**Template for a single journal writing assignment tied to an experiential activity:**

Just handing students a journal and expecting them to write on their own won’t work well. Leaders are meditative writing coaches who are willing to watch students, listen to them, engage them in conversation, focus on their growth, and create a relaxed environment. Leaders on extended programs should have the students write every day (1/2-hour blocks of time, 1-2 times). Here are some guidelines concerning the process for integrating reflective writing into an activity:

* **Preparation**: Create a prompt of selection of prompts that will fulfill learning objectives, will help students reflect on the activity, and fit in your lesson plan and curriculum.
  + You can choose a purely reflective prompt: What do you think and feel about X? What did you learn through this experience?
  + Or you can choose a prompt that is partly narrative or descriptive and partly reflective: What happened during our experience that interests you? Why does it interest you?
  + Decide when you will have the students write. Set up the activity so that the writing happens before the activity or experience is completely over, so students can focus on the writing, not on getting home or on moving to the next activity.
* **Frame both the experience and the act of writing.** Just as you need to frame the activity before students engage with it, you need to also frame the reflective writing exercise. Show how the prompt connects to the experience and to learning outcomes or program goals. Perhaps express this in the form of a theme, for example:
  + “On this hike our theme will be ‘hearts knit together.’ I want you to think and talk about what others have done to help you feel that you are an essential part of this group. This links to our learning objectives of communicating feelings to create a stronger community.”
  + “Today in class, I want you to jot down ideas that other people in our class seem to care intensely about. This ties to our life-long learning objective of finding your own passion.”
  + “During this phase of the experiment I want you to observe when people do something other than the prescribed procedure in order to see if their method is better than the prescribed procedure. This connects to our life-long learning goal of continually imagining how to improve scientific processes.”
* **Engage in the activity and in the writing exercise**.
  + During the physical experience, if possible, converse with students about the theme, the learning objectives, and the prompt. Also, converse with students about other matters or every activity becomes overly focused, overly programmed.
  + At the beginning of the writing exercise, if possible, seat the participants in a circle.
  + Talk about the idea behind the prompt and give the prompt again. More examples:
    - “Now expand on three of the 20 interesting images you observed on this hike and recorded in your journal.”
    - “I mentioned that you should observe things that seem ‘foreign’ on our walk through Edinburgh. Now describe some of them.”
  + Model the writing by verbally giving a short version of what the students might write about and then eliciting more examples from the students.
  + Have them write. If outdoors, ask them to find a place where they can focus. You have to be firm about them being silent; nobody can talk and write at the same time. When they first engage in writing the time you give them should be short, 5 minutes or so. Then you can have them write for longer stints, up to 15 or 20 minutes.
  + Leaders should also write; if it's important to do, everyone does it. Also, if you read your writing out loud, students will see that mistakes don't matter, that no piece of writing dashed off like this is perfect. Perfection at isn't the point.
* **Reflect on the writing and begin to integrate with lifelong learning objectives.** Writing can be reflection on a physical activity, but it’s also good to reflect on the process of learning through writing. This can happen in discussion.
  + Have the students return to the circle**.**
  + Ask, "Who would like to read what you wrote?" If no one volunteers, you can use an arbitrary method of choosing someone (spin a water bottle, and whoever it points to should read) or call on someone. You can also just share what you wrote. Make sure they know that anyone can say, “I don't want to read what I wrote, it's private.”
  + Make sure the person reads from the page, no verbalization or summary, this shifts the priority from verbal to written language.
  + Have people comment (reflect) on the writing, giving feedback such as, “I liked your description of x.” “I can tell that you are a person who y.” “This tells me that Z is important to you.” The writer can also reflect on their own writing. This part of the process creates community and gives you the opportunity to emphasize the connection between what they wrote and program goals.
  + Perhaps have them write a minute more, describing what they’ve learned from the writing experience.
  + Future writing exercises can build on this one.