

Educational Support Cell (ESC) TLDE Tips & Strategies

Journaling in the USAJFKSWCS Learning Environment

What is Journaling you ask?

Journaling describes the procedure of capturing a collection of thoughts, understandings, and explanations about ideas or concepts, perhaps in a little green Army notebook. Journaling, if implemented effectively, functions as a powerful learning tool in the USAJFKSWCS learning environment. As facilitators, we use journals in a variety of ways to document learning and to collect information for self-analysis and reflection.

When individuals record thoughts, ideas, or feelings into written words, they have to inspect their learning and thought processes. Each time individuals submit journal entries to their facilitators, we have the opportunity to tailor and customize instruction more precisely for our learners.

Facilitators can make instructional decisions about the use of journals in their classrooms. Journals can involve private conversations that students have with themselves; however, recent research indicates that when students share journals with facilitators and receive feedback, student learning increases significantly. Facilitators should provide samples of journals for students and frontload clear expectations and procedures for journal writing in order for journaling to be effective. Facilitators must plan how long, how often, when, and for what purpose students will write in their journals.

How Does Journaling Work?

Let's say we introduce new content to students in a course. Think about how we can utilize journaling in our efforts. Remember that journaling supports our optimal USAJFKSWCS learning environment in three significant ways:

1. Pre-Assessment

First off, we ask students to write about the prior knowledge they have of the content about to be presented. This could include knowledge from past experiences or even information from previous assignments. For a facilitator, journals operate as an invaluable means to gauge the knowledge that students have

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of SWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

-Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

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previously acquired. By using journals to pre-assess students, facilitators can tailor content delivery more precisely to target knowledge gaps and to boost students' strengths in the content.

2. Reflection

Secondly, after we provide new content to students, we challenge students to write about their “thoughts” on the content. These exercises require students to self-reflect on questions that will encourage them to incorporate their learning and assess their thinking. Higher order thinking skills develop as the result of individuals taking the opportunity to think about what questions they may have regarding new information. Moreover, students need time and a platform to reflect on any difficulties they may have in understanding the content and on their respective levels of interest in the new information.

3. Application

Finally, we ask students to write about how they will apply this newly acquired information in the future. How can students use their experiences to improve their capabilities to learn, think, and work? Will we need to modify the content at a certain point to maintain its applicability? Are your students capable of applying different theories to the new content? Congrats! This means that your students can use those theories to make decisions and solve problems more effectively.

Different Types of Journals

- **Double Entry** - analyze central concepts and refer to text for justification.
- **Reflective Journals** – develop metacognitive skills by reflecting on what they learned and how they learned it.
- **Dialogue Journals** – students communicate in writing about the content they are learning.
- **Learning Logs** – keep a record of learning; clarify thinking and learning.

To summarize, journals can be an important source of information about learners' strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, facilitators and students can use journaling as tangible snapshots to record *how* students are thinking about *what* they are learning and to demonstrate how students are applying the new content they acquire. At the end of the day, folks, isn't that what we really want to know?

For additional information or training on journaling (assessing, critical thinking, or improving writing ability, etc...) please contact Mr. Jones (jonesgeo@soc.mil) and the ESC.