

# Journaling with EFL Students- A Case Study

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## Abstract

The journal-writing project was undertaken as a small-scale study with a class of high-level English language learners at an all-female liberal arts university in Japan. The project was initiated not only as a way to extend, improve and develop their English language and writing skills but also as a tool for personal reflection to lead these adolescent learners to a greater and deeper understanding of themselves. The project involved writing seven journal entries as homework over the course of one semester. They would be writing for an audience of their peers with the intention that this would enhance both their interest in the journaling process and their motivation.

Both of these aims, the linguistic and the psychological, were realized by the journaling practice as revealed by an end of project questionnaire as well as the journal entries themselves. It is hoped that after experiencing such a method of self-examination that it will become a valuable tool for students' own future personal growth and development.

*Keywords: Journaling; journal writing; reflective writing; differentiated learning; adolescents; self-realization; homework; motivation; peers.*

## Introduction

The journaling project was undertaken with a class of 23 first-year university students who had TOEIC Bridge scores in the range of 146-168. The students belonged to the Department of International Careers Development, a 4-year program aimed at cultivating global citizens and nurturing future female leaders. The Department of International Careers Development specializes in three main areas: International Business, Intercultural Communication and Area Studies, which includes international cooperative activities, volunteer work. To reach the goal of preparing students for careers in international business, the department

aims that all graduates achieve a TOEIC score above 730, the minimum requirement of most companies for their employees to work abroad. In order to attain this goal, students are offered a variety of elective English classes as well as the compulsory First Year English course, and it was as part of this First Year English course that the journal-writing project was initiated.

Extending the English skills of high-level language learners can be a challenge for any teacher or course. The aims of this journal-writing project were not only to advance English skills however, but also to introduce students to a reflective practice that can be used as a tool for personal growth and development. It was also hoped that writing for an audience of their peers would enhance motivation and encourage them to become self-regulated learners. In this instance, self-regulated learning refers to students being able to execute a task, monitor their own performance and then to reflect on the outcomes.

In order for any writing project to succeed, particularly one that requires deep personal reflection, it is essential that students be intrinsically motivated. This is the kind of motivation that springs from the desire to seek out new challenges, learn new things and is driven by the enjoyment involved in doing the task itself. This is a motivation from inside the self, rather than from any outside agent, consideration of grade or figure of authority. To foster this kind of motivation, it is important to consider both the content and the approach. The writing tasks themselves must be engaging and relevant to the students' lives as, "the nature of writing itself is not interesting enough to motivate English learners to practice regularly" (Hedge, 1991 in Tuan, 2010). Tasks must also spark an avenue of inquiry that appears to have personal value. Having such value, the activities will be seen to be meaningful and thus worthy of students' time and effort. Teachers allocating writing activities in schools and universities often struggle in their attempts to make tasks meaningful. A common outcome is that students find themselves just giving information rather than writing for an audience or for any particular real-life purpose. This is not only de-motivating but also unrealistic in terms of how and why people put pen to paper in the real world. Additionally, learners may dread writing tasks that require them to rewrite, rework and edit the same material in order to arrive at a finished piece (Graham, 2003). For these reasons a genre-based writing strategy that approaches writing from a social and communicative perspective may serve students better. The

conversational style of journal writing is just this; it is a practice that puts the communication of ideas above perfectly crafted sentences, allowing writers to express themselves without the limiting 'it must be perfect' mindset.

The methodology of any writing project, the 'how', must also be given careful consideration. Writing tasks done during class time, for example, may be difficult for the students who haven't yet developed a fluency in this skill. This deficit can manifest in the inability to spontaneously generate ideas under the pressure of time, or even in the mechanics of writing quickly by hand. For this reason the journal writing project was designed for out of class study, despite the problems inherent in the very concept of homework itself.

Homework is a challenging issue for many teachers and there are even those who limit the tasking of it in light of the workload involved. At universities in Japan, however, out of class study is a requirement in order to earn credit for a course. One course credit is seen as 15 hours of lectures or class time, and an additional 30 hours of supplementary study, to take place outside the class. Furthermore, MEXT requires that teachers submit syllabi stating, amongst other things, the expected study outside of the classroom. Although the practical aspects of giving homework must be considered, for example the hours it takes to check and grade each submission, there are undeniable benefits of learners reviewing and practicing their skills further outside of class. Applying skills learned in a classroom setting to a different situation helps to consolidate and transfer learning, for example by helping students to construct knowledge, make connections and gain a deeper understanding of the material. That said, when teachers have more than 200 students under their care, checking homework takes a significant amount of time and energy. A further consideration is the learners themselves; not only must the teachers' weekly workload be considered, but also that of the students'. Typically, freshmen fill their schedules with three or more classes a day. If each class includes a homework assignment the students may find themselves over-reached. An inappropriate quantity, or even homework that is too difficult, leads to de-motivation and a loss of interest in the subject matter. When student-motivation is such an important element of the effective teaching and learning formula, it must be of the utmost concern in the design and allocation of homework. Ways of applying the language being studied in a stimulating, purposeful and authentic way must be found if homework is to

support the learning processes and lead students closer to proficiency. Despite teachers' best intentions when it comes to homework however, it's common to see students finishing or doing completely the set assignments in the last few minutes before class. This practice reduces the effectiveness of homework, as students can spend neither the time nor apportion the depth of thought required, in such a situation. Teachers must find a way, therefore, to make homework inspiring and interesting and it was hoped that journaling would provide students with such inspiration.

What is journaling?

Journaling is a practice that many people, particularly women, integrate into their daily lives. Contrary to what most people imagine is a '*Dear Diary*' type of activity, journal writing addresses much deeper topics and issues and is credited with a broad range of personal benefits. These benefits arise in part, from exploring and reflecting upon the experiences, feelings and beliefs that consciously or subconsciously effect our every thought and choice that we make. Self-examination into who we really are and what we want from life can lead to insights into our own motives and the motives of others, which in turn can lead to a greater understanding of our sense of identity and personal circumstance. The Center for Journal Therapy describes journaling as the application of the analytical and rational left side of the brain, while the more creative and emotion-based right side of the brain is simultaneously being used. According to their website, journaling can be credited for boosting mood and enhancing the state of well-being, as well as reducing symptoms associated with depression and other mental health challenges. Thai Nguyen in the Huffington Post column '*Mental strategies for healthy living*' wrote an article titled: "*10 surprising benefits you'll get from keeping a Journal*". Nguyen claims journaling benefits personal development in relation to: I.Q. (connected to the fact that vocabulary is closely correlated to intelligence in I.Q. tests), mindfulness, achieving goals, cultivating emotional intelligence, boosting memory and comprehension, strengthening self-discipline, improving communication skills, emotional and psychological healing, sparking creativity and enhancing self-confidence. Hussein (2018) further holds that journaling fosters a 'Growth Mindset' defined amongst other things, as a personal attitude of embracing challenges and believing that positive results can be brought about through effort.

Aside from the psychological aspects and effects of journal writing there are obvious and very real benefits for the foreign language learner. It

is no surprise that the skills of writing are improved and advanced by the practice of writing: A study by Tuan (2010) found that through journal writing, language learners' writing skills improved in two main areas; the reduction of grammatical and spelling errors and an increase in the number of words written within a timed period. Taquil et al. (2015) found that after a 14-week diary writing project, students' language abilities had significantly improved particularly in the areas of grammar and vocabulary. Creative writing cultivates cognitive development in the foreign language as concepts and meanings are brought together in the act of expression. Focusing on the communicative aspect of writing establishes a stronger link between the meaning and the language and allows learners an experience that is more than merely a skill-based activity. Through personal reflective writing learners can begin to appreciate how much more is required to convey their thoughts than simply the production of accurate sentences and grammatically correct phrases. The struggle to communicate effectively in writing requires a high degree of organization of ideas, information and arguments and brings an awareness of the differences in organizational conventions between their own and the foreign language. Furthermore, journal writing gives language learners opportunity to experiment in the safe context of the written word, a much less face-risking arena than speaking. As learners gain confidence through this process, they build an awareness of their audience and start to understand how important it is to have a sense of the reader as well as the sense of the writer. In this way their writing takes on a new level of sophistication as they develop their unique 'writing voice'. Not only are writing skills themselves improved by journal writing, but also other language skills. Graham (2015) found that journal keeping with Taiwanese junior-high school students about their extensive reading activity outside the classroom, not only led to an increase in the amount of reading done but also improved students' attitudes towards it. Studies in Iran (Bagheri & Pourgharib 2013) and Egypt (El-Koumy 1998) found that students' speaking skills significantly improved after journal keeping projects.

The benefits of journaling may be fully realized both from the psychological and language-learning perspectives for university aged learners. Many first-year students experience upheavals requiring them to be able to change and adapt to new circumstances. Additionally, this transitional phase between childhood and young adulthood, known as adolescence, is a key developmental period. This is a time of change in

potentially every sphere of their lives, physical, psychological and emotional areas in particular. The personality may as yet be unstable, and it's not uncommon to see teenagers 'try on' different personas as they alternate allegiances and corresponding images. University brings a time where the adolescent's world opens up as they meet a wider range of people and become more independent. This newfound independence brings new relationships and shifts and changes in old ones, and issues of self-identity and self-esteem are being reevaluated and reworked. This time can be not only one of discovery but also of disorientation and disorder. Helping young people through this potentially challenging period by guiding them towards a greater self-awareness and self-knowing can begin with journaling.

#### The Journal Writing project

As journal writing evokes such high praise from those who integrate it into their daily or weekly routines, as well as from teachers who incorporate it into their classrooms, a way of making it appeal to students is paramount. Consequently, if it is to be allocated as an out of class activity the issue of motivation and typical student attitudes towards homework must be addressed. It would be a shame to initiate such a project only to have it treated with disregard and condemned to the '5-minutes before class homework club'. Accordingly, both the methodology and the content must be carefully considered in order to capture students' interest and enhance their motivation. The first consideration is the audience. As one of the aims of this project is to introduce a more interactive and communicative approach to writing, the journal entries must be addressed to someone, and written for someone. Most often in writing classes, students find themselves writing for the teacher knowing that their work will be read by the critical eye of someone who is looking for mistakes. In order to release them from this expectation, their journal entries will be primarily read by their peers, the other members of the class since, "Students' motivation may be enhanced when they write for their peers rather than the teacher" (Ward, 2009). Not only will the writers be more motivated knowing that their classmates are their audience, but they are more likely to have cultural knowledge and expectations in common with each other than with the teacher, who is often from another culture. Additionally, most important in this phase of a young adult's life are friends, and sharing their thoughts and feelings with others like them, is sure to be a rewarding and motivating experience.

In order to make this homework both appealing and convenient, using strategic methods of delivery that students enjoy and are familiar with is key. For this reason, the journaling assignments were accessible to students through a webpage on the Internet. Seven Journal Tasks were set up, each that offered two different journal prompts that were in some way connected to the same topic. Journal prompts were given rather than having the tasks be a free-writing activity as many first-year university students haven't yet developed a life full enough to have had many experiences outside of study and school. Lewis (2009), recommends against students writing about what they want as this produces irrelevant and unfocussed results. It was hoped too, that the journal prompts were themes that students hadn't written about before and so would elicit fresh thoughts and new ideas. The writing tasks were designed to require and encourage self-reflection and inquiry into thoughts and beliefs in a way that may never have occurred to students. This thinking about thinking is termed 'meta-cognition' and is considered a skill of higher-order thinking. Approaching thinking in this way can help young people to define who they are and develop a stronger self-concept; it can make them more aware of their beliefs and attitudes and the resultant effects of those ideas and thus, help them to make informed choices when making decisions. For this purpose the topics offered students an opportunity to 'dig-deep' as is termed in the self-help literature. This means to go further than the superficial thoughts the writer may have, and explore why these ideas are believed and where they originated.

The journal project was introduced and explained through a two-page handout given to class members at the start of the First Year English course (see appendix). The handout outlined the purpose of journaling, the operational aspects of the project and the expectations in terms of the quality, length and timeliness of their written submissions. It was explained how journaling wasn't something that could be done in the 10-minutes before class, and they were encouraged to look deeply inside themselves at their thoughts and feelings about the topics as they wrote. The concept of journaling was introduced as the writing of their personal thoughts in order to learn more about their own beliefs and ideas. The handout explained how through this process, they would be using English in a new way, in response to a prompt, which may be a question, phrase, video-clip or picture. They were told that their writing would not be corrected and that rather than concerning themselves with perfect English, they should

focus on expressing their thoughts, feelings and ideas freely, and in a way that would allow the reader to step into their world.

On the submission day, the journal entries were collected and shared anonymously with classmates, who were required to read, comment upon and ask a question to the writer. In this way the journals became an interactive and cooperative project as students shared, probed and elicited more information from each other. After this, the journal tasks were collected again and checked by the teacher, and in the following class, returned to the writers who read the comments and wrote their answers to the questions. Students were required to keep their journal entries together and were given a back and front cover of coloured paper. On the inside of the back cover there was an area designated to write the questions that they asked about each reading.

The website introduction can be found in the appendix, the journals tasks themselves are listed below:

Journal Task 1:

Choose one of the Journal Tasks below. Task A is non-fiction and Task B is fiction. In Task B, please cast yourself as the Main Character.

Task 1A: Are you loud, outgoing or shy? What are the advantages & disadvantages of being that way? Would you like to change that about yourself? Why or why not?

Task 1B: Sometimes she wished nothing more than to turn back time...

Journal Task 2:

Here is a very interesting photograph by photographer Jamilia Clarke (<http://www.jamiliac Clarke.com>). Choose one of the journal tasks below and write based on the picture.

Task 2A: Use this photo by Jamila Clarke as inspiration for a story. Remember to write so that the reader can enter your imagination and step into the story.

Task 2B: Write a dialogue between the two people. That means a conversation, for example:

Mr A: Hi there, I haven't seen you for ages!

Mr. B: Hey! How are you doing?

This is a very interesting and unusual situation so I am expecting your dialogues to be interesting and unusual!

Journal Task 3:

Watch the video-clip about Social Networking Services. Choose one of the Journal Tasks and tell us your feelings and opinions.



Task 3A: What are the advantages and disadvantages of Social Networking Systems? Which ones do you use regularly? Why do you use these (for what purpose)? How is your 'Online Life' different from your 'Real Life'?

Task 3B: If you had to become an 'Internet Sensation', what would you like to be famous for? Why would you choose this? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being famous? Would you like to be famous? Why or why not?

Journal Task 4:

Choose one of the Journal Tasks below:

Task 4A: To 'kick-the-bucket' is an idiom that means to die. Some people like to write a 'Bucket-List', meaning they write a list of all the things they want to do before they die.

Write a Bucket-List of 50 things you want to do before you die! Include illustrations and pictures.

Task 4B: There are countless things you can learn how to do in this amazing world! Write a list of 50 things that you want to learn!

Journal Task 5:

Read the articles from Teen Magazine. Choose one of the Journal Tasks below and tell us what you think.

Task 5A: Read the article called 'Why I Love Swimming'. Is there anything you love to do? Write a similar article about your hobby. Include pictures if you can.

Task 5B: Read the article called 'Three Benefits of Solo Travel'. There are thousands of travel bloggers who are women and who travel solo, check some of them out on YouTube. What do you think of traveling alone? Have you ever traveled anywhere alone? Would you like to travel somewhere alone? Why or why not?

Journal Task 6:

Task 6A: Is there an event in your life that changed you? Tell us more...

Task 6B: Would you rather become someone else or live your life as you? Tell us more...

Journal Task 7:

Here are two very interesting quotes about life. Choose one of them and tell us what you think. How is this true or not true for you in your life? Tell us more...

Task 7A: Do you have an Inner Scorecard or an Outer Scorecard? What's on your Inner Scorecard? How is it different from what's on your Outer

Scorecard? How does your life change when you focus on the Inner Scorecard rather than the Outer Scorecard?

Task 7B: Focus on the journey, not the destination.

Building the webpage was a relatively simple task involving the use of a free site from [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com). The address of the website is *fyejournaling.blogspot.com*. The material was initially created on Microsoft word documents and then converted into png. or pdf. files which were then loaded onto the website platform. Each task included links on the webpage to empty journal pages using the Google documents system, for the students to download and print out. They were then to complete the homework in longhand and submit each task, one a week for seven weeks. It was suggested that the students decide and print out the pages in one go and then subsequently they could use their cell-phones to access the instructions.

The decision to provide journal pages was not only so that an attractive journal could be built up page by page, but so that students had an automatic reminder of the length of writing required. They consisted of two A4 pages, with a border and double-spaced writing lines. The last half of page 2 was sectioned off and designated for the reader's comment and question and for the writer's response. Thus, the students were required to fill one and a half sides of A4 paper with their writing. As journal tasks were to be exchanged and read by members of the class, an element of anonymity was necessary. This was achieved by requiring their eight-figure student number rather than their name on each journal page.

Discussion

The particular topics and journal prompts were chosen to elicit a synthesis of the students' thoughts and emotions. Almost all the topics asked them to reflect on their past, their present and sometimes their future, with just three of the 14 choices being imaginative and fictional in content. The order and progression of tasks were also carefully considered, starting with the easier tasks and progressing towards those that were more demanding in terms of deeper self-reflection. The first task asked them to talk about themselves but also offered students the opportunity to write a story instead. This was to address the shier students who may not have been used to writing about themselves directly. Additionally, the more journal tasks students completed, the more familiar they would be in what was required of them through the feedback and guidance that they

received. The journals tasks were collected and given a grade of 1 to 10. It had been explained that their entries would not be corrected and that they would be assessed on the effort they had expended. A short class feedback session was given when their journal tasks were returned to them. Typical comments included common mistakes, a reminder to read the instructions carefully and almost constant encouragement to take the time to do their best. Many of the students needed reminding of the expected length of their submissions; some students started the project writing with huge margins, writing on every other line and writing 'poem-style', that is with each sentence written on a different line. The greatest challenge of the project was emphasizing that the homework couldn't be done in 10 or 15 minutes and that they were required to think deeply about their responses. Disappointingly, some submissions were so poor that it was obvious that no more than 10 minutes could have been spent on the writing. One fictional account even called the two main characters 'White-jacket man' and 'Black-jacket man' in accordance with the picture that provided the writing prompt. This was the second task of the project and proved to be so poorly done in terms of effort that a full 11 of the 14 students who chose to write the dialogue (Task 2B) didn't read the instructions and wrote randomly rather than based upon the picture as was required. After this feedback session students started to read the instructions carefully and put more effort into their work. Aside from two members of the class consistently doing minimal work, the other students seemed to embrace journaling. The effort expended could be seen easily in the range and depth of ideas being written, with some being extremely heartfelt and personal. One such entry told how the writer had lost her best friend: *"I can't write detailed information here, but as a result, she never came close to me again. I have suffered as much as I have never ever experienced. Since then I became negative thinking, and I began to be afraid of people"*. The only other problem was a case of plagiarism that occurred in the journal prompt about Social Networking Services. The student's writing was clearly not her own and a Google search check easily identified it as copied from a website. In this era of access to seemingly infinite information, perhaps it's too much of a temptation not to copy others' words. In this particular case the student was taken aside and explained how this was not permitted, and directed to produce a piece of work of her own.

Apart from these few issues, the journals were completed well and in a timely manner. Students were enthusiastic about sharing and reading

their classmates' entries and the classroom atmosphere was silent as they read and commented upon each other's work. The comments consistently showed a kindness, understanding and compassion for what the writer had written and questions that probed deeper into the issues being addressed. One comment that stood out as particularly sagacious was, "*The relationship between me and my friends is shallow and wide. So I have many friends but there are few friends I can tell my true intention*".

Of more interest than the actual content of the students' writings was their attitude and what they thought about journaling. To address this, a questionnaire was given at the end of the project asking students to rate their feelings and experiences and soliciting from them which of the tasks they thought to be the easiest, the most difficult and the most and least enjoyable. It also asked them to rate their enjoyment of each part of the journaling project, the writing, the reading of other peoples' journals, commenting or reading comments, and the asking or answering of questions. Their thoughts and attitudes were also elicited through long answer questions intended to provide insight into how the project could be improved such as: '*What topics would you like to write about?*' '*What advice can you give about Journal writing with students?*' And '*Did you learn anything new about yourself? If so, what?*'

As the number of students taking part in this case study was so small, it is unclear how well the answers to these questions would be transferrable to other teaching situations. They were insightful to this particular project however, because answers confirmed the teacher's initial impressions that journaling had benefitted students from both personal and language learning perspectives. Additionally, the ideas and suggestions contributed valuable information for future journaling projects.

#### The Questionnaire Results

Below are two graphic representations of the first four questions on the survey: *Which was the easiest journal task for you? Which was the most difficult journal task for you? Which journal task did you enjoy writing the most? Which journal task did you enjoy writing the least?* The graphs show the Modes, or most frequently occurring answers as well as the range of answers. As can be seen, the Modes show clear favorites and little variation in the range of responses. Journal Task 4A, writing a 'Bucket List' was considered the easiest and also the most enjoyable with 12 and 16 responses respectively. Journal Task 7B, 'Focus on the Journey and not the Destination' was seen as the most difficult with 12 responses; Task 2B,

dialogue writing based on a picture, and 3A, the advantages and disadvantages of Social Networking Systems, tied for the least enjoyable tasks with five responses each. The 'Bucket List' task was considered the easiest and most enjoyable perhaps because students were also encouraged to illustrate their entries and the writing was directly about their future hopes and dreams. In contrast, task 7B required them to consider that the process is more important than the end product, an idea not generally embraced in the Japanese education system. The two prompts that tied for the least enjoyable, writing about a picture, and a critique of SNS may have been considered so due to the nature of tasks themselves: The picture prompt was one of the few that called for a fictional answer rather than writing directly about themselves, and the SNS prompt required that they address the disadvantages of social media, when actually they all spend considerable energy and many hours of their time on various social networking sites.

The Questionnaire Results ( $n=23$ )

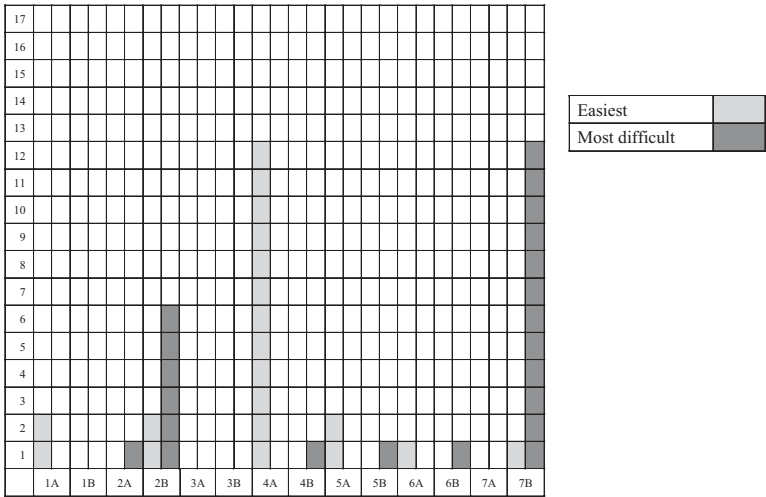


Figure 1

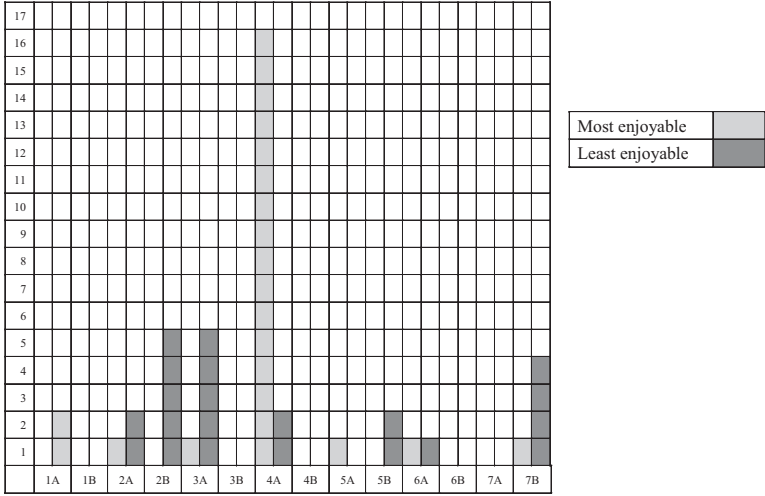


Figure 2

The information on the graphs may be misleading however, as the students did not complete all of the tasks, rather they had to choose either the task A, or the task B. Thus, it's difficult to tell from their responses, for example on Figure 2 above, if task 1B would actually be the most or least enjoyable had all the students done that task. It did however, give an indication of the kinds of tasks that were chosen and then considered in response to these questions.

The number of students who chose each task can be seen in the table below:

1A	1B	2A	2B	3A	3B	4A	4B	5A	5B	6A	6B	7A	7B
20	3	7	16	20	3	22	1	10	13	16	7	2	21

Interestingly, with almost all of the task sets, e.g. 1A and 1B, there was a clear favourite that the majority of students chose to write about; only task 5A and 5B had a roughly equal number of respondents. Referring to the actual tasks themselves, this information shows those that they thought would be the easiest or the most fun to write about.

Two of the survey questions addressed whether students had ever kept a diary before in Japanese or English, and if they are keeping one now in Japanese or English:

	Yes, in Japanese	Yes, in English	Yes, in Japanese & English
<i>Have you ever kept a diary or journal before ?</i>	5	3	6
<i>Do you keep a diary or journal now ?</i>	5	2	3

Five of the questions addressed how much students enjoyed each part of the journal writing process. Students completed their responses on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 = *I didn't enjoy it at all* to 7 = *I enjoyed it very much*

The results can be seen below ( $n=23$ ):

*How much did you enjoy reading other people's journal entries ?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	0	2	3	5	13

(Median=7 Mode=7)

*How much did you enjoy writing comments on other people's journal entries?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	2	1	7	7	6

(Median=6 Mode=5 & 6)

*How much did you enjoy writing questions on other people's journal entries?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	0	3	7	5	8

(Median=6 Mode=7)

*How much did you enjoy reading other people's comments on your journal entries?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	0	3	7	5	8

(Median=6 Mode=7)

*How much did you enjoy answering other people's questions on your journal entries?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	1	2	6	5	9

(Median=6 Mode=7)

The Median and Mode values are shown as they have the most meaning with this type of data. Commonly in research, Mean values are referred to but not only does this obscure the skewed response bias towards the higher end of the scales, but also can be deemed inappropriate as it would be an indication of the average of, *I didn't enjoy it at all* and *I enjoyed it very much*.

Two questions inquired as to whether the students thought the journaling project had improved their English abilities, from 1 = *No, not at all* to 7 = *Yes, very much*

*Do you think this journaling writing improved your English grammar and vocabulary?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	0	1	3	5	14

(Median=7 Mode=7)

*Did this journal writing increase your confidence writing in English?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	0	0	3	7	6	7

(Median=6 Mode=5 & 7)

The students were also asked their opinion about their work not being corrected:

*Did you like that your errors weren't corrected?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	2	1	11	5	3	1

(Median=4 Mode=4)

The questions on the survey that asked for long answers addressed whether they had learned anything new about themselves through this project, and if so what, about the topics they would like to journal about in English and if they had any advice for journal writing with students.

*Did you learn anything new about yourself? If so, what?*

The answers have been categorised in the left columns in relation to the learning outcomes:

- A=In relation to Self-Realisation. B=In relation to Language Learning.
- C=Other.



A	B	C	Responses
	<input type="radio"/>		I learned that it's fun to write English because I didn't like English ever.
	<input type="radio"/>		I learned that I like writing.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		I could think about my opinion to write journal in this time. Also I got many new knowledge to share the journal!
<input type="radio"/>			Yes I did. I learned 'Focus on the journey not he destination'. This words made me positive.
<input type="radio"/>			I learned about myself many things that I have a bucket list which I want to do before I die and many others.
<input type="radio"/>			J-task 4 was good for me. (bucket list) I have many things I want to do before I die.
<input type="radio"/>			I was able to know that I am very shy.
<input type="radio"/>			I learned who I am, what I like.
<input type="radio"/>			I found out what I want to do through "kick-the-bucket".
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		Yes, I could learn how to write in English and could know what I want to do before I die.
<input type="radio"/>			I could find what I want to do.
	<input type="radio"/>		I can know what "kick-the-bucket" means.
<input type="radio"/>			Yes, Task 4A. I could know what I want by writing on a paper.
<input type="radio"/>			Yes, I did. I could think about myself which I don't think usually.
<input type="radio"/>			I think I could understand myself by writing journals.
		<input type="radio"/>	Yes, I did. Now I could know another opinion of classmate!
	<input type="radio"/>		Yes, I did. I thought I couldn't write long sentences. And it was so hard for me, but I could.
		<input type="radio"/>	Nothing.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		Yes! I came to write my thoughts on papers. I couldn't write long sentences, but I came to do through these journals.
<input type="radio"/>			I think that I came to understand by myself since I started writing the journal.
	<input type="radio"/>		Yes, I did. I learned that I like writing more than I had thought.
		<input type="radio"/>	No

The answers from the questions about which topics they would like to journal about in English and if they had any advice for journal writing with students can be found in the appendix. Students' responses indicated that they got great enjoyment out of journaling as a communicative activity with their peers. Most students claimed to have enjoyed reading other people's journal entries very much with both a Mode and Median of 7 on the scale. This could be due to the social nature of adolescents or the fact that the writings were often very personal. Two of the responses state that they could find out their classmates' opinions and that they had gained

some new knowledge from sharing the journals. The writing of comments was seemingly a more challenging task, as the Median was 6 and the Mode a tie between 5 & 6. A possible reason for this could be that this part of the project was done in class with a clear time limit, and also that the writing of comments was a new kind of activity for them. Indeed, they preferred writing questions to comments, with a Median of 6 and the most frequently chosen answer of 7 corresponding to, *I enjoyed it very much*. Reading other people's comments and answering other people's questions were rated the same, with both having Median values of 6 and Mode values of 7. The fact that many of the questions elicited a majority of responses at the highest point of the scale, corresponding to, *I enjoyed it very much* showed that the project had been a success in terms of the content and approach being interesting and motivational for the students.

More than half of the students thought that journaling had improved their grammar and vocabulary, and 20 of the 23 students answered in the affirmative that it had increased their confidence to write in English. What they thought about their errors not being corrected was another matter with both the Median and the Mode at 4 or the neutral point of the scale. In fact, in their advice for journal writing with students, 8 of the 18 responses addressed this point saying that they wanted their errors corrected and their writing commented upon by the teacher. This was contrary to expectation, as the idea of not directly correcting errors was intended to free them from this worry so that they could concentrate on fluency rather than accuracy in this more communicative approach to writing. This could be a cultural phenomena however, as Japanese students are taught to predominately focus on accuracy, even when it is at the expense of fluency.

The responses addressing whether they had learned anything new about themselves, and if so what, were particularly interesting as one of the aims of the journaling project was to provide a tool for self-realisation. As can be seen in the table above, their answers have been categorised into responses relating to 'self-realisation', 'language learning' and 'other'. Of the 23 answers, 20 of them claimed to have realised something new about themselves, with 14 of the comments, or parts of comments, referring to the psychological area of self-realisation and 8 referencing language learning. This was felt to be an excellent result as the purpose of introducing journaling to students had these two goals as its main priorities.

The topics that students suggested they'd like to journal about can be found in the appendix. Unsurprisingly, most of them harked back to topics

they must have written about countless times before. By the time they reach university, the number of essays they have written about 'My hobbies' or 'My dream' must be nearing double figures. This indicated that it had been worthwhile to allocate topics rather than have students decide for themselves what to write about, as one of the aims was to extend their repertoire of genre and experience of writing about deeper subjects.

Responses to the question, *What advice can you give about Journal writing with students?* can also be found in the appendix. In accordance with their thoughts about not having their writing corrected, 8 of the 19 answers referred to error-correction. These 8 stated that they would like the teacher to check and comment upon their journal entries, again reflecting the prioritisation of error free English rather than fluency in the educational approaches to language learning in Japan. Other suggestions included that they would have liked more topic choices, that the topics should be easier and shorter and that the papers should be given to students rather than have them print them out themselves. It's understandable that students would like homework to be easy however, the journal submissions that were shorter than the required one and a half sides, showed a significant lack of depth in both thought and language usage. It is felt that these recommendations for easier homework highlight the differing priorities of educator and learner.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the journal writing project undertaken with Japanese first year university students was a great success. In terms of language-learning goals both the students and the teacher felt that their English had improved by the end of the project. The final three or four journal entries from the majority of students were impressive in terms of depth of personal inquiry and the ways in which ideas were expressed. Journaling with high-level students offered a differentiated approach where each student could improve their writing skills according to the amount of effort they were willing to expend. Writing for an audience of their peers was not only motivational, but provided interesting feedback through the personal comments and spurred further development of their ideas through the questions. Additionally, 6 of the responses about what they had learned indicated that they had found out that they liked writing or that they could write in English when previously they had thought that they couldn't.

Concerning the psychological aspects and goals of the project, these too were realised. Commenting on what they thought they had learned

about themselves, 14 of the 22 responses stated that they had come to know themselves better through journaling. Additionally, many of the journal entries were searching and deeply introspective accounts of their personal ideas and experiences.

Using journaling to bolster and enhance key learning skills such as motivation and creativity, helps students to focus their energy and attention in a way that will propel them towards their learning goals. Putting seemingly intangible thoughts and feelings into language makes them graspable and more available for interpretation and understanding. Thus, personal reflective writing often results in realisations and new ways of seeing things, especially important for adolescents who are navigating the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood.

Although the benefits of journaling were realized both from psychological and language-learning perspectives, the weekly checking of lengthy journal entries is a time-consuming task for the teacher, and perhaps only practicable with one or two classes. Despite the work involved however, introducing such a tool for personal insight and self-realisation has the possibility to improve students' lives and their understanding of themselves beyond measure.

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Additional articles and links:

The Center for Journal Therapy <https://journaltherapy.com>

Top 8 Benefits of Keeping a Journal or a Diary. (Software program) [penzu.com](https://penzu.com).

Retrieved from: <https://penzu.com/journaling-benefits>

## APPENDIX

### 1. The Introduction to the Journaling Project that the students received in class.

#### First Year English Journaling Homework.

\* The more you learn a foreign language, in many ways the harder it is to improve and to become a better speaker. Maybe you have experienced this ‘plateau’ effect yourself. One of the ways to get over this plateau is to use English in new situations.

\* First Year English Journaling homework is an opportunity to use English in a way that maybe you haven’t done before, through Journaling. Journaling is really just writing your personal thoughts, feelings, reflections and ideas in response to a ‘prompt’ – which may be a title, a question, or a picture, for example.

\* Journaling is a way many people, especially women, learn more about themselves. Putting your thoughts and ideas onto paper helps you to look at them clearly and then to decide if you want to keep those ideas, or change them for new ones.

\* On the FYE Journaling website there are 7 Journaling tasks for you to have fun with in English. The English won’t be corrected; these tasks are more about expressing your thoughts, feelings and ideas in a way that helps the reader to step into your world. We will exchange Journal Entries with classmates anonymously, write comments and ask and answer questions about each other’s Entries.

\* I hope that these Journaling Tasks will help you to develop your own voice in English. And I hope you enjoy thinking about these topics. I’m really looking forward to reading your thoughts!

\* Let’s go to the FYE Journaling page now:

<https://fyejournaling.blogspot.com>

or follow:



#### How does this homework project work?

- \* There are 7 Journaling Tasks on the website. For each task please choose 1 of the 2 offered.
- \* Go to the site on a PC, print out the Journal Pages for your chosen task and complete it before the next week. You have 1 week to do each task. (It’s best if you can print or copy the pages onto the 2-sides of 1 piece of paper).
- \* The following week, your Journal Tasks will be collected and given to someone

else to read. We will spend the first 10 minutes of the class reading each other's Journal Tasks. After reading, the reader will make a comment and ask a question about the Journal entry. The reader writes their question inside the back cover of their own Journal too.

- \* Then, I will collect the Journal Tasks and give them back the following class.
- \* When you receive the Journal Task back, please answer the question that the reader asked.
- \* Put each Journal Task inside the Journal covers. At the end of the project, you will have a finished Journal, which will be evaluated and given a grade.

What am I looking for?

- \* The aim of this project is to help you to find your voice in English. Therefore, perfectly correct English isn't necessary, and your grammar and spelling won't be corrected. I am looking for your Effort. If you have done your best, you will be sure of a good grade.
- \* Completing the Journal Tasks **on time** is very important. We will read each other's Journal Tasks in class, write comments and ask questions, so if you have not done the homework, you can't join this very important part of the project.
- \* This is not the kind of homework you can do in the 10-minutes before the class starts. To do it well, you need to 'dig-deep'. That means to look deep inside yourself, to look at your thinking and feelings about the topic and to put them into the words that your reader will understand and relate to.
- \* I'm really looking forward to finding out more about you and what you think and feel. I hope that your writing will vividly portray the people, places and situations you are writing about so that I can make a clear picture in my mind of your ideas.
- \* Do your best and stretch your English into places it's never been to before!

## 2. Website *fyejournaling.blogspot.com* Top Message:

Welcome to the First Year English Journaling Page!

Journaling is a way many people, especially women, learn more about themselves. Putting your thoughts and ideas onto paper helps you to look at them clearly and then to decide if you want to keep those ideas, or change them for new ones.

Here are seven Journaling tasks for you to have fun with in English. The English won't be corrected, these tasks are more about expressing your thoughts, feelings and ideas in a way that helps the reader to step into your world. We will exchange Journal Entries with classmates anonymously, write comments and ask and answer questions about each other's Entries.

I hope that these Journaling Tasks will help you to develop your own voice in English. And I hope you enjoy thinking about these topics. I'm really looking forward to reading your thoughts!



### 3. Questionnaire Responses:

*What topics would you like to journal about in English ?* Here is a list of the responses:

School life
Story of our life. It means a story that I remember or that I like.
Foreign countries which is interested in.
About movies and books.
I'd like to journal about social programs
Actually, we got very interesting topic for journal. And I want to write about my country Nepal.
Most moving events in your life.
About my future.
I would like to journal about animals.
I would like to write about my favourite things, hobbies.
I would like to journal about my interests.
I would like to write about "If you came back the past, when would you back? What would you do?"
I'd like to journal about how to spend a day.
Introduce countries I had been to before.
I would like to write about my hobby.
My dream.
I would like to write about my hobby.
I would like to write about "My hobby".
Where do you want to live in the future?
Why I entered Fukujo university.
Your future.
Hobbies, foods, dreams and so on.

*What advice can you give about Journal writing with students?* Here is a list of the responses:

Your journal tasks are so good for students. I think if we're checked our English skills by you, we could learn more.
Please hand out papers directly. I don't want to copy every time.
I wanted to correct my sentences, I know it's hard work for you, but if you do that, Freshers will improve grammar!
I'd like you to correct my errors.
It is difficult to write in English, but it will be good for us someday.
I want you to correct my errors. I want to improve my English skill more.
Journal writing is useful for me in the future.
I would like you to correct my errors. so that I can realise my errors and change them.
I think it is good to practice to write English. I think it's better to have 3 choices.
I want to read Teacher's journal!
I think I want to write more journal but it should be a little shorter.
Please correct my errors.
To increase the choices of journal.
Please correct our mistakes.
If there are more choices of topics, it will be more interesting.
I think it's too long. But I also think it is very good homework for students.
Sometimes I didn't understand explain about Journal Task. For example, J-task 2.
I would like to be gave some comments by you. If you do, I would be happier and more confident.
Some topics are difficult, so I would like to write about easier and more fun topics.

Student Number:

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### Journal Project Feedback Form

Please answer the questions about this homework journal project.

1. Which Journal Prompts did you do? Please circle A or B:

J- Task 1	A: Are you loud, outgoing or shy? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being that way? Would you like to change that about yourself? Why or why not?	B: Sometimes she wished nothing more than to turn back time...
J- Task 2	A: Use this photo by Jamila Clarke as inspiration for a story. Remember to write so that the reader can enter your imagination and step into the story.	B: Write a dialogue between the two people. That means a conversation.
J- Task 3	A: What are the advantages and disadvantages of Social Networking Systems? Which ones do you use regularly? Why do you use these (for what purpose)? How is your 'Online Life' different from your 'Real Life'?	B: If you had to become an 'Internet Sensation', what would you like to be famous for? Why would you choose this? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being famous? Would you like to be famous? Why or why not?
J- Task 4	A: To 'kick-the-bucket' is an idiom that means to die. Some people like to write a 'Bucket-List', meaning they write a list of all the things they want to do before they die. Write a Bucket-List of 50 things you want to do before you die! Please illustrate your list too!	B: There are countless things you can learn how to do in this amazing world! Write a list of 50 things that you want to learn! Please illustrate your list too!
J- Task 5	A: Is there anything you love to do? Write a similar article about your hobby. Include pictures if you can.	B: There are thousands of travel bloggers who are women and who travel solo, check some of them out on YouTube. What do you think about traveling alone? Have you ever travelled anywhere alone? Would you like to travel somewhere alone? Why or why not?
J- Task 6	A: Is there an event in your life that changed you? Tell us more...	B: Would you rather become someone else, or live your life as you? Tell us more...
J- Task 7	A: Do you have an Inner Scorecard or an Outer Scorecard? What's on your Inner Scorecard? How is it different from what's on your Outer Scorecard? How does your life change when you focus on the Inner Scorecard rather than the Outer Scorecard?	B: 'Focus on the Journey not the Destination'... What does this mean? What does this mean for you in your life? Do you think it's good advice? Why or why not?

- Which was the easiest for you? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which was the most difficult for you? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which did you enjoy writing the most? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which one did you enjoy writing the least? \_\_\_\_\_
- Did you learn anything new about yourself? If so, what? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How much did you enjoy reading other people's Journals?

*I enjoyed it very much 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 I didn't enjoy it at all*

8. How much did you enjoy writing comments on other people's Journals?

*I enjoyed it very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *I didn't enjoy it at all*

9. How much did you enjoy writing questions on other people's Journals?

*I enjoyed it very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *I didn't enjoy it at all*

10. How much did you enjoy reading other people's comments on your Journals?

*I enjoyed it very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *I didn't enjoy it at all*

11. How much did you enjoy answering other people's questions on your Journals?

*I enjoyed it very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *I didn't enjoy it at all*

12. Have you ever kept a Diary or Journal before? In Japanese? Yes  No  In English? Yes  No

13. Do you keep a diary or Journal now? Yes  (in English / Japanese) No

14. Do you think this Journal writing improved your English grammar and vocabulary?

*Yes, very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *No, not at all*

15. Did this Journal writing increase your confidence writing in English?

*Yes, very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *No, not at all*

16. Did you like that your errors weren't corrected?

*Yes, very much* 7--- 6 --- 5 --- 4 --- 3 --- 2 --- 1 *No, not at all*

17. How do you think Journal Tasks should be graded? Please write in a %. (Anything is OK!)

Effort =	%
'High-level' English (grammar & vocabulary) =	%
Correct sentences (no mistakes) =	%
Interesting content =	%
Other (your idea) =	%
TOTAL =	100 %

18. What topics would you like to Journal about in English? .....

19. What advice can you give Phee about Journal Writing with students? .....