

**Purpose: to use a journal to reflect on teaching**

A teaching journal is a written account of your teaching experiences that can serve both as a record of things that happen during teaching, and also as a place to record reflections, incidents, questions, insights, and other comments that can be reviewed to better understand your teaching. Writing about teaching can prompt you to reflect on your teaching and enhance your awareness of the way you teach and how students learn, and it is also a simple form of classroom research. This tip examines the nature of journal writing and how it can be used.

1 Planning: a number of decisions have to be made when you undertake journal writing. How are you going to keep your journal? You can either use a notebook in which journal entries are written, or use an e-journal. Many teachers find blogs a useful approach to reflecting through writing. For example, I recently read a great blog about a teacher in Spain who was interested in teaching a semester without using a coursebook. He described how he got the students and school to agree, and documented the process.

Who is your audience? You need to decide who the primary audience is for the journal. Is it just for you, or do you plan to share it with others, such as colleagues or a supervisor?

What is your time frame for journal writing? Decide when is a good time for you to spend 10 or 15 minutes on journal entries.

2 Topics to write about: journal entries are both descriptions of things that occurred during lessons as well as reflections or interpretations of incidents or lessons.

Topics could include:

- the content of a lesson
- students' reactions to activities
- problems encountered with aspects of a lesson
- unanticipated incidents that occurred

- how materials were used
- effective moments during a lesson
- unsuccessful moments during a lesson.

Reflections and interpretations could include:

- explanations or understandings of classroom incidents
- examples of how principles and values were realized in a lesson
- understandings of how students' learn
- personal theories that account for aspects of learning
- accounts of changes in beliefs
- recognition of personal growth
- reflections on future goals

If you plan to share your journal with other teachers or a colleague, you may also pose questions for them to consider and respond to.

3 How to write: journal writing may take several forms. You may choose to write in note form or make your entries more of an extended narrative. Here is an example from a teacher in a Japanese university:

*'Need to keep it stimulating for those guys who have lots of ideas'. Students had done a survey outside of class on meat eating and vegetarianism. The task of the class was to write a report on what they had found out, in a group of four, and then feed back their report to the whole class. While watching students perform this task I became strongly aware of the differences in levels within the class. When it came to listening to the feedback, the more able students were bored listening to their more hesitant classmates.*

(Richards and Farrell 2005)

4 Using the journal: the journal can be used as a source of review and reflection. It can also serve as a record of how you teach and document some of the innovative and effective teaching practices you make use of. It could also be included in a teaching portfolio (see Tip 7).

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Richards, J.C., & Farrell, T. S. C. *Professional Development for Language Teachers: Strategies for Teacher Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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