

## *Reflective Journals*

*I never know what I think until I see what I say.*

Saul Bellow

*I was in the habit of abridging and commonplacizing what I read, meriting it, and of sometimes mixing my own reflections on the subject.*

Thomas Jefferson

*Who we are is ultimately a moral question, bound up with the issue of who we wish to be.*

William Sullivan

Education is a process in which students learn to make their own meanings, to answer the question "what does it mean *to me*?" A journal provides a regular opportunity to reflect on that question, to see how course readings and discussions relate to our individual life experiences, to our own aims and assumptions, to other things that are going on in our lives. A journal allows us to integrate life and learning, to connect the texts and contexts of our lives. As Thomas Jefferson suggests, one way to use a journal is as a "commonplace book," a place where you collect ideas and quotations from your reading (required or not), and reflect on it. Such reflections should also reflect and affect the quality of our class discussions. In a class, professors necessarily *teach* the same thing to all students, but each student *learns* differently. The journal is the place where different and diverse learnings can first take shape.

Try to write in your journal daily (the word "journal" comes from the French word "jour," or day)—or at least often. The idea is to get in the habit of perception and analysis. Although we will occasionally suggest topics that you may want to write about, you may, in fact, write about anything that interests you--class reading, other reading, events in the news, perceptions of your own day. In looking at the connections between land (or landscape) and culture, you may want to take off from the reading, but you might also want to look around you, and see if you can apply ideas to your everyday life. What do you notice now in the St. Olaf landscape? The landscape of your hometown? The place where your family vacations? Why do people have potted plants in their dorm rooms, or Georgia O'Keeffe paintings? Is there such a thing as an interior landscape? What does your favorite TV show tell you about land and the American imagination, and why? Why are SUV ads always set in sublime landscapes? What's your favorite landscape? Why? If you were designing a utopian landscape, what would it look like? Why?

Since you are examining your own thoughts and ideas, you should write in your own voice. You might start entries with reactions to readings or events like "I really don't understand \_\_\_\_\_ because . . ." or "This makes me think about \_\_\_\_\_ because . . ." or "I think the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ is interesting because . . ." or "These ideas remind me of the ideas in [another reading] because . . ." or "This event or reading reminds me of something in my own life, the time when . . ." Feel free to have the courage of your confusions (a word which, serendipitously, comes from the Latin "confundere," "to pour together").

There are several types of journal entries, and we'd like you to try a variety of them in the course of the semester. The first is a **reading response**, where you set yourself in conversation with one of our authors (or something else you're reading). You generally use this sort of response to clarify your relationship to an idea or set of ideas in a reading. You think about a quotation that made you think twice. Or you examine the logic of an argument, the imagery that an author uses, the way it fits with something else we're reading or something you thought you knew. Another type of response is a **close reading** of a social or cultural situation (like Jim's essay on "Waking Up to Nature." You take an everyday occurrence (a party, checking your e-mail, driving a car, etc.) and "dense fact" it, looking for the American values and environmental values in it, and making sense of the common sense of our culture.

A third type of response could be a **table**, which is just a way of mapping ideas. There's one that Jim is working on now at the bottom of this message. A fourth type of response is just a personal (and often visceral) account of **what you're learning**, and what it means to you. Sometimes these entries begin with a quotation that seems to encapsulate an idea perfectly, or that leads you to make other sorts of connections in your life (or in American life or the life of the planet). There are probably more types of journals too, and you will invent them in the course of the semester. Use them as a way of "going deep" into class materials, and into your own soul, and you'll be fine.

The journal is not a research paper (although you can look stuff up if you're curious); you should "probe" rather than "prove" your thoughts. It is a place to play with ideas, a place for what Daniel Noel calls "serendipping." We'll read the journal and write back every once in a while (but if you have entries you'd like us to look at earlier, please say so). In evaluating the journal, we look for a focus on nature and culture on campus, and for connections, comprehensiveness, complexity and care.

As for quantity, aim for a couple of good entries a week. More is not a bad thing, but less is not more, no matter what they say.

<i>Environmental Values</i>	<i>American Values</i>
An appreciation of all life forms, and a commitment to a politics based on ecological complexity.	An appreciation of human life forms, and a commitment to a politics based on sound-bite simplicity.
Human humility in relation to other species.	Human hubris (or at least unconsciousness) in relation to other species.
Concern with human health and the quality of life	Concern with human health and the quantity of things.
Globalism--vs. nationalism or localism.	Globalization—vs. nationalism or local communities.
Decentralization--either demographic or political, or both.	Multinational corporatism, along with <i>m</i> ecentralization, the belief that the earth revolves around the self
Long-term thinking, concern for posterity	Short-term thinking, concern for today and tomorrow. Presentism—the now
Sense of urgency about the prospects for survival on earth.	Satisfaction of urges more important than the prospects for survival on earth.
Call for sustainable societies.	Call for sustaining consumer society.
Opposition to waste in the face of pressing human needs.	Generation of waste in the face of pressing human needs
A love of simplicity, but not a rejection of appropriate technology or modernism [see Orr on constructive postmodernism]	A love of technology and the modern things that make our lives “simpler,” even if they complicate the life of the planet or the natural world.
"An aesthetic appreciation for season, setting, climate, and natural materials."	Anaesthetic appreciation for nature, preferring to smooth out and standardize seasons, settings, climate and natural world.
"A measurement of esteem, including self-esteem and social merit, in terms of such nonmaterial values as skill, artistry, effort, or integrity."	A measurement of esteem, including self-esteem and social merit, in terms of material values such as income, wealth, house size, make of car, and style of clothes.
"An attraction to autonomy and self-management in human endeavors [anarchy strictly defined] and, generally, an inclination to more democratic and participatory political processes and administrative structures."	An attraction to individualism and self-management in human endeavors, and generally, an inclination to less participation on political processes and administrative structures. Democracy of goods instead of democracy of common good.

List of environmental values from Robert Paehlke, *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics*