

School-Based Intervention Idea from [www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org)



Focus: **MATHEMATICS**

## Math Instruction: Unlock the Thoughts of Reluctant Students Through Class Journaling (Baxter, Woodward & Olson, 2005)

Students can effectively clarify their knowledge of math concepts and problem-solving strategies through regular use of class 'math journals'.

Journaling is a valuable channel of communication about math issues for students who are unsure of their skills and reluctant to contribute orally in class. At the start of the year, the teacher introduces the journaling assignment, telling students that they will be asked to write and submit responses at least weekly to teacher-posed questions. At first, the teacher presents 'safe' questions that tap into the students' opinions and attitudes about mathematics (e.g., 'How important do you think it is nowadays for cashiers in fast-food restaurants to be able to calculate in their head the amount of change to give a customer?'). As students become comfortable with the journaling activity, the teacher starts to pose questions about the students' own mathematical thinking relating to specific assignments. Students are encouraged to use numerals, mathematical symbols, and diagrams in their journal entries to enhance their explanations. The teacher provides brief written comments on individual student entries, as well as periodic oral feedback and encouragement to the entire class on the general quality and content of class journal responses. Regular math journaling can prod students to move beyond simple 'rote' mastery of the steps for completing various math problems toward a deeper grasp of the math concepts that underlie and explain a particular problem-solving approach. Teachers will find that journal entries are a concrete method for monitoring student understanding of more abstract math concepts. To promote the quality of journal entries, the teacher might also assign them an effort grade that will be calculated into quarterly math report card grades.

### References

Baxter, J. A., Woodward, J., & Olson, D. (2005). Writing in mathematics: An alternative form of communication for academically low-achieving students. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(2), 119-135.

Copyright ©2008 Jim Wright