

A reflective journal or diary is the perfect place to note down your thoughts and observations about your current experiences.

In a reflective journal, you can write about a positive or negative event that you experienced, what it means or meant to you, and what you may have learned from that experience.



A well-written journal can be an important tool. As with any tool, to get the most benefits, you need practice. This could mean forcing yourself to write, at first, but after a while, it will become like second nature. Write down your entry as soon as possible after the event. This way, the details will still be fresh in your mind, which will help later in your analysis.

## 5 Reasons to Write a Reflective Journal

Reflective journals are most often used to record detailed descriptions of certain aspects of an event or thought. For example, who was there, what was the purpose of the event, what do you think about it, how does it make you feel, etc. Write down everything, even if you don't have a clear idea of how this information will be helpful.

Here are some of the most common reasons why people find reflective journals so useful:

- 1. To make sense of things that happened.** What you write should sound as if you are describing the details to someone who wasn't there. Be as descriptive as possible. Just the act of writing down the details of what happened may give you perspective that you may not have otherwise considered had you just continued to think about it.
- 2. To speculate as to why something is the way it is.** Your views can come from your own common sense, or from something you have heard at a lecture or read in a book. Either way, speculating why something is the way it is can be a very useful exercise in reasoning.
- 3. To align future actions with your reflected values and experiences.** After thinking about your interpretation, continue to observe the subject of your speculation to decide whether you want to stick to your original views, or make changes. Making changes and updating your thoughts is one of the great things about keeping a journal--you can make changes to your entries at any time.
- 4. To get thoughts and ideas out of your head.** Writing down your thoughts can help relieve pressure or help resolve problems. It will also help you focus the task at hand.

- 5. To share your thoughts and ideas with others.** Getting opinions from others about what you wrote can help you clarify your feelings for a deeper understanding of yourself.

## The Reflective Journal Thought Process



When writing a reflective journal, you are simply documenting something that has happened in your life that requires you to make a change or consider the impact of your decision. Your journal, in many ways, is a dialogue that you are having with yourself. You are forcing your brain to think critically about something and to produce written words accordingly.

The worst thing you can do to a creative flow is to start inputting criticism before your thought is complete. Allow yourself the time to make a mistake and keep going. Who cares if you didn't phrase that exactly how you should have, or you didn't spell that word right? Those things just aren't important here. Find whatever works for you.

## 4 Tips to Get Your Reflective Journaling Started

Writing a reflective journal requires not only that you describe a learning experience, but also that you analyse the topics covered and articulate your feelings and opinions about the subject matter. There is no set structure for writing a reflective journal, as the diary is meant for your own use. The writing process is entirely free-form. However, there are certain guidelines to follow that will make you more successful at this. Here are some basic tips at how to write a reflective journal.

### 1. Always keep the journal nearby

The first step in learning how to write a reflective journal is as simple as being prepared to jot down your thoughts and opinions on something you are learning anytime the mood strikes. For example, if you have an insightful observation about a book you're reading while on the bus, it pays to have your journal with you.

### 2. Make regular entries

While you can write in whatever form and style you please, it's important to write regular entries, even if a moment of inspiration doesn't arise. This ensures you are reviewing content and actively thinking about what you have learned. This will develop your writing and critical thinking skills while keeping you organised. In the end, this should enable you to better understand specific topics you are studying.

### 3. Participate, observe, summarise and contemplate

While reflecting is the main part of keeping a reflective diary, it's also vital that you first participate in a learning activity, make observations and summarise facts and experiences. For example, if you are writing about doing a presentation to a peer group, be sure to first cover what you did, and what the goal and outcome of the presentation was. Then think about what you noticed when you were doing the presentation, how you felt whilst presenting and note any feedback you gained. The next step is to reflect on how the experience was for you, what went well, what you would have done differently, how you felt before, during and after, as well as how the feedback you received impacted on you.

Reflective journaling is about participating and observing before writing.

### 4. Review regularly

Take time to read over previous journal entries and see how new experiences, additional knowledge and time have altered how you think and feel about the material you've been analysing and contemplating. This will make the journal more valuable to you personally, as it will shed light on how you've personally developed and grown.