



# ***Using Weekly Reflective Academic Journals to Track Learning in Content Heavy Classes***

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UNIVERSITY  
*of* HAWAI'I®  
MĀNOA

Founded in 1907, the University of Hawaii at Manoa is the Land Grant (and also Sea Grant and Space Grant) University of the State of Hawaii. In 2015, it had 13,689 undergraduate and 5,176 graduate and professional students. The demographics of our student body are:

- Asian: 36.2%
- Caucasian: 22.6%
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander: 16.7%
- Multiracial: 14%
- Hispanic: 1.9%
- Black or African American: 1.5%
- Native American or Alaska Native: 0.3%



The *nail* that sticks out gets hammered down.



出る杭は  
打たれる

*Japanese proverb:*  
*deru kugi wa*  
*utareru*

*English translation:*  
*“The nail that*  
*sticks out gets*  
*hammered down.”*

<http://www.slideshare.net/gambana1/immigrant-nation-homogenous-nation-cultural-comparisons>



**Do you really know  
what they are thinking?**

**Much less learning?**



# Have you ever had a student tell you this in class?

***“I HATE your exams – the format, the wording, all of it. I have literally tried almost every studying style for your classes and apparently NONE have worked since clearly I have failed yet another exam.”***



# Reflective Academic Journal

THIS IS  
IMPORTANT



- Used in **upper division or graduate level** Animal Science classes
  - ANSC 451 Physiology of Domestic Animals (30 students, Spring 2016)
  - ANSC 462 W Reproduction and AI (28 students, Spring 2016)
  - ANSC 643 Physiology of Reproduction
- Beginning 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the semester, students write one page academic journals. **13 total journals per semester.**
- **10 points each (130 total) out of 1150 points.**
- **Submitted online** via Laulima (Sakai)



# ***From the student syllabus:***



Your **one page** journal needs to include the following:

- A **description/summary** of what happened in class – what happened, who, what, where, when and how.
- A **reflection** – what you “felt” about the class, your personal feelings or observations about what happened.
- **What did you learn?** What did you “take away” from the class? What might you have done differently? How confidently are you in your understanding?





# ***From the student syllabus:***

- Write in **first person** – using “I” or “me” – this is about you and your learning. Make the writing true to your personality.
- Try to **write as soon as possible** after class – this encourages a true and honest reflection on the events.
- **Don't write to please** Dr. Vincent, be fair and objective, and above all, be honest.
- Writing the academic journal helps Dr. Vincent **gauge the learning in the class**. The pace of the class may be sped up or slowed based upon the learning reflected in the journals.





# How it Works!

THIS IS  
IMPORTANT



Instructor makes presentations of topics for the week

At the end of each week

Students write and reflect on previous week's subject matter. Asks questions.

Cycle begins again for a new topic

**Reflective Academic Journal**

At the beginning of the week

Instructor highlights misconceptions observed or interesting questions gleaned from entire class journals. Reinforces learning of important points at the beginning of class

Prior to the next class period

Instructor collects journals on line to read, makes individual comments, and returns to students for personal feedback



# Making it Work

## The Students Benefit When You

- **Keep up** – make time to read all the journals.
- **Answer their questions.** No matter how “manini” they are.
- **Provide feedback to all.** Students appreciate the feedback.
- **Be encouraging, positive.**



# Making it Work

## The Course Benefits When You

- Do it in relatively **small classes**, < 30 students.
- For larger classes, assign reading journals to TA's, then meet weekly with TA's to gather themes, and gauge learning.
- Find the **core questions** and **address** these in the next class period.
  - Validates the students who ask questions.
  - Encourages future questions.
- Don't be afraid to **slow the pace**.



# Making it Work

THIS IS  
IMPORTANT

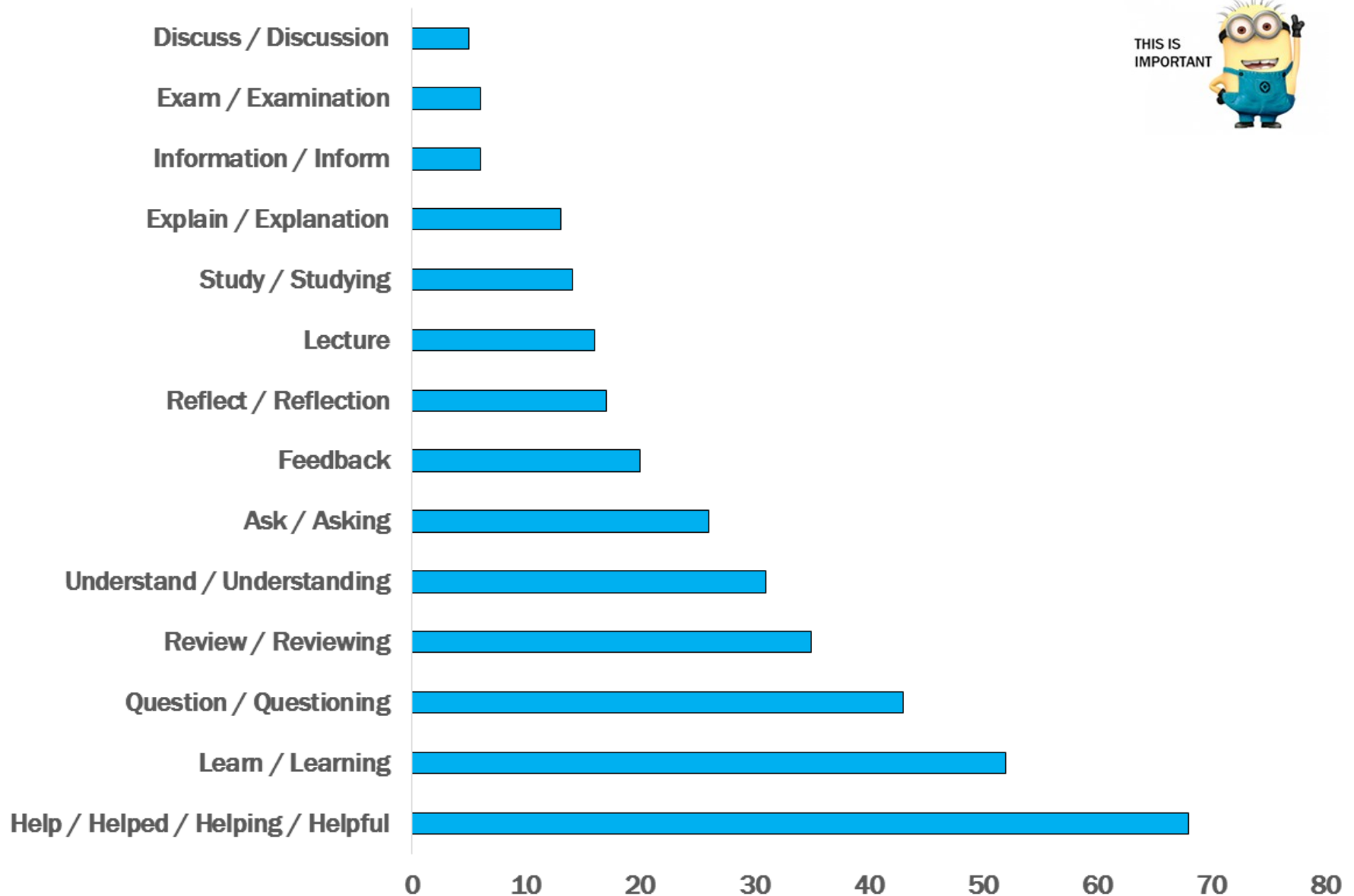


## The Instructor Benefits When You

- Don't **over complicate the grading**
  - They did it, or not
  - They turned it in on time, or not
  - They reflected on their learning, or not
- Make it **non-threatening**
  - Keep it informal writing
  - Correct grammar and spelling but don't knock off points for it.
- Do it all **online**. Download documents. Use **track changes** to provide feedback. Return **online**. Email attachments work. No paper, if possible.



**Figure 1. Frequencies of Words Used in Final Journals or Course Evaluations to Describe Reflective Academic Journals, 2013-2016.**



# Conclusion



- Reflective Academic Journals **enables student learning** in content heavy classes.
- Weekly, one-page, online journal entries provide for a **non-threatening, 2-way conversation** between student and instructor.
- The instructor benefits because journals provide a **weekly gauge** of student learning.
- Pace of the class can be slowed or sped up based upon the feedback received from students.



# Representative Student Comments:

What I appreciated the most, although I did not enjoy writing them because I always forgot to, were the weekly journals. These weekly assignments allowed us to **review** the material, while also **presenting questions** we had on the material. The immediate **feedback** was very **helpful**, although what I personally appreciated was the **support you offered** in the comments when I had a concept wrong. When I wrote my journals, I usually focused on what I remembered off hand rather than simply copying the slides (like I've seen some people doing). However, when I got a concept wrong, I would be politely corrected and then given a “**you got this**,” or “if you keep studying, you'll do fine.” I work the best when given **feedback** on my work, and these small comments were very **encouraging** this semester. – ANSC 451, junior, Spring 2016



# Representative Student Comments:

I actually liked these weekly journals we had to do. It gave us a chance to **voice any questions or confusions** we had about a subject without having to **feel the pressure of asking personally in class**. Or if we thought we understood something and we explained it wrong in the journals Dr. Vincent would **explain it better to us in class**. – *ANSC 462, senior, Spring 2013*





# Representative Student Comments:

Another thing that was really helpful, which I think **contributed to a lot of what I learned**, was writing these weekly journals. It helped me **understand and re-explain** what I knew to you. It also made me study the material after I learned it (which I usually do not do) so that I was fully informed when writing the journals. The best part about the journals was that it was an **easy and convenient way to asking you a question**. As much as I disliked writing the journals, I would say it was one of the best things about the class. – *ANSC 462, junior, Spring 2013*



# Representative Student Comments:

As annoying as they were, the journals are a nice touch for you to **check in on our understanding**. – *ANSC 451, junior, Spring 2015*

I actually found the weekly journals really helpful. I liked that you used them to **gauge our understanding** of a topic and **adjust your teaching style**, I think that **facilitated our learning** quite a bit. They also helped me to **review the material weekly** when I probably normally wouldn't, to be honest, so the journals were one of the best things of the class to me.  
– *ANSC 462, junior, Spring 2014*





*Mahalo for your attention*

*May I try and answer your questions?*



## Excerpted Journal – Vision (ANSC 451):

One of the questions that I have is about the macula and fovea. In my notes I have that both of these structures have the greatest amount of rods and cones here, is this correct? The fovea is within the macula. The macula is a broader area of mostly cones. The fovea is where the greatest amount of cones are present. The other question that I have is about the extrinsic muscles. I believe you discussed four in class and their functions and was wondering what they were. I was only able to write down two (superior oblique and inferior oblique) and miss the other two you discussed. Medial and lateral rectus, turn the eyeball medially (toward the nose) and laterally (toward the temple). The superior and inferior rectus turn the eyeball upward and downward. The superior oblique turns the eyeball downward and inward. The inferior oblique turns the eyeball upward and outward.



Excerpted Journal – Cardiovascular (ANSC 451):

What does it mean when it states that blood flowing back toward the relaxed ventricles causes the semilunar valves to close? From the aorta and pulmonary arteries – the pressures are greater than that in the ventricles so the semilunar valves close. Is it from the atrium? Also, what was the name of the image that relates the ECG wave, with ventricular volume and ventricular and atrial pressure? Wiggers diagram? The amount of information was a little overwhelming, but I will watch those videos you mentioned that are posted on Laulima to gain a better understanding. Go through it step by step. You'll get it. Grade 10/10

