



## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Teaching Technique 47

# What? So What? Now What? Journals

### ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Reflecting
- Writing

### TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Surface Learning

### LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Caring
- Learning How to Learn

# What? So What? Now What? Journals

*In What? So What? Now What Journals*, students write journal entries to reflect on their recent course-related activities or experiences. The questions that comprise the name of this technique provide them with a structure for critical analysis during their reflections.

1

Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the journals

2

Identify the What? So What? and Now What? questions

3

Set assignment parameters, such as how often and how long

4

Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading the journals

5

Create a handout, and communicate assignment parameters to students

6

Implement the technique

7

Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

# Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section, we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

## STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

*What? So What? Now What? Journals* is a technique that helps students to process information, as well as synthesize and evaluate their experiences, which can improve their retention of ideas and information. It also encourages students to apply what they have learned to contexts beyond the original situations in which they learned it, which can deepen their learning. When students have an opportunity to reflect on their work, it enhances the meaning of the work. Consider your own goals for using this technique.

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Clarify the content students should write. Consider the following questions and sub-questions:

- **What?** What happened? Was there a difference between what you expected and what happened? How did you respond?
- **So What?** What have you learned? Why does that matter? To you? To your peers? To other stakeholders? Is the experience in alignment, informed by, or in conflict with class texts or other activities?
- **Now What?** How can you apply your learning? What information can you share with others? What would you like to learn more about?

## STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

Consider how often students should write, how long journal entries should be, and how often you will review their journals.

## STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

The Learning Artifacts for this activity are the students' journals. They provide evidence of a student's ability to take in an experience or activity and describe it, along with insight into a student's ability to connect this experience to past learning or to texts in the course.

In addition, they provide evidence of a student's ability to make a plan for the future, which is an indicator of a student's capacity for life-long learning. Thus, the artifacts yield many different types of information that provide a more holistic view of student learning.

# Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



## **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

Create a handout with instructions to share with students.

## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

- Distribute the handout, discuss the purpose of the journal, and allow time for questions.
- Ask students to record entries in their journals for the predetermined amount of time.
- Collect the Learning Artifacts.

## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

# Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For *What? So What? Now What? Journals*, we are providing you with ideas to vary it.

## ANALYSIS & REPORTING

To assess the individual artifact, score them with a simple +1 system. For example, you might score as follows:

- **What?** = 1 point
- **So What?** = 1 point + 1 point for each connection to a lecture or reading
- **Now What?** = 1 point + 1 point for a concrete action plan or evidence of action taken.

Alternatively, take notes on key themes that you see in the data. You may want to assign a grade for this task, but it will likely not be one for a large portion of the grade. Some teachers assign around 10%, as this is a sufficient number to influence a student's grade, but not typically as high as major class projects or exams. To share information with students, return the scored journals along with any comments you might have.

To aggregate results, tally the scores you assessed and develop an average score. Create a simple table that displays the information.

# Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how a Professor adapted *What? So What? Now What? Journals* in their course, *Algebra*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

# Technique Template

Sample What? So What? Now What? Journals Completed Technique Template:  
Content from *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*.

*Sociology*

Course Name

## COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

*This example is from a sociology course that we described in our Learning Assessment book.*

## STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

*This math professor had a learning outcome that students would learn to solve linear and quadratic equations using analytic, graphical, and numerical methods. She also had an outcome that students would learn how to be lifelong learners in the area of mathematics. She believed that writing about math was an important way to learn about it and for students internalize what they have learned, so she assigned What? So What? Now What? Journals. She also believed this was a technique they could continue to use in their other mathematics courses.*

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

*After each class, students were to complete a journal entry that responded to the specific day's lesson with the following questions as prompts: Ask yourself "What?" and record your basic observations of the mathematical concept or situation we covered in class today. For example: What are you learning about in Algebra 1? What did you do or observe during the lesson? What are some specific examples of a concept, problem, or task related to this topic? Ask yourself "So what?" and add insights and connections. For example: What connections can you make with previous math learning? How confident do you feel about your understanding of this topic? What parts of the topic are still unclear? Ask yourself "Now what?" and consider what this means for your future learning in mathematics. For example: What have you learned? What do you wonder about now? What will you do next?*

## STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

*They were to post their journal entries online so that she could review them prior to class and base the next day's lesson on them.*



## STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

*She decided to do a holistic analysis of key themes from the journals.*

## STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

*The professor simply announced the assignment in class and gave students the prompts.*

## STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

*When the professor implemented the technique, she noted that most students understood. She made the following notes during her assessment:*

*What?: Almost all students who attended class understood we were covering quadratic equations, two students seemed to have this concept confused with linear equations, and three students were absent and seemed lost.*

*So What?: A few students seem to have advanced knowledge in this area; they seem to distinguish between standard form and hidden form. (Use these as group leaders in tomorrow's group work session), most students are fairly uncomfortable with this concept (we are going to have to spend more time on it, and I'll give a few quizzes to give practice and improve confidence).*

*Now What?: A few students know how to study this, most students are struggling with where to go next. The textbook does not seem to help them (provide additional readings).*

## STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

*Because she used the journaling, she was able to assess how students were feeling toward the class quickly, and discovering that while she had a few students who know what they were doing, the majority of students were really struggling. She made changes in her teaching to provide these students with more support.*

# Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **What? So What? Now What? Journals** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

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**Course Name**

## **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

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What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

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If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

#### **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

## STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

## STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

*Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.*

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

# References and Resources

## PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Learning Assessment Technique 48: What? So What? Now What? Journals” in *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley & Major, 2016), pp. 388–392. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E., & Major, C.H. (2016). *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley/Jossey-Bass.

## CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Lubins, J. (2009). What? So what? Now what? *Library Leadership and Management*, 23(3). 140–149.
- Eyler, J. & Giles, D.E. (1996). *A practitioners guide to reflection in service-learning*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University.

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