

Learning Logs

Goal

Students will reflect and write about academic issues to synthesize their learning.

Rationale

The learning log is a reflection strategy to help students think critically about what they are learning in their classes. Learning logs provide students with an opportunity to synthesize their knowledge and to ask unanswered questions. The learning log also provides teachers with insight into their students' perceptions and struggles about the content in the class.

Teacher Reference

- Characteristics of Learning Logs

Student Handouts

- Learning Log Variations
- Learning Log

Instructional Steps

1. Establish a format students will use for their learning logs. See Student Handout: Learning Log for a common format.
2. Define learning logs for students: open-ended, non-threatening writing tasks that help students grapple with ideas in a tentative, exploratory manner. Review the characteristics of a learning log with students. See Teacher Reference: Characteristics of Learning Logs. Since some students are intimidated by writing assignments, they need to understand learning logs are informal pieces of writing.
3. Explain how learning logs will be graded. This is an important step to address with students. Students need to feel free to record their thoughts in a quick, fluent manner; so typically, learning logs receive points for participation or completion.
4. Assign learning logs daily or at regular, frequent intervals.
5. Duplicate or read aloud anonymous learning logs on the same topic but expressed in different ways. Students can see the varieties of ways others are responding to the questions and prompts and understand there are many ways to be "right." Students may not write much at first but fluency will increase as they see and hear many examples.
6. Collect learning logs on a regular basis. Initially, respond to the logs to encourage students and ask genuine questions about what they have to say. This will encourage students to write more and with more honesty.

Differentiation

Increased Scaffolding

- Begin by using 3 x 5 cards for students to use for learning logs. The smaller space to write is less threatening to struggling writers. The cards can be used as exit cards for students. Before students transition to full-page logs, have them secure them into an interactive notebook, if one is used.
- Use short, accessible topics and gradually move to prompts requiring higher-level thinking. This allows students to learn the process of completing a learning log before moving to the more critical levels of synthesis and evaluation.
- Post several learning log prompts on large sheets of chart paper and post in various places in the classroom. Have students rotate in small groups and record their thoughts on the chart paper.

Increased Rigor

- Ask students to expand several learning log entries into longer, more thorough pieces at various points in the semester.
- Provide students with a copy of the Student Handout: Learning Log Variations once they have become proficient with the format. These are suggestions for topics students can select on their own based on what connections they make to the content and learning in class.

Using Technology

- Have students complete learning logs using Twitter with a specific hashtag developed by the teacher for the class.
- Establish blogs for students to use to record their learning logs.

Other AVID Resources

- *Strategies for Success Teacher Guide*

Characteristics of Learning Logs

Characteristic	Explanation
Regular and Frequent	Allow 3–7 minutes at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a lesson. Learning logs are effective at the beginning of the class as students are settling in or as exit slips to wrap up the learning during the class.
Short	Short, timed writing sessions work best. It is better to leave a few students wanting to express more than to have most of the class struggling with nothing more to say. Build confidence by beginning with short increments of time that can be increased as students become more proficient and comfortable with the reflective process.
Minimally Structured	Encourage students to write what they really think, not what they think the teacher wants them to say.
Academic	Students should focus on an academic challenge or issue.
Uncorrected	To encourage honest responses and reduce apprehension, do not “correct” the writing in a learning log. Instead write comments and genuine questions in a conversational manner.
Credited	Students receive credit for each completed learning log. Set the standards at the start: a certain amount of writing and thought is expected as a minimum. The general expectations, the class environment, and the reinforcement of the importance of the time spent on learning logs should help reduce the tendency for some students to waste the time.
Shared and Responded	To learn the most from their writing, students need both an audience and appropriate models. Sharing learning logs provide both, allowing students to see and discuss a variety of responses as well as reinforcing the lesson’s concepts. Responses to entries may involve oral sharing in pairs, small groups, or a large group, as well as direct comments from the teacher. It is important that teachers inform students prior to writing whether the learning logs will be shared and how that sharing will occur. Spending time in class on learning logs emphasizes the importance of writing, validates the students’ reaction to the lessons, and provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their own learning and thinking.
Managing the Paper Load	Learning logs take time: time to think, time to write, and time to share. Another concern for teachers is the time it takes to read and respond to the writing. Do not read everything students write. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to star entries for the teacher to read. • Skim entries until there is something to respond to, and then comment or question briefly. • Have students share logs in pairs or small groups and then lead the class in a discussion of the ideas expressed. The time spent sharing and responding becomes even more valuable than a written response because the dialogue helps to clarify ideas. • Have students keep their learning logs in the classroom for easy review. This allows for learning logs to be used as a measure of student progress and growth.

Adapted from *Strategies for Success*

Learning Log Variations

A learning log is related to the subject materials in class. In a learning log, you are asked either to talk about what you have been learning in class or reflect on it in some way, or to relate something out of class to what you have been learning in class. By making personal connections with the subject matter, meaningful learning will occur. Learning logs can be used in conjunction with note-taking.

Basic Learning Logs Questions

- What did you do in class today?
- What did you learn?
- What did you find interesting?
- What questions do you have about what you learned?

Analyzing a New Idea

- What were the main ideas?
- What did you understand best?
- What questions do you still have about this information?
- How will you find more information?
- How does this idea relate to what you have already learned in class?

Quickwrites

Write non-stop for 2–5 minutes on a specific topic that you are studying. The purpose of focused writing is for you to find out what you know about a topic, to explore new ideas, and to find out what you need to learn about a topic.

Writing About the News

Part of what makes one literate is being aware of what is happening in the world. Choose an event that is unfolding in the media and is related to what is being studied in class.

- 1) Describe the event in detail.
- 2) What classroom topic does the event relate to and why?
- 3) What are your personal feelings about the event?
- 4) Why does this event interest you?
- 5) What do you predict will be the outcome of this event? Why?

Life Application

Apply the concepts you learned in class today to your life. How do they affect your everyday being? What would happen if they suddenly changed or ceased to exist?

Creative Solutions

You can be creative. Take a real-world problem that relates to what is being studied in class (e.g., air pollution, global warming, trash) and come up with creative solutions for this problem. Allow your solutions to be outlandish and unrealistic. Real solutions have often arisen from activities similar to this one.

Adapted from *Strategies for Success Middle Level*

Learning Log

Directions: Fill out this learning log based on what you learned in class today.

What I did	How I worked and How I learned	What I learned