

A guide for writing a “reflective journal”

(Adapted from Professor Wayne Iwaoka, the University of Hawaii at Manoa)

What is a reflective journal and why should you use one?

A journal is an instrument for practicing writing and thinking. A reflective journal differs from your typical class notes in which you “passively” record data/information given to you by an instructor. It should not be a mere “listing of events” but rather reflect upon lessons you have learned-- a personal record of your educational experience in class.

Maintaining a journal serves several purposes:

- A means of communication, conversation (e.g., between material and yourself, yourself and instructors).
- Provides regular feedback between you and the instructors and helps to match expectations.
- Platform for synthesis of knowledge and ideas
- Help develop critical thinking
- Helps to elicit topics of interest, challenging topics that need improvement, etc.
- Dictionary of important terms: clarify troublesome concepts

What to write?

First write a brief summary of the contents of a lecture, lab activity, group discussion or reading material. Then reflect upon these activities- record your own thoughts, ideas, responses and reactions to any of the above activities. Make notes about concepts, questions you have, and any confusion that may arise. Use the journal to explore possible solutions to problems being raised in class or alternative activities to the ones presented in class. Record new insights and problem solving strategies realized during discussions with fellow students and instructors. The journal reflects your own thoughts and ideas. Be as original and critical (constructive) as you can.

When do I use the journal?

You are expected to use the journal in every class.

How to write?

You should use whatever style you are comfortable with as long as it is clearly written and sensible, so you can pick it up next year and be able to understand it. Journal entries must be a response to what was covered in class, lab and reading assignment.

What are we looking for when we grade your journal?

You will not be graded upon whether your ideas are scientifically or pedagogically correct or not, and there will be no docking of points for poor writing or grammar (unless it is not clearly written).

The table below presents the “essentials” we look for:

	Exceeds Expectations (4)	Meets the Standard (3)	Needs Improve- ment (2)	Weak Element (1)
Bring journal to each class and turn it in on time				
Clearly written				
Thoughtful and creative				
Refers to the lesson and its concepts, both scientific and pedagogical				
Reflects upon what interested and/or excited you about the current lesson				
Reflects upon ideas you could adapt from the current lesson to teaching science.				
Reflects upon what you would do differently if you taught the current lesson.				
Clearly addresses journal assignments.				

Full credit for a journal check: All 3s

©Karp-Boss, Weller and Boss, 2007

this page was last edited on 1/16/2007