

# Getting Started With . . . Writing Journal Prompts



Blackboard  
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## Spotlight on Journals: Writing Prompts for Students

The ways you can use journals as assignments are as varied as the number of instructors who assign them. Some prefer to let students write about whatever comes to mind and then provide feedback to further encourage, guide, and engage their students. Others require students to focus on a specific subject or question. Some provide the Journals tool as an optional space and never read student entries. You may choose to have students write weekly about their reactions to the lecture, assignments, or field study.

If you find your students are having difficulty finding topics to reflect on, consider using writing prompts. Let students know if the writing prompt is just a starting point or if it needs to be addressed as written. Students may also need to be reminded that you expect fully developed answers, not just a yes or no. As with all assignments, provide instructions detailing the intended outcome—a reflection on learning, personal thoughts, and observations. When possible, provide an example of a journal entry that fulfills the assignment completely.

You can ask students questions to help their creative juices flow or consider a topic they might otherwise not have chosen to use. In the following list, questions and topics that you can use for many subjects is provided to help you brainstorm more for your discipline.

- **Reading** – Do you read because you have to or are you an avid reader who constantly has a book? Do you fall somewhere in the middle?
- **Research** – Love it? Hate it? Necessary evil? How can your instructor help? Do you ask for help?
- **Challenges** – What challenges do you expect to encounter this semester? Do you have a plan to handle them or avoid them? For example, are you a procrastinator? Or, do you take on more than you can possibly finish?
- **Interview** – Interview someone in the field of study and write a few reaction paragraphs. What connection can you make to yourself?
- **Brainstorm** – Before a writing assignment is assigned, ask students to brainstorm some possible topics and list a few ideas for each.
- **Reaction** – Supply an article pertaining to the unit of study and ask for comments.
- **Defend** – Provide an argument prevalent in the field of study and ask students to defend a side. This also works as an excellent graded blog topic as students can continue to develop and support their ideas, adding rich media and sources throughout the term.
- **Explain** – Provide a quote from a prominent person in the field of study and have students explain what it means to them.
- **Review** – Review the entries you have written so far. Can you find key themes and recognize what longer-term action you might need to take, such as improving a particular study skill?
- **Document** – What changes have taken place in your motivation or attitude toward your learning?
- **Connect** – How are different areas of your study connected?
- **Discuss** – Discuss the most important concept you learned in this unit. Discuss the biggest waste of your time in this unit. Discuss which method of instruction worked best in this unit. Discuss how your classmates influenced you or helped you make some valid connections in this unit.