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Journal Writing in the Classroom: Chore or Delight?

Jennifer Karchmer
Western Washington University

Anya Nakrokhina
Western Washington University

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WRITING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY FELLOWSHIPS
Closing Write-up for 2007-08

Researchers' Names:

Jennifer Karchmer & Anya Nakrokhina

Title:

Journal Writing in the Classroom: Chore or Delight?

Research Questions:

1. What are some attitudes and behavioral trends of students toward a journal writing assignment?
2. How effective is a journal writing assignment in the classroom?
3. How can a journal writing assignment be improved for both students and instructor?

Method:

Quantitative data based on 39 surveys administered during Fall 2007 quarter at WWU to COMM318 Professional Communication students. Also, this study included student journals (about 10-pages each) with qualitative comments.

Key Findings:

- Students preferred to type journals rather than handwrite (67%).
- Students typically wrote what they thought the instructor wanted them to write (59%).
- Some students waited until the final weeks of the quarter to write their journals (49%).
- About half of respondents (46%) rated the effectiveness of the assignment "good."

Implications for Further Study:

1. Cross tabulate results by gender, major, previous journal experience (e.g., are women more likely than men to have previous journal writing experience? Does that experience influence their perspective when approaching the assignment? Are certain majors more likely to have the journal writing experience?)
2. Explore the definition of "journal." How does it differ from "diary," "log," "field journal"? What are students perceptions of each of these going into the assignment and how has their perception of the value of journaling changed afterward?
3. Give students the option of choosing whether to handwrite or type journal. What are the implications of the choice and what led to students' choices?
4. Does journal writing in the classroom require a level of reflection to truly understand, learn from and appreciate it. (Conduct a study of the attitudes of students toward journal writing at intervals after completing assignment, i.e., one year, 5 years, etc. and re-survey these students about how they reflect on the assignment).

Implications for Teaching and Learning:

1. Focus groups. Hold a focus group of instructors who have implemented a form of journal writing in the classroom. What are some similarities and differences among their approaches? Is journal writing reserved for "Humanities" or do we see journal writing in other disciplines (and how effective is it?)
 - 1a. Focus group of students who have done journaling and find it useful.
 - 1b. Focus group of students who have negative attitude toward journal writing.
2. Gain feedback from instructors on how best to approach grading of journals. What kind of rubric is most effective? Is Journaling a low-stakes or high-stakes assignment?

Journal Writing Survey

This survey is being used to study journal writing as part of a research grant. The results are expected to be presented at the Festival of Scholarship in April 2008 being held at WWU. Your thoughtful input is greatly appreciated. Completing this survey is optional and anonymous and in no way will affect your final grade in this course. Thank you.

Jennifer Karchmer, Department of Communication

Expected Graduation Date: _____ Gender (circle one): Male Female

Your Declared Major: _____ (if applying for Communication, write "Pre-Communication")

Have you completed a journal writing assignment in another college course before? Circle one: (yes / no).

If "yes," provide the name of the course: _____

Indicate your level of agreement by circling one number on the right for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I had a difficult time thinking of what to write each week.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I enjoyed writing the journal.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The goal of the journal assignment was clear to me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Writing the journal gave me an opportunity to explore new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
5. If you were given a choice whether to handwrite or type your journal writing assignment, which would you choose? Circle one: (handwrite / type). Why?	1	2	3	4	5

6. For the following statements, check as many that are true for you:
- I waited until the last weeks of the quarter to complete the journal.
 - I thought the journal writing was a cool idea.
 - I discussed journal entries with classmates.
 - I wrote what I thought the instructor wanted us to write.
 - I was diligent about writing each week.
 - I assumed the instructor wouldn't have time to read my entire journal.
 - I found myself writing honestly about ideas and concepts.

7. How would you rate the effectiveness of the journal writing assignment in fulfilling the course requirements? (circle one of the following five choices)

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent I'm unable to determine

8. Provide any additional comments you have on improving the journal writing assignment (write on the back if you'd like).

Thank you for completing this survey.

COMM318 Professional Communication
Prof. Jennifer Karchmer
Journal assignment & evaluation

Evaluation: 100 points

Weighting: 25%

Due: Thursday, Dec. 6, beginning of classtime

Assignment: Toward the 5th-hour arranged portion of the course, students keep a weekly journal reflecting on their progress during the quarter. Entries may be on assignments, learning, class observations, participation in “Make a Difference Day,” and other topics provided by the instructor. The purpose of the journal is to provide a “reflection place.” It is expected that students will write with honesty and discuss appropriate topics relating to COMM318 coursework. The journal will be shared only with the instructor.

“**Journal entry**” reminders appear on the course schedule to encourage students to keep up with the journal on a weekly basis. Your reflections should be in chronological order and demonstrate a progression throughout the quarter. The instructor will not check in regularly on journal progress. If at any time, you would like feedback on your journal, hand it in and give the instructor at least one week to return it to you with a brief comment on your progress.

Do not wait until the final weeks of the quarter to write your entire journal. Doing so will be obvious to the reader and will affect your grade heavily.

Requirements:

Must be typed & double-spaced!

Includes at least 10 entries (one per week)

Single entry is at least 250 words (approx.: one page, double spaced, 12-point, TNR)

Must be spellchecked

Correct header: every entry is dated and numbered, ex: “Sept. 30, 2007, Entry #1”

Staple evaluation sheet to top (cover page)

Evaluation: (see next page) Journals are evaluated on overall effort; thoroughness, insight, ability to make connections to course concepts and the real-world, use of constructive tone. While grammar, syntax and sentence structure are not as important, the entire journal must be spellchecked and presented in a way that is understandable for the instructor to read.

Journal Topics to get you started (check BB weekly for journal prompts, although you may write on any topics each week you choose that are appropriate)

Week 1 Entry #1, course outline, assignments, journaling

Week 2 Entry #2, team building process

Week 3 Entry #3, addressing conflicts

Week 4 Entry #4,

Week 5 Entry #5,

Week 6 Entry #6, M.A.D.D.

Week 7 Entry #7,

Week 8 Entry #8,

Week 9 Entry #9,

Week 10 Entry #10, (final entry) final reflection on quarter.

COMM318 Professional Communication
Prof. Jennifer Karchmer
Journal Assignment Evaluation
(this is your cover page)

Name/Section: type your name here

Grade: _____

1) Attention to details:

Submitted on time
Typed
10 entries
Spellchecked
Employs correct header for entries
Includes this evaluation sheet

Needs work

acceptable

excellent

2) Content:

Thorough, insightful, makes connections to course concepts and real-world, constructive tone, shows personal growth, maturity, sense of learning.

Needs work

acceptable

excellent

3) Effort:

Overall presentation and output of effort.

Needs work

acceptable

excellent