

Instructions for learning diary

(The following text is adapted from instructions given to students in University of Helsinki (author unknown)).

A learning diary is a tool of reflection. It helps the student to assess what she/he has learned on a course, and therefore also the teacher. The aim of a learning diary is to analyse and comment on the course and lectures. As such, it can be used to replace or supplement an essay or a final exam.

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.

So, what to write?

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.

In the learning diary you can, for example

- discuss how did the classes and materials relate to your prior learning and life experience
- compare and contrast with the previous knowledge you have
- criticise or defend a point
- review what was new or interesting
- discuss how you could utilise the things discussed in your own work

- give feedback or (constructive) criticism to the teacher
- etc. etc. etc.

The following questions may help you write your learning diary:

- What did I learn? What was new to me? Was there something that changed my views and why? Focus on and analyse the themes important to you.
- What did I not understand? What went against my own ideas? Why? What was less comprehensible? Why? Focus on and analyse the questions that left you puzzled.

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.

Format

Write at least 1 page per session - there's no upper limit

You can use a very personal style - this is a diary, after all! You may include pictures, cartoons, and poems, anything you want, if you wish. Or you can adopt a more academic style.

Whatever the style you prefer, please note that a mere summary will not enough. A learning diary demonstrate critical thinking. Please note that in this context "critical" does not mean "overly negative", but rather "analytical". That means, for example, that when you criticise something, you give clear, coherent reasons for your criticism.

If you refer to outside work, or quote other people, use appropriate citations.