

Activity Sample #1

Private Journal Project¹

Overview:

In response to the increasing need for information literacy and digital literacy, the FYC classroom has adopted digital social pedagogy practices like discussions, peer reviews, digital humanities projects, public-facing projects, and online discussion posts. To mitigate the anxiety and pressure of a public-facing 21st c. FYC course, I turned to subversive diary and journaling practices of the 18th-20th c. The Private Journal Project is a recurring low-stakes assignment that asks students to write in a private space.

Objective:

This assignment is meant to give students a dedicated, recognized space to develop their writing privately. As writing becomes increasingly public and the FYC classroom continues to encourage public-facing projects with tangible effects in the community, students need a space where they can write for themselves. The project is assessed for completion and the instructor should never read the students' entries.

Activity/Assignment Outline:

When I have included this assignment in my syllabus in the past, I have had students write a minimum of a 1-page (or some kind of equivalent for students who do not feel comfortable producing written content or would rather produce another form of content for themselves) per week. Typically, students will purchase (or donate/share) college-ruled composition journals and fill one page each week, submitted in class. Each week, students bring their journal and I make a note of the assignment's completion without reading the students' writing. This is a low-stakes assignment with clear parameters and works easily with both points-based and contract/agreement-based assessment schemes.

Student Reception:

Students report getting a lot out of the assignment. Some students said they wrote about their lives, problems, wrote creatively, drew, colored, and wrote in ways they normally wouldn't. Some students said they've continued the exercise after the conclusion of the class, the best-case scenario. The assignment is rooted in composition research by Elizabeth Wardle, Linda Adler-Kassner, and others. The assignment resonates best with students when they encounter existing journal forms through the course content.

¹ This assignment was presented in conjunction with research on private journals in FYC at the Red River Graduate Student Conference in Fargo, ND. The presentation title is “You Mean You’re Not Going to Read Them?: The Barrier-Breaking Value of Private Journals in the Public FYC Classroom.”