

REACTING TO READING: ANNOTATIONS AND JOURNALS

When you react to your reading, you start to make a link between the ideas suggested by the page and what happens in your mind—your responses. This link is essential for any kind of intellectual work. Because your reactions pass so quickly, turning your responses into words will help you hold on to them. Both writing notes in the margins of your books and keeping a reading journal will help you remember and develop your thoughts about reading.

The Reader's Active Role

Real intellectual exchange begins when we *react* to what we read. The writer's words touch our minds; soon we will have something to say in reply. The reader becomes a writer.

But if we swallow our reading whole, without thought, we will only be accepting empty phrases. We may parrot those phrases on an examination or at a cocktail party, but those memorized words will never affect our own thinking or lead us to say anything new. They will simply replace our thinking process with mimicry. We will probably soon forget these memorized lines in the same way we soon forget what we “learned” when we crammed for an exam. Unless we fit the words we read into everything else we think and know, we are only pretending to read.

The only way that your reading will affect you and stay with you is for you to react to it. Actively consider whether you agree with the ideas you read and how these ideas relate to questions you find personally important. As you read with greater care, your reactions too will develop. (The techniques of paraphrase and summary discussed in the next two chapters will increase the precision of your reading.) But whatever level you are reading at, you need to ask yourself in many different ways, “What do I think about this idea? How true is it? How important is it to me? Does it challenge anything I already believe? Does it raise questions or answer questions?”

At times the personal importance of particular books moves us with unquestionable force. We know immediately when those books speak to our condition. While he was in prison, Malcolm X began to read history books and started to grasp the process of racial oppression at work. As he writes in his *Autobiography*, these volumes provided what he was looking for: “Ten guards and the warden couldn't have torn me out of those books.” Information directly applicable to our personal situation can excite our minds in ways that may have the strength of a religious conversion.

More frequently, we must make efforts to grasp the book before it will excite us as Malcolm X was excited. The initial impetus to read a particular book may be unformed and tentative; glimmers of thoughts may be forgotten as our eyes move on to the next sentence, to the next paragraph, to the next chapter. A nagging desire to get up for another cup of coffee or anxiety about an upcoming exam may prevent us from reacting fully to the words in front of us. Without conscious effort to record, sort out, and develop full responses to reading, the ideas quickly fade to the back of the mind. We soon remember the book only vaguely—as either interesting or dull.

Not paying attention to your personal reactions may lead you to feel disconnected from the communication going on—as though some other people were arguing about something that you had no interest in. Words parade past the eyes and boredom settles in the mind. You have a case of pseudo-boredom. Genuine boredom occurs when you are reading material you already know only too well; nothing new emerges to occupy the mind. Pseudo-boredom comes when you feel you just cannot be bothered to figure out what all the new information and ideas mean; the mind backs away from a real and demanding occupation. The cure for real boredom is to find a more advanced book on the subject; the only cure for pseudo-boredom is to become fully and personally involved in the book already in front of you. By recording and developing your reactions and thoughts, you can talk back to the book and consider yourself engaged in conversation with the author. Although the numbered pages of the book keep coming past you in a straight line, you can turn the thoughts expressed on them in your own direction. Once you are involved, pseudo-boredom vanishes.

Marginal Annotations

The way to begin sorting your first reactions to your reading is to put them in words—either by talking or by writing. The problem is to find someone you can trust with these tangled, contradictory, half-formed thoughts. As you struggle to find words to express your dim intuitions, you should not worry about whether what you are saying is “right or wrong” or whether it is elegantly expressed. To whom can you speak or write without committing yourself permanently to your unconnected fragments of reactions and your rambling journeys to nowhere? Sometimes a friend will let you talk out your ideas without making you defend every tentative assumption, which you yourself might reject the next moment. A friend with sufficient patience to hear out all the most trivial ramblings that occur during reading is a rare find.

However, you may not always have a friend handy. A more realistic practice is to confide in yourself, writing down your thoughts, reactions, and questions as they occur to you in the margin of your book—next to the passage that triggered the response. Once you overcome your inhibitions about writing in books, marginal comments flow almost naturally from the desire to engage the writer in a dialogue. The conversation starts to come alive. If you own the book, show that it is really yours by leaving your thoughts in it. When you reread the book at a later date, you will know what you liked and what you didn't, what reminded you of a personal experience, and which ideas stimulated your interest and curiosity. Or if you weren't sure just what you thought back then, you can sort out the many directions of your earlier thoughts when you return for a second look.

Annotation to Clarify

With pencil in hand, ready to comment on your reading, you may find you want to make two different kinds of remarks: some to help you understand the meaning of the text more fully and others to express your own reactions, evaluations, and associations. Although annotation works best with no rules—the whole trick is to feel free to jot down whatever comes to mind—it helps to keep the two kinds of comments separated. My own practice is to put comments on the meaning in the narrower margin near the book's spine and to leave all the other margins—the outer side, top, and bottom—for reactions.

You may already use annotations for meaning as a study technique. Underlining key statements, numbering supporting arguments, defining unusual words, and paraphrasing difficult passages all help you approach the surface meaning of a text. But annotations can go more deeply to establish the connections and logic of the entire selection. In the margin you can explicitly state underlying assumptions of the text—that is, ideas only indirectly suggested by the original. Marginal comments can provide an overview of where the argument has come from and where it is going; they can bring out the structure of the original as well as restate the obvious meaning of the words. Where the meaning of words or structure is unclear, a well-placed question mark—even better, a purposeful question—will remind you of what is puzzling.

John Lam, a student in a social problems course, annotated the following passage from the psychologist Gordon Allport's book *The Nature of Prejudice*. In order to understand the passage better, John has underlined and labeled definitions of the key terms *in-groups* and *reference groups* and has circled those terms in the text. In marginal comments, he notes examples of and observations about those concepts and raises questions about how the concepts apply to various situations. By marking up the text, commenting, and questioning, John works through its meaning, gaining a more detailed and clarified understanding of the main ideas presented there.

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Annotation to Evaluate

On the second level of annotation, your thoughts interact with the ideas suggested by the text. Feel free to express the most outrageous opinions in the most informal way. Probably no one but you will see these comments, so allow yourself freedom. Wander from the point, contradict yourself, speculate without substantive support, be irreverent, and express extreme opinions. Any type of phrase, mark, smudge, or sign that conveys your attitude is legitimate. With this freedom—with this pleasurable irresponsibility you will eventually find your own topics, your own things to say. To get you started, here are some typical kinds of comments:

approval and disapproval—*, ???? , NO!, not bad, exactly, yecch, nonsense, right
disagreements—I can't agree because ..., no, the actual facts are ...
exceptions—doesn't hold for the case of ...
counterexamples—isn't case x just the opposite?
supporting examples—this is exactly what happens in case y
extensions—this could even apply to ...
discoveries—this explains why ...
possible implications—would this mean that ...
personal associations—my uncle acts just like that, *or*, in student government ...
reading associations—Z in his book argues the same thing, *or*, this fits in with what A wrote.
distinctions—but then again it's not like Z's argument because ...

It doesn't take long to get into the spirit of annotation. Once you are attuned to it, you can throw out all these suggestions and develop comments most appropriate to the way you think. Robert Bell's sociological discussion of friendship is presented on page 19 for you to annotate. We have all had experiences of friendship that we have likely thought about. In this passage you may find statements that touch your experiences, expectations, and thoughts. You may find much that makes sense to you and much that doesn't. Most important, recognize your reactions and express them in writing.

Here is how a student, Cynthia Perez, annotated part of Bell's selection. In her opening lines you can see that Cynthia is uncertain about Robert Bell's analytical approach to the subject. As she starts to compare her experience with what Bell says, she starts to warm up to his ideas. The certainty of Cynthia's final "exactly!" suggests that the author has touched a very strong memory or thought in her mind. Only if Cynthia later expands on that memory or thought can she examine the full meaning of her "exactly!"

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Scholarly Annotation

The annotations discussed so far in this chapter have been for personal use; making personal annotations is a way to assert oneself during the reading process. In contrast, scholarly annotations (published rather than personal notes) can serve a wider audience by presenting a perspective—interpretive, evaluative, or informational—on a major literary work or on a primary

legal or Biblical text. With such formal annotation, a second writer can discuss the work of the first, with the words of both appearing on the same page. In the Hebraic tradition, for example, marginal commentary is the main method of theological debate, with as many as eight or ten sets of marginal annotations by different writers filling up the large margins around a few short lines of the original sacred text. Each commentator presents a consistent interpretation of the holy text, but each is often at odds with the interpretations of the other commentators printed on the same page.

In such learned marginal commentary, we can see the seed of the footnote—another device for adding additional information, interpretation, and perspective to the original passage. Well-conceived and carefully written footnotes can be quite informative, lending whole new dimensions to the basic text. They are the place for a second voice to speak, often adding more recent findings and interpretations to the original. The following example of scholarly annotation shows how the annotator lends wisdom to the original text, even if that text is only a few lines of a children's rhyme. This passage, from *The Annotated Mother Goose*, illustrates the second opinion of footnotes.

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WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Annotate to clarify the following continuation of Gordon Allport's discussion of in-groups and reference groups in *The Nature of Prejudice*.

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2. Annotate to evaluate the following excerpt from Robert Bell's sociological study of friendship, *Worlds of Friendship*.

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3. Annotate each of the following epigrams to indicate your reactions to it. The first six are by the French moralist Francois Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) and the second six are by the British writer Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).
 - a. We all have enough strength to bear other people's troubles.
 - b. It is more shameful to distrust one's friends than to be deceived by them.
 - c. One gives nothing so freely as advice.
 - d. Hypocrisy is the homage paid by vice to virtue.
 - e. Nothing prevents us from being natural so much as the desire to appear so.
 - f. To establish oneself in the world one has to do all one can to appear established.
 - g. Truth is never pure, and rarely simple.
 - h. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time, they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.
 - i. A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies.
 - j. We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.
 - k. Anybody can be good in the country.
 - l. [A cynic is] a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

4. Annotate either *a* or *b* to clarify and evaluate.
 - a. the passage on poverty in America, page 66
 - b. the passage on the history of the Equal Rights Amendment, pages 234
5. Annotate a brief (one-page) passage from a text from one of your other courses. Pick one of the more difficult readings you have had this term. Read it through once to get a sense of the passage as a whole. Then read it a second time, annotating to clarify. Finally, read it a third time, annotating to evaluate.
6. Choose a passage from a book that you have personally found meaningful. Then annotate the passage both to clarify and to evaluate, keeping one type of comment in the left margin and the other type in the right one.

The Reading Journal

Sometimes your comments may outgrow the limits of the margin. A desire to pursue one thought at length, a need to enlarge on your perception of the reading as a whole, or a need to sort out a number of confusing issues will lead you from an inch of margin to a blank sheet of paper. The reading journal provides the space for more extended ideas—and particularly for ideas not tied to anyone particular passage of the original.

A reading journal is a diary of your thought processes. After each session of reading, you simply start writing about your most dominant or curious impressions, just as in a diary you might review and comment on the day's most noteworthy events. By its nature a journal will ramble, for you may have no idea of what you are going to say when you begin each entry. The act of getting words and ideas on the page will help you discover what it is you want to write about. The journal is only for your own use, so you need not worry about shifting the topic, contradicting yourself, losing sense, or being unconvincing—those weaknesses in writing that teachers are always bringing up. Correctness of language and problems with spelling should not even cross your mind. Just put down your first reactions and explore them until you have worked them out fully.

Making It a Habit

The journal works best when it is a regular habit. If you waited for the spirit to move you before you pulled out the journal, you wouldn't use the notebook very often. Set aside fifteen minutes after every reading assignment (you may wish to limit yourself to one course or subject at the beginning) for a chance to establish the habit. Some days you may not get very far with anyone idea, but on other days your thoughts will gain a momentum of their own. When you look back on what you have written, you may be surprised to see how much you had to say. Keep all the entries together in a notebook or file folder so that you can consult them when you want to. You should also date the entries and identify the book and page numbers to which you are responding.

Because both journals and marginal annotations are messages written to yourself, you will get much more out of them if you read them over within a day—and then again several months later. As a short-term benefit, you will be able to find topics and ideas for assigned essays—as well as the specific supporting evidence. Notice whether you kept returning to one particularly

interesting idea or whether you can spot a pattern emerging in your agreements or disagreements with a piece of reading. If you discussed one particular passage of the original at length, that discussion might be the seed of something more extended, such as a research project. Over a longer period, you will start noticing how the process of your thinking has developed. You will probably be quite surprised by the differences between your first and your most recent entries. Over a long span of time, a reading journal can become an intellectual diary—a record of the development of your ideas.

As with marginal comments, what you write in the journal is up to you; with time you will find the most appropriate ways to express your own interests. No matter what topics or modes of expression you are drawn to, it is important to pursue your line of reasoning to its natural conclusion. Although you may shift away from an uncompleted thought, try to return to it. Take your ideas seriously enough to follow where they lead. In the course of developing your ideas, a viewpoint and an attitude will emerge that are yours alone. Tentative ideas will grow in strength to become ideas that you will want to express to others in your essays.

Getting Started: Freewriting

Until you become comfortable with keeping a journal, you may be at a loss as to how to begin a day's entry. One technique for getting started is to freewrite about those parts of the reading assignment that most impressed you, either positively or negatively, then try to explain why they made that kind of impression. Freewriting, as its name suggests, is an unstructured and informal record of the writer's thought processes. The key to freewriting is letting your thoughts come and writing them down for a set period of time, such as five to ten minutes, without analyzing or editing them. If you get stuck, keep writing, even if you just write *I'm stuck* or *I don't know what else to write*. When readings don't evoke immediate responses and you find yourself hard-pressed to write anything in your journal, freewriting can provide a way in. Simply start writing—write about how boring what you read was or why you didn't like it, or even about an exam or other classwork that you're thinking about. In freewriting, you don't have to worry about wandering too far from the subject. Eventually you will find yourself back on track with an interesting insight or observation.

In the following entry, Cynthia Perez, the student who annotated Bell's discussion of friendship on page 18, describes some trouble with starting a journal entry to put together her thoughts about that passage. Looking back at her annotations, however, helps her focus her thoughts and dig more deeply into her initial reactions. Although her initial reaction to the reading was negative, she moves beyond this to explore why she later responded positively. She also discovers that what she had in mind was somewhat different from what Bell said (and perhaps more subtle as well). When she starts to describe her own friendships, she finds that Bell's description does not quite fit her experience.

I'm not sure how to begin. I keep thinking about all the work I have to do before next week. It's only the fourth week of the semester and already we've got midterms. That doesn't seem right. The semester is 14 weeks long. Shouldn't midterms be in week 7? Oh well, I can't figure that one out. Maybe I can do this. Okay. What do I think about this reading assignment? Well, I don't like the way Bell talks about friendship. The words he uses—all that talk about what people "get" out of friendship, what the "results" of friendship are—seem pretty cold. He makes friendship sound like some kind of experiment or business transaction. I don't usually think about my friends that way and because of this it's hard for me to take Bell seriously. He sounds so intellectual. I wonder if he really has friends, or if he just writes about friendship in general. I guess that's pretty harsh. Maybe I'm just tired of reading. Okay. I'll try again.

Even though I don't like the cold, impersonal way Bell talks about friendship, I think he's right about how friends can explain yourself to you. A friend sees you from the outside—how you're acting, what your situation is. When I have a problem, I'm usually so wrapped up in my own feelings that I don't really get a clear picture of what's going on. But a friend like Anne, someone who hangs out with me and sees things for herself, can explain what's going on in a cool, collected way. She can tell me if I am acting stupid, or if am really doing the right thing. So is this what Bell means? Maybe.

Actually, Anne doesn't really "explain" me to myself or "tell" me anything. It's not that obvious. She just starts describing what she sees, and then I react to it, and when I tell her how I feel I don't get so lost in my feelings because I have to compare my feelings with what she says. When I told Anne I was angry at Lee for not getting her part of the project to me when she promised, Anne said I didn't act angry at all. I was still being friendly to Lee, but whenever I talked about the project I acted anxious and nervous—I kept talking about going to the library (but not going) or refusing to make plans (because I was too busy). What Anne said made me realize that I wasn't just angry with Lee but with myself. She was holding up her end at least as well as I was holding up mine. That helped me see the situation more clearly and soon I got to work with Lee to get the project done.

After you finish a freewriting entry, be sure to take time to read what you wrote. You may find, as Cynthia Perez did, that one idea led to another until you arrived at some new understanding about the reading assigned. When she reread her entry, Cynthia noticed that in her fourth paragraph, she began qualifying what she had said earlier and that she disagreed with Bell more than she had previously thought. This qualification opened a new line of reasoning, so she added a short paragraph to wrap it up:

So, it's not that Anne explains me to myself but that she helps me to see myself more clearly so I can understand what's going on. I guess my comment on what Bell said should not be "Exactly!" but "Sort of."

Notes-and-Response Entries

Sometimes your reactions to readings may be limited by how much (or how little) you know about their subject matter. In these instances, you may need to be sure you comprehend the reading before you write a response. Writing a notes-and-response entry will help you check your comprehension. Such an entry begins with notes that present the main ideas from the passage. Then you start to develop your ideas in response to each of those points.

Because notes-and-response entries are more structured than freewriting, they may help you tackle difficult reading assignments or assignments that you find it hard to get involved with. The following entry, written by John Lam, the student who annotated Allport's discussion of in-groups (page 18), shows how clarifying his understanding provides a strong foundation for responding to a reading assignment. Although notes-and-response entries can be written in sentences and paragraphs (like freewriting entries), this entry has been written as a list of main ideas with corresponding response questions.

Notes and Response to Gordon Allport, "The Formation of In-Groups"

Notes:

1. in-groups

defined—a group of people who mean the same thing when they use the word we; membership can be rejected but not gotten rid of entirely—for example,

a. ethnic identity: Italians

- b. national identity: Americans
- c. community identity: neighborhood gangs or schoolmates

2. reference groups

defined—a group that a person is a member of or wants to be a member of (can be an in-group but doesn't have to be)—for example,

- a. all of the 3 kinds of in-groups described above if the person accepts membership in them (for an Italian-American who strongly identifies with an Italian heritage, Italians are a reference group)
- b. any in-group that the person wants to be a member of (for a recent Italian immigrant, who wants to be a U.S. citizen, Americans are a reference group)

Response:

1. I wonder if Allport's definition of in-groups explains why people tend to "stick with their own kind" and stay away from people who they think are "different"? Does this explain why there are still segregated ethnic communities in large U.S. cities and why prejudice is still a problem? If people in one in-group all define we in the same way, do they define they in the same way as well? If they do, then is the us vs. them mentality that feeds racism and other kinds of prejudice built into the way people view themselves? If so, is there anything we can do about it? Is belonging to an in-group necessarily a bad thing? Can it be a positive part of a person's sense of self without putting other people down?

2. Does Allport's definition of reference groups explain why some people don't "stick with their own kind" and attempt to change group memberships (e.g., why members of ethnic minorities sometimes move away from segregated communities and attempt to "blend in")? Why would a person attempt to get out of an in-group? Could this be because being part of an in-group isn't always a positive thing? Or because some in-groups are "better" than others? What happens if your reference is not—and can never be—one of your in-groups? What would the effects be on a woman who considers the in-group composed of men to be her reference group?

Question-and-Answer Entries

The questions in the response section of the preceding entry suggest two other kinds of journal entries: question entries and question-and-answer entries. Question entries look much like the response section to the sample summary/response entry: you write a series of questions about the meaning, implications, and value of the reading.

Question-and-answer entries go one step further: you choose one question from your list and start writing an answer. If you run out of ideas to include in the answer, you can turn your last sentence into a new question by putting *What*, *How*, or *Why* at the beginning. This last kind of entry can be called a *pursuit entry*, because you pursue your ideas and responses by constantly questioning your responses. In the following pursuit entry, John Lam tries to answer two of the questions raised in the response section of his notes-and-response entry.

Is belonging to an in-group necessarily a bad thing? Can it be a positive part of a person's sense of self without putting other people down?"

I can't believe that being a member of an in-group is always a bad thing. You can be part of an in-group without putting down people who are not part of that group. After all, there are a lot of in-groups that people wouldn't want to be "in."

Why would people not want to be in an in-group? Because these groups are not their "reference groups." For example, I am a member of a fraternity, and I know a lot of people who have no desire to join me in my "in-group." I don't think these people are inferior to me or to members of my in-group. They just have different reference groups than I do. In fact, they may be members of in-groups that I am not part of. For example, I have a friend who is not in a fraternity but is an enthusiastic rugby player. He and his teammates make up an in-group—they enjoy the sense of being a team just as they enjoy going out and

getting muddy and bruised up. If I were to want to join their in-group, and were willing to do what they do, they would gladly welcome me in. My presence would not threaten their sense of identity in the least.

Why would the members of the rugby team not feel threatened by me? Why would they welcome me into their in-group? It's not an exclusive in-group.

But is it really not exclusive? What would happen if my girlfriend wanted to join? Would she be as welcome as I would be? Probably not.

Why should she not be welcome? Because she's female, and female rugby players are rare.

But why are they rare? Is it because they don't want to go out and get muddy and bruised up? Or is it because the in-group of rugby players is part of a larger in-group of males? If this is the case, then it may be true that being a member of this in-group does always involve discrimination. This is true of other in-groups as well. For example, only men can be members of a fraternity (and of course only women can be members of a sorority). Technically, this is discrimination.

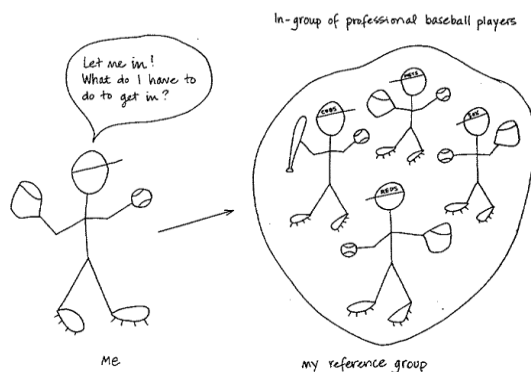
But is this kind of discrimination necessarily a bad thing? Is discrimination always bad? Is it always a sign of prejudice?

Notice how John's understanding of Allport's two central concepts, in-groups and reference groups, works its way into his entry and leads to a much bigger question about a relationship between group identity and prejudice.

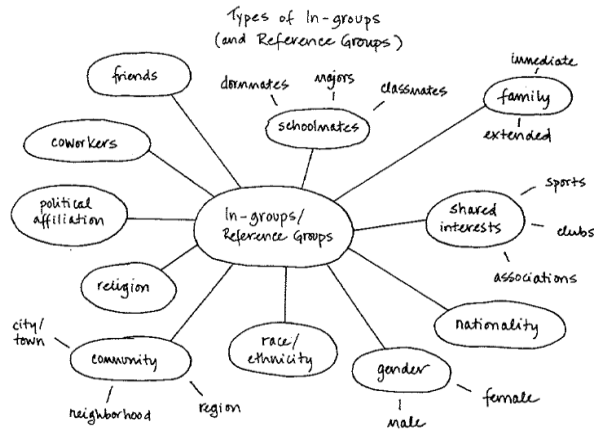
Multimedia Entries

Often we think and respond in ways that are not always easily captured in words. A reading may suggest a visual image to us, or a set of feelings, or a network of associations. Drawing a cartoon or picture may help us capture the feelings or imagery through which we are relating to the ideas in a book. Creating a cluster or diagram or a chart can help us put together a network of associations and relations among ideas. Sometimes, drawing a picture or making a graph just breaks up the monotony of more conventional journal entries and thereby allows us to think more creatively. On the following pages are several alternatives for responding to the Allport passage (page 19).

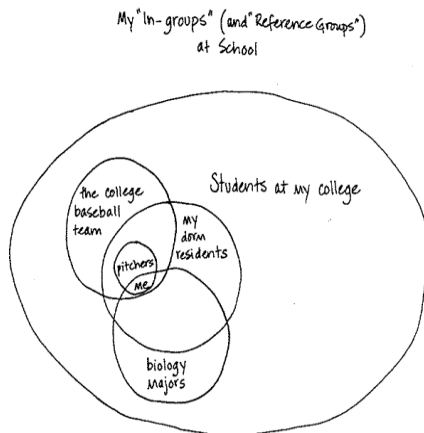
Sample Drawing Entry



Sample Cluster Entry



Sample Diagram Entry



Writing about Writing

Journal entries, in addition to helping you understand and respond to reading assignments, can also provide a space for you to test out new ideas. In exploring your ideas informally in a journal, you may discover an idea you want to expand into an essay. An idea just starting to emerge in rough form may show promise of fuller and more orderly expansion. Therefore, it is worthwhile to reread your journal before writing on a subject you have been exploring in it.

When you have any piece of writing to do, such as an assigned paper for your history class, you can try out your ideas in an informal journal entry, where you can just get your ideas on paper without worrying about the form. From this type of exploration of ideas, it is only one more step to considering the problem of writing any particular paper—the process and the difficulties, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions.

Dianne Pari, a student working on a research paper on gun control, is having difficulty in drawing her materials together. Her problem is not only to organize her material but also to focus on a particular issue about which she can come to some original, forceful conclusions. As her research continues, she begins to discover a new, important aspect to the material. The new

aspect is tempting to explore, but in the limited time remaining it is too difficult to get a handle on. Thus, in this journal entry, Dianne has to consider both sides of the conversation: her own writing and the reading that stands behind the writing.

I am going through the final stages of organizing my paper. The topic gets more involved as I continue & I have difficulty trying to limit it. I stumbled into the constitutional issue pretty late, and it really might change my mind if I knew enough about it. But to really cover it would take a doctoral thesis, so I'm going to limit myself just to the political reasons for the gun control law being passed in '68, and I'm going to drop consideration of the merits of the law. What I'm learning about the political process there reminds me of things that keep happening every day. One group makes a lot of noise about an issue and people submit to their cries. Most will not stand up for their beliefs and will buckle in under pressure, in this case from the National Rifle Association. The NRA's pressure was partly responsible for the weakening of the bill. But that constitutional issue still bothers me because the NRA might have been right on that basis.

The hardest part is coming with the organization of the mass of materials. I feel as if the facts are going to take over the paper and I won't be able to bring in my ideas clearly enough.

Kenneth Wertheim, another student, focuses his thoughts successfully but has a hard time crystallizing his final idea into a thesis, or a statement of his main idea.

The thesis is driving me up the wall. I think writing it is harder than the actual paper is going to be. I know WHAT I want to say, but I don't know HOW. I spent an hour in class today searching for the right words. Even though I have all the research completed, I am not happy. Once I have my thesis, maybe then it will be downhill.

On a number of the papers to be assigned in this book, you will be asked to use your journal as part of the process of discovering ideas and planning your essay. The journal will be especially useful as you are gathering materials for research assignments, for it will allow you to think through the meaning and importance of research materials as you find them.

As you develop the journal habit, you will find your mental life growing in pleasant and surprising ways. Keeping a journal for any course with a lot of reading helps you remember the material and develop thoughts on it. If you prepare an entry on the reading assignment before class, you will have prepared ideas to bring to class discussion. As certain ideas start to intrigue you, you may find that seemingly disparate materials from many different sources seem to relate to a single idea. The journal can become the place where you start to fit together the pieces in the puzzle of your education. It can also be where you discover the abiding intellectual questions you will carry with you for the rest of your life. If you give yourself a chance, you will wind up discussing the issues that you find important to discuss.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Keep a reading journal for the next two weeks, while you work with the next two chapters of this book. Use the journal to explore your responses to the passages you are paraphrasing and summarizing. Try out as many different types of journal entries as you can, using the samples in this chapter as models and experimenting with different formats. For three of these passages, write double entries: one before class discussion and one after.

At the end of the two weeks, read your entire journal and write a final entry commenting on it as a whole: What did you gain from writing the entries? What changes did you notice in

your thinking or writing? Were there any recurrent themes, issues, problems, or questions? Which entry do you think is “representative” and why? What kinds of entries were most useful for you as a reader and as a writer?

2. Choose a reading assignment for another course you are taking and write three different kinds of journal entries for that assignment—for example, a five-minute freewriting entry, a notes-and-response entry, and a drawing or diagram. After you have completed these entries, read through them and write a paragraph comparing the ways your ideas developed in the different formats.
3. Draw a picture, a cluster, or a diagram illustrating your response to one of the points raised in either the Bell or the Allport selection on pages 19 and 18. Then write a paragraph explaining what the diagram means to you.