

The Appalachian Trail: How to Keep your Memories After

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In this article, Hopper explores the great outdoors and examines how journaling is an awesome way to keep your memories after the trail ends. He also writes about journaling through the lens of CHAT, and how journaling is an uptake genre, as well as the health benefits of journaling.

Most of my friends have an affectionate nickname for me: Grandpa. I think it's probably because I really enjoy going to bed at a reasonable time, I'm always yelling at the rotten kids to stay off my apartment welcome mat, and I have an appreciation for the nostalgic. This last part is why I think I enjoy journaling so much. It takes me back to a simpler time—no technology but rather just myself and my thoughts. Journaling is in itself a genre of writing and one I am definitely going to implement when I take to the Appalachian Trail this summer. It will capture memories in a completely different way than pictures and will be something that I will keep with me for the sake of my future children and grandchildren to read someday. Journaling is also a tool you can use to help better understand the concept of an **uptake genre**. In our history and culture that has seemingly become so hectic, journaling can be a source of stress relief for college students.

Uptake

Before getting into the meat of this article, I'd like to take a paragraph or two to explain uptake and how journaling can be considered an uptake genre. According to isuwriting.org, "Uptake is the process we go through to take up a new idea and think about it until it makes sense." You may have learned in your high school classes how to write different types of papers (i.e. research papers, five-paragraph essays, and the like). However, no one sat you down and said, "This is the proper way to journal," because everyone's journal is a personal creation. To start journaling, you are taking experiences, emotions, and random tangents and creating your own style of journal.

Journaling as an uptake genre, then, is how you are putting into words what you've experienced. An example of my journal beginnings is provided later. I began to write down my thoughts and what was important to me in my life at the time. Keeping track of all these various improvements during my life has allowed me to track how I have grown as a person. It really is a great tool to help articulate abstract things like emotions, but it also helps you organize your thoughts, and *gives you more freedom to write without "rules" of conventional papers*. This last part is **KEY** to your success in college and life. As you go higher in education, the five-paragraph essay and its structure will be replaced by writing projects that you have no idea where to begin because the instructions are not clear cut or you've never written in that type of genre or style before.

Hitting the Trails

Pope Paul VI said that people listen to witnesses more than teachers and to teachers only if they are witnesses. My humble beginnings as a college student who decided to journal is not a cliché story about doodling and pouring my heart out to "Dear Journal," but rather is a story about a young college freshman who was pretty apprehensive at first because his only friends who journaled were girls. I originally started journaling as a way to collect my thoughts, especially during prayer time, because journaling was a way for me to see what mattered to me during my freshman year versus what matters now, two years later. Journaling has shown the growth and strides that I've made as a writer and as a person in regard to how I organize my thoughts and what is important to me (this is how I have used journaling as "uptake"). As mentioned in the beginning of this article, my nickname is Grandpa, so forgive me if I age myself here, but I really enjoy reading books, especially those about Christian spirituality, and I have found that a great

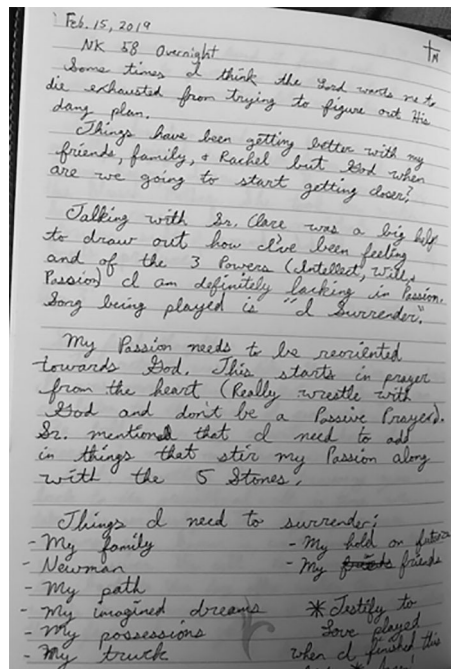


Figure 1. Picture of my prayer journal

way to process these is to actually write down how I interpret them. Now how does this relate to the Appalachian Trail or journaling as a genre?

For all of my camping friends out there, the trail is a great time to just get lost in nature. There will be, undoubtedly, many challenges out there, and journaling will serve as a format to write down your various experiences and how you coped with them. It will also be a great way to write down all the things that pop into your head when you're just out walking in nature alone and you let your mind wander. Throughout the trip, you might even learn something about yourself and you can write that down and take it back to civilization with you.

I am going to be hitting the trail this summer with my dad (also an old man like myself) and I hope to journal everyday about what has happened that day, where we went, that sort of thing. Journaling will help me keep my memories organized and if something spectacular happens, I can't tweet it out because, well, I'll be in the mountains. Being able to journal will also be a great way to unwind by the fire from a long day of trekking; nice quiet time is so hard to find these days with the constant cacophony of sounds that we are bombarded with in our day-to-day lives.

I think that we all long for at least a sliver of a simpler time. Journaling allows you that time to put yourself into your writing and the journal is your voice, not the rubric of a teacher. We are in an age of social media prominence, so people very much enjoy the anonymity of hiding behind a user name. They can rant and rave all they want on their “Finstas,” but journaling is you: heart and soul, the good and the bad. It is a way to write about our everyday lives and doesn’t just have to be in the great outdoors. Writing about your day, something that happened in class, or a really good conversation with a friend are just a few topics that could be in a journal. I find it really enjoyable to write about the positive impacts that have been made throughout the day, because it helps refocus my mind and remind myself that the world isn’t burning down. Our lives can be very stressful and journaling has a lot of really great benefits in the realm of mental health.

I’ve talked a lot about all the great benefits of journaling in regards to improving your writing prowess, but allow me to point out the medical benefits as well (English class can be very multifaceted). Some people may be hesitant about journaling because of their antecedent knowledge of the topic. For instance, when I was younger, only girls would journal, and so my antecedent knowledge of journaling was mistaken as something feminine. However, I want to put forth a different side of journaling and how it works as an uptake genre in regards to mental health. All of the information that will now be presented is from the University of Rochester Medical Center. I can guarantee that most of you are stressed out because—I’m no doctor and don’t play one on TV—but I am a fellow college student and know all the stressors placed on us throughout our four years on this hallowed quad, and I can speak from my own experiences, too.

Health Benefits

The URMC offers three thoughts about where journaling can help: manage anxiety, reduce stress, and cope with depression. I totally agree with them there. Whenever school or life gets to be too much, journaling is a really great way to let it all out on the paper and you don’t have to be an amazing writer because journaling is just for you. It is a composition for one and I think that’s part of the beauty of it: anyone can journal. You can be brutally honest with what is going on in your day, and you can keep it simple with all that you jot down because you probably aren’t going to publish your deepest, darkest secrets.

With every school project, you learn something and this one is no different. While reviewing the URMC, I found a great example of journaling

as uptake. “Journaling helps control your symptoms and improve your mood by: Tracking any symptoms day-to-day so that you can recognize triggers and learn ways to better control them” (URMC). I think that this is one of the best benefits of journaling. Uptake genres are all about using various experiences and being able to articulate them. If you can recognize things before they are going to happen because you’ve been tracking them through the uptake of your journal, then they become that much easier to prevent or avoid. Journaling then becomes a double whammy; you can get your creative juices flowing and become a better writer all while de-stressing and improving your mental health! All in all, journaling helps you feel more in control, and even if your day goes south (which would probably be warmer than the weather here in Central Illinois, so not that bad), then you have an outlet where you can put all the highs and lows of the day. Always remember, you’re too blessed to be stressed.

CHAT It Up

People may not believe that journaling is a genre of writing but by channeling Joyce Walker’s article, “Just CHATting,” we are going to see just how journaling is a unique uptake genre. For those freshmen who have no idea what CHAT is, or if you’ve never taken an English class at ISU, it stands for cultural-historical activity theory. Essentially, CHAT, as it’s used at ISU, is a way of looking at a particular composition, examining how it affects its audience and the impact it will have as a piece of writing. CHAT is a concept that can be applied to more than just your homework. Being familiar with the different components of ISU CHAT will help you in many aspects of your life. You can look at a business proposal and analyze it and CHAT helps you figure out 1) what the proposal is, 2) what are some ways to accomplish the task, and 3) what are the repercussions or challenges that will be presented along the way. CHAT will also take place in your mind before you even begin writing. Once you are given an assignment, your thoughts will start to put pen to paper in your mind and a lot of ideas will begin to spring up. This makes CHAT useful for so much more than just your English classes.

There are 7 key parts of ISU CHAT: **production, representation, reception, distribution, socialization, ecology, and activity**. I would like to focus specifically on how **production, socialization, and ecology** work together in the journal genre.

Production for journaling can be a very different experience for each writer. Walker describes it as, “All the aspects that went into creating the text.

These can include tools, practices, materials, and other related elements” (Walker 74). Journaling needs only two things: a journal and a writing utensil. Everything else you would like to add is completely up to you. I have many friends who are amazing artists and they doodle (well, they call it a doodle, I call it a work of art) and this adds color and another dimension of their personality on the pages. Another tool I use is writing in cursive. I think it is an elegant form of writing and it’s simple, yet no one does it anymore. That is one way I put myself onto the page, but, as you can see, the possibilities are really wide open for the production of your journal. Production is also going to be influenced by the experiences that you have (the main reason you are journaling in the first place). Without this next part of ISU CHAT, your production wouldn’t have much meat on its bones.

Socialization is an interesting part of ISU CHAT and journaling. This genre is for an audience of one, as I mentioned earlier. However, even though a journal may only have an audience of one, that person understands their writing as part of their experience in the world, with genres, and tools, and other people. The way they understand what a journal is for, the way they write in it, and even what they write about (their emotions and activities) is all based on their experience in the world. This is socialization! We view journaling as a very solitary act but we are very social people and it is particularly those experiences that shape and mold us into the people we are. The very fact that writers of this genre are writing is due to the interactions that they have had with their peers and with their environment. This brings me into the seamless segue of how **ecology** connects.

The term **ecology** in the ISU CHAT model deals with how the environment affects the text and shapes it. It is more than just the weather! Journaling and social media are two genres that take ecology beyond the biological forces in life. If you live in a very hostile environment, then those experiences are going to shape your outlook on life. This “ecology” of your living situation will come out differently in your journaling versus social media. Actually, you might find yourself writing more about the minute moments of happiness to help you keep an optimistic view of the world around you in your journal. On your various social media platforms, however, you could take a more rebellious stance towards the current status quo and fight for more changes. I view journaling as a more passive genre, whereas social media’s ecology allows it to be a genre of change. These two writing platforms are written for very different audiences—an audience of one, to an audience of thousands. It could also affect your journaling if your socializations are really bad, then you might write more pessimistically about things. Ecology takes socialization into account, and shapes the choices you make about when, how and through what medium you write (**production**).

To sum it up more succinctly, Joyce Walker says, “The actual activities that people engage in when they are creating the text” (Walker 76). A big component of this is what inspired you to write in your journal that day. It could be something very small or a big event that happened. Whatever it is, it has sparked something in you that you felt was important enough to write down, and that is what makes journaling so personal. An event that happened to you will elicit a completely different response to another journalist and their entry will be totally different than yours.

To Conclude

Journaling is a great way to articulate and keep your experiences in a way completely different than a social media post would, and to keep your thoughts organized and your life hopefully a little less stressful. Journaling is an uptake genre, and as you write more frequently, you can track how your writing and your entire being have grown and changed. I hope this article has evoked a call to action for you all to start a journal and to really see the changes throughout your years at ISU and beyond. To conclude: Dear Diary, you have so much to offer as a genre and it will be a treat someday to re-read my thoughts and not only relive some of my life’s great memories but also realize how much I’ve grown as a writer.

Works Cited

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Jacob Hopper is a sophomore transplant at Illinois State. He is a Horticulture and Landscape Management major, who loves spending his time in the great outdoors, at the Newman Center, and with friends. He credits God for bringing him to ISU and couldn't be happier.