

# Keeping a Notebook or a Journal

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## Why keep a notebook or journal?

Think about it! Imagine that you are in a workshop or professional development session on a topic that is important for your daily practice. Would you be keeping notes? What kinds of notes would you be keeping? How do you organize notes? What does note-keeping do to assist you in your professional development?

You have just participated in a reflective activity that mirrors several in this online course. These activities are called “Think about it!” and you’ll find that they challenge you to begin thinking about new topics, about your learning in these topics, and about how to apply this learning to your practice.

Many of our other activities, entitled “Work with it!” also include a reflective component. You may be asked to review a website, read an article, or case study, and then asked to consider the new learning from your reading from different points of view or for different purposes.

In each of these types of activities, you should have a place to write down your reflections, and your new learning. Just as you would keep a notebook or journal in a workshop, professional development session, or an onsite class at a university, so too should you keep one throughout your online course.

## What is a journal?

Journals may be a memory aid, document your learning, reflect on how you learn, note questions for the instructor, or confusion about a concept.

Don’t be put off by the term “Journal”. With memories of diaries we kept as young people, or knowing that we may have just assigned a math journal assignment to our own students, you may be a bit cynical about the role of journals or notebooks in adult learning. There have been several studies to demonstrate that adult learning is enhanced by journal writing, especially when the learners are confident of confidentiality, are aware that the journals will not be marked, and are given guidance and prompts to deepen the reflection

and metacognition. (Two summaries of the literature may be found in the two ERIC digests cited in Sources, below.)

## How will it be used?

Please be assured that your notebook or journal in this course is your own. No one will mark it. No one will critique its grammar and spelling. No one will see it, but you. It is your own learning tool, but one which your instructor and the writers of this course recommend. You will use it to generate material of your own selection, for your module activities, and your Candidate Reflection as well as the culminating activities including Reflective Practice and Action Plan.

Here are suggestions for using a notebook/journal in this course:

1. After each "Think about it!", and/or "Work with it!" where you are asked to reflect or make notes, use your notebook/journal to do so.
2. At any point, as you read, or participate in a discussion, record points of interest, or questions.
3. When you are asked to submit a Candidate Reflection form during this course, you may draw on your notebook/journal entries for material.
4. When you participate in the discussion board during Work with It! or during module activities, you will be able to draw on your notes and reflections.
5. In the culminating modules of this course, such as Design a Unit, and Reflective Practice and Action Plan, your journal entries will be valuable.

### Ways to write in your journal:

- Create a separate file on your computer entitled Notebook or Journal. Open it each time you begin work on the course. This will make it easier to access your entries and to copy and paste any for other activities. However, if you're more comfortable with pen and paper, it's your choice.
- Use titles to remind yourself what you're writing about and where in the course this occurred. Use the same module and section titles as are in the course.
- Use dates to remind yourself when in the course your work occurred.
- Divide up your page to reflect observations, quotations or ideas from a text in one column, and your thoughts, reflections, connections, applications in a corresponding column. (This is called a "double entry journal.")

#### [More information on double entry journals](#)

- Journals may use "quickwrite" where you write very quick, uninterrupted thoughts down, both during and immediately after reading or discussing. A variation on this is "First Thoughts" which are a list of key words and phrases that come to mind after reading. Point form notes, page references, questions, notes to the instructor, writing down points of confusion, these are all ways to record in a journal.

However, the way to grow through a journal is to reflect on these points, questions, pages, etc. Discuss why they are important to you. Do they challenge your beliefs? Do they provide an important rationale or strategy for your practice? Do you agree or disagree with the ideas?

- Cranton(1998) states that "Journal writing allows students to record first what happens and then step back from the experience and view it in a fresh way, and finally question the value or professional, or markers in the understanding of the subject area (e.g., When did you get confused? When did you have an "ah-ha" moment?) Students then go back and write about why each event was a critical time." Use a special section of each page to perform this critical reflective task, after some time has elapsed.
- Here is a set of prompts for reflective entries from "Journal Writing as an Adult Learning Tool:"

- **Descriptive**—What happened?
- **Metacognitive**—What were your thoughts, feelings, assumptions, beliefs, values, attitudes?
- **Analytic**—What were the reasoning and thinking behind actions and practices?
- **Evaluative**—What was good or bad? What are the implications?
- **Reconstructive**—What changes might be made? What are plans for future actions?

## Sources

Cranton, P. (1998). *No one way: Teaching and learning in higher education*. Toronto, ON: Wall & Emerson, Inc.

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