

4. Journal organization

A journal is a place for students to respond privately to their literature while preparing for a discussion. They are also a place to write down reflections after a discussion. All students should know what topics they are expected to cover in their responses.

Journals should have a specific organization. This will make it easier for students to use them during discussions, and for teachers to evaluate. Depending upon the ability level of the students, teachers should assign a page limit for the pre-discussion and post-discussion responses. This limit should be clear to the students.

Teachers also must decide upon the type of journal to use. Students should not just write on binder paper and carry it in their binders. The journal responses must be bound together in some way. Some suggestions are using spiral notebooks, report covers filled with paper, small binders, or simply stapled paper packets. All journals should be the same for ease of teacher evaluation. Teachers can buy the journals and have students or the school reimburse them, or the journal can be a required supply for the beginning of the year. Keep in mind that reading and responding to the journals will be time-consuming. The journals should be lightweight and easy to carry. This will lighten the students' load as well. For examples of journal organization, see pages 41 and 42.

If teachers find that students are having a hard time organizing their journals and/or their responses are repetitive or lacking in certain areas, then they may want to structure the journals for the students at first. A sample journal packet that has been used successfully with the first round of novels is given on pages 43–53.

