

INTRODUCTION TO JOURNAL WORK

Consistent with the emphasis on active learning and self-reflection, personal journal work can be an exceptionally valuable part of your internship experience. Effective journal use takes time, but journals that are done well provide a unique and valuable form of learning.

Many students and instructors who use journals do not make the most of the process because they are not clear about what should go into a journal or why. To make the most of journal work you should use a journal to (1) record experiences at your internship; (2) reflect on your experiences to better understand your emotional reactions, thoughts about clients, impressions of treatment, and so on; (3) make notes about questions, ideas, or discoveries that you wish to discuss or study further; (4) complete exercises presented throughout this text.

A RECORD OF EXPERIENCES, REACTIONS, AND THOUGHTS

I recommend to interns that for every day at their internship, they make a journal entry that begins by listing the day, date, and the hours they were at the internship. The entry should then list and briefly describe your major activities at the internship that day. A chronological format is convenient: note the activities, clients, and staff you worked with, and any other salient information for the day. Remember confidentiality issues as you write in your journal. As discussed in Chapter 3, it is good practice to use generic terms or single-letter abbreviations, rather than names, to signify clients. Here is an example of a journal entry of this type:

Thursday, April 21, 2001, 10:00 A.M.–2:00 P.M.

10:00–10:30. Met with Rachel (Supervisor) and followed up on yesterday's group. Agreed that J. and R. had dominated group. B. was distracted by something but we do not know what. We will discuss these observations in tomorrow's group. Also spoke with Rachel about plans to be at conference next Friday. She approved of my absence. In staff meeting the following Wednesday, I will report back to staff about the conference.

10:30–12:00. Participated in recreation activities with clients under supervision of Robert Jones, Rec Therapist. Played softball at Jefferson Park. Close game and clients seemed to enjoy it.

12:00–1:00. Lunch in dining room. Ate with two clients I had not met before. A. and N. Today was A.'s first day and she was nervous but seemed to be coping. N. has been here three weeks. He is looking forward to visit from his family this weekend.

1:00–2:00. Administered and scored the Beck Depression Inventory for F. Discussed results with supervisor and with F. Wrote brief summary for patient records.

In addition to journal entries describing events of the day, you should also establish a record in which you keep a running total of the number of hours spent in different activities, such as milieu observation, assessment, therapy, and case conferences. If you conduct intake interviews, write case reports, or perform psychological assessments, maintain a count of these including specific information about which tests were given, interpreted, and/or scored by you.

Recording your experiences in the internship serves several purposes. This documentation of your activities can keep your supervisor or instructor apprised of what you are doing. Your journal record also will be useful later on when you seek employment and need to indicate your experience in various clinical activities. The record in which you document numbers of interviews, therapy sessions, and assessments, and so on will be especially useful for this purpose.

Such information is often requested for graduate-level internships and, in many states, it is required as part of the professional licensing process.

Along with serving as records of what you have done, the process of keeping regular journal entries helps to establish a habit of record keeping. Accurate and current records are essential to responsible clinical practice, but record keeping is often neglected (Kagle, 1993). By getting into the practice of keeping records each day, you are less likely to develop poor record-keeping practices later on. To serve this function and maintain accuracy, you must avoid the rather common intern strategy of neglecting the journal until the end of the term and then trying to fill it in by memory. Instead, as part of the time allotted for your internship include a few minutes at the end of each working day for writing in your journal.

REFLECTION AND EXPLORATION

The record-keeping function of journals is important in itself, but their real value emerges when interns go beyond record keeping and use journals as a place for deeper reflection on their experiences. By using journals as opportunities to explore and process their experiences, interns can gain a deeper understanding of clients, the internship setting, the clinical process, and, most importantly, themselves. Journaling then becomes a form of self-supervision and can markedly enhance the benefits of the journal and the internship.

To illustrate this approach to journal work, suppose an intern noticed that a client who usually was quite talkative seemed extremely quiet. That observation might lead the intern to think and write about what might be associated with the change in the client's behavior. The intern might consider recent events at the internship or in the client's life. The general mood of the placement could also be taken into account, as could topics and stages of therapy, anticipated events on the unit, and a host of other pertinent factors. It is not necessary for the intern to arrive at "the right" explanation in the journal. What really matters is that the intern is observing things carefully and trying to understand them.

Of course, it is not possible for interns to engage in detailed exploration of every event that happens every day at the internship. This means you will have to be selective about what you choose to write about in your journal. One approach is to focus on two or three main ideas or concerns and write about these in detail. An intern might attend to the progress of a specific client, changes in the setting, supervision experiences, or other topics of interest.

Whatever external events your journal addresses, for maximum benefit it is essential to include internal observations in your journal. Interns should use journals to reflect on their emotional reactions, thoughts, and behaviors. The goal of this reflection should not be to "evaluate" or reach conclusions about whether you did things well or poorly.

Rather, the goal is to increase self-awareness and understanding by reflecting on what you experienced or did. A journal entry from one of my students illustrates this process well:

One of the students at the school really blew up at me today. T. has kind of been a favorite for me and we usually get along great. Today he was causing all kinds of trouble so I asked him what was up. He totally lost it. He called me all kinds of names and acted like he wanted to hit me. I was blown away. I didn't understand what caused him to act like that and I was really hurt by what he said. I felt like maybe it was my fault that he was so upset and that I should have been able to do something to help calm him down. It was especially hard because some of the other kids saw it all and so did a couple of the staff. The staff were nice afterward but still I felt like I'd screwed up. I'm supposed to be here to help these kids and sometimes it seems like there's nothing I can do to really reach them. Sometimes I wonder if I need everyone to like me too much.

This process of self-reflection can go a long way toward helping interns work through, and learn from, their experiences. It also provides a useful basis for discussions with instructors or supervisors. The key to making the process worthwhile is to be as open and honest as you can about what you thought, felt, or did and what your impressions are after you have time to reflect.

of your professional library; you should have them handy as references for future classes and as you work in the field. The marginal return you might gain from a resale is far outweighed by the value of having your own resources to draw on and refer back to in the future. Developing a personal library is part of the process of becoming a professional, and you might as well begin that process with this book. If you do go on to work in the field or to future internships, you will have many occasions to refer back to the chapters on ethics, writing, supervision, diversity, stress, and other topics. Keep this book when the class is over and read it again in the future.