

Learning Journals

What is a learning journal?

A learning journal is a collection of notes, observations, thoughts and other relevant materials built-up over a period of time and usually accompanies a period of study, a placement experience or fieldwork. Its purpose is to enhance your learning through the very process of writing and thinking about your learning experiences. Your learning journal is personal to you and will reflect your personality and experiences.

Structuring your learning journal

A learning journal may be called several different things: a learning log, a fieldwork diary or personal development planner, for example. Different subject areas may ask you to focus on different aspects of your experiences and may also have a different format. A journal could be a notebook, an electronic document or sometimes can be recorded verbally on a tape. You will need to check which format is required with your module tutor.

Why use a learning journal:

- To provide a 'live picture' of your growing understanding of a subject or experience
- To demonstrate how your learning is developing
- To keep a record of your thoughts and ideas throughout your experiences of learning
- To help you identify your strengths, weaknesses and preferences in learning

Essentially, a learning journal helps you to be **reflective** about your learning, this means that your learning journal should not be a purely descriptive account of what you did etc but an opportunity to communicate your thinking process: how and why you did what you did, and what you now think about what you did.

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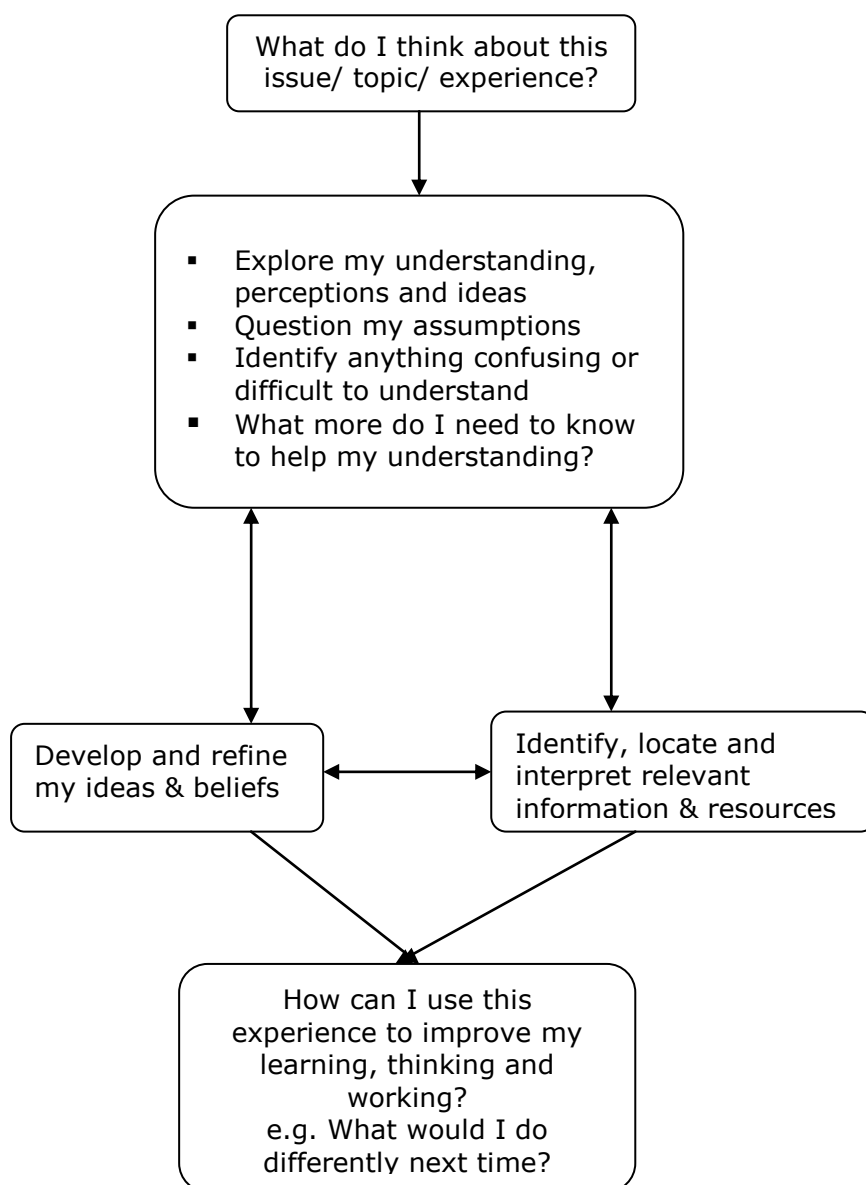
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What is reflective learning?

Reflective learning is a learned process that requires time and practice. It is also an active process: involving thinking through issues yourself, asking questions and seeking out relevant information to aid your understanding. Reflective learning works best when you think about what you are doing before, during and after your learning experience. Reflective learning is therefore not only about recognising something new (new learning), it is also about seeing reality in a new way.

Reflection is an important skill to develop, and requires you to think about how you personally are relating to what is happening on your course, during your assignment, or in your placement. The following diagram illustrates the process of reflective learning.

Process of reflective learning



The benefits of developing your skills in reflective learning

Reflective learners are more likely to develop a deeper understanding of their subject and to achieve higher grades as a result. Reflective learners tend to:

- Be motivated, know what they are trying to achieve and why
- Be pro-active in extending their understanding of new topics and subjects
- Use their existing knowledge to help them to develop their understanding of new ideas
- Understand new concepts by relating them to their previous experiences
- Understand that additional research and reading widely will improve their understanding
- Develop their learning and thinking by building on the critical evaluation of their previous learning experiences
- Be self-aware, able to identify, explain and address their own strengths and weaknesses

Content of your learning journal

A learning journal should focus on your own personal responses, reactions and reflections to new ideas or new ways of thinking about a subject that have been introduced to you through:

- Lectures, seminars and workshops
- Research and reading including any visual research: e.g. television, film etc
- Conversations and discussions with other students or tutors
- Significant experiences that have happened in the work place, on placements or field trips

What should you write about?

The most important thing is to make time for your writing – regularly set aside some time to think, and then write down your thoughts. Try to focus on using the journal to help you to communicate:

- What you think about issues raised on your course/ placement etc
- Any flashes of inspiration you have had
- What you understand so far
- What you find puzzling, difficult or contradictory
- How you can reach a better understanding of the above
- What do you need to know more about, and how can you go about finding out more?
- What resources have helped you to understand and/or been interesting to use?
- How do you feel about the way you have approached the issue/topic so far?
- What new knowledge, skills or understanding have you gained during the process of writing your learning journal?

Further information

This Study Advice Sheet has been produced by Student Services at UW.

We support student learning across the University through the publication of materials such as these.

Other study advice sheets that you may find useful include:

Essay writing

Learning at university

Making oral presentations

Minimising stress

Organising yourself

Plagiarism & referencing

Reading efficiently

Revision and exam skills

Study at a distance

Taking notes

Using feedback to improve your work

What does the question mean?

Working in groups

Writing reports

All study advice sheets are available to view and download on the following website:

www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills

or you can follow the links from your SOLE page.

You may also find it useful to check out the '**Moving On**' pack, accessible from the link on your SOLE page.

'**Moving On**' is a study skills package specifically designed to help you prepare for Higher Education & to become a successful student.

Contact: studyskills@worc.ac.uk

Finally, writing a learning journal gives you the opportunity to consider the following issues regarding your long-term development:

- Have you changed your opinions or values during the process/experience?
- How can you improve your learning, thinking and working in the future?
- Have you identified the next step(s) for your further development?

Sources of further information

- The following titles are available in the Peirson Library to help you find out more about learning journals:

Ghaye, T. & Lillyman, S., 1997. *Learning journals and critical incidents: reflective practice for health care professional*. Dinton: Quay.

Moon, Jennifer., 1999. *Learning Journals: a handbook for academics, students and professional development*. London: Kogan Page.

More generic guidance on reflection and critical thinking is available in the three titles by Stella Cottrell (all available in the Peirson Library):

- Critical thinking skills
 - Skills for success
 - Study skills handbook
- You can also search for 'reflective learning' in the keyword search on the library catalogue for additional relevant titles.
- Talk to your module tutor for further advice about any specific requirements for your course
- There may be relevant guidance in your student handbook, depending on your subject area.
- The Student Qualities Profile provides a framework for you to record your self-evaluation, reflection, skills development, action planning, target setting and achievements through all your learning at Worcester.