



Subject: **Keeping A Learning Journal**

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Instructional Support  
Technical Note

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## What is a Learning Journal?<sup>1</sup>

For this particular course you will be required to keep a learning journal. In the guiding profession it is common for guides to keep a daily logbook of activities, weather, route notes, emergency reminders and personal reflections.

The learning journal for this course can include those observations and much more. In addition to being a record of technical items that you may wish to remember, it is also intended to be a vehicle for you to focus on your thoughts relative to your learning experience before, during and even after this course.

It can resemble a long letter to yourself or a personal scrapbook of your learning. It can include pictures, notes, drawings with captions and just about anything else that may help you to recall your thoughts and feelings in regard to each learning opportunity.

Your journals will not be graded, but rather the instructors will try to take one or two opportunities to provide feedback on your comments and thoughts. There should be no concerns about spelling, grammar or punctuation and your artistic efforts will not be judged! You can write essays or use point form notes or drawings as you desire.

Your learning journal can be a binder, spiral bound notebook (8 1/2" X 11" pages), smaller bound notebook or any other convenient form of writing book. I would recommend a smaller bound book that can be taken with you in the

field. Guides typically use waterproof "surveyor's" type field books for field logs, but that may be a bit expensive for this application.

A good portable compromise is an inexpensive 6" X 8" (15cm X 20cm) size bound notebook containing 100 or more blank pages as commonly found in stationery stores. If it is not waterproof paper, keep it in a Ziplock® bag.

## What Do I Put In My Journal?

### *Before the Course*

You will be required to read a number of pre-course articles and handouts. For each and every handout including the general camp information, you should try to produce at least 1/2 page of writing or drawing in an 8 1/2 X 11 format (or 1 page of writing or drawing in a 6" X 8" format) per article or handout.

You may want to include some or all of the following types of comments or questions:

- What was the article about?
- How does it apply to me?
- What else would I like to know about this subject?
- What would make this handout better?
- Did I learn anything new?
- Did this reinforce my previous beliefs or challenge them?
- Does this affect my future learning?

### *During the Course*

Your journal should be a combination of notes on technical information and learning along with personal accounts of your feelings about revelations, insights and anything else that impacted your learning in a positive or even negative way.

<sup>1</sup>This article was inspired by handouts distributed during the CAA ADAPT Level 2 Module 1 Beta Course in Golden BC in January 2002. The reference handouts were unattributed but likely originated with Jan Johnson an Adult Education Consultant from British Columbia.

If things impacted you negatively, try to present yourself with ways to resolve the negativity and focus on how to enhance your learning experience for the next session or the next day.

For each session or lesson during each day, you should try to produce at least 1/2 page of writing or drawing in an 8 1/2 X 11 format (or 1 page of writing or drawing in a 6" X 8" format). You should also try to write a brief synopsis at the end of each day summarizing your feelings about your learning

You may want to include some or all of the following types of comments or questions:

- What was this session or lesson about? (brief comments)
- How does it apply to me?
- What else would I like to know about this subject?
- What was the reaction of myself and others to this session?
- What would make this session better?
- Did I learn anything new?
- Did this reinforce my previous beliefs or challenge them?
- Is there anything I would do differently after what I have learned in this session / today?
- Does this affect my future learning?
- What did I think about today?

### **After the Course**

Your journal is your own property and you are encouraged to continue to add your insights even after you have arrived at home.

### **Feedback**

You will be asked to turn your journals in to the instructors at the beginning of the course and then one or perhaps two more times during the week. Your efforts will not be graded, but rather the instructors will scan your journals to try to

see if there are any areas in which very short constructive comments can be made or perhaps some teaching points should be clarified the following day to the group as a whole.

Your journals will be confidential and will not be viewed by other students unless you authorize it. They may be discussed among the instructional staff but will not be otherwise circulated.

### **What Is A Satisfactory Journal?**

Do not simply write notes on the technical hard skill aspects of what you learn and don't just paraphrase the articles you read. That is OK for part of your notes about hard skill sessions but not as the final product for each day. Supplement your cognitive and psychomotor learning with discussions of your feelings, insights, and personal thoughts about where the various lessons take you, particularly in your notes at the end of each day.

Be reflective and see if you can come up with resolutions for issues that affect you. Feel free to say what is good and less good about each article or session. If something doesn't sit well with you, try to ask yourself why, and more importantly try to resolve outstanding issues or use the instructors and other participants to help you come to terms with areas that concern you.

### **What Is The Point?**

The intent of reflective learning journals in part is to try to encourage the adult learner to think more deeply and analytically about their learning. Learning journals are not just about the questions "HOW and WHAT?" but also about the question "WHY?" They can help you explore a subject more deeply to gather a more full insight.

Good Luck and Good Learning!

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This article was written by Cyril Shokoples. Cyril is an internationally certified Mountain Guide and has been a member of the Alpine Club and Edmonton Section since 1975. He became a Senior member in 1979, received the Silver Rope Award in 1988 and became a 25 year heritage member in 2000. He is the current President of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides He resides in Edmonton and is the proprietor of the firm Rescue Dynamics, which is involved in climbing, rescue and safety instruction, as well as mountain guiding. Further information on courses as well as additional copies of this and other technical notes in this series can be obtained directly from Rescue Dynamics. On the Internet, visit the Rescue Dynamics World Wide Web Site at - <http://www.rescuedynamics.ca/>