

Students across a range of disciplines are often asked to keep a reflective diary, portfolio or journal. This is not really surprising since a diary/log/journal is a record of your development as a learner or practitioner in your field. Exactly what goes in your journal will, of course, vary from one discipline to another.

Learning journals in creative and technical subjects

Students learning to create or build something – for example a bridge (Engineering), a product (Product Design), a structure (Architecture) or an artwork (Creative Arts) – will be learning to:

- ▶ **look at** or **observe** objects, paintings, structures
- ▶ **analyse** what they see (form, function, materials)
- ▶ **consider** how each element contributes to the whole
- ▶ **be aware of** how they have **borrowed**, **changed** or **built on** the ideas of other practitioners, artists or theories
- ▶ **reflect** on their own **developmental process**: starting, experimenting, changing, adapting, starting again.

This development of ideas is likely to be recorded in a personal **record** or **sketchbook** or lab diary. Often it is only later that you can see the origins of the ideas you work on. You don't see it at the time, which, of course, underlines the importance of these informal records, not only for students in these disciplines but for everyone who wants or needs to chart their development. Only at the end of the process do you see the path to the outcome clearly.



You can then write a summative piece that explains and justifies the choices you made along the way:

The starting point for this work came from a trip to Africa. I noticed a variety of objects washed up on the beach, old jeans, shoes and sacks and I tried to imagine who they might have belonged to ...

Brief context

Observing and reflecting

Imagining and reflecting

... I looked at Marcel Duchamp, Christian Boltanski and Bill Woodrow to see how artists made use of found objects ←

Building on other artists' work

... I noticed that when two or three unrelated objects were placed together [...] the audience would find themselves trying to identify a link between the objects ...

Observing and reflecting

Awareness of audience and reflecting

I looked at ways of preserving the objects and learnt about casting and the range of materials to cast from including wax, chocolate, resin and plaster ...

Experimenting

I wasn't really happy with how the wax teacup turned out ... I became fascinated with shoes ...

Testing ... feelings and reflecting

I discovered fibreglass – the delicacy and opaqueness of the fibreglass shoe ...

Changing

Experimenting ... reflecting

... I hope the installation stimulates the memories and imagination of the audience. ←

Connecting with audience

Thanks to Pippa Chambers (Creative Arts student) for her kind permission to include this extract.

A reflective diary or learning journal

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Design, construct, test ... to destruction

Technical courses at college or university – Engineering, Computing, Architecture – add a bit of spice to the process outlined above. At some point in the course, students are likely to

- ▶ work in design teams: Does better teamwork lead to better designs?
- ▶ sketch or model the design: How does it help the design process?
- ▶ build it within the constraints of materials, cost and time
- ▶ test it to destruction: How resilient is the structure? How well designed?

Finally, looking back and reflecting on the whole process, what have you **learnt**?

The brief: build a bridge

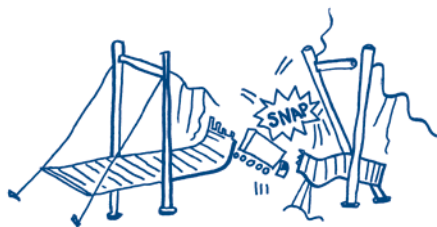
Working in groups you are required to **design** and **later construct** a bridge as specified below ... Only the following materials may be used ... The following costs apply ...

Thanks to Nick Spencer Chapman, Chartered Engineer,
Lecturer, Construction Management

Opposite are extracts from two student critical appraisals looking back on the whole process:

Time to reflect on ...

<p>'Keep it simple stupid' (KISS) – one person talked like he knew what he was doing but it was far too complicated to build in time and our semi-finished bridge didn't even support itself.</p>	<p>Group processes</p> <p>Design process</p> <p>Construction and destruction</p>	<p>We should have organised the construction better. We rushed and half the team didn't know what to do. The team next door even had cutting lists and everybody had jobs – they didn't rush and finished early.</p>
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A reflective diary or learning journal

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More students' reflections show the range of their learning:

We should have drawn it to scale with load in position.

You could see why it was helpful to sketch to scale ... it made it look real.

We wasted materials when we realised we'd cut it too short.

The group hadn't realised that unless the towers are tied back at each end they add nothing.

Others in our 'team' just chatted and larked about.

Often the bridges with the most material were the weakest! They hadn't thought about ...

Once the load began tipping sideways you could see it had become unstable.

And finally ...

Take another look at the comments above. Decide which aspect or combination of aspects of the process each one illustrates:

Group processes	Design process	Construction/destruction

You'll see how much learning about bridge construction comes from reflection throughout the assignment.

Learning journals in professional courses

Learning journals help to develop your practice as a professional by:

- ▶ recording your own practice and actions
- ▶ noticing what went well and what needs development
- ▶ acknowledging issues, problems and areas that need attention
- ▶ planning for future actions to help with areas of challenge.

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Learning journals in education

I found the behaviour of the class really challenging. I realise I was not differentiating between kinds of difficult behaviour: for example, one child is frustrated because she is gifted and the class is too slow; one child has attachment issues and can't settle among other children; one I know has been bullied and doesn't speak up. I just got frustrated that it wasn't working and didn't even think about strategies that would work for those different needs. I definitely need to research these issues and what best practice is for each of them.

(Suzette, BA Education student)

Record your actions and notice what has not gone well.

Notice what needs development

Acknowledge areas that need attention

Plan for future actions

Learning journals in Health and Social Care

A Health/Social Care student will learn to:

- ▶ **participate in** or **observe** an incident (such as the care of a client)
- ▶ **discuss** what went well and not so well about it

- **analyse** their thoughts about it, by linking to relevant theory/policy/science/ guidance, and to the experience of others
- **reflect** on how this links to their own experiences – how could this inform their future practice?

A junior nurse's reflective diary entry

Last week my mentor transferred a client into her bed without using any equipment to assist her. The client was unable to stand safely. However my mentor said there was no hoist nearby and it would take too much time to go and find one. Since then I have had my moving and handling training update. Under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations (Health and Safety Executive 2004), all staff have a duty to attend moving and handling training, and to make full use of any equipment available to them in their place of work to assist them in moving and handling patients or objects. I am sure that using a hoist would have reduced the risk of injury to the patient as well as to the nurse who was moving her.

Describing the incident

Observing

*The incident continued.
Unstated concern about
poor practice*

*Reflection linking first-hand
experience with reading and
training*

*Reflection on practices and
implications*

A reflective diary or learning journal

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After my training, I feel more confident to challenge others' practice, and I realise the importance of being assertive to ensure my own safety as well as the safety of clients and colleagues.

Reference

Health and Safety Executive (2004). *Manual Handling Operations Regulations* (3rd edn). London: The Stationery Office.

Reflection on self and future practice

A medical student reflects

[The exercise] was to consider the approaches a doctor might take with a person with a chronic illness. To be honest, I didn't want to do this, as some things were too close to the bone. I'm glad I did though as the scenario our group was given was one I had never particularly considered, and I was able to consider what [the person's] particular needs would be. I suppose it was a case of separating personal and professional attitudes ...

Incident/activity

Feelings/reflections

New learning

Outcome

New learning in professional context – generalising to make the link between this experience and prior understanding of the issue (personal and professional attitudes)