

LEARNING JOURNAL AND WRITING INSTRUCTIONS

Writing a learning journal supports your learning while you are reading the literature. The teacher should clearly see that you have been studying and learning the central content of the provided material and, most importantly, that you have understood it. Learning journal also contains your own thoughts and analyses of what you have read. Write with your own words and describe your thoughts from diverse angles. Use clear argumentation and good language. A good learning journal can later on be used as a memo. Clearly indicate that you know and understand what you have read and that you can apply and combine your knowledge. Also show that you can evaluate the information you have read.

In practice, read a chapter, put the book aside, and write your reflections on what you just read. Don't write an abstract or copy text from the book. There is no set length in terms of number of pages. Write for yourself, to help your own learning process. At the same time, keep in mind that the teacher has to be able, by reading your learning journal, see that you have read the material with thought. It is a good idea to show an early version (e.g. journal of the first chapter of the book) to the teacher, in order to make sure the way you write your learning journal is as expected.

The following paragraphs offer some tips about writing learning journals to help your ability for critical reflection as a learner, to make sense of what you have been learning. Entries in a learning journal can include (please apply as relevant to your task):

- Introduce the most important, central points of the content that you found especially interesting in your reading, and would like to follow up in more detail. What new did you learn? Can you make comparative analyses to what you already knew? What points were still not clear for you? Justify your opinions.
- Questions that came up in your mind, because of points made in material you read on this topic. You can further process these questions and look for further material to read.
- Think "What were the three main points that were new to me, in the material I read today?" Write them down without looking at the book - then compare them with what was presented in the book, to make sure you remembered the points accurately.
- Notes from other material you read as a result of the book - whether this was publications cited, or other relevant material that you happened to read. Remember to add the references to your text as appropriate.
- A record of other learning (e.g. recently dealt with in some course, discussed with a colleague, reported in news or such) you link to this subject area, while you're reading the book, with a sentence or two on the main points how it adds to your understanding of the subject.
- Your reflections on this book, and how well it is meeting your needs. By considering what the knowledge means to you personally, what kind of thoughts it triggers and how you evaluate it in relation to your previous knowledge, you can create a personal, analytical and well-reasoned view on the given topic.
- Thoughts that aren't yet fully formed, but that you want to refine later. This could include your feelings about the subject area of the book, and your progress in learning more about it, and theories that are developing in your mind.
- Every time you come back to reading the book and writing the learning journal, think back over everything you've learnt and written in the journal since the last time. You may want to add remarks on the previous notes.

What form should a learning journal take?

Write at the same time when you are reading the book. Some people prefer to write with the computer, while others prefer to write by hand. Depending on your preference, you may use different methods:

- A pad with small pages - every time you have a thought about the course, write it on a separate sheet of paper. Later, you can tear the pages out of the pad and sort them so that similar notes go together - e.g. the main points you learned, what you need to learn more about, references that you need to read, questions to ask the instructor, and so on.
- If you want to write by hand, you can transcribe the relevant notes in to a hard-bound notebook. Alternatively you may use the computer. It is important to save your notes since you may use them as a reference long after you finish the course. Remember to take backup from your files.

Evaluation of the learning journal

The central topics covered and presented, subject understood, clear argumentation, written in good language and style, shows independent thinking, intellectual reflecting and ability to link topics visible, the text serves the learner as a memo later on.

Arvosana	0	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation and discussion of the central content	Important topics are completely missing or presentation includes big mistakes. Learning journal gives an impression that the student has not read the literature at all	Important topics are missing or interpreted weakly. Lots of irrelevant discussion is included	The most important topics are covered, but some of the fairly important topics are missing or unclear. Conceptual formulation is rather weak, and indications of understanding the relevance (to identify the most relevant contents) is not convincing	The important and central topics are understood and presented fairly clearly. The test however is mostly descriptive without links to wider contexts	All the central topics are presented clearly, and a personal touch is present through independent ingredients, such as for example, linking to recommended additional literature. What is learned is applied and related to student's own cases and examples	The topics are mastered, and the student creatively applies the findings and concepts to his own examples and/or learning or experience. The text documents considerable enthusiasm in studying not just the required texts but also other materials available for the topic
Argumentation and language	Argumentation as well as language/style is very poor	Argumentation is weak and partially wrong. Language and/or style is poor	The style is fairly good, but expressions are sometimes unclear	The text flows, indicates fair understanding of relevance, and does not contain any big mistakes or weaknesses	Argumentation is clear and the language and style are very good	Argumentation is strong and constructively critical, language and style are very good
Grasping the whole and the theoretical logic	Grasping of the whole and theoretical logic is not visible	Grasping of the whole and theoretical logic is weak	Grasping the whole and understanding the theory are satisfactory	Grasping the whole and understanding the theory are at good level	Grasping the whole and understanding the theory are at very good level	Grasping the whole and understanding the theory are at excellent
The quality of the learning journal as a memo	The text would not serve well as a memo	It would be hard to use the text as a memo in future	The material is somewhat helpful as a learning memo for student's future use	The material would serve as a learning memo for the future use	The document would serve as a valuable memo	The text would serve as an excellent summary and memo for future use