

Reflective or learning journal

A learning or reflective journal is a steadily growing document that you write to record the progress of your learning. This type of journal is not simply a summary of the course material; it should also include your reactions to what you've learnt.

Note: If you are writing a reflective essay, please see our separate writing guide on reflective essays.

Content

Read the assignment instructions and marking criteria carefully. Base your journal entries on these. Listed below are some general ideas that may also help you write your journal. Use these where they fit with your specific assignment instructions.

- What did I read for this topic, apart from the notes? (Include information and references from a range of sources)
- What was the most interesting thing I read for this topic - why was that?
- What material didn't I find interesting - why was that?
- What did I previously think was true, but now know to be wrong?
- What did we not cover that I expected we should?
- What have I changed my mind about as a result of this topic?
- What is one thing I learned in this topic that I may be able to use in future?
- What am I still unsure about? What would I like to learn more about?



- What issues(s) interested me and would I like to study in more detail?
- What are my ideas for action, based on this topic?

You may also be required to include a summary of the journal looking at what you learn across the term as a whole. For example, did you notice that some weeks/topics were easier to learn? Did you combine or build on your understanding from earlier weeks?

Structure

Organise your learning journal with a section for each week. If you are required to submit the whole journal, use a heading for each week. If you need to include a summary of the journal, put this at the start or end of the assignment (check this with your educator) and give it the heading 'Summary'. If you have in-text references, then remember to include a reference list.

Style

Learning or reflective journals require you to write in both the first and the third person.

Use first person ('I') to provide your own reflections about what you are learning, its personal impact upon you, and how you would apply theories, concepts and skills being considered in the unit.

Use third person (people's names, he/she/they and words like *counsellors*, *an individual* etc) when discussing the theories or research of authors you discuss in your journal.

A learning or reflective journal might require you to provide examples of what you would say to a client or another person, and what they might also say. These are called verbatim examples.

Self-evaluation

Rate yourself on the following aspects of writing a reflective or learning journal.

- 1 = very weak
- 2 = weak
- 3 = ok
- 4 = good
- 5 = excellent

Able to read, understand and reference the content of the unit

1 2 3 4 5

Able to find additional reading material on key topics to show depth of understanding

1 2 3 4 5

Able to think about how and what you are learning

1 2 3 4 5

Able to think critically about the unit material and your own learning and reactions

1 2 3 4 5

Able to use first and third person appropriately

1 2 3 4 5

Example of a section of a student's reflective learning journal

Week 5: The counselling process

Reading Hackney & Cormier's (2009) five-step counselling process led me to reflect on the impact of the termination process in relation to my personal experience of being discharged from hospital after eight months. Whilst excited about being well enough to leave, once home, I was extremely sad. Over my stay I had formed close bonds with the staff, and, I felt secure in their care. I was surprised by the brief I experienced, however, I found follow-up visits helpful. Similarly, when termination occurs as a consequence of successful counselling sessions, this too is often met with a sense of both accomplishment and regret, due to the loss of a significant relationship (Hackney & Cormier, 2009). Therefore, counsellors need to talk openly with clients about the feelings of grief and loss they may experience, and a follow-up appointment may be necessary to minimise the pain experienced (Geldard & Geldard, 2012). Hence, as a counsellor, I hope to sensitively integrate discussions regarding termination into the end stages of the counselling process, and, if required, offer follow-up sessions.

