

## LEARNING JOURNAL MECHANICS

Keeping a journal is one way to organize and examine one's experience so as to learn from it. One way to do this is to focus on three elements:

1. A description of the experience (*i.e. the "event" or "episode" – "what happened,"*) *It usually involves one of the 5 senses; I saw..., I heard..., I smelled..., I tasted..., of I felt... (as in touch).*
2. Your reaction to the experience (*what you thought, felt "emotion", wanted, did*)
3. What you learned by examining how you reacted to what happened.

For many people, whether they are aware of it or not, the most difficult part is #1, a description of the experience. This is because we are accustomed to interpreting and/or evaluation our perceptions, often without even realizing what the perceptions are, in any objective sense. Asked to describe an interaction, many people would say, "Joe gave me a hard time." This is not descriptive – it is interpretative/evaluative. (To check this, what do you see or hear when someone says "hard time?" Whatever it is, it's not necessarily going to be what another person sees or hears.) A description would be, "I heard Joe say he wasn't ready yet to give me the information I wanted", or "Joe interrupted me a number of times when I tried to explain to him why I needed his help."

### A FEW HINTS ON JOURNAL WRITING

The process of journal writing almost always involves personal writing about what one perceives as important. In education, we use journals in attempts to foster a more personal and intense engagement in the learning process. In other words, through an invitation to reflect on learning experiences, we are trying to encourage a connection between the individual learner and what he/she is learning.

Journal writing is often referred to as "keeping a personal journal". The implication here is that journal writing represents an opportunity for you to engage with the curriculum in a totally personal or individual way, without regard for what others might think or say. It is a chance for you to say what is on your mind or to ask questions that you might not raise in class.

The key requirement in journal writing is reflection. That is, your thinking about what happened in class or in your reading or assignments. Some educators advocate checking with your emotions to see what aspects of the instruction "grabbed you" or stood out from the rest.

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The theory is that if your emotions were raised by something, then it obviously meant something to you, and that is probably worth reflecting on. And what happens if your emotions never seem to flare up? Here are some options that you might want to try:

- Compare aspects of your learning with your own experiences. Take the new theories or concepts and see how they fit or measure up in your experience.
- Summarizing: Try to restate the gist of a piece of work. This doesn't mean repeating everything that was said or done in class or in a handout; it means distilling a piece to get down to its central theme.
- Make a progress report on what you believe you are learning (a form of self-evaluation).
- Classifying: Sorting and grouping to develop order among things. Possibly trying to situate new ideas among previously held issues.
- Interpreting: Often involves paraphrasing or summarizing and then trying to come to some position on what something means.
- Criticizing: Taking interpreting a step further, which involves looking for the underlying assumptions and then speculating about cause and effects.
- Implementing: Thinking about what you are learning and contemplating on how it might be useful in your life.

The reactions, in other words, can suggest issues we need to work on, explore, or think about. They may indicate that we've made some headway in our effort to change certain behaviors. They may help us make greater sense out of things that have happened to us in the past. And they may provide us with information that will be useful to us the next time a similar situation occurs.

It is not necessary to write down what we thought and felt and wanted and did. Instead, include whichever of these (and at times it may be all four) have salience for you – either because they just “pop out” or because you've been able to puzzle them out.

Source: NTL READING BOOK FOR HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING 1982 NTL INSTITUTE.