

REFLECTION EXAMPLES & PROCESS

I. REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

A common tendency is for journals to become a mere log of events rather than a reflective activity in which students consider the service experience in the context of learning objectives. It is most often necessary to guide students to help them link their personal learning with course content. Here are some journaling ideas to assist with this endeavor:

Personal Journal

Students write freely about their experiences or are given some standard prompts (usually weekly). Students submit journals periodically to faculty or keep as a reference to use at the end of the experience when putting together an academic essay reflecting their experiences. You may ask students to consider what ideas from the readings or class discussions come to mind as they reflect on their community work.

Dialogue Journal

Students submit loose-leaf journal pages from a dialogue journal biweekly (or otherwise at appropriate intervals) for the faculty to read and comment on. While labor intensive for the instructor, this can provide continual feedback to students and prompt new questions for students to consider throughout the course.

Highlighted Journal

Before students submit the reflective journal, they reread personal entries. With the use of a highlighter, they then mark sections of the journal that relate to concepts discussed in the text or in class. This makes it easier for the instructor to identify how the student is reflecting on his or her experience in light of course content.

Key Phrase Journal

In this type of journal, students must integrate terms and key phrases within their journal entries. The instructor can provide a list of terms at the beginning of the semester or for a certain portion of the text. Students could also create their own list of key phrases to include. Journal entries are written within the framework of the course content and become an observation of how course content is evident in the service experience.

Double-Entry Journal

When using a double-entry journal, students write one page entries each week. They describe their personal thoughts and reactions to the service experience on the left page of the journal and write about key issues from class discussions or readings on the right page of the journal. Students then draw arrows indicating relationships between their personal experiences and course content. This type of journal is a compilation of personal data and a summary of course content in preparation for a more formal reflection paper at the end of the semester.

Critical Incident Journal

In this journal, students analyze a particular event that occurred during the week. By answering one of the following sets of prompts, students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future:

*Describe a significant event that occurred as a part of the service-learning experience. Why was this significant to you? What underlying issues (e.g., societal, personal, etc.) surfaced as a result of this experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior?

*Describe an incident or situation that created a dilemma for you in terms of what to say or do. What is the first thing you thought of to say or do? List three other actions you might have taken. Which of the above seems best to you now, and why do you think this is the best response?

Three-part Journal

Students are asked to divide each page of their journal into thirds and write weekly entries throughout the course. In the top section, students describe some aspect of the service experience. In the middle of the page, they analyze how course content relates to the service experience. Finally, an application section prompts students to comment on how the experience and course content can be applied to their personal or professional life.

II. PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Students can construct a personal account of their experience by writing in a narrative form. This allows students to be creative in telling a story and finding their voice. Faculty could experiment with allowing students to use first or third person and assign a particular audience to whom the students address their comments. Faculty can assign this as an ongoing midterm or final project for the course.

III. PHOTO ESSAY

This is an alternative approach to reflection which allows students to use their figurative and literal “lenses” to view their service experience and how it relates to the classroom. This is a good final project or presentation technique. Students use photographs to reflect on their service experience and can weave a main theme or concept learned in class to actual photo documents. These projects are also excellent ones to share with the campus community, the service sites for year-end celebrations, or college and other local publications. These projects are also great displays for annual service-learning symposia.

IV. PORTFOLIOS

This type of documentation has become a vital way for students to keep records and learn organizational skills throughout the course, while submitting the portfolio as a final product at the end of the course. Student portfolios could contain any of the following: service-learning contract, weekly log, personal journal, directed writings, and photo essay. Also, any products completed during the service experience (i.e., agency brochures, lesson plans, advocacy letters, etc.) should be submitted for review. Finally, students can include a written evaluation essay providing a self-assessment of how effectively they met their learning objectives. Faculty should instruct students to keep content and format professional, as their portfolios are something they can use in job applications and interviews. Students gain organizational skills, broaden other skills and abilities, and walk away with a final product to use in their life planning and career search.

V. PUBLICATIONS

Faculty or community partners can assign students to create publications for their service sites in order to market the agency’s services and express the value of service to a community. This technique may be used mid-course or for a final project. Publications can include web sites, brochures, newsletters, press releases, newspaper articles, etc.

VI. QUOTES IN PRINT

Faculty can use quotes throughout the course as a means to initiate student reflection. Assign students a page of quotes, and ask them to pick one that represents their experience with service-learning. Students can then explain why they chose a particular quote. Faculty can assign this as a one-minute paper in class (for reading out loud to the rest of the class upon completion) or as an out-of-class assignment.

VII. QUOTES IN SONGS

Faculty can use this variation on quotes throughout the course. Students find a song in which the singer uses lyrics that describe their thoughts about the service experience. Students may find a whole song or only partial lyrics. If students have access to the song, have them play it at the end of a reflection session after they have explained why these lyrics relate to their service experience. If students prefer to write their own lyrics for a song, allow this as an option. The class session in which these songs are performed usually has a festive atmosphere. Faculty may want to provide “concert souvenirs” or don concert wear to contribute to the spirit of the sessions. (Think of a Jay Z *Magna Carta Holy Grail* performance! Epic! ... This was a test to make sure that you have actually read the content. If you’re smiling, then congratulations. You’ve passed the test and are well on your way to becoming a service-learning, reflection aficionado. If you don’t know who Jay Z is, then you have officially lost all of your Coastal SWAG—short for swagger.)

STRUCTURING THE REFLECTION PROCESS

DESIGNING CONTINUOUS REFLECTION

If possible, develop a plan for continuous reflection to effectively integrate service activities with course content. You might find it helpful to think in terms of three stages of reflection: before, during, and after the experience. Ideally, you should address the same set of learning outcomes at each stage, but the way in which you address the outcomes may differ depending upon the reflection stage. For instance, you might focus on helping students acquire the prerequisite problem-solving skills before the experience. During the service, the focus might be on coaching students in solving a complex problem. After the service, reflection activities might focus on helping students consolidate their learning and consider limitations and future extensions. Examples of the goals of reflection and the design of reflection activities at each stage follow:

REFLECTION BEFORE the EXPERIENCE

Design reflective activities that help students prepare for the service experience. The activities should help students:

- *Acquire the disciplinary knowledge required for service activities
- *Gain opportunities to practice application of disciplinary knowledge
- *Develop the problem-solving skills required to address community concerns
- *Develop an understanding of community needs and organizations
- *Develop information gathering skills for collecting information required for service activities

You might consider using case studies, presentations, small group activities, and / or large group discussions to prepare students for the service experience.

CASE STUDIES	Assign case studies to help students practice problem-solving skills.
PRESENTATIONS	Arrange for an orientation session by community agency / organization staff as well as the Center for Service-Learning & Community Engagement.
SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES	Ask students to develop an information-gathering plan (e.g., sources of information, interview questions, etc.).
LARGE GROUP DISCUSSIONS	Organize a large group discussion on developing an information-gathering plan.

REFLECTION DURING the EXPERIENCE

Communicating with students throughout the service project is critical to ensure they are performing project tasks competently and for helping them refine and develop their initial ideas. Ongoing communication can also be a starting point for understanding student problem-solving efforts and assessing the developmental levels of students as they grapple with issues. As these factors will have an impact on the service activity and student learning, they can provide useful information for refining the reflection process in subsequent semesters.

You might consider using structured journals, critical incident journals, small group activities, and / or large group discussions to facilitate reflection during the service experience.

STRUCTURED JOURNALS	Ask students to record thoughts, observations, feelings, activities, and questions in a journal throughout the project. Provide prompts to direct student attention to important issues and questions so that you can adequately frame the problem by examining various issues related to people, organizational structures, processes, and resources that must be considered in solving the problem. You might also want to consider prompting students to gather appropriate evidence, identify alternative solutions to a problem, and make recommendations based on justifiable evidence.
CRITICAL INCIDENT JOURNALS	Ask students to record a critical incident for each week describing an event during which a decision was made, a conflict occurred, or a problem was resolved. Ask students to describe the event, how it was handled, alternative ways in which they could have resolved the situation, and how they might act differently in a similar situation in the future.
SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES	Ask students to keep a log describing plans and activities.
LARGE GROUP DISCUSSIONS	Encourage formal and informal discussions with team members, the class, and community partners to introduce students to different perspectives and to challenge them to think critically about the project.

REFLECTION AFTER the EXPERIENCE

Use reflection to connect service-learning experiences to disciplinary knowledge and to explore future applications. Try to challenge students to think critically about their service experiences and the responsible application of knowledge and problem-solving of real-world problems.

PAPERS	Ask students to write an integrative paper on the service project. Journals and other products can serve as the building blocks for developing the final paper.
PRESENTATIONS	Ask students to present their service experience and discuss it in terms of concepts and theories discussed in class.
INTERVIEWS	Interview students on service experiences and the learning that occurred in these experiences.