

MC 400 – JAMES MADISON COLLEGE FIELD EXPERIENCE

CRITICAL INCIDENT JOURNAL TECHNIQUE SHEET
for
MC 400 - OPTION 3A

Refer to this sheet if you choose to complete Option 3A (Critical Incident Journals) for MC 400.

Critical Incident Journals are an excellent way to improve and document your active, conscious reflections on your internship experience. They differ from Field Journals in that they are more consciously-structured, focused, and oriented around preset goals and objectives. The Learning Contract you sign at the outset of the Field Experience should remain your guide, and your journal entries a record of your success in fulfilling that contract.

The task then is for you to use the Learning Contract to determine which incidents that occur during your internship are critical. We ask that you select, on average, one incident per week. Your selection criteria should also include whether those incidents *produced a change in you*. The incidents most critical will be those that had an impact on you and your perspective, in terms of your Learning Contract. “*What have I learned from this*” should be the question uppermost in your mind, and the Critical Incident Journal that you submit in completion of your MC400 assignment should contain your reflections (of a page or two in length) on 14 of the most critical of those incidents. Such incidents need not be recorded chronologically – you may not become fully aware of the impact on an incident until days, or even weeks, after its occurrence. Do not hesitate to reflect back on events, even as you have moved on.

To quote from a recognized manual on this subject:

Whether to include an incident or not depends on how it relates to why you have chosen to be an intern and what you are trying to get out of the experience. Consider yourself a pool ball in progress across the table. In a “critical incident” journal, you will want to record and explore the points of impact with other balls which cause you to change your direction. You will want to describe and explore in writing both the incident of impact and how it affected your progress as an intern. At first, it will be difficult to determine which incidents comprise these “points of impact”. However, as time goes on you will become increasingly adept at recognizing a pattern in the kinds of incidents which have a powerful effect on you. The understanding of your own patterns, alone, should prove extremely useful to you in making key decisions later on.¹

Do not overestimate the difficulty of keeping such journals, but do not underestimate the seriousness of the task. Sifting through your experience to select those incidents from which you learned the most can be a dynamic and useful way to more fully assimilate the richness of your experience. Or, it can feel like drudgery and busy-work. The difference will lie in your attitude. Approach these journal entries as an integral part of learning from your Field Experience, and in getting the most out of it. Far beyond the grade that you receive, or even how much you enjoy your day-to-day tasks, a serious and reflective journal will enable you to realize and explore the full range of learning opportunities with which your Field Experience presents you.

¹ Timothy Stanton and Kamil Ali, *The Experienced Hand: A Student Manual for Making the Most of an Internship*, (Cranston, NJ: The Carroll Press, 1982)