

## Resource Guide

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### **Building an Online Journal Assignment in Canvas.**

Journal assignments are helpful pedagogical tools to include in your online course. By journal, we mean short, informal writings where individual students can record their thoughts, ideas, questions, and reflections on the materials assigned (i.e., readings, videos, etc.), and on their learning in the course. Journals can be occasional assignments on specific materials, or even weekly assignments to give students a chance to document the scope of their thoughts over several weeks or even the entire course. Journals are **individual** and **private** between the student and the instructor, and are not collaborative or peer review assignments, so that each individual student has the freedom and safety to share their personal thoughts. Since reflection opportunities are a requirement of the **Distance Course Design Rubric-Version 3 (see Standard 3.10)**, it is important to consider the type of reflection assignment and the necessary technical steps as part of your course design process. Canvas, unlike Blackboard, does not have a dedicated “tool” in the course navigation for journal assignments; however, there are two technical options for creating a journal assignment.

#### **Option #1: Creating a Journal Assignment for Individual Students via Assignment Group**

The first option is to create an Assignment Group in the Assignment Tab on the Course Navigation menu.

1. Go to the top right of the Assignments page and click the “+Group” button. A pop-up titled, “Add Assignment Group” will appear along with a space to enter the name of the assignment group. Consider naming this assignment group something like “Journal Assignments” or “Reflection Assignments,” something to designate it as informal, reflection-like assignments that are different from other writing assignments.
2. Then, create individual Journal Assignments (“+Assignment”) just as you would any other assignment except that you should select the Journal Assignments in the “Assignment Group” within the assignment settings. All the other options and settings for assignments (i.e. type of submission, grading, adding rubrics, etc.) are available to this assignment group as well. Add Journal Assignments to any module just as you would any other assignment.

#### **Pedagogical Considerations for Option #1**

- Use this option if you have occasional journals or reflections on separate topics and with separate prompts.
- Use this option if there is no need to keep a “running commentary” of a student’s reflections throughout the course.

### **Option #3: Creating a Journal Assignment via Student Groups paired with a Discussion.**

The second option is to create a Student Group in the People Tab on the Course Navigation menu, and then pair it with a Discussion in the Discussion Tab on the Course Navigation menu.

1. Go to the top right of the People page and click the "+Group Set" button. A pop-up titled, "Create Group Set" will appear. Enter the name of the group set (consider naming this student group something like "Journals" or "Weekly Reflections" to designate it as something different from other student groups you create). Then, in the "Group Structure" setting, select "Split number of students per group" and enter "1" so that each student on the roster is in their own individual group. This will prohibit students from seeing each other's posts as each student will be in their own "group."
2. After the Journals Group is created, go to the top right of the Discussion page, and click the "+Discussion" button to create a new discussion topic. The naming of the discussion topic is your choice, but we suggest you include something to indicate that this is a journal/reflection discussion, especially if you have other discussion assignments.
3. All the usual setting options for Discussions are available; however, there are two important settings to note. First, select the "This is a Group Discussion" box and then select the Group Set you've created for Journals (remember that the Journal Group is set for each individual student, whereas regular discussions or other Group Discussion may have several students). Second, select a Due Date that corresponds to when you want these journals to end (see pedagogical uses below).

#### **Pedagogical Considerations for Option #2.**

- Use this option if you have several weeks of journals or reflections on **the same topic** or with **the same prompt**. For example, if the course design calls for students to reflect weekly on the readings or practical activities conducted that week, establish the scope of the assignment in the Discussion Instructions.
  - If the Instructor wishes to have a specific prompt for a certain portion of the assignment, use an Announcement or Email to all students to communicate this information.
- Use this option if there is a need to keep a **"running commentary"** of student's reflections throughout the course or for a certain number of weeks throughout the course. In this case, students and instructor can look back over previous comments while they are posting new comments and responding to subsequent comments.
- **Regarding Due Date and Grading:** Select a Due Date that is at the end of the time frame you wish to have weekly journals; essentially, the Journal Discussion will stay open for that entire time. This will impact grading in that instructor will need to withhold entering a grade weekly in the grade box for this journal assignment until it is complete after the allotted amount of time. Instructor could "informally" grade each

week within Submission Comments, then total the grades at the end of the allotted time and submit that as the final grade for the complete assignment.

- **Regarding Instructor interaction with student weekly journals:** Instructor can choose to a) enter comments in the "Submission Comments" if using SpeedGrader to read the weekly journals, or b) reply with comments to each student's discussion. In both cases, only the instructor and individual student would see these comments.

For both options, it is important to have clear, concise instructions to communicate the purpose, the privacy aspect, the organization and grading particulars, and the learning outcomes related to this type of assignment. Doing so will allow both students and instructors to use this assignment to its fullest, while also evidencing learning and creating strong student-instructor interactions.

## Resources

Patson, N. (2022). [Using Reflective Writing to Get Students Connected with the Material](#). Faculty Focus.

Reinert Center Brief Resource Guide: [Implementing Reflective Assignments](#).

Wheeler, A. and Waltje, J. (2020). [Recording and/or Writing? Weighting the Benefits of Reflective Practices](#). Faculty Focus.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#) or submit a [consultation request form](#).