

## ***Optional Journal Instructions***

***Mr. Peterson***

### **1. What**

The journal is an optional assignment. Students use the journal to show the instructor the extent of their critical thinking and philosophical reasoning during the course.

### **2. Who**

Those students who perceive themselves as being shy or quiet often do journals. Many students are uncomfortable in class discussions. They need another means of showing the instructor that they are engaged in class. This will ensure the proper score for the In-Class Discourse part of the grade.

### **3. Why**

The In-Class Discourse part of one's grade is largely assessed by the instructor's day to day observations of students during class. Some students do not ask questions or participate in class discussion. The comments a student makes are the main way of assessing students for this part of the grade. Students who are engaged, but are not overt about it should do a journal to give the instructor an adequate means of assessing their thinking during the course. Students who do not comment typically lose points throughout the course.

Note: In-Class Discourse (20%): See syllabus for particulars.

### **4. How**

After each class period the student should write down comments relevant to their thinking in the classroom as well as thoughts regarding the reading. These comments should be relevant to the content of the course, especially the comments one would normally make in class. They should indicate reflection and consideration. In addition to this, one may want to record examples of their application of course concepts outside of class. The journal should be a separate notebook. Do not turn in entries mixed in with other class notes. The journal should not be the same as the class notes. It should not simply repeat comments made by others in class. One should record their own unique contribution.

### **5. When**

The entry should be made soon after the class meeting each day. Do not wait until the end of the quarter (or semester) and try to extrapolate information from your notes.

**DUE DATES:** For classes that meet once a week, students must submit their journals at the beginning of the third class meeting. For all other classes, students must submit their journal at the beginning of the second week. This is to give feedback to ensure that subsequent entries are properly done. No journal will be accepted at the end of the course if this first assignment is not submitted.

The journal must be turned in by the last regular class period. No journal will be accepted after the last day of instruction. (Note: The final exam meeting is not a class period.)

### **6. Caveats**

Original thinking should be exhibited. Simply repeating examples already given in the book or in class will not result in added points.

Points are only given for entries done on dates when the student attended class.

**7. Some examples:** The back page features some examples of good entries versus poor entries. (Note that these examples are abbreviated in order to get several on the page. Actual entries should be more complete.) Guidelines for length: While there is no specific length requirement, those who do a good job generally write between 1.5 to 3 pages per week.

The following type of entry is **NOT GOOD**:

Example One:

Jan. 22

We spent the whole class period picking apart a question on emotion. We took sides and shared opinions. I learned some new thoughts. Well, at least I took some new points of view into mind. This was a good exercise. Everyone seemed to enjoy it.

Problems with this entry:

- No discussion of concepts discussed in the class.
- No discussion of her thoughts.
- No indication that she learned anything at all. What are these "new thoughts", "shared opinions", and so on? Are these worth accepting, or is something about them inadequate?

Example Two:

Feb. 12

Today we discussed examples that students brought in. One person told us of an article in the newspaper that she saw as jargon. I find myself with so many other things on my mind that it's hard to be totally involved in class discussion. Capitalism was a topic that everyone seemed to be involved in. Everyone had their own views and opinions.

Problems with this entry:

- No discussion of concepts discussed in the class.
- No discussion of her thoughts. Did she agree that the example was jargon? She should explain. What was said about capitalism? Was it accurate or inaccurate? What principles of reasoning did she use to evaluate the discussion?
- No indication that she learned anything at all. One only gets the clear impression that the student is not engaged.

The following type of entry is **GOOD**: (Note, that they are abbreviated examples. Yours should be longer.)

Example One:

March 12

We spent the whole class period discussing democracy. I noticed that the word was being used without adequate definition. Some people were talking about the United States as though it is a pure democracy, which of course it is not. Even the teacher let this slip by without clarifying the difference between a democracy and a democratic republic. I also noticed that many people assumed that capitalism of one sort or another is a necessary part of a democracy. I don't think this is correct. For instance, public ownership of businesses are not incompatible with democratic principles. Quite the contrary, really.

Good things about this entry:

- Good discussion of concepts (importance of defining terms, ambiguity, assumptions).
- Clear discussion of her thoughts on the issues discussed in class.
- It is very clear that she was thinking and that she learned something.

Example Two

April 30

Last night my boyfriend and I went out for a date. He said, "We'll either have to go to dinner or go to a movie tonight." I pointed out to him that he committed the "either-or" error that we discussed in class. There were actually a number of choices available besides those two. We went bowling.

Good things about this entry:

- Good discussion of concepts ("Either-or" error).
- It is very clear that she was thinking and that she learned something.

- Solid evidence that she is thinking critically outside the classroom.