

Top Tips for Keeping a Reflective Journal

While it may seem laborious to write down what you've experienced, keeping a journal helps organise thoughts and bring out new ideas. In this article we offer some tips for keeping an effective, reflective journal.



Find regular writing times

One of the main difficulties experienced when trying to keep a journal is finding the time. Pick a time of day that is suitable for you and stick to it. For example, before you start work might be a good time for you to reflect, or you may decide that last thing at night is more convenient.

Find a peaceful place to write

The clearest thinking most often happens in an environment that is comfortable and free of distractions. Find a place where you can relax and write in peace and keep interruptions to a minimum, allowing you to concentrate.

Focus on the process rather than the output

The most important part of keeping a journal is the process of recording your thoughts and feelings. Writing about events forces you to be clear on what occurred. The end result isn't for anyone but yourself, unless you plan to make it available to others. If this is the case, you can edit and polish at a later stage – getting your thoughts and feelings written down should be your first objective.

Write about the experience soon after it occurs

Details of events will quickly disappear if they aren't captured within a few days. This is especially true during particularly busy periods, when there are many things going on at the same time. If time is short, it is worthwhile jotting down some notes that you can expand on at a later date.

Ask yourself questions

If you find it difficult to start writing you may find it useful to ask yourself one or more of the following questions:

- What happened since your last entry?
- What did you feel at the time?
- How did others react?
- What went well?
- What went less well?
- What might you do differently next time?
- What did you learn today?

Be organised

How you organise your journal is up to you, but you should be able to easily find specific entries. Consider making an index of your entries. If you are using a paper based journal you could use the front or back pages for the index. Keeping a computer based journal enables you to have a separate file as an index. Be sure to include dates and a brief description or keywords.

Revisit your entries

One of the great benefits of keeping a journal is that it enables you to go back to your experiences and look at them from a different perspective.

For example, you may have had a difficult experience one day and wrote about it in your journal detailing what happened and what you were feeling. Revisiting such an entry generally enables you to emotionally distance yourself from the event and analyse it more carefully. This often results in you understanding and learning from the situation in ways that you would not have otherwise.

When you revisit your entries, add to them if you have any new insights or thoughts. This will help the reflective process.

Take advantage of technology

If you're not already familiar with the internet or blogs, now would be a great time to start. A blog is like an online journal, with the entries usually presented in chronological order. The entries can be assigned several keywords or 'tags' that allows them to be indexed effectively. If you're interested in starting a blog, try one of these sites:

- <https://wordpress.com/>
- <https://www.blogger.com>
- <http://www.livejournal.com/>

Don't give up

Following the tips in this article will make it easier for you to maintain the momentum of making regular entries. However, everyone can lose enthusiasm from time to time. Don't worry if you haven't written anything for a few days or even weeks, there's no timetable for you to follow other than your own. If you are finding it a bit of a chore consider making less regular entries for a while or establishing a re-start date.

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