

2 The Personal Connection: Journal Writing across the Curriculum

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The part that was said about writing stuff down in your own words to clarify or remember something, I really agree with. Even when I copy over a batch of notes or something, I remember it a lot better. . . . I've heard a few people say that by keeping a journal, their writing abilities increased. This could help me. (Bruce M.)

Teachers sometimes look suspiciously at journal writing. For some it is too personal, unstructured or informal to assign in the classroom; for others it is too difficult to measure; and for still others journal writing simply serves no practical pedagogical purpose—it is a waste of time. The premise of this chapter, however, is that the journal can be both a formal rigorous assignment and, at the same time, a place for students to practice imaginative and speculative thinking. Journal writing, in the broadest sense, is an interdisciplinary learning tool with a place in every academic classroom¹; it is not the sole province of the English teacher any more than numbers belong to the math teacher, or speaking belongs to the speech teacher.

A dozen years ago, when I began teaching college English, I sometimes assigned journals in composition and literature classes but used them sparingly in the classroom itself, preferring to let students write on their own. Some students used them well, while most never really understood what kind of writing they were supposed to do in them. I no longer trust to chance. Journals “work” now for most students in my classes because we use them actively, every day to write in, read from, and talk about—in addition to whatever private writing the students do on their own. These everyday journal writes take the place of other routine writing assignments from pop quizzes to book reports. Journal writing in class stimulates student discussion, starts small group activity, clarifies hazy issues, reinforces learning experience, and stimulates student imagination.

Journal writing works because every time a person writes an entry, instruction is individualized; the act of silent writing, even for five minutes, generates ideas, observations, emotions. It is hard to day-dream, doze off, or fidget while one writes-unless one writes about it. I don't believe that journal writing will make passive students miraculously active learners; however, such writing makes it harder for students to remain passive.

At Michigan Technological University we conduct off-campus writing workshops to introduce our colleagues to a variety of ideas for using writing to enhance both learning and communication skills. Workshop topics include: (1) invention and brainstorming, (2) re-writing and revision, (3) editing, (4) peer-response groups, (5) evaluation, and (6) journal writing. In these interdisciplinary workshops we ask teachers of history, chemistry, and business to keep journals, themselves, for the duration of the workshop. Sometimes we start a session by asking the participants to write down their opinion about the causes of poor student writing. Other times we ask the teachers to summarize or evaluate the worth of a particular workshop-on revision or editing, for example-by writing about it for five minutes in their journals. And still other times we ask them to "free write" in order to generate possible paper topics which will be expanded, later, into short papers. These five and ten-minute writing exercises allow teachers to experience first-hand the potential of journal writing as an aid to learning.

Teachers in all subject areas and all grade levels find it easy to add more writing to a class by using journals. Regardless of class size, this kind of informal writing need not take more teacher time. Journals can be spot checked, skimmed, read thoroughly, or not read at all, depending on the teacher's interest and purpose. Journals have proved to be remarkably flexible documents; some teachers call them "logs," others "commonplace books," still others "writers' notebooks." While I prefer students to keep looseleaf binders, science teachers who are conscious of patent rights often require bound notebooks. While I suggest pens (pencils smear), a forestry teacher suggests pencils (ink smears in the rain). And so on.

Student Academic Journals

What does a journal look like? How often should people write in them? What kinds of writing should they do on their own? How should I grade them? These questions often occur to the teacher who has not used or kept journals before. Following are some possible answers.

Journals might be looked at as part of a continuum including diaries and class notebooks: while diaries record the private thought and experience of the writer, class notebooks record the public thought and presentation of the teacher. The journal is somewhere between the two. Like the diary, the journal is written in the first person about ideas important to the writer; like the class notebook, the journal may focus on academic subjects the writer wishes to examine.

Diary	Journal	Class Notebook
(Subjective Expression)	(I/It)	(Objective Topics)

Journals may be focused narrowly, on the subject matter of one discipline, or broadly, on the whole range of a person's experience. Each journal entry is a deliberate exercise in expansion: "How far can I take this idea? How accurately can I describe or explain it? How can I make it make sense to me?" The journal encourages writers to become conscious, through language, of what is happening to them, both personally and academically.

Student writers should be encouraged to experiment with their journals, to write often and regularly on a wide variety of topics, to take some risks with form, style, and voice. Students should notice how writing in the early morning differs from writing late at night. They might also experience how writing at the same time every day, regardless of inclination or mood, often produces surprising results. Dorothy Lambert relaxes students by suggesting that "a journal is a place to fail. That is, a place to try, experiment, test one's wings. For the moment, judgment, criticism, evaluation are suspended; what matters is the attempt, not the success of the attempt."² She asks students to pay attention to writing as a process and quit worrying about product perfection- in this case, correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, form, diction, and style. For better or worse, the journal is the student's own voice; the student must know this and the teacher respect it.

Peter Elbow urges students to explore and discover through "free writing," a technique that encourages writers to free associate while writing as fast as they can. Elbow writes: "You don't have to think hard or prepare or be in the mood: without stopping, just write whatever words come out-whether or not you are thinking or in the mood."³ This process illustrates immediately, for most writers, the close relationship between writing and thinking. The journal is a natural place to write freely. Students can practice it on their own to get their mental gears moving toward a paper topic; teachers can assign such uninhibited writing to brainstorm new research projects. Keeping these exercises in journals guarantees a written record of the ideas generated,

which may prove useful during the term of study or, later, to document intellectual growth.

The significance of journals as records of thought cannot be underestimated by teachers who value independent thinking. The journal records the student's individual travel through the academic world; at the same time it serves well when formal papers or projects need to be written. Ken Macrorie calls journals the "seedbeds" from which other, more public (transactional or poetic) kinds of writing will emerge.⁴ Echoing Macrorie, Mark Hanson advocates using personal journals "to generate (both) academic and creative writings"; journal entries are the primary "sources" for educational growth, regardless of subject area.⁵ Field notes jotted in a biology notebook become an extended observation written in a "biology journal"; this entry, in turn, might well become the basis for a major research project. Personal reflections recorded in a history journal can help the student identify with, and perhaps make sense of, the otherwise distant and confusing past. Trial hypotheses might find first articulation in social science journals; the strongest idea will provide the impetus for further experimentation and study.

Journal Assignments

Starting class. Introduce a class with a five-minute journal write. Any class. Any subject. Use the journal to bridge the gap between the student's former activity (walking, talking, eating, listening) and your classroom. In a discussion class, suggest a topic related to the day's lesson—a quote from the reading assignment, for instance—and allow those first few minutes for students to compose (literally) their thoughts and focus them in a public direction; without that time, the initial discussion is often halting and groping. After such a journal entry, the teacher may ask someone to read an entry out loud to start people talking. It is hard sometimes to read rapidly written words in public, but it is also rewarding when the language generates a response from classmates. I often read my own entry first to put the students at ease, for my sentences may be awkward, halting, and fragmentary just as theirs sometimes are. Repeated periodically, this exercise provides students with a structured oral entry into the difficult public arena of the classroom and helps affirm the value of their personal voice.

Like the discussion class, the lecture also benefits from a transition exercise which starts students thinking about the scheduled topic. For example, prior to beginning a lecture in a nineteenth-century American literature class studying "Transcendentalism," I might ask students to

define their concept of “romanticism” in their journals. I might then commence lecturing directly, using the brief writing time to set the scene or mood for the lecture; or I might start a short discussion based on the student writing as a lead into the lecture. Either way, the students involve themselves with the material because they have committed themselves, through their own language, to at least a tentative exploration of an idea.

Summarizing. End a class with a journal write. This exercise asks students to pull together, in summary fashion, information or ideas they have learned during class. The summary serves several purposes: “What did you learn in here today—one thing—anything?” or “What questions are still unanswered?” These issues can be handled orally, of course, without recourse to the journal, but forcing loose thoughts onto paper often generates tighter thinking. Too often instructors lecture right up to the bell, still trying to make one last point. Better, perhaps, to cover less lecture territory and to end the class with students’ own observations and summary in journals. That final act of writing/thinking helps students synthesize material for themselves, and so increases its value.

In the following journal entry, written at the end of the first day in a humanities class, a student writes his way toward an answer to the question “What are the humanities?”⁶

A definition of humanities? Kind of a tough question. I really didn’t have any idea before the class discussion today. I could’ve guessed that it had something to do with humans just looking at the word. A dictionary definition probably wouldn’t help either. They never do. So, I guess, by remembering what was said I’ll have to think of something myself. At first I thought about just human behavior but when I think of humanities I think of English and that doesn’t fit in. It seems that human creative expression or communication would be a good, short definition. Because I consider photography, drawing, painting, writing, building, and lots of other stuff to be creative human expression. Humanities has to be a very general topic; so the definition would also have to be general. When someone mentioned subjective, I agreed with that a lot. I think that separates it pretty well with the sciences. Scientists all seem to be very objective people with objective purposes. They have to make precise decisions and don’t really seem to have any feelings toward what they do. I mean, they may get involved in the things they do, but while they’re working they don’t seem to get emotional about it or anything. So, I think if you said the humanities are human creative expressions, it would include a lot of things that most people think of when they hear the word.

This entry is typical of a person using his writing to think with. He repeats the questions, reflects on his prior knowledge, digresses about

dictionaries, thinks about class discussion, tries a sample definition, expands and narrows his conceptions, compares and contrasts, and finally arrives at a definition which satisfies him for the time being. What we see in the form of a product (the journal passage itself) is actually most valuable to the student as a process (what went on in the student's head while writing). Phrases like "I guess," "I think," "It seems," "I mean"-some repeated several times in this text-indicate attempts to make sense of the teacher's question through the student's own language. Other trigger words in this passage are past-tense constructions ("I agreed" and "I thought") which reveal the writer testing prior assumptions against both the definition question and what went on in class that day.

This passage is a summary journal write; at the same time it is typical of the thinking process which journal writing in general encourages. The digressions, dead-ends, awkward constructions, and repetitions typify our thinking process when we are trying to solve a new problem or come to grips with a new idea. The student tries to make the problem "personal"; whatever new definition he arrives at will have to be tested against personal experience with the humanities ("photography, drawing, painting, writing, building") on the one hand and his experience with scientists ("very objective people with objective purposes") on the other. This ten-minute activity at the end of a class period has called forth from the student a variety of learning strategies to help him synthesize important issues talked about during class.

Focusing. Interrupt a class lecture with a journal write. Listening is passive and note-taking often mechanical; even the best students drift into daydreams from time to time. Writing changes the pace of the class; it shifts the learners into a participant role. Writing clears out a little space for students to interact with the ideas thrown at them and allows them to focus problems while the stimulus is still fresh.

A professor of American history at Michigan Tech used journals as a regular part of his course in "Michigan History." In discussing the railroad system of the state, for example, he asked students to write for five minutes about their current knowledge of trains-from personal experience, movies, or books. This brief writing time engaged his students more personally with the topic of his lecture. Later in the term, he based exam questions on the midterm and final on some of the inclass journal writing.

A variation on the planned lecture pause is the spontaneous pause, where the lecturer senses misunderstanding in the audience or where the lecturer loses track of an idea. While writing in journals, either

teachers or students may put their finger on the problem and so make the next fifteen or twenty minutes more profitable. Of course, instructors do not plan for misunderstanding, but if it occurs, journal writing is one way out.

A digressive or rambling discussion may be refocused by simply calling "Time out" and asking students to write for a few minutes in their journals: "What are we trying to explain?" or "Restate the argument in your own words; then let's start again." In one-sided discussions, where a few students dominate and others can't participate, interrupt with a short writing task and sometimes the situation reverses itself, as the quiet ones find their voices while the loud ones cool off. The group also can become more conscious of the roles people play in class by asking questions like: "What is your part in this discussion?" or "Try to trace how we got from molecules to psychopaths in the last fifteen minutes" or "Why do you think Tom just said what he did?" Writing about talking provides distance and helps to generate thoughts we didn't have before.

Problem solving. Use journals as a vehicle for posing and solving problems. In a class on modern literature ask students to write about the lines in an e. e. Cummings poem which they do not understand; the following day many students will have written their way to understanding by forcing their confusion into sentences. What better way to make sense out of "what if a much of a which of a wind" or "my father moved through dooms of love"? Math or science teachers might ask their students to solve difficult equations by using journal writing when they are confused. For example, Margaret Watson, a high school teacher from Duncan, Oklahoma, reports that using journals in her mathematics classes has improved her students' ability to solve math problems.⁷ She asks students questions such as: "The problem I had completing a square was . . ." and "This is how to. . ." Watson reads the journals and comments to each student individually about his or her feelings about mathematics. Watson writes: "This two-way conversation has been beneficial to the class. The students realize I hear them and care. They seem to have looked inside themselves and to have seen what they could do to help solve their mathematical problems. Many of their grades improved."

The journal could become a regular tool in any subject area to assist students in solving problems, since the act of writing out the problem is, itself, a clarifying experience. Switching from number symbols to word symbols sometimes makes a difference; putting someone else's problem into your own language makes it your problem and so leads you one step further toward solution. The key, in other words, is articu-

lating to yourself what the problem is and what you might do about it. Following is a brief example of a student talking to himself about a writing block:

I'm making this report a hell of a lot harder than it should be. I think my problem is I try to edit as I write. I think what I need to do is first get a basic outline of what I want to write then just write whatever I want. After I'm through, then edit and organize. It's hard for me though.

Homework. Assign journal writing for students to do outside of class. Suggest that students respond to questions or ideas that were highlighted in the day's class or ask questions which would prepare them better for the next class. Teachers might ask students to keep a written journal record of their responses to a current issue; on a given day these responses would form the basis for a more formal class discussion. By using the journal as the place to record students go one step beyond thinking vaguely about their responses but stay short of a formal written assignment which might cause unproductive anxiety over form or style. In some disciplines, like engineering, math, or physics, homework questions might be less "open-ended" than ones asked in liberal arts courses, but even in the most specialized fields some free, imaginative speculation helps. When that speculation is recorded in the journal, students have a record to look at, later, to show where they've been and perhaps suggest where to go next.

Science and social science teachers might ask students to keep a "lab journal" in addition to a lab notebook to record thoughts about their experiments. This adds a personal dimension to keeping records and also provides a place to make connections between one observation and the next. Journal entries could be interleaved next to the recorded data. The same may be done with a "field notebook" in biology or forestry: to the objective data add each student's own thoughts about that data. Such personal observations might prove useful in writing a report or suggest the germ for another paper or project.

A Michigan Tech political science professor uses journals for a variety of homework assignments in his course on "American Government and Politics." He asks students to record frequently their opinions about current events. He also asks students to write short personal summaries of articles in their journals, thereby creating a sequential critical record of course readings. While both of these activities may be conducted through other written forms, using the journal is simple and economical for both students and teacher.

A teacher of music at Michigan Tech asked her students for a term to keep "listening journals," in which to record their daily experience

of hearing music. Periodically, she conducted discussion classes which relied heavily on the subjective content of the journals, and so involved the students both personally and critically in her course content. In similar fashion, a Michigan Tech drama teacher currently asks his actors to keep a journal to develop more fully their awareness of a character or scene in a play. He has found that his student actors can write their way into their characters by using journals.

Progress reports. Use journals to monitor student progress through the class. One Michigan Tech metallurgy professor has prepared a full-page handout with suggestions to students about using journals to encourage thoughtful reflection upon important topics, to practice writing answers to possible exam questions, and to improve writing fluency. More specifically, he asks students to write about each day's lecture topic prior to attending class; after class, they are asked to write a class summary or write out questions about the lecture. Periodically, these journals are checked to monitor student progress through the course; they are not graded.

This professor also monitored his own teaching through the journals. In reading his first batch of one hundred journals he was surprised to find so few charts, diagrams, or drawings. As a consequence, he introduced a section on "visual thinking" into his course, as he believes that metallurgical engineers must develop visualization skills to a high degree.

A geography professor at Michigan Tech has used journals for ten years in large lecture classes.⁸ In "Recreational Geography" he asks students to keep journals to stimulate their powers of observation. Because they must record their observations, the students look more closely and carefully and, hence, begin to acquire the rudimentary techniques of scientific observation. He also requires students in "Conservation" to keep journals; specifically, at the beginning of new course topics, he asks them to write definitions of terms or concepts which they misuse or misunderstand. At the conclusion of each topic he requests another written definition for comparison with their initial perceptions. During the final week of the ten-week course he asks students to compose an essay about how the course changed their attitude toward conservation. The journal is the primary resource for this last assignment, revealing to both instructor and student what has been learned, what not.

I often ask students to make informal progress reports to themselves about what they are learning in my class. I'm interested in having students share these thoughts with me and/or the class. I often ask for volunteers to read passages out loud after such an assignment. But more

important, I think, are the observations students make to themselves about what they are learning. My question is the catalyst, but the insights are only of real value if they are self-initiated. Following is a sample response from a student studying technical writing; it refers to an exercise in which the entire class “agreed” that one piece of writing was better than another:

After, we took a vote and decided which proposal letter we liked the best-it really made me wonder. I hadn't realized it but we've been conditioned to look for certain things in this class. I guess that's the purpose of any class, strange how you don't notice it happening though.

Class texts. Ask students to write to each other, informally, about concerns and questions raised in the class. By reading passages out loud, or reproducing passages to share with the class, students become more conscious of how their language affects people. Students in my first year humanities class actually suggested that duplicated journal passages should become a part of the “humanistic” content of the course; we mimeographed selected journal entries, shared them for a week and all learned more about each other. Passing these journal writes around class suggested new writing possibilities to the students. In this case, the stimulus to experiment came from classmates rather than the teacher and so had the strong validity of peer education.

An entry such as the following, written about a geography class, can go a long way toward provoking classmates into a discussion of topical issues:

I don't know if I'm just over-reacting to my Conservation class or not, but lately I've become suspicious of the air, water, and food around me. First we're taught about water pollution, and I find out that the Portage Canal merrily flowing right in front of my house is unfit for human contact because of the sewage treatment plant and how it overflows with every hard rain. Worse yet, I'm told raw sewage flows next to Bridge Street. I used to admire Douglas Houghton Falls for its natural beauty, now all I think of is, “That's raw untreated sewage flowing there.”

Our next topic was air pollution. Today I was informed that the rain here in the U.P. has acid levels ten times what it should, thanks to sulfur oxide pollution originating in Minneapolis and Duluth. I'm quite familiar back home in Ishpeming with orange birch trees due to iron ore pelletizing plants.

Is there any escaping this all encompassing wave of pollution? I had thought the Copper Country was a refuge from the poisonous fact of pollution, but I guess its not just Detroit's problem anymore. As I write these words, in countless places around the globe, old Mother Nature is being raped in the foulest way. I get the feeling someday she'll retaliate and we'll deserve it. Every bit of it.

Personal Journals

I am not concerned with *what* students write in their journals, nor even if they respond to all my suggestions. One student, for example, felt she wasn't doing the journal writes "correctly" in my nineteenth-century American literature class because she kept drifting off into personal reflections and writing about her own religious convictions instead of role-playing an imaginary Harvard divinity student responding to Emerson, as I had requested. What could I say? She made the material her own in the most useful way possible. I suspect that the best journal writes deviate far and freely from the questions I pose -and that's fine.

A student's journal can be a documentary of personal as well as academic growth, a record of evolving insight as well as the tool to gain that insight. In classes which explore values, such as philosophy, sociology, and literature, the journal can be a vehicle to explore the writer's own belief system.⁹ In like manner, writing classes may benefit from using the journal as a vehicle for self-discovery. In *On Righting Writing*, Robert Rennert reports using a journal for deliberate values-clarification purposes throughout the semester.¹⁰ He asks students to use journals to rank their values, to make lists of "important human qualities," and to write their own "obituaries." He confronts students and makes them objectify, to some extent, their own biases through responses to topics such as "What I want my clothes to say about me." Rennert reports encouraging results from his journal-focused class: "Confronted with significant questions and problems, students moved off dead center and were stimulated to discover, through writing, knowledge about their values and attitudes."

In *Composition for Personal Growth*, Hawley, Simon, and Britton offer teachers suggestions for posing developmental problems for their students. Under the heading "Journal-Synthesizing Activities," Hawley lists a number of imaginary situations which require journal writers to move outside their writing and experience it from a different perspective. In an exercise called "Time Capsule" students are given these directions: "Your journal is discovered one hundred years from now (or three hundred years ago). You, your other-time counterpart, find the journal. Write a description of the person and the way of life revealed in the journal."¹¹ Tasks such as these provide students with the means to witness their own progress and, as such, are useful concluding exercises in any class using journals,

The journal is a natural format for self-examination. The teacher can initiate the process by suggesting journal writes on traditional

value-clarification questions: If your house was on fire and you could only save one object, what would it be? If you had only two more days to live, how would you spend them? Sometimes I pose a general question to a class, at the end of the term, and ask students which particular entries have been most valuable for them to write. This causes some useful review and helps students clarify the journal writing assignments for themselves. Following is a brief example from a class in technical writing:

Not to be trite or anything-I don't know if that's even the right word. The first entry was the one that helped me the most. It got me started at writing in a journal-in this journal. My sanity has been saved. I can't keep all my problems locked up inside me but I hate telling others- burdening them with my problems. The hardest thing to do is to start something-so my first entry was the hardest. The rest has been easy-somewhat. My professor is the only one who's ever made me have a journal. I was afraid I couldn't do it cuz I never have been able to keep a good diary.

More important, perhaps, than personal journal entries assigned by teachers are the personal entries initiated by students about topics close to themselves. Sometimes students volunteer to show me their more personal sections-I never request them-and it is then that I am convinced that the personal entries will remain, for most students, their most important writing. Sometimes I find students generating (or recording?) strong personal insights, such as the following:

I think I should quit complaining about being misunderstood . . . since I don't try very hard to be understandable, it's no wonder people don't. I just get ticked because more people don't even seem to try to understand others. So many people talk, instead of listening. (I think I'm scared of the ones who listen.)

Personal journals are *not* the business of the classroom teacher. However, it is obvious that what students write to themselves, about themselves, as they journey through the academic curriculum has a lot to do with "education." We cannot and should not monitor these personal trips, but we should, perhaps acknowledge them and encourage students to chronicle them wherever and whenever they can. Again, the journal is one vehicle for such journeys.

Teacher Journals

Teachers who have not done so should try keeping a journal along with their students. Journals do not work for everyone; however, the

experience of keeping one may be the only way to find out. Teachers, especially, can profit by the regular introspection and self-examination forced by the process of journal writing. The journal allows sequential planning within the context of one's course-its pages become a record of what has worked, what hasn't, and suggestions for what might work next time-either next class or next year. Teachers can use journals for lesson plans, to work out practice exercises, and to conduct an ongoing class evaluation. The journal may become a teaching workshop and a catalyst for new research ideas as well as a record of pedagogical growth.

Teachers should consider doing journal writing daily, in class, along with their students. Teachers who write with their students and read entries out loud in class lend credibility to the assignments; it is worth the teacher's time too. Doing the writing also tests the validity of the writing task; if the instructor has a hard time with a given topic, it provides an insight into the difficulties students may encounter and so makes for a better assignment next time.

The journal provides an easy means to evaluate each class session; the journal is not the only way to do this, of course, but it proves a handy place to keep these records, alongside the planning sessions and the inclass journal-writes. One of my own entries, for example, written ten minutes after class read like this:

12/16-9:40 a.m.-Union

Class discussion of Orwell: asked small groups of people pointed questions and passages to look at for 15 minutes-then had people repeat to larger group. This started slow-but by last several reports, people were regularly contributing to the discussion. "Absence" continued to be a problem, with certain people missing frequently-screws up the groups and the presentations-the guy from group 2 who took the transparency home with him-he never showed up with it!

Last 15 minutes of class: we projected one overhead and a second group orally explained their project. This was rushed and unsatisfactory; resolve to "start" next class with group work and discussion.

Next class: I need to do certain things:

1. Finish 1984 discussion
2. Group projects
3. Allow group planning time in class
4. Collect papers (due)
5. Assign *Mythologies*

Thursday Class

8:00: Meet in groups and discuss project
prepare outline of planned activities for me

8:30: Project 3 group plans for investigation

9:00: 1984 discussion: centered on “communication” and “human nature”

Jottings like this may help teachers understand better their own teaching process and sometimes result in useful insights about what should or shouldn't have been done. These evaluations also act as prefaces for the next planning session, pointing toward more structure or less. And when a class, for one reason or another, has been a complete failure, writing about it can be therapeutic; I, at least, try to objectify what went wrong and so create the illusion, at least, of being able to control it the next time.

Reading and Evaluating Student Journals

Reading student journals keeps teachers in touch with student experiences- frustrations, anxieties, problems, joys, excitements. Teachers who are aware of the everyday realities-both mental and physical-of student life may be better teachers because they can tailor assignments and tests more precisely to student needs. In other words, reading student journals humanizes teachers.

Some teachers insist on not reading student journals, arguing they have no right to pry in these private documents. It is a good point. However, there are important reasons why the teacher ought to look at the journals, and there are precautions which can eliminate prying. First, for students just beginning to keep journals, a reading by a teacher can help them expand their journals and make them more useful. Sometimes first journals have too many short entries; a teacher who notices this can suggest trying full-page exercises to encourage a fuller development of ideas. Second, some students believe that if an academic production is not reviewed by teachers it has no worth; while there is more of a problem here than reading journals, the teachers may decide at the outset that looking at the journals will add needed credibility to the assignment. Third, students feel that journals must “count for something”-as must every requirement in a high school or college setting. “If teachers don't look at these things how can they count ‘em?”

One way to count a journal as part of the student's grade is to count pages. Some teachers grade according to the quantity of writing a student does: one hundred pages equals an ‘A’; seventy-five a ‘B’; fifty a ‘C’; and so on. Other teachers attempt to grade on the quality of insight or evidence of personal growth. Still other teachers prefer a credit/no credit arrangement: to complete the requirements for the course the students must show evidence they have kept a journal.

Teachers need only see that pages of journal writing exist; they don't need to read the entries. While fair, this method precludes the teacher from learning through the students' writing.

To resolve this apparent paradox between the students' need for a private place to write and the benefit to both student and teacher from a public reading, I ask students to keep their journals in a loose-leaf format and to provide cardboard "dividers" to separate sections of the journal. I am able thus to look at sections dealing with my course, but not to see more personal sections. And if portions of the student's commentary about a particular class would prove embarrassing, the loose-leaf allows deletion of that entry prior to my perusal. I may ask for the pages concerning "American Literature," for example, the third week of the term, skim quickly, and hand back-making suggestions only to those students who are not gaining much from the experience. At the end of the course I may check the journals again and assign a credit/no credit mark. Or I may raise student grades for good journals (lots of writing), but not penalize students for mediocre ones.

Teachers who read journals need to be careful about how they respond to them. A small, positive comment following the latest entry encourages the writer to continue: "Good journal. I especially enjoyed your entry on freedom of speech." Date the comments and read from that point next time. Needless to say, negative or critical comments have no place.

Near the end of the term I usually ask students to prepare their journals for a public reading, to delete any entries too personal to share, and then add page numbers and a table of contents for major entries.¹² Finally, students write an entry in which they formally evaluate their own journal: "Which entries make the greatest impact on you now? Which seem least worthwhile? What patterns do you find from entry to entry?" For some students this proves to be the clarifying activity of the term, the action which finally defines the journals. For many, this informal, nongraded writing is a new and pleasant experience. In the words of one student:

The journal to me has been like a one-man debate, where I could write thoughts down and then later read them, this seemed to help clarify many of my ideas, To be honest there is probably fifty percent of the journal that is nothing but B.S. and ramblings to fulfill assignments, but, that still leaves fifty percent that I think is of importance. The journal is also a time capsule. I want to put it away and not look at it for ten or twenty years and let it recall for me this period of my life. In the journal are many other things besides the writings, such as drawings and pages from this year's calendar. It is like a picture of this period of my life. When I continue writing a journal it will be of another portion of my life.

Conclusion

Journals are interdisciplinary and developmental by nature; it would be hard for writers who use journals regularly and seriously not to witness growth. I believe that journals belong at the heart of any writing-across-the-curriculum program. Journals promote introspection on the one hand and vigorous speculation on the other; as such they are as valuable to teachers in the hard sciences as to those in the more cushioned humanities. To be effective, however, journal use in one class ought to be reinforced by similar use in another class. Of course, for teachers in some disciplines, where the primary focus is the student's grasp of specialized knowledge, the personal nature of journals may be of secondary importance. However, the value of coupling personal with academic learning should not be overlooked; self-knowledge provides the motivation for whatever other knowledge an individual seeks. Without an understanding of who we are, we are not likely to understand fully why we study biology rather than forestry, literature rather than philosophy. In the end, all knowledge is related; the journal helps clarify the relationship.

Notes

1. Don Fader argues in favor of a program called "English in Every Classroom" in *Hooked on Books* (New York: Medallion, 1966); the student journal was a key component in his program. See also, James Britton, Tony Burgess, Nancy Martin, Alex McLeod, and Harold Rosen, *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (London: Macmillan Education, 1975); and Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," *College Composition and Communication* 28 (May 1977): 122-127.
2. Ken Macrorie, *Writing to Be Read*, 2nd ed. (Rochelle Park, N. J.: Hayden, 1976), p. 151.
3. Peter Elbow, *Writing without Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 9.
4. Macrorie, p. 158.
5. Mark Hanson, *Sources* (Lakeside, Calif.: INTERACT, 1978).
6. Examples of journal use are taken from professors at Michigan Tech who have attended writing-across-the-curriculum workshops. For further information, contact the author.
7. Margaret Watson, *Mathematics Teacher* (October 1980), pp. 518-519.
8. Robert Stinson, "Journals in the Geography Class," *WLA Newsletter*, no. 15 (Findlay College, Spring, 1980): 5.
9. Teachers and counselors will find a thorough discussion of the possible therapeutic uses of personal journals in Ira Progoff's *At a Journal Workshop: The Basic Text and Guide for Using the Intensive Journal* (New York: Dialogue House, 1975).

10. Robert A. Rennert, "Values Clarification, Journals, and the Freshman Writing Course," *On Righting Writing*, ed. Ouida I-I. Clapp (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1975), p. 196.

11. Robert Hawley, Sidney Simon, and D. D. Britton, *Composition for Personal Growth* (New York: Hart, 1973), p. 142.

12. I learned to organize journals from Dixie Goswami at the NEH Seminar "Writing in the Learning of Humanities," Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, July 1977.