Learning Logs

Learning Logs are like diaries students keep that record their reflections about what they are learning and how they are going about learning it. Learning Logs are useful because they promote metacognition. They are also useful tools for teachers because they can reveal students' perceptions (and misperceptions) of the information, as well as reveal how they are reacting to the way the material is being taught.

You will probably find that students respond best to Learning Log activities when provided some structure. For example, you can provide a set of “guiding questions” that students can select from and respond to.

If you decide to allow students to select from a list of questions, be sure to limit the number of options from which students may choose. Often, providing students with too many questions to choose is counterproductive. Some students feel overwhelmed by a list that is too long and spend much of their time deciding which of the questions to answer.

Likewise, human nature being what it is, some students will select only those questions that require minimal effort. Ultimately, what you want is for students to think deeply and grapple a little, so it is important to include some questions that require such an effort. Often the best format of Learning Log questions is to:

### Content Learning Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I've been learning about</th>
<th>How they clean up oil spills -- the different ways of doing it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- decomposition - dispersion - physical removal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowing about this topic helps me</th>
<th>Know more about how to protect the environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This topic reminds me of</th>
<th>How expensive and how much trouble oil spills are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reminds me of garbage dumps (landfills) - in a way, all three ways are used with regular garbage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The part I know the most about is</th>
<th>The part that was the newest to me was</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical removal - oil mops, etc.</td>
<td>Emulsification (weird way of getting rid of oil)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The part that is the most confusing is</th>
<th>microbial degradation - I sort of understand this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>photo-chemical oxidation - ??</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I'd like to know more about</th>
<th>Which approach is cheapest and fastest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Provide a limited number of questions from which students may choose to respond.

-AND- provide a few questions that students are required to respond.

Below are examples of two different Learning Logs. The first is designed to facilitate students' reflection about their understanding and learning of the content subject. The second addresses students' perceptions of a learning strategy they have been learning.

Listed below are a variety of Learning Log questions you may wish to pose:

Sample Learning Log questions about Learning the Content

What are you thirsting to learn? Why?

What connections did you make between today’s lesson and your own personal experiences?

What was an idea/experience that came up today that you think should be “trashed”? Why?

What was the most important thing you learned today? Why was it important? How was it the same as or different from what you already knew?

What was the CORE IDEA of the whole lesson? What makes it “core”? How did it relate to what you already know?

How does the core idea of the lesson relate to our class theme of?

What were some general things you learned today? specific things? How were they the same as or different from what you already know?

What were some reactions you had to the information we addressed today (e.g., surprises, conflicts, regrets? joys? etc.)?
Sample Learning Log questions about...

Habits of the Mind
adapted from
Marzano

What did you notice about your thinking when working on?

When did you notice others thinking about their thinking?

How did you go about planning?

When did you realize that you could use other resources to help solve? When did you realize that you needed other resources?

How did you go about evaluating...?

What did you focus on when evaluating?

What evidence can you offer that shows your commitment to being accurate? seeking accuracy?

What evidence can you offer that shows your commitment to being clear? seeking clarity?

What evidence can you offer that shows stick-to-it-ness (persistence) even when the task was hard or unclear?

When did you want to give up? What did you do to prevent it?
How did others’ ideas differ from yours? How were differences discussed/addressed?

What did you say to yourself today about yourself that was positive? negative?

Sample Learning Log questions about **Collaborating**

What did you notice about how well your group collaborated?

When one of the members of your group seemed to dominate or take over, what happened? What could have happened instead?

Did you offer assistance (or receive an offer of assistance) to another student? How did this make you feel? What could have been a good time to offer assistance to someone?

Did you offer encouragement to or compliment (or receive encouragement or compliment) another student? Which of the members of your group need more encouragement?

How well are the member of your group listening with interrupting? When someone interrupts, what would be the best way to handle it?

When everyone is not doing his or her share in your group, what happens to the process? What could you do to help everyone do his or her share?

For each member of your group, identify at least one talent this person has that would be valuable to the group. How is each valuable?

What evidence can you offer that shows you respect differing opinions?

What evidence can you offer that shows you recognize and celebrate others’ successes? Why is this important to do?

What evidence can you offer that your group built a consensus when making a key decision?

Was there a time when someone in your group provided someone else in the group negative feedback? How well was it provided? How could the person providing the feedback do it better? How might the person receiving the feedback receive it better?

What evidence can you offer that shows that you are committed to peacefully resolving conflicts?
Teaching Tips

**Step 1:** Teach the core ideas and supporting points of the lesson.

**Step 2:** Provide students with a set of Learning Log questions.
   It is often best to provide a limited selection of questions from which students are to select for responses and also provide some questions that all students are required to respond to.

**Step 3:** Provide sufficient time for students to reflect and note responses.
   In lieu of traditional homework focused at learning additional content, you may wish to assign writing in Learning Logs as homework.

Common Questions about Learning Logs

*How do less capable writers use Learning Logs?*
Students who are poor or extremely reluctant to write are often mistakenly characterized as poor thinkers. You may find that some reluctant writers, they are willing to note ideas in a Learning Log because they are sharing personal perceptions.

Regardless of how motivated some students may be to write in Learning Logs, some simply lack the writing skills. These students can attain many of the same advantages by having them communicate their reflections concerning each of the Learning Log questions into a tape recorder.

*Should students’ Learning Logs be shared with other students?*
Occasionally, students will note powerful insights that you may want to share with other students to help make a point. ALWAYS ASK PERMISSION of the author before sharing the student’s response.

If conducting a group activity after students have written in their logs, you can ask open-ended questions and allow students to volunteer to share their responses. Calling on specific students in not a good idea.

*Should the teacher read students’ Learning Logs?*
Ultimately, this is an individual decision that each teacher must make. A key advantage of reading students Logs is that they provide valuable insight into what students are thinking about their learning. If you decide to read students’ Logs, INFORM THEM PRIOR to their writing in the journals that you plan to read their responses.