

Putting Philosophy into Practice: Focus on Student Experience in the Writing Process



Reflective Writing Exercises: The Writing Process Journal

Context for Instructors:

The sample prompts below are part of an ongoing Writing Process Journal assignment based on a two-essay cycle model, completed over the course of 15 Weeks. Entries are not assigned weekly. They are positioned throughout the term to coincide with specific points in the writing process. The goals of each prompt are self-contained and can be differently ordered to meet any first-year, rhetorical writing learning chronology. By contextualizing the goals of each entry and providing a series of guiding questions, students of various learning styles are invited to approach reflection in ways that feel natural to them. Of course, prompts can be adjusted based on course delivery and desired outcomes.

Context for Students:

We will address writing as a process over and over again throughout this course. An important part of the writing process is to approach each recursive step metacognitively. Metacognition refers to *thinking about thinking*. In this context, it requires us to not only engage in a process but to analyze and reflect on the *whys* and *hows* of our thoughts and approaches throughout that process.

Sample Prompts:

Entry 1: What Kind of Writer are You?

We are all writers. Think about your past experiences with writing, either in informal or academic contexts. What are your strengths as a writer? Are you good at expressing ideas clearly? Are you creative and engaging? Do you excel at structure and organization? Are you persuasive and convincing? Do you relate information in a way that is easy for others to understand?

Now, reflect on what you would like to improve about your writing. Have you developed any strategies to compensate for these limitations? What writing skills would you like to take away from this course?

Lastly, write about what intimidates you about academic writing? What concerns you most about writing at the college level? Provide at least one thing that your instructor or your classmates could do to support you in overcoming these anxieties.

Entry 2: Writing as Conversation

For this journal entry, consider the "conversation" that occurs between the authors of this week's readings. What topics are they engaging with, respectively? How are their main ideas similar? Where do they differ? Are the authors responding to the ideas of others, either explicitly or implicitly? If so, what are those claims or ideas?

What might you add to the conversation if you were talking with the authors informally?

Entry 3: Rhetoric and Persuasion

For this journal entry, take some time to think critically about the concepts of persuasion, written argumentation, and the rhetorical appeals. Often, reflecting on our own responses to the work of others reveals tendencies that might emerge when we engage in our own argumentative writing.

Briefly define each rhetorical appeal (ethos, logos, pathos) and then evaluate how effective you find each one to be, personally. Do you respond mostly to the perceived credibility of a source? Are facts and statistics most likely to convince you to consider another point of view? Are you more likely to give an author the benefit of the doubt if they provide evidence that provokes an emotional response? Does it all depend on the situation?

Now, think about the last time you tried to convince someone to see things your way. What rhetorical strategies did you employ and why?

Entry 4: Reflecting on Your Process

For this journal entry, take some time to consider your approach to the various stages of the writing process. How did you approach reading and research? Did you find it easy to identify the best evidence from your sources? Did annotation help you here? What were your most effective close reading strategies?

Now, consider your process of development. How was outlining useful in considering organization? How did your thesis and argumentation change in response to feedback? Did prewriting assignments make essay drafting easier? How so?

Next, write a bit about your approach to essay drafting. What was the easiest part of writing the essay for you? What was the most challenging?

Finally, reflect on your successes as a writer. What element(s) of your essay are you most proud of? Is there a passage from your essay that you think uniquely illustrates effective written communication?

Entry 5: Inquiry

For this journal entry, reflect on the following quote from Warren Berger's (2014) *A More Beautiful Question*:

"...one of the primary drivers of questioning is an awareness of what we don't know – which is a form of higher awareness... Good questioners tend to be aware of, and quite comfortable with, their ignorance... But they constantly probe that vast ignorance using the question flashlight..." (p. 16).

Write about a time when you were a "good questioner." Were you comfortable with your ignorance? If not, why was it hard to acknowledge that you didn't know something? What did you gain from asking questions in this instance?

Has there ever been a time when you felt like you shouldn't be asking questions? Why did you feel that way? How did you respond?

Entry 6: Self-Guided Research

For this entry, reflect on your research process so far.

What strategies did you use to optimize your research methods? Did you rely heavily on academic databases? Are there any tips or tricks you discovered that you might employ when conducting future research? Did you feel particularly challenged at any point in the process? How so?

Write about how engaging with the sources you found affected your original research question. Did a certain source problematize or change the point of view you may have been considering before engaging in independent research? What was the most significant thing you discovered about your topic as a result of your research? Has the research niche you want to occupy changed as a result?

Entry 7: Ideas Matter

For this Writing Process Journal entry, take some time to reflect on the significance of your topic and how your interest in the subject drives your developing argumentation.

Taking the time to thoughtfully reflect on how personal interest leads us to the research niches we occupy in academic writing can help us clearly communicate to our readers why what we have to say truly matters. Address any or all of the questions below to reflect on these ideas.

What made you decide to spend weeks researching and writing about your topic? Does the topic and argument resonate with you on a personal level? Would you have something specific to gain by convincing the reader to see things your way? Would it benefit others? How so?

Does your topic align with your field of study or an interest from outside of the academic sphere? Did your own past experiences motivate the development of your claim and argumentation?

Are you occupying this particular niche out of simple curiosity? If so, how does this help you engage in the writing process?

Explain the significance of your thesis conversationally, as if you were telling a friend about it over dinner or coffee.

Entry 8: Peer Review

For this entry, you will briefly reflect on your experience with the peer review process.

What was the best piece of feedback you received from each of your reviewers? Were you surprised by any of the feedback you received? Did any of the feedback make you reconsider your approach to any elements of your essay development?

What do you think were the best suggestions you provided as a reviewer? How did your approach to the process differ from earlier instances when you were called upon to provide feedback, either in an academic environment or otherwise? Would you have done anything differently? What was your level of comfort with providing feedback on your partners' work? Why did you feel that way?

As a writer, how do you intend to integrate feedback into your drafts as you work toward your final submission? Is there any feedback you disagree with? Why?

Entry 9: Public Speaking

For this journal entry, think about a time that you were called on to speak in public. Was it a presentation in class? Was it in a less formal space like a family gathering or club meeting?

Now, write a reflection about how public speaking made you feel. How did you feel leading up to the presentation? Were you nervous? What did you do to manage your anxiety? Were you very confident? Why? How did you feel after the presentation? Were you satisfied with your performance?

Write about your successes in public speaking and what you could have done better.

If you haven't had to speak in public before, recall a time when you attended a presentation given by someone else. Evaluate that presentation. What worked and what didn't?

Reflecting on earlier experiences of completing or engaging with academic tasks gives us the opportunity to metacognitively project ourselves into new situations. This kind of internal preparation is particularly useful for oral presentation. Acknowledging that we have experience sharing our ideas in public (or have at least seen it done) allows us to recall strategies for success and opportunities for better execution.

Entry 10: What Kind of Writer are You Now?

For the final journal entry, take some time to consider all the work you've done and the things you've accomplished in completing the course. How do you feel about your writing today compared to how you felt about it at the beginning of the course? What have you learned about the writing process that you will likely use in completing future writing assignments?

Thoughtfully recalling our successes help us to integrate best practices that suit our individual approaches to the writing process. Is there a single area of improvement that you're particularly proud of? Is there a piece of writing that you feel was especially successful, even if it was a single paragraph or sentence? Be specific. Thoughtfully recalling our successes help us to integrate best practices that suit our individual approaches to the writing process.