

JOURNAL WRITING

“An intellectual journal is neither a diary nor a finished written paper.”
Steve Orvis, Professor of Government

Professors assign journals as a tool for students to become actively engaged with the course material. Students, however, often are resistant to keeping journals because they feel unsure about either the content or the purpose of the journal. Knowing some of the basic goals common to all journals should help you approach a journal writing assignment.

Common Goals of a Journal

- to encourage regular writing
- to make connections between class material, lectures, and personal observations
- to raise questions and issues that can fuel classroom discussions
- to generate ideas for future paper topics
- to provide a forum for inquiry, analysis, and evaluation of ideas

Do

- write regularly
- try to make concrete connections between journal entries
- link personal reactions to the class material
- approach the exercise with the intention of being challenged
- present your ideas in a coherent and thought-provoking manner
- take your journal seriously. Keeping a journal helps develop writing, reading, analytical and critical skills that are necessary in all disciplines.

Do Not

- ignore basic rules of grammar and punctuation
- write to fill pages; the process is more important than the product
- wait until the last minute to make your entries
- confuse your journal with a personal diary. Although this is your journal, the main focus should be on class assignments and their connections. Try not to focus too much on your personal feelings, such as whether or not you liked the book or the film. Instead concentrate on why your professor assigned the material.
- simply summarize -- analyze. Avoid describing what you have read. Ask probing questions: are the points well-argued? Does the writer come to a logical conclusion? What other issues should be considered?

Faculty Comments on the Value of Journal Writing

“I’ll be looking for evidence of thought and clarity of expression. The journal needn’t be polished to gem-like lustre, but it should be coherent and, I hope, thought-provoking.”

Richard Decker, Professor of Computer Science

“Journals are ultimately very useful for developing good work habits by providing a venue and location for thinking through ideas in an ongoing and consistent way.”

Ella Gant, Professor of Art

“A journal’s pedagogical purpose is twofold: to engage the literary text, to know it more rigorously, to discuss the problems it raises, but, secondly, to engage one’s own social/historical location, to make visible and to question one’s own ideological bases. Since meaning is created in the encounter between reader and text, the journal allows the student to refine that encounter.”

Susan Sanchez-Casal, Professor of Spanish

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