

Journal writing is an informal approach to developing students' writing skills. The assessment is primarily based on improvement and completing a minimum number of pages (5 pages skipping lines) by the established deadline. My feedback to students is focused on interaction with what they have written as opposed to correcting syntax or orthography. Since this is a dialogue journal, I respect the confidential nature of what students choose to write. Be prepared for students to share anecdotes that may be sensitive in content. This is a great way to get to know your students on a more personal level. I do not place a value judgment on their ideas or how compelling their argument may be. I am concerned with improvement from one journal collection to the next. Ease of expression and sophistication of vocabulary are taken into account in the grade that is assigned.

One strategy, as a focus activity, is to start the class with one of the journal topics on the board or overhead when the students are entering the classroom. After a 6-7 minute writing exercise, have the students turn to the person seated next to them and converse about what they have just written. Next, solicit opinions from the class as a whole to engage the class in a discussion in Spanish. This activity focuses on the synthesis of writing, speaking and listening while combining the interpersonal and presentational modes of communication.

Students write the 5-page entries outside of class. Ideally, the class will finish the 70 pages in the notebook (skipping lines) by the date of the AP exam. I have found that the spiral-bound composition books are both inexpensive and practical. Different colored composition books are used in rotation, so that the grading is not overwhelming. For example, I buy red, blue and green composition books, collecting one color each week in a cycle throughout the semester. Students will see the benefits of keeping a dialogue journal as it allows them to get their ideas down on paper more quickly and coherently when writing more formal in-class essays. Teachers will likely want to adapt this list to their school community as some topics may not be appropriate in all schools. Likewise, many of these would never appear on an actual exam because of the bias and controversy that the topics provoke. Nonetheless, these are topics that pique students' interest and can make for excellent discussion and essay writing.

Adolescents

1. Stress and its effects on young people today
2. The process of applying to college
3. Solutions to prevent high-school drop outs
4. Should the secondary school curriculum be increased or reduced
5. Should contraceptives be available in high schools

Advertising

6. False advertising
7. Political campaign advertising and its effects
8. Sexism in the media
9. To what extent should the government control advertising
10. Ads for tobacco and alcohol

Minorities

11. Should colleges have admissions quotas
12. How has the Afro-American youth changed in recent years
13. Racism in the courtroom / in prisons
14. The verdict of Scott Peterson / Martha Stewart / Michael Jackson
15. The impact of Latin Americans as the largest minority in the US

Americana

16. The high costs of funerals or / the social pressures of planning a funeral
17. Who benefits from the lottery or does it exploit the poor
18. A nationalized health care system
19. The disappearing middle class in America

Social Problems

20. Censorship in art / in the media
21. Should convicted criminals be eligible for social welfare
22. Mandatory HIV testing or testing for drugs
23. Poverty fosters crime...Yes or no?
24. Hunting (deer, birds) is necessary in some cases

Transportation

25. Should airlines be nationalized
26. The car as a status symbol
27. The minimum age or the ideal age to get a driver's license
28. The impact of the "chunnel" tunnel connecting English to the European continent
29. The effects of increasing or eliminating speed limits on the highways

Ethics

30. Should the morning-after pill be available in the US?
31. Should HIV+ patients have to identify themselves as positive
32. The denial of health care benefits to illegal immigrants
33. Homosexuality in the military
34. The treatment of Native Americans on reservations

Children

35. The possible effects of videogames or violent toys on children
36. Overseas adoption of children
37. What kids can learn from grandparents and great-grandparents
38. How to train or hire a reliable babysitter
39. The worst nightmare of my childhood / or the best dream I can remember

Community

40. Fire arms should be required to be registered with the police...why or why not
41. The effects of gangs in and beyond urban centers

42. The advantages and disadvantages of legalizing prostitution
43. Write an editorial to your mayor complaining about problems in your town or city
44. What the individual can do to help protect the environment

Consumerism

45. The effects of fast food on your health
46. Cell phones, television, computers...luxuries or necessities
47. Should phone surveys and telemarketing be prohibited
48. Are brand name clothes worth the price (Abercrombie, Ralph Lauren, Nike)
49. Advantages and disadvantages of credit cards

Current events

50. The importance of the ozone layer
51. The shortage of teachers nowadays
52. How to improve security of air travel
53. Should Puerto Rico be the 51st state, a commonwealth or independent
54. Modern-day heroes and idols for young people

Customs and Traditions

55. How to plan a surprise party
56. Witchcraft and its practices
57. Smoking in public places
58. Why are tattoos in style and what do they express
59. How the institution of marriage has changed for modern society

The Environment and Pollution

60. The causes and effects of acid rain
61. The causes and effects of noise pollution
62. Recycling should be mandatory...why or why not?
63. The pros and cons of being vegetarian
64. The importance of the Amazon rain forest

Family

65. What every father/mother should know about raising children
66. The impact of divorce
67. Same sex marriages
68. The concept of family in the US vs. Latin America, Europe, Asia
69. The ideal age to get married / to have children

Fashion

70. Is buying /wearing a fur coat unethical
71. School uniforms should / should not be required
72. Describe the fashion styles of the 70s / 80s / 90s
73. The impact of sweatshops on the clothing industry
74. European influence on fashion in the US

Food

75. How your diet is influenced by religious beliefs
76. How to prepare your favorite dish
77. Myths and misunderstandings about certain food items
78. How mechanization has changed the quality of food (vs. organic)

79. Eating disorders and how to prevent them or cope with them

The future

80. Should the US continue space (and other planets) exploration

81. UFOs: Reality or fantasy

82. The benefits of solar energy

83. The car / house / school / workplace of the future

84. The impact of overpopulation

Government

85. The role of First Lady of the US

86. Why American can't recite the pledge of allegiance / cite any of the declaration of independence / the constitution / find basic places on a map

87. States need and deserve more autonomy

88. Pros and cons of social welfare programs

89. The national deficit

Health

90. The benefits and risks of organ transplants

91. Hunger in the Third World

92. Unnecessary operations by surgeons / corruption in the health care industry

93. The effects of caffeine on your diet

94. Bodybuilding: Only for the ego or for health reasons

Philosophy

95. Does the American Dream still exist? What does it consist of?

96. How does one define love / honor / truth

97. Lying is OK sometimes

98. Is terrorism revolutionary?

99. Today's attitudes about what is good and bad / right and wrong

100. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" Discuss.

Debate Topics

- Euthanasia / Death with dignity
- Experiments on animals (for medicine, cosmetics, etc)
- Abortion
- Death penalty
- Affirmative action
- Donating organs for transplant or in exchange for money
- Foreign aid
- Sex education in schools
- Violence in the cinema and on TV
- Prayer in schools
- A flat tax (fixed income tax)
- Tobacco advertising and its effects
- Free drugs and syringes for addicts
- Animal rights
- Immigration laws

- Gun control
- The military's policy of "Don't ask, don't tell"
- Censorship
- Global warming
- Televised court decisions
- Year-round schools
- Drug testing for athletes, coaches, teachers
- Eliminating the grading system in high schools
- Eliminating the SAT or the ACT for college admission
- Santa Claus destroys the meaning of Christmas
- Avoiding "Merry Christmas" and using "Happy Holidays" / Christmas trees vs. ornamental trees
- Minimum age to drink
- English as the official language in the US
- Locker searches in schools
- Women on the battlefield (role in the military)
- Effects of rap and hip-hop lyrics on teen language / behavior
- Can money buy happiness / what money can't buy
- If you could create a national holiday for someone (past or present), whom would you choose and why?
- The commercialization of the sports industry