

# Promoting Strategic Journaling Practices in the Integrated Reading and Writing Co-Requisite Classroom

Leta Deithloff, Ph.D.

*The University of Texas at Austin*

# Session Objectives

- Discuss 5 Journaling Principles
- Provide examples representing different types of journal prompts for different curriculum agendas
- Workshop individual journal prompts
- Conduct a Question & Answer period

# Why Journals?

- Student journals help learners process course concepts by connecting the content to their own experiences.
- Epistemic writing (writing to learn) organizes thought, stimulates learning, aides in meaning construction, and permits individuals to understand more than they did before writing (Nystrand, 1982; Schallert, 1987; Spivey, 1990; Squire, 1983; Tierney & Pearson, 1983).
- Journals provide a means for authentic assessment of student comprehension when the task is based on the skills and knowledge taught in the course (Santrock, et al., 2004).
- Summation: Learning is maximized when students actively construct knowledge and understanding.

## Principle #1:

### **Create an environment that values response depth...and mean it**

Low-stake assessments (Elbow, 1997) help students prepare for high-stakes tasks.

Guidelines:

- Focus on ideas rather than grammar (+ early writing stages)
- Practice often (daily prompts with three journal checks; 30% of the course grade = 10 points per check)
- Establish an expectation for evidence + reasons (Proof + Explanation). Where's the PE?

A = Argument

P = Proof

E = Explanation (so what?)

Instruction example: "Be honest, thorough, inventive, and well-reasoned—with proof. Use the text and defend your statements!"

*Practice #2:*

## **Identify your goals and objectives**

Consider:

- Journaling is a beneficial way for students to internalize both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning in college (Hettich, 1990; Mc Manus, 1986)
- What kind of learning outcomes do you hope to reach (content-knowledge, discipline-specific, metacognition, strategy practice, etc.)?
- Why use a journal for these outcomes?
- How do the desired outcomes fit into the bigger picture of outcomes generated by other courses?

## Practice #3:

# Vary Journal Prompts

**Integrated reading/writing outcomes should transfer to other environments and across disciplines.**

So...

- Ask open-ended questions or follow-up with:
  - “Explain your answer” or
  - “Why or why not?”
- But vary:
  - The topics/readings that serve as each entry’s base
  - The questions (type, depth, and focus)
  - How you ask the questions (i.e., direct or indirect guidance towards the end goal)

**Journals offer the opportunity to hit the same learning outcome from different angles.**

# Practice #3 Examples:

- Describe a learning experience that you enjoyed.

“In a 2006 U.S. study, researchers from Lafayette College and Johns Hopkins University concluded that there was no scientifically significant correlation between handedness and earnings for the general population, but among college-educated people, left-handers earned 10 to 15% more than their right-handed counterparts.”

—<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handedness#Income>

- What is the message in this statement? Is it credible? Why or why not?
- After reading “An ER Doctor Speaks at a High School Graduation” by Louis M. Prefeta—If you had to give advice to graduating seniors, what would you say? What points would you stress?
- After reading “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” by Jean M. Twenge—How do the graphs contribute to the reading? What do they say? What do they NOT say?
- Evaluate the introduction [of any reading].

# Directed vs. Unguided Example:

## **Direct metacognitive prompting:**

- Write about what it is like to write with a specific reader in mind. How did you change your approach, style, etc. to reach that audience? If you didn't make changes, say why.

## **Student-driven example:**

- Write about your writing up to this point, about anything you want. Just make sure you write *something* and that you back up your statement with reasoning and evidence.



## Practice #4:

# Strategically Stagger and Sequence Your Journal Semester Plan

Consider:

- How often should students journal?
- When in the class should students journal (before, to introduce a topic or after, to process it?)
- How long should each entry be?
- How much time should each entry require?
- On which stage of the reading or writing process should each entry focus?
- Where should students be in their learning at the time of each prompt?
- Is there enough time between similar journal prompts to register student change and/or development?
- How do the prompts build on each other?

## *Practice #5:*

# Grades as Feedback and Progress Check

- Focus on content over mechanics.
- Question, respond to, and converse with students in their responses.
- Maintain grading rigor to push students into deeper reasoning.
- Model strong or “proper” responses when necessary.
- To rubric or not to rubric?

# Tips to Make Grading Reasonable:

- Ask students to maintain a notebook or binder for their entries. (Encourages organization)
- Divide the entries into manageable chunks, or “checks”, and grade in mass.
- Grade one entry in depth and focus on completion for the rest.
- Set a different objective for each in-depth entry assessment (best work; effective rewrite; shows the most growth; etc.)
- Get students involved in selecting “best” examples.
- Remember, it’s easier to grade when mechanics aren’t an issue.

# Results

Students make important connections as they work on producing strong responses.

- Connections about writing:

“I think my writing up to this point has improved. I’ve learned how to really go into detail about things that I am writing about and taking my time in things that I write. I remember my first couple of papers I handed in, I received them back with a bunch of questions asking about why this was this way, and why that is like that. So I really focused a lot on just trying to answer those missing pieces in my papers. The other thing about my writing up to this point is just if I take my time with my writing I get good results. If I rush sometimes it’s not as interesting or near where it should be to when I do take my time. So I’ve learned to just take my time with my writing.”

- Connections about studying after first round of tests:

“I learned that if I really want to be great and not just good with academics I’m going to have to put the time in and really give it my all. I think if I do that I can be better with academics. I just can’t settle for what’s expected and just shoot for the top.”

# Example Time

- Break down an argument to effectively support or counter it. Choose one of the following famous statements and challenge it word by word.
  - Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.
- Choose one of the following statements and complete it. (Notice the *They Say/I Say* format.)
  - Abortion isn't about \_\_\_\_\_, it's about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Most people think love is \_\_\_\_\_, but it's really \_\_\_\_.
- Choose a template from *They Say/I Say* and think about your controversy for RHE 306 as you...
  - Explain it (what is your controversy)?
  - What is your stance on that controversy?
  - Answer the "so what" question about your issue. Why should your reader care?

# Continued...

- Examine the cartoon and discuss its relevance to the day's topic. (Examining Claudia Rankine's novel *Citizen*)



# And more...

- Based on “An Animal of No Significance” from *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari:
  - Why is the possibility of genetic differences between Africans, Europeans and political dynamite” (15)?
  - Is Harari right to be concerned? Why or why not?
  
- Find a current event happening in the world that interests you. Describe:
  - The issue (what is it?)
  - What’s at stake (why does it matter?)
  - Why is it of interest to you or to us?

# Still going...

- Based on "Why America Is Self-Segregating" by Danah Boyd and a *Hillbilly Elegy* excerpt by JD Vance:
  - **How would Boyd explain what's happening in the *Hillbilly Elegy* excerpt?**
  - **Which argument (Boyd or Vance) is more persuasive? Why?**
- From "Spin" by Tim O'Brien:
  - Look closely at paragraph 4 in 'Spin', beginning with 'I remember Norman Bowker....' What is the author suggesting here? (Hint: what is he comparing to a game of checkers?)
  - Litcharts.com says that the "old poppa-san" who is the Company's guide to safety through the Bata Ngan Peninsula mine fields shows through his tears that "the line between enemy and ally is blurred in war". Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
- Examine the multiple versions of the Gettysburg Address. Which change between drafts do you find the most effective? Why? Make sure you model effective quotation strategies in your response.



# Finally...

- Comparing “Should Everyone Go to College?” by Stephanie Owen and Isabel Sawhill with *The Washington Post* blog response  
Which side is “better” in the college debate? Who **should** go to college? Use “the template of templates” on page 11 of *They Say / I Say* to defend your choice.
- Answer the questions below with depth, clarity and a well-supported response:
  - How does Trevor Noah use language to navigate different cultural groups in *Born a Crime*?
  - Do you agree with his belief that, through language, “my color didn’t change but I could change your perception of my color” (56)? Defend your opinion.
- Where in Sean Blanda’s essay “The Other Side Is Not Dumb” does he explain WHY his argument matters? Did he convince you? Why or why not?

# Your Turn

- Think of an upcoming assignment.
- Describe it and the skill set(s) students will need to perform well on this task.
- How might they practice these skills?
- What readings might help them model the appropriate response?
- Where are they now?
- Where do they need to be?
- Think of some prompts that could help students get at these skills.
- OR...think of a topic that will get them talking/writing.

Questions?



[leta.deithloff@gmail.com](mailto:leta.deithloff@gmail.com)