Keeping a Reflective Diary

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**Details**

According to some educational theorists ‘Learning occurs not in the doing but in the reflection and conceptualisation that takes place during and after the event’. The writing of a diary constitutes the main form in which such reflection takes place. In order to gain the necessary credit for the CLP class, from the second semester of the first year of the CLLB for graduate entrants or the first semester of the second year for school leavers, students must keep a diary during each semester in which they reflect on any relevant clinic experience they have during this period or in previous fortnights which they have yet to reflect on in the diary. In all semesters other than semester 1 of your final year when you are exclusively required to write diaries for the Ethics and Justice, this should be done fortnightly. The rest of this section relates to the standard diary requirements – for the specific requirements for the writing and submission of diaries for the Ethics and Justice class, see the relevant handbook.

If due to the absence of any relevant experience, you are in danger of not having enough separate diary entries to submit in any semester, you can shorten the period in which you reflect from a fortnight to a week or provide more than one diary entry on the same experience. Note that you can discuss experiences which arise in the first fifteen weeks in a semester, not simply the twelve teaching weeks.

The diary must be filled in on pre-formatted pages available on the CLLB MyPlace site. Failure to do so will result in the diary not being read. Please use those set aside for general CLLB diaries rather than those for Ethics and Justice. Entries must be no longer than 500 words for each week. In order to obtain feedback on their diaries, you must post your diary entries on the CLLB Myplace site in weeks 6 for all entries relating to the first six weeks of the semester and 12 for all entries relating to the second six weeks of the semester (please date each entry and collate all into one document). You must then also respond to these comments (maximum length 200 words). This will allow for greater development of ideas and almost invariably better performance. You must also include as part of the diaries a maximum 500 word introduction to the diaries as whole, calling attention to any noteworthy aspects of the reflection process and the development of your learning, such as how your skills have developed, values have changed, etc. For examples of diary entries by previous students, see the CLLB MyPlace site under “On-going Requirements”. Here you will also find criteria which will guide you in writing your diary.

Final submission of ALL Six diary entries for each semester (apart from that in which you take Ethics and Justice – ie semester 1, final year) must be done online on the CLP Myplace site by 11.55 pm on the last day of the relevant semester, except for the last semester of your final year when you must submit all diaries as part of your Clinical Practice portfolio. The usual Law School rules apply to late submissions (see the [Undergraduate Law](https://nemo.strath.ac.uk/owa/redir.aspx?C=-sm0NuudRU6yI9NAF9SP1n-i_W4codEIYcJmGWTDwS-u-zIHmL_SEhSljEmFGdpEyc35vuDSIUI.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fclasses.myplace.strath.ac.uk%2fcourse%2fview.php%3fid%3d19220) site on Myplace) but there are specific rules for exceeding the word count which are set out in the CLP handbook.

Diaries will be marked semester by semester and marks returned within a month of submission with general comments for improvement.

**Guidance on Writing a Diary**

*Introduction*

Writing a Diary is an exercise in extended reflection on experience. It involves at least three aspects of Kolb’s learning cycle:

* having a *concrete experience*,
* *reflection* on that experience
* the development of a new, or adjustment of an old, theory (what he calls *abstract conceptualisation)*

Moreover, if similar experiences are repeated within relevant period of reflection it might also involve a fourth – *active experimentation.* This wouldinvolve the application of a new theory of action, thought, feelings or values to a new experience relevant to the first one. Accordingly, a diary entry should involve at least three elements (with active experimentation possibly coming up in a late entry, allowing for further reflection, abstract conceptualisation, etc).

*What?*

Here you want a clear, focused and engaging description of experience or at most two experiences. Relevant experiences on which you can reflect will include, most obviously, any case work, but also Clinic training, attendance at an IAC, and attendance at surgeries. As long as it somehow illuminates one of your various clinic activities, you may even reflect on what you have learnt in the standard LLB from, for example, classes in Legal Process on access to justice, classes in Legal Theory on substantive justice or ethics, and any class in which you learn law relevant and helpful to the conducting of one of your cases. If you are unsure whether a particular experience is worthy of reflection for the purpose of writing a diary entry, you should contact the CLLB Director.

Choose an experience/experiences which most engage you and/or are which lend themselves to deep reflection and theory development: something that was, for example, shocking, pleasing, embarrassing, disappointing, unexpected, etc and/or which made you change your views, values, ways of doing things etc; something that lead to self-appraisal, some form of change and/or personal growth (in emotions, understanding, values, experience, etc). You are strongly advised to discuss one or two issues in great detail rather than skate over a few in superficial detail.

You are also advised to try to engage in as many Clinic activities as possible, as this not only makes your entries more interesting but provides more opportunities for reflection and hence for picking the most interesting, useful, etc experience upon which to reflect.

*So what?*

This involves deep reflection on what the experience(s) meant in terms of ideas, emotions, skills and capacities, and/or values. Ask yourself what did the experience mean to you, what did you learn, how did you feel before, during and after the experience, what went well or less well than you expected or could be expected. In short, ask yourself how has the experience changed me, my ideas, my values, my future plans, etc, what does this tell you more generally about law, justice, ethics, legal practice, etc? What did you think/feel before and how do you think feel now; how does it compare with what you already know from previous experiences, what others have told and what you learnt through study, how did such learning help you understand (or not understand) your experience? Here you can reflect on the implications for further study, for your clinic experience, future career, etc. In other words, what does the experience(s) tell you about legal education, legal practice, justice, ethics, society, other people, etc.

*Now what?*

What does your reflection means for the future:

* what will you do, think or feel differently?
* how can you about making further improvements or changes:
* what literature can you read, course go on, what person can you speak to – or indeed what do these already consulted sources tell about what you need to do?

*General*

Ensure that the dairy entries are well-written, well-punctuated, grammatical, clearly structured, free of typos, etc. You should strive for the same levels of written communication as is required in essays, clinic letters, pleadings, etc,

Ensure that diaries are submitted for comments, that you respond to comments and that invitations to read further or otherwise gain information are taken up.

Ensure consistency in quality and quantity of reflection.

*Favourable Features of Diaries*

Discussion of experiences that lends itself to deep reflection on relevant topics

Honest, open and *non-defensive self-appraisal*

Curiosity

Awareness of and thinking through perspectives other than one’s own

*Signs of* Personal growth – change in thoughts, feelings and values as well as knowledge

Symbiosis between experience, theory and learning

Use of what taught and what read in reflection

Strong sense of how experiences lead to new outlook on law, society, other people, being a lawyer, and being a human being

*Unfavourable features*

Badly written, eg unclear, ungrammatical, stream of consciousness writing, repetitive and waffly

Bland and descriptive

Over or well-under the word limit

No submission for comments

No response or very thin response to comments

*Marking Criteria*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Unsatisfactory | Satisfactory | Competent | Good | Excellent |
| Length | Very brief, no response to comments | Mostly uses full word length in initial entries and provides some responses | Mostly uses full word length in initial entries and responses | Use full length, full response to all comments | Use full length, full response to all comments |
| Style | Very Bland, highly descriptive, opaque | Mostly bland description, not very clear | Clear but mixture of bland description and more engaging writing | Clear and costly engaging | Crystal clear and highly engaging |
| Presentation | Ungrammatical, littered with spelling mistakes, typos | A substantial number of typos, and grammatical, spelling errors | A few typos, and grammatical, spelling errors | No grammatical, spelling errors, and only a few typos | Free of all errors |
| Structure | Stream of consciousness, repetitive | Some structure but mostly stream of consciousness and some repetition | Largely well-structured , with some lapses | Well-structured , albeit occasionally a bit “flabby” | Clear narrative structure, concise and succinct |
| Analysis | Description only, no attempt to learn from experience | More description than analysis | Mixture of description & analysis; | Good balance between analysis & description; some use of learning from other sources (eg reading, other classes) | Deep analysis and very insightful; excellent use of learning from other sources |
| Reflection on personal development, | Description only, | Mostly descriptive one or two insights into personal development, but largely rigid and defensive attitude to change and no self-disclosure | Fair amount of reflection on personal development, with a few good insights and some openness to self-disclosure and change | Some good insights into personal development and openness to change | Extremely insightful about personal development, open to change |
| Reflection on law, justice, ethics, professionalism and future career | Description only, no reflection | Mostly descriptive but one or two insights into law, justice etc | Fair amount of reflection on law, justice etc | Some good insights into law, justice etc | Extremely insightful about law, justice etc |

Note:

* the above categories of unsatisfactory, etc roughly correspond to a fail, 3rd, 2.2, 2.1 and a first.
* the various elements are not equally weighted. For instance, elements relating to substance (analysis and reflection) are far more important than those relating to presentation. Thus really insightful entries with a few typos and even grammatical and spelling errors may still gain a first class mark; on the other hand, even well structured, perfectly written and lengthy entries which are bland and purely descriptive will struggle to fall into more than the “satisfactory” category, unless there is at least some reflection.

**Further Reading**

Gibbs, *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning* (1998) (electronic access)

Maughan and Webb, *Lawyering Skills and the Legal Process* (2005), ch. 2 esp, pp. 44-46

Casey, “Reflective Practice in Legal Education: The Stages of Reflection” (2013-14) 20 Clinical Law Review 317.