

THE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

1. *Reflective thinking requires a mental “place” to stand apart from, or outside of, a durably created idea, thought, fact or description.* Robert Kegan

Human freedom involves the capacity to pause, to choose the one response towards which we wish to throw our weight. Rollo May

The ‘Reflective Journal’ or ‘Learning Diary/Log’ as it is often called is a practical tool by which the “mental place” and the “capacity to pause”, through which insight and learning occur, can be created by anyone. It promotes change in personal thinking which is at the heart of the learning experience. Reflective journals, well known in the form of diaries, have been kept by all sorts of people for many different purposes. Writers, for example, use them as a means to generate ideas or to experiment with language. In the natural and social sciences, researchers keep notebooks in which details of experiments, interviews and surveys are recorded. Business executives use them as a personal aid by which to guide, manage and monitor professional development and career progress.

2. *The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but what direction we are moving.*
US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes

The purpose of the Reflective Journal is to facilitate, in a private way, the process of intellectual transformation which accompanies critical reflection on sources of knowledge and the faculty for making good judgements. Through the Reflective Journal participants can ‘see’ how their own thinking is progressing over time and how they are making their own contributions to what they think about issues.

3. *If you look across the many venues in which we do seek to educate adults – from basic literacy programs to continuing professional education – you find an interesting convergence. The best programs are moving away from a strictly-orientated, information downloading model and*

asking what supports real transformation of mind. Robert Kegan

The Reflective Journal is an individual forum for reworking information drawn from external sources covers personal observations, questions, and hypotheses and, indeed, digests any matters causing unease, interest and challenge. All these are the resources for the Reflective Journal. It is used to contemplate ideas from discussions, own thoughts or any other source of knowledge and to revise thinking by helping to

- sort thoughts
- come to a viewpoint
- watch for confirming indications
- practice using the viewpoint
- maintain awareness of thinking.

4. *Learning is movement from moment to moment.*
J. Krishnamurti

In order that all men might be taught to speak truth, it is necessary that all likewise should learn to hear it. Samuel Johnson

In the mahayana tradition of Buddhism there is a practice known as *lojong* – ‘training the mind’ (*lojong* is Tibetan: *lo* means ‘intelligence’, ‘mind’, ‘that which can perceive things’; *jong* means ‘training’, or ‘processing’). Chogyam Trungpa says: “In all activities, train with slogans”. ‘Slogan’ means insights, precepts, thoughts on which we reflect. The purpose is to enhance awareness by catching our first thoughts and ideas as they emerge through the reflective or contemplative process. In this way we can generate our own material for contemplation and ‘movement’. (For example, return to the quotations cited already and jot down your first thoughts as you now contemplate each one. Do the same when you read the quotations below. You have now started your Reflective Journal). This practice is the basis for working with a Reflective Journal as a mode of learning.

5. *A man must keep a little back shop where he can be himself without reserve. In solitude alone can he know true freedom. Michel de Montaigne*

The right to be let alone is indeed the beginning of all freedoms. US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas

The most important feature of the Reflective Journal is that it is personal and private, allowing the writer the freedom to surface, express, explore and develop ideas without the restrictions, fears, assessments of external observers. It is the place where we can focus and productively engage with the ‘internal dialogue’

always going on inside of us. To protect this feature during the programme, we suggest dividing the Reflective Journal into two parts.

The first part of the Reflective Journal remains entirely private and is referred to as the **Personal Learning Diary**. Even nowadays it is usually handwritten in a private notebook to promote spontaneity and maintain individuality. (A notebook is supplied with your initial instalment of course materials. Now find yourself a nice pen with which to write!) Always make writing in your journal a good experience.

The second part of the Reflective Journal is called the **Learning Log**. This is based on material extracted from the Personal Learning Diary and is shaped and organised for reading by others, e.g. for course assessment purposes. Although it may be created at a particular point in time, e.g. submission purposes, the quality (comprehensiveness, originality, truthfulness, progress) of the Learning Log will be governed by the commitment and genuineness inherent in the Personal Learning Diary since, in effect, the Personal Learning Diary is a narrative, unique to each individual, of what is learnt and when and how it is learnt. Each person will draw distinctive insights, understandings and judgements from the same source materials, discussions, and presentations. As D. Kirby and C. Kuykendall put it: "Thinking is not a program or a text or a hierarchy of skills ... each mind must do its own creating, forming and inventing – indeed make its own meaning" (*Mind Matters: Teaching for Thinking*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991). The Learning Log is then an 'edited' version of the Personal Learning Diary.

6. *Our ultimate freedom is the right and power to decide how anybody or anything outside of ourselves will effect us.* Steven R. Covey

People hardly ever make use of the freedom they have, for example, freedom of thought; instead they demand freedom of speech as a compensation. Soren Kierkegaard

Suggestions for moving beyond the 'blank page' include

- Recording and reflecting on your learning process, revisiting or redefining your achievements, charting the thinking process, identifying 'brick walls' or learning 'milestones', and celebrating successes and reassessing challenges
- Exploring the limiting assumptions held about oneself; facts (objective), possible facts (subjective) and bedrock assumption (subjective). The bedrock assumption is the answer to the question: what am I assuming about myself that is stopping me from achieving my goals? "We choose our bedrock assumptions about 'self and how life works': 'they are rocks in the mind, ancient deposits that stop its flow. They were made without our permission a long time ago.' So now we have to choose and we do choose." (Nancy Kline, *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind*, Ward Lock, London, 1999).
- Utilise two principles for critical thinking: (i) identify and challenge the assumptions underlying your own and/or another's beliefs and behaviour;

and (ii) explore and imagine alternatives to your own current ways of thinking, acting, living

- Explore any number of questions: What have you been doing and why? What did you learn from it? What did you expect to discover? What did you unexpectedly find? How will you build on what you discovered? What difficulties did you encounter? How can you transform difficulties into opportunities? What resources have you available to do so?
- What is the key idea in the chapter/article? How is it connected to other ideas? How does it change your thinking? What questions does it raise for you?

7. Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. Aristotle

Character is habit long continued. Plutarch

The Reflective Journal is, most of all, your own, so experiment with different approaches in order to discover your own style and find your own 'voice'.

The Personal Learning Diary is about practice, that is, habit, exercise, regularity and commitment i.e. excellence.

Always date entries so you can come to know your journey and prepare a meaningful Learning Log if you wish.