

Washington Service Corps

XIV. Sample 1

SAMPLE

*Washington Service Corps
Reflection Journal*



"Getting Things Done"

SAMPLE

Introduction

A reflection journal is an integral part of service learning. It allows participants to reflect on the meaning of their participation as a team member. It also permits them to reflect on the principles of the Washington Service Corps (WSC) and of service learning. It allows individuals to think, analyze, question and discuss their experiences, thoughts, actions and ideas. During the reflection process, team members and their supervisors may choose one or all three journal writing formats: individual, buddy or dialogue journal.

An Individual Journal

An individual journal is used when participants and supervisors do not necessarily wish to share their reflections with anyone else. At the beginning of one's service experience, participants may not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with others on their team; thus, this type of journal process may encourage more reflection because privacy is given to each individual and his/her thoughts. During individual journal writing, it is important that the supervisor also expresses his/her thoughts in a journal so that team members will see the process as meaningful. Journals should be kept in a safe place where no one has access to them, except for the supervisor, who should only acquire them when it is time to write in them. The supervisor should assure team members that the journals are confidential and will be kept in a private, restricted location. In time, team members may wish to share something from their journals during a team meeting.

A Buddy Journal

A buddy journal involves a different process. A journal is shared between partners. One partner writes his/her thoughts, ideas, or experiences in the

buddy journal, and then allows his/her partner to respond to what has been written. Then the partner writes his/her own reflections. With this process, the supervisor may want to allow team members to select their own partners so as to encourage an enthusiastic dialogue between participants. Even the supervisor should have a partner so that s/he may model the buddy journal process. The supervisor may want to initiate this process after the individual journal process has been implemented and experienced for a while. The supervisor and participants may choose to have one partner for two to three weeks, and then choose another partner. The team may want to have each team member as a partner during their period of service. Later, partners may wish to share their journal writings with the team during meetings.

A Dialogue Journal

The last process is the dialogue journal. This process involves a dialogue of journal writing between the supervisor and each individual team member. This process may or may not be more applicable after the individual process and before the buddy journal. It depends on each team's attitude and level of ease with other team members and the supervisor. It does involve a great deal of work for the supervisor because s/he has to write and respond to each team member. As one can predict, the buddy and dialogue journals are less confidential than the individual journals in that they are not conducted individually. However, the exciting part about this process and the buddy journal is that they are both similar to writing letter to friends or family. In a buddy and dialogue journal, one has an audience (his or her partner) and a purpose (to read and respond to his or her partner).

Journals in General

With all three journal processes, team members may choose to share or not to share. It is important for team members and supervisors not to critique writing in the journal. It is also pertinent to ask open-ended questions of their partners if doing buddy or dialogue journals. Team members may choose to express themselves in various ways such as poetry, prose, or whatever writing form they choose. Supervisors and team members may choose their own journal writing topics or use the of questions provided in this journal.

Time to Reflect

Reflection journals are an important aspect of service and learning, and developing and operating effective programs. Thus, journal writing should be done on a regular basis. Teams may decide to write in the journals every time they meet, once a week, everyday, or some combination of these suggestions. Journal writing should be done at least once per week during team meetings. Teams should also try writing as a group in a comfortable area away from the work site or other pressures of life.

Team members may choose to have two journals: one for their own private reflection and one for his/her buddy or dialogue journals. This process should be encouraged with enthusiasm, seriousness and purpose. The team should decide which journal process it will use and how often journal writing will occur.

**Do you have the
Courage to Care
and the
Strength to Serve?**

Experience is the best teacher.
Or is it?

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*Today I got to the nursing home at 2:00.
Talked to some ladies. Passed out
popcorn at the movie. Went home at 4:00.
- From a student's journal*

The student quoted above was surrounded by human drama. On every side were loneliness, love, struggle, joy, death, dignity, injustice and concern. There were people with wisdom she could draw upon, and with pains she could ease. There were more than a dozen health-related careers to observe. She missed it all.

The same barren sentences were entered in her journal, twice weekly, for six weeks. She was in a youth service program where she had chosen her own assignment. She was needed there. She was engaged in tasks that mattered to others. But she'd seen, felt and experienced virtually nothing.

It's not supposed to be that way. People are supposed to learn from experience. In fact, a central part of the case for youth service rests on claims for the possibility, even necessity, of learning from experience.

To say that experience is a good teacher does not imply that it's easily or automatically so. If it were, we'd all be a lot wiser than we are. It's true that we can learn from experience. We may also learn nothing. The key, as Aldous Huxley explained, is that "experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happened to him."

Writing Suggestions

The following questions are possible journal writing topics about your service assignment.

- What do you do on a typical day at your project?
- How has this changed since you first began (different activities, more or less responsibility, etc.)?
- Tell about the best thing that happened this week; something someone said or did, something you said or did, a feeling, an insight, a goal accomplished.
- What's the most difficult part of your project?
- What thing (or things) did you dislike most this week? Why?
- If you were in charge of the project, what would you do to improve it?
- If you were the supervisor, would you have team members do anything different from what you are now doing? Would you treat them differently?

Tell about a person there who you find interesting or challenging to be with. Explain why.

What do you feel is your main contribution to the project?

If a time warp placed you back at the first day of the project, what would you do differently the second time around?

How do people see you there? As a staff member? A friend? What do you feel/ like when you're there?

What did someone say to you that surprised you? Why?

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What compliments have been given and what did they mean to you? How did you react?

What criticisms have been given and what did they mean to you? How did you react?

Did you take (or avoid taking) some risk this week? Were there things you wanted to say or do that you didn't say or do?

What happened that made you feel you would (or would not) like to do this as a career?

What type of person does it take to be successful at the type of service you provide?

What did you do this week that made you proud? Why?

What feeling or idea about yourself seemed especially strong today?

What insights have you gained into people (what makes them happy or sad, successful or failures, pleasant or unpleasant, healthy or sick, etc.)?

How similar is your impression of yourself to the impression others seem to have of you?

Tell about something you learned as a result of a disappointment or even a failure.

Think back on a moment when you felt especially happy or satisfied. What does that tell you about yourself?