal?

Journals do more than capture ideas and experiences. They provide an opportunity for you to express yourself freely, honestly, and without external criticism. Many students find the journal frees them from "phony" or "stilted" writing, and increases their fluency, evaluation, and organization skills. Because you do not have to worry about formal structures, such as in an essay, you can concentrate on the most natural, honest use of language.

The journal is *your* business, so you do not have to please other people. This is a place where you can test new concepts, try different writing styles, and work through confusing ideas. Usually, journals are not written for others to read, and your instructor never shares your journal with anyone.

What makes an effective journal entry?

Sharp images, clear ideas and penetrating inquiries are all marks of a successful journal. An effective journal entry is focused. Keep the focus on experience rather than accomplishments.

What can you write about?

Go back over your day, reflecting on events, images, and people. Try to remember any conclusions made or conflicts that developed. Examine your emotional responses to each, and try to bring to the surface any reasons for personal actions and responses.

Do not discard possible journal entries because they seem too average, common, or routine. Work, school, family, friends, commuting, dating, parenting, bill paying, lawn mowing, clothes washing—all these and more occupy our time. Mundane experience is the heart of a journal.

Another source is to pay particular attention to ideas presented in your classes. Did anyone's opinion interest you? Did some ideas disturb you? Why? Did a new idea present itself that requires investigation? Did you find that your attitude is changing in some way? Your reaction to television programs, current events, music, art, photographs, writings, and places are often productive sources. Regularly reading exposes you to many new ideas.

Overall, try to balance. Examine and capture as wide a range of experiences as possible.

Works Cited

- Klarner, Walt. "The Journal: An Introductory Unit." Unpublished handout on file at Maple Woods Community College, Kansas City, Mo.
- Caverly, David C., Sharon Sundin McKool, and Cynthia Peterson. "Journaling Through E-mail." Unpublished paper Presented at the annual meeting of the College Reading & Learning Association, March 26, 1994, San Diego, Ca.