

EPA Thinking Journal – Documentation for the Match

Overview

This document has two parts:

- 1) an introductory explanation with directions for building your own EPA Thinking Journal
- 2) a blank EPA Thinking Journal *template* (EPA Thinking Journal Critical Incident Form) to facilitate documenting your efforts to become an entrustable thinker.

How will awareness of the EPAs help me in the match?

Any applicant that can convince a program director that they are entrustable, will put the program director at ease. Instead of having to correct deficiencies in the new resident, they will be able to give attention to educating them in their specialty. On the other hand, applicants who cannot convince a program director that they are entrustable will create a concern about possible deficiencies (from “The Core Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs): The Next Step 1?”, ESP Student Blog).

Why will journaling increase my awareness of the EPAs?

If you make a record of how you are thinking during specific activities, you will automatically improve and develop your ability to use those skills.

- Sleep science has revealed that your brain continues to replay events experienced prior to sleep and this includes journal writing. If you make a record of your thinking during daily events, you will learn that way of thinking.
- If you document entrustable thinking, it will be consolidated into a long-term skill. Sleep research shows that this occurs primarily during REM sleep - and the good news is that you can't prevent it! (The only way to prevent learning is to sit and read!)

Do I just make a record of anything that comes to mind?

If you want to develop entrustable thinking skills that are convincing both to your clerkship attendings and to future residency programs, you need to *specifically* record brief explanations of what you did and how it revealed entrustable (or pre-entrustable) thinking. As a result, journaling will help you sell yourself through an ability to sell your awareness of thinking skills in clinical practice. An easy way to compose journal entries is through reflection on “critical incidents.”

Is a critical incident the same as a crisis incident?

A critical incident shares in common with a crisis incident that both are related to events that test us. A crisis is more urgent and unstable, and an example would be the way you have felt before an important exam. A critical incident is also an event, but it is more *controlled and stable* involving skillful *judgment* about the outcome. Your journaling will call on specific situations called critical incidents to focus your attention on your performance in those situations.

How can “critical incidents” focus my attention?

A critical incident always has an expected outcome, e.g. studying for an evening or presenting a patient case to a clerkship team. Each of your journal entries will evaluate the outcome, i.e. “How did things go in this particular situation?” In the EPA Thinking Journal, you will answer specifically by recalling the type of thinking that you used in each situation, i.e. you will reflect on how you used what you have learned.

- Part of your reflection will be informed from feedback, e.g. teachers, grades on exams, or simulated patients.
- Another part of your reflection will be based on your own developing self-awareness. This part of your learning will be of great interest to residency program directors.

How will I recognize the type of thinking I’m using?

The purpose of the EPA Thinking course is to teach you to be aware of your own thinking. The modules are designed to acquaint you with how both pre-entrustable and entrustable thinking compare, not just when performing in the clinic but also when studying the basic sciences.

- Pre-entrustable thinking in the clinic emphasizes the use of *rote replay* of memorized scripts. In the basic sciences, pre-entrustable thinking emphasizes recognition learning since this tends to be emphasized on most MCQ exams.
- Entrustable thinking in the clinic emphasizes the use of integrative knowledge to achieve an *intuitive, anticipatory* grasp of the performance. In the basic sciences, entrustable thinking emphasizes relationships and comparisons in building a big picture.

Are there any other aspects of my EPA thinking that require awareness?

While entrustability indicates skill development based on experience, there is a normal tendency of the brain to *automate* routines. If you are going to document entrustable thinking, you must also include steps you take to prevent automated behavior.

How do I organize my journaling?

The primary problem with journaling is organization. A haphazard system would not reveal improvement or provide insight into persistent problems. Poor organization will provide little support for intervention.

- A highly effective approach to organization involves *specific criteria* as reference points for composing journal entries. These criteria are “fill in the blank” prompts that help you recall your critical incidents.
- Prompts help you identify what your *blind-spots* are while at the same time indicating the intervention, e.g. reducing your dependence on memorization by organizing information into a big picture or by recognizing clues in a patient history that lead to a focused interview.

How do I get started?

The EPA Thinking Journal Critical Incident Form that is provided below is adaptable to any learning situation. This is possible because there is no difference in the way your brain learns

microbiology from the way it learns surgery. Everyone starts as a novice and progresses only as fast as skill develops.

- A novice may not always complete a learning cycle in everything they study, but an entrustable student always does. This development requires the practice that journaling provides.
- The fastest skill development has been shown to occur when the student is aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in the learning cycle. Learning cycle outcomes can be evaluated by how decisions are reached and what actions resulted – and you can include how future decisions could be improved.

Do the critical incidents include clinical procedures along with thinking skills?

The EPA Thinking Journal Critical Incident Form is a checklist with prompts for both cognitive learning and clinical procedure learning.

- Cognitive learning prompts, i.e. learning that is assessed by exams, will help you think through the way you spend your study time. This is a form of practice since you tend to repeat the process the same way for different subjects.
- Clinical procedure learning, i.e. learning that is assessed by activity, e.g. procedures that involve data collection with various examination tools such as a stethoscope or activities that involve repair such as surgical procedures.

How are the activities and the prompts organized?

The attached EPA Thinking Journal Critical Incident Form includes the following categories:

1. Learning activity:
 - a. Exam preparation (this is most of years 1&2)
 - b. Simulation exercises and lab experiences
 - c. Patient and/or case presentation
 - d. Other patient related dialogue
2. Type of thinking used
 - a. Reading for understanding; recognition
 - b. Flash cards, retrieval practice, other memory enhancers
 - c. Organizing for grouping categories, cause and effect relationships, similarities and differences. (concept mapping, tables)
 - d. Explaining out-loud ESP Step 1 Prep group sessions
 - e. Recording clinical events, i.e. patient assessment, progress notes, other management (hand-offs, consults)
3. Outcomes and assessment more than one day later.
 - a. Thinking used was pre-entrustable because... (includes self-assessment of exam readiness)
 - b. Thinking used was entrustable because... (includes self-assessment of exam readiness)
4. Future opportunities for developing entrustable thinking.
5. What pre-entrustable thinking did I use? What intervention strategy will help?
 - a. ESP principles used to develop strategy
 - b. Feedback and assistance needed

- c. Any potential advantages for pre-entrustable thinking?
- 1. The EPA thinking Student Journal Critical Incident Form is available as a blank document template to facilitate entry of responses]