

Learning Logs

Marion Heyn, STARS, LAVC 2004

What are they?

Account, chronicle, class book, :daily record, daybook, journal, log, minutes, notebook, record, recounting, playbook, project log, whatever they may be called, learning logs are records of **what was done AND a reflection on what happened, when, in what order, how, why.**

Beginners rarely get "it" right the first time they try something new. They inevitably make mistakes from which they may eventually learn. If mistakes are opportunities for learning, learning logs are environments where that learning can be encouraged, captured, and cultivated.

What can they do for the instructor?

Learning logs let you:

- know your students better
- infer student learning patterns and strategies
- check on what they heard when you said...
- better plan lessons to meet student needs
- teach them how to learn (your discipline)

What can they do for the student?

Learning logs let them:

- write, think, ponder
- practice working with the concepts of the course
- learn how to think like a historian, mathematician, writer, nurse, etc.
- develop metacognitive skills
- join our discourse community

Can the instructor keep a learning log?

Certainly! It might then be called a teaching/learning log and brings the same benefits of the student learning logs, plus gives the STARS Project some more deliverables.

How are learning logs used?

Learning logs, playbooks can be used:

- occasionally periodically intermittently
- regularly as an informal collection of thoughts
- ungraded as a formal assignment graded
- adjuncts to coursework.

Structuring the Assignment

Learning logs can be easy and simple:

- a show of hands tallied and recorded
- an informal discussion with someone summarizing the proceedings
- a CAT such as Focused Listing, Minute Paper or Muddiest Point

OR

Learning logs can be as complex as you have time for:

- "Writing to Learn with Learning Logs" (occasional)
- Brookfield Chapter Five (weekly)

Things to Expect

Students will not know how to reflect at first. They will need prompts and our modeling of the behavior and processes. See "Use Sentence Starters for Your Learning Log."

Some students will hate the idea, at first. Most come to enjoy it once they get the hang of it. You may need to explain your rationale for using it.

You will need to explain that the learning log is neither a personal diary nor a class notebook. Sample entries and prompts at the beginning of the semester will help them learn the differences.

An atmosphere of trust must prevail. "For critical reflection to happen, there has to be a trustful atmosphere in which people know that public disclosure of private errors will not lead to their suffering negative consequences" (Brookfield, 1995, p.250).

Looseleaf binders with dividers work well for term-long learning logs. You can collect only a section at a time and any special forms or instruments you decide to use can be inserted easily.

There is no need to respond to every entry. Ask students to select the one or two that they want you to focus on; comment on the entire set of entries. Keep comments brief and encouraging.

Counting rather than grading works well for required logs. If you keep a log along with your students, you will know exactly how many entries or pages they should have. Fulwiler (1987) suggests that logs should "...count in some quantitative way: a certain number of points, a plus added to the grade, as an in-class resource for taking tests" (p.7).

Learning logs are personal and should be kept confidential, though it may be appropriate to share your observations about what you read. Never mention an individual by name, unless you have prior consent.

TIPS FOR JOURNAL ENTRIES

Be spontaneous.

Be honest.

Be creative.

Most of all, dive deep!!

(Downing, 2005, CD-ROM)

RULES OF FREEWRITING

1 . Keep your hand moving.

2. Lose control.

3. Be specific.

4. Don't think.

5. Don't worry about punctuation, spelling, grammar.

6. Be totally honest.

(Goldberg, 1990, p. 2-4)

Writing to Learn with Learning Logs

Short, ungraded and unedited, reflective writing in learning logs is a venue to promote genuine consideration of learning activities. ... [W]e offer a series of prompts designed to provide authentic writing experiences in any content area.

Pause To Write in Learning Logs

Immediately following a particularly engaging activity, discussion, or presentation, pause and allow students to reflect in their learning logs or journals. If necessary, provide a simple prompt directing students to record their thoughts about or connections to the topic. Follow the "pause to write" with an opportunity to share (volunteers only) or a brief question/answer session.

Pausing to Paraphrase Solidifies Learning

During a difficult lecture, reading, or activity, pause and ask students to clarify the idea by writing a paraphrase in their learning logs. Share a few student explanations aloud and discuss as necessary. This is an ideal time to clear up misconceptions.

Listening Response

Before beginning an activity, direct students to divide a page in their learning logs into two vertical columns. In the first column, students should record a series of teacher identified words key to the discussion, lecture or activity about to occur. During the discussion, lecture, or activity, students should record ideas relevant to the key words. [Doesn't this sound like note taking? Sure, but how many of our students have not yet learned how to do this effectively? Each of us can help them learn. MGH]

Write Extended Definitions in Learning Logs

Following a lecture, discussion, or activity, ask students to write an expanded definition of the topic in their learning logs. Use definitions shared by volunteers to review the concept, and provide an opportunity for students to clarify their definitions following discussion.

Learning Log Swap

Direct students to divide a page from their learning logs into two columns. In the first column, students should write a series of original questions related to a previously learned topic, skipping a few lines between questions. Then, students should partner, swap learning logs, and respond in the second column to their partner's questions. Each team should then discuss the questions and responses, and ask for clarification from the teacher or class as necessary.

Sentence Starters for your Learning Log

Adapted from "Weekly Tips" on Glencoe Publishing website, www.glencoe.com.

Directions: To help assess your progress, your teacher may require you to complete Learning Log entries either at the end of the class period or at home. Choose one or more of the following sentence starters to help you get started or write about what you accomplished in class today. Be specific. You may be asked to use the information in your Learning Log to write part of your research reflection. Choose a sentence starter that truly fits what **you did** and what happened to you that day. You may use the same sentence starter more than once in your log.

1. Today I was very successful because...
2. Today I was unsuccessful because...
3. Today I had a problem trying to ... Tomorrow I will try to solve that problem by...
4. Today I made an important breakthrough in my research. The thing that helped me was...
5. Today I was finally able to make progress because I
6. The easiest part of research for this project is ...
7. The hardest part of research for this project is ...
8. I need help with... so tomorrow (or tonight, or after school), I will...
9. I am proud of myself today because I...
10. The most helpful source of information for my topic so far is... because...
11. I think I am becoming an expert on my topic because ...
12. Today, I changed the way I ... because...
13. One thing I learned today about my topic is...
14. One thing I learned today about how to do research is ...
15. One thing I learned today about myself as a researcher is...
16. One thing I learned today about how I learn is...
17. I used time well today because I ...
18. I need to do a better job of... during the next research session because..
19. I liked using the source _____ because ...
20. I know that I am becoming a more efficient researcher because

<http://www.bcpl.net/~sullivan/modules/diseases/Sentstarters.html> 5/10/2004 2:49 AM

References & Resources

- Angelo, T. A. & Cross, P. C. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2 d . Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Downing, S. (2005). *On course: Strategies for creating success in college and in life*. (40'. Ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Facilitated Systems: <http://www.facilitatedsystems.com/llogs.html> Online log templates and tips for use. This is a project-focused log.
- Fulwiler, T. (Ed.). (1987). *The journal book*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Glencoe Publishing. Writing to learn with learning logs. (n.d.) Retrieved April 21, 2004 from <http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/weeklytips.ghtml/l2rint/54>
- Goldberg, N. (1990). *Wild mind. Living the writer's life*. New York: Bantam Books.

THE "CLEAREST" AND "MUDDIEST" POINTS*

*Adapted from T.A. Angelo -- Phase 11 Classroom Research Project

What is the "clearest" point of this morning's session?

(in other words, what concepts or ideas do you understand the best?)

What is the "muddiest" point of this morning's session?

(in other words, what concepts or ideas are the least clear to you?)

Teaching-Centered vs. Learning -Centered Instruction

Concept	Teaching-Centered	Learning-Centered
Teaching Goals	Cover the discipline	Students learn: How to use the discipline How to integrate the disciplines to solve complex problems An array of core learning objectives, such as communication and information literacy skills
Curriculum	Courses in catalog	Cohesive program with systematically-created opportunities to synthesize, practice, and develop increasingly complex ideas, skills, and values
Course Structure	Faculty "cover" topics	Students master learning objectives
How Students Learn	Listening Reading Independent learning, often in competition for grades	Students construct knowledge by integrating new learning into what they already know. Learning as a cognitive and social act
Pedagogy	Based on delivery of information	Based on engagement of students
Course Delivery	Lecture Assignments and exams for summative purposes	Active learning Assignments for formative purposes Collaborative learning Community service learning Cooperative learning Online, asynchronous, self-directed learning Problem-based learning
Faculty Role	Sage on the stage	Designer of learning environments
Great Teaching	Teach (present information) well and those who can will learn.	Use classroom assessment – identify objectives, routinely examine student progress, and make necessary adjustments. Scholarship of teaching
Course Grading	Faculty as gate keepers Normal distribution expected	Grades indicate mastery of learning objectives
Assessment	Reliance on grades, registration and course completion data, etc.	Faculty use classroom assessment to improve learning in day-to-day courses Faculty use program assessment to improve learning throughout the curriculum