

Documenting Everything: Your Journal is Your Logbook

Sailors had it for years. Great explorers had it as well. If you go on an expedition to an ancient Aztec mound, more than likely the archaeologist will have one too - so, why shouldn't you own one?

No, I'm not speaking of the scurvy that plagued the sailors! No, I'm not speaking of the Loch Ness Monster or Bigfoot, whom explorers claimed to have seen in snowy Manitoba winters. Nor am I speaking of a lost city, which was never truly lost, but simply buried under mounds of earth and recently dug up by an archaeologist.

I'm speaking of journals. Journals? Yes! Keeping a journal can be just as much of an adventure as sailing the high seas, exploring unknown Canadian wilderness or digging in the dirt to find buried treasure.

Journals have been a source of reflection for centuries. My suggestion is to look at your writing career as if you're an explorer analyzing new-found land; an archaeologist digging up new artifacts and renaming them and so on...

How can you do this? Well, view your journal as a logbook and document your daily happenings. Here is a suggested format for keeping your captain's log.

Divide your journal entries into sections: Date, Weather, Mood, Events and Freewrite

1. Date: This is the obvious one (for some people). Write the month, day and the year. Also write which day of the week it is (i.e., December 17, 2001; Monday).

2. Weather: Make note of the temperature outside. Is it 100 degrees? Or perhaps it's only 20 degrees? Is it raining and 35 degrees? Snowing and 110 degrees? Raining cats and dogs? (Don't step in a poodle....)

3. Mood: What's going on in your head? Did you just get off the phone with your ex-lover who ruined your day and sank you into the depths of depression? Write about it. Did you manage to pull off some wondrous passive-aggressive revenge against said ex-lover? Write about that too and how it made you feel.

4. Events: Here's where things get a bit complicated - for some. You have to do your homework. Watch television, read the newspaper and write a few lines about what's going on in your city, state, country or the world in general.

5. Freewrite: Here's your chance to shine. Since we're all writers, we should leave a section for free writing. Allow yourself some space to simply write aimlessly without direction. But, here's the challenge - try to limit yourself to a certain number of lines.

When you keep these entries for a week, two weeks or a longer period of time, it can be extremely beneficial. Comparing and contrasting the Mondays or Tuesdays could be a surprising learning experience.

Many times I've written stories and wanted to "know" what 78 degrees felt like, so I went to my journal and found an entry, read my mood descriptions and weather descriptions and was easily informed from my own documentation.

Keep in mind, a good writer documents everything - whether it be on paper or just in the mind's filing cabinet. But, to keep things in order, try to keep your documentation on paper - or at least saved to disk.

About the Author

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