



Museum School Journal Guide

Every year the CCOM teachers purchase THOUSANDS of journals for the students in preparation for their week. Along the way, we've learned a few things that work well... and we're happy to share!

1. Size: "basically, you want a journal as big as your students can handle" – Grade 4 teacher

There's nothing more adorable than a tiny tot holding on to something waaay to big for them. But it can be frustrating for them (and for you, "can you carry this?") if the journal your students have is too big, or too thick for them to carry comfortably. Likewise, if it's too big, some students have trouble taking care of their journal respectfully. Choose a size that feels right for you – if it means waiting a month to get to know your students before you order them – that's a-okay!

2. Material "durability is key" – Grade 2/3 teacher

There are a lot of different journal choices out there right now, but the most common one we see is the letter (8.5×11) size, coil bound, and blank insides. These have plenty of pages, and they're a bit sturdier than floppy journals because they come with composite covers. This is super important, because the ideal journal is comfortable to use in a variety of settings, not just at a desk. Here's the thing though... those covers rip right off. Here's two techniques we like for keeping them on. Have students design their own front and back cover using one side of one piece of A3 sized paper then use clear plastic tape to cover the whole page, and affix it to the composite covers, completely covering the binding. OR make a strip of laminate the same length of the journal and big enough to cover the binding and at least 1.5 inches on either side. Tape this laminate to the covers using duct tape or something else strong. BONUS: if you have the coil journals, this will also help students resist the urge to pull the coil out.

3. Lined or unlined? "work with what your students will use" – Grade 5 teacher

Lined journals encourage writing, unlined encourage other forms of communication. Generally, we recommend providing unlined journals for younger folks, but keeping some lined paper handy to glue in if they need it. Whatever you choose, practice a lot (if it's unlined, practice writing in it with students, if it's lined, practice drawing)! This will help students get over their discomfort with the page.

4. Fold or coil? “I prefer coil myself, so I use that with my students” – Grade 1 teacher

Ideally you want a journal that can lay flat, so that either side can be written on, and students can use the stability of the pages as a writing surface if they’re not working at a desk. Lots of types of binding allow this, but coil seems to be quite popular. BUT – there’s always those young folks who tear that coil out. Here’s two tips for curbing that. Glue a paper “fidget” onto the cover (a textured piece of paper, maybe a pop out card, maybe a line of triangles or two that can be popped up or folded, a pipe cleaner... anything that works for that students!) and when you see that student playing with the coil, remind them to use the fidget instead. OR super glue a bead to each end of the coil, sometimes the texture of the bead is enough of a fidget itself, and it’s much harder to pull through the cardboard.

5. Make it special through ritual “we made our own covers that they felt proud of, and every time we use our journal I have a chime that I sound, and we do a breathing activity before we open them up” – Grade 3 teacher

It takes practice to generate a respectful loving relationship to things. This is part of the museum school in so many ways, so why not start with your journal. Use whatever tools you like, but if you help your students see their own journals as important records of their year, they’ll get more out of them. Records are not mistake proof either, it’s important to record our learning by showing how we improve. This is why we have things like graduations and piano recitals regularly, not just when you’ve gotten to the highest level. It’s important to record and celebrate the journey.