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Goals of a Journal Program

One excellent way of helping students learn to communicate effectively is through a directed journal writing program. Such a program sharpens students' language skills, widens their repertoire, builds their confidence, and helps them discover their relationships to the world around them. This makes the writing process a more personalised and enjoyable experience that encourages students to write more.

Effective journal programs are carefully constructed to accomplish four interrelated goals:

Establish and maintain relevance – Writing exercises should always be grounded in the writers' experiences. Journal writing topics should flow logically and naturally from the students' other work. Nothing is worse than a journal that lacks coherence; nothing kills motivation and interest faster than writing assignments lacking personal significance. If the writer is not interested in his or her writing, no audience will be.

Reinforce content area knowledge – When journal assignments stem directly from students' general studies, they provide special opportunities for students to enhance that learning. Writing about the topics they are studying helps students internalise information, examine interrelationships, and synthesise conclusions. This leads to greater understanding and retention of the content covered. At the same time, using learning topics as the focus of writing assignments reinforces the writing process by providing pre-writing activities and background experiences on which the students can draw.



Motivate interest and encourage creativity – Effective journal assignments stimulate students to think in new and intriguing ways about the content under consideration. At the same time, these tasks allow students to use their creativity as well as their knowledge. This gives them a sense of control and a vested interest in the writing which, in turn, encourages students to write regularly.

Foster language skills development – By focusing on particular skills, by appropriately sequencing those skills, and by clearly establishing expectations, directed journal assignments move students toward improved writing skills and increased sophistication without frustrating them. The students know precisely what destination they should reach and can concentrate on effective strategies to get there.

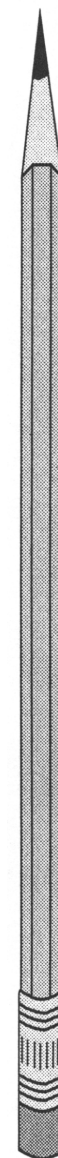
The briefest look at these goals reveals the dynamic tension inherent in any journal writing program. The program must be structured for content and skill development, but it must remain flexible enough to meet the needs and interests of diverse learners. The same problem exists for a book of this sort. It must present concrete examples and ideas, but it cannot predict precisely what topics will best suit your students and your teaching situation.

So the real task is up to you, the teacher. You must view the ideas presented here as examples and adapt them to your students. The topics and writing forms presented can be adapted to an infinite number of subjects, as long as the four essential criteria outlined here are maintained.



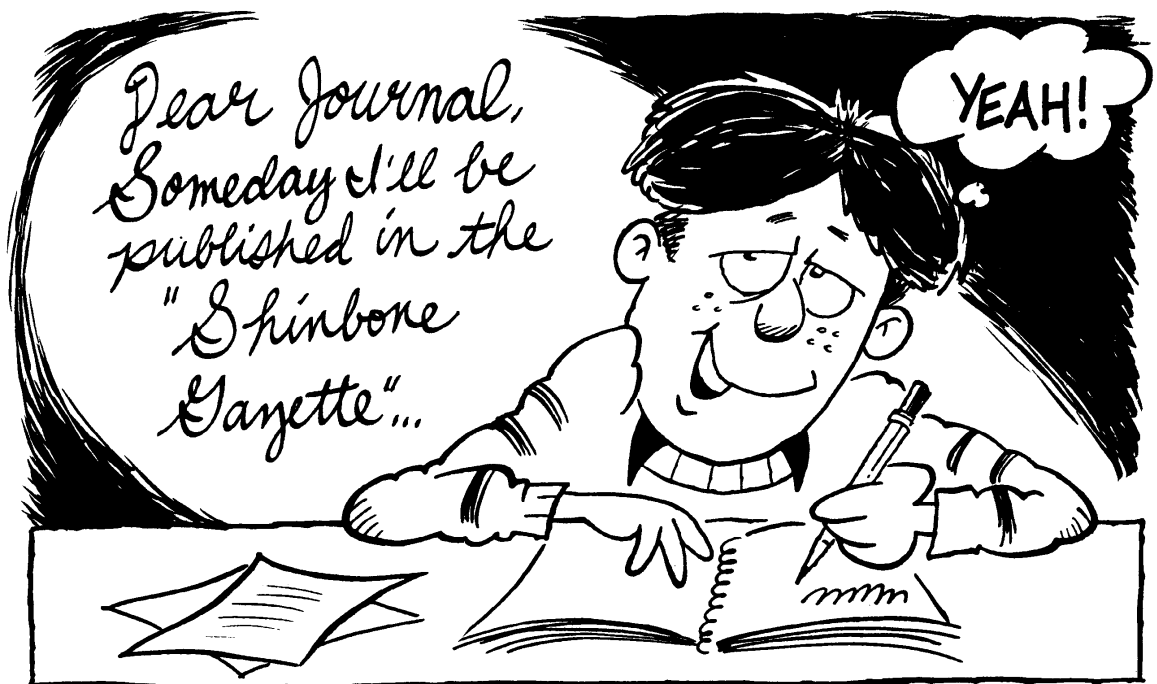
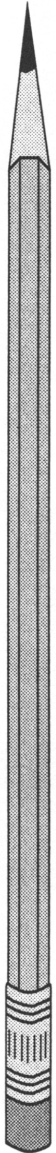
Tips on Conducting a Journal Writing Program

- **Educate students and parents about the goals of the journal program.**
 - a. Explain the program to students, distribute the forms, and explain each form.
 - b. Send a letter to parents explaining the program and inviting their support.
- **Provide a regularly-scheduled time for writing.** The frequency and duration of writing sessions will vary depending on scheduling factors and skill levels. Some classes may be able to write daily, while others can schedule only a once-a-week session. Younger, less experienced students may be able to sustain writing for only five or ten minutes, while older or more experienced writers can handle longer sessions. What is most important is that you set a time and maintain it, so that writing becomes a ritual.
- **Provide assignments which are appropriate to students' skill levels.** Identify appropriate themes and topics for your class, then establish a sequence of journal activities appropriate to your students' skill levels. (See the sample sequence and suggested writing activities on pages 10 and 11.) If you need to determine the basic skill levels of your students, give a preliminary writing assignment to assess the students' skill levels on the basis of their responses to the assignment.
- **For each writing assignment, focus on a limited number of specific skill areas.** As students become more familiar with the writing process, you can involve them in selecting the skill areas to be focused on. Practice in setting goals and expectations for their own work helps students become independent writers. Students' work will be more focused and productive if you limit the number of skill areas rather than asking them to consider many different skill concepts at one time.
- **Require students to keep all of their journal work in a special folder or binder.** Using a binder helps students develop organisational skills and monitor their progress. Materials in each binder should include the student's goal statement, required topics record sheet, and journal-entry log. (See Forms and Worksheets on page 9.)





- **Provide meaningful feedback on all work that you collect.** Your comments on your students' journal writings show whether you care about their work. Point out improvements as well as errors, and make concrete suggestions for changes.
- **Explain the evaluation criteria and process at the outset of the program.** How many journal entries will each student be required to submit to you? Will students have a voice in determining which entries are submitted? How will their work be evaluated? Will students be involved in peer reviews? Will there be opportunities for self-assessment? Will students be allowed to revise and improve their work?
- **Provide opportunities for students to share their work with a wider audience.** Writing requires an audience, and the wider the audience, the greater the incentive to write well. The possibility of publishing for audiences beyond the classroom – in a monthly newsletter, an anthology of the year's best, and/or magazines and newspapers – provides added motivation for students to write. Being published lends credibility and value to students' efforts.
- **Remember that your attitude establishes a tone that students quickly discern and emulate.** Be creative and enthusiastic and have fun!





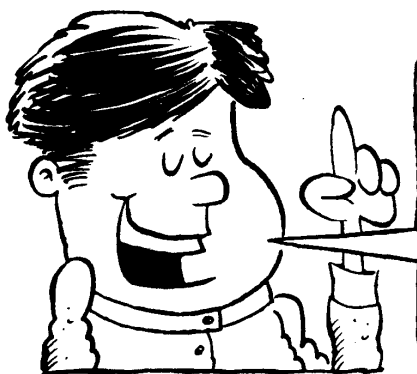
The Circulatory System

Simple Entries

- Define the function of the circulatory system in one sentence.
- Name the parts of the circulatory system.
- List the parts of the circulatory system in order.
- Sketch and label the pathway of blood flowing through the heart.
- For each step in the pathway of blood through the heart, list three appropriately descriptive sensory adjectives.
- List activities that are beneficial to the heart.
- List activities that are detrimental to the heart.

Short Paragraphs

- Write a paragraph describing the pathway of blood through the heart.
- Using sensory adjectives (see Simple Entries), write a paragraph or poem describing the journey of blood through the heart.
- Imagine that you are a blood cell and describe as fully as you can your experience of flowing through the heart.
- How would a blood cell change during one complete cycle through the body?
- If the heart was a person, what would his/her personality be like? Explain.
- If the heart was a person, describe what kinds of jobs it might seek.
- Describe the differences between a red corpuscle and a white corpuscle.
- Which would you rather be, a red blood cell or a white blood cell? Tell why.



One from the heart:
YOUR VEINS, THEY ARE BLUE,
YOUR ARTERIES, RED.
IF YOUR HEART DIDN'T PUMP BLOOD
YOU'D BE LIKE, YOU KNOW, DEAD.