

How to write a learning diary

A learning diary is a tool of reflection. It helps the student to assess what she/he has learned on a course. This obviously helps the teacher, too! The aim of a learning diary is to summarize, analyze and comment on the course and lectures. As such, it replaces or supplements an essay or final exam. Learning diaries may also be used to assess student work in conjunction with guest lectures or conferences.

The key to writing a learning diary is to draw on the lectures, but instead of just repeating what the lecturer has said, the students should speak with their own voice. A diary is a subjective view, and a learning diary should reflect what the student has heard and learnt. It's the student's own analysis and insights that count. The teacher's ideas may even be taken further and elaborated on.

These guidelines will give you pointers to writing a reflective academic learning diary. First of all, put the lectures into perspective: how did the classes relate to your prior learning and life experience? Secondly, you should state the main points of the lecture, but a mere summary is not enough. The teacher is not keen to read summed up versions of his/her ideas, but would rather learn of the trains of thought that his/her teaching has set in motion. Such feedback is also valuable to the teacher's own professional development.

You don't necessarily have to use complementary literature to write a learning diary, but you may wish to make use of both prior learning and relevant academic literature to enhance your work. Take note of the literature recommended by the teacher.

The sensible thing to do is write a brief summary of the thoughts raised by the lecture soon after the class. It may prove hard to go back to the lecture notes months after the lecture. Reflect on the contents of the lecture both during and after class in relation to your own views of the issues at hand. Consider, too, how the teacher got his/her message across.

You should write a page or about 450 words of each lecture (font size 12, line spacing 1.5). Note, however, that the length may vary from one course to another.

You may write a chronological diary, but an essay form is also possible. An essay will also demonstrate your ability to organize and analyze knowledge. In the midst of writing an essay-form diary, don't forget that the learning diary should be based on the lecture notes and it should contain the lecture's key contents.

To conclude the diary, you should write a 1/2-page summary on what the course has taught and meant for you. This is also an excellent opportunity to give feedback about the course as a whole.

Finally, make an effort to write lucidly. Work on the language!

The following questions may help you write your learning diary:

1) What did I learn? What was new to me? Was there something that changed my views and why? Focus on and analyze the themes important to you.

2) What did I not understand? What went against my own ideas? Why? What was less comprehensible? Why? Focus on and analyze the questions that left you puzzled.

3) What the course has taught is likely to have some relevance for you and your studies. Can you identify what this is? How are you able to apply this knowledge in your studies? How does this support your development as a student? Make note of and reflect on the thoughts that emerge as especially important.