Dear Diary . . . What’s the word for the qualities that make your writing unique?



Science magazine recently released a study on the effects of [diary](http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/diary?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028) writing for college and high school students. The results showed that students experiencing test [anxiety](http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/anxiety?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028) and who wrote about their disquiet (worries/concerns) in a diary right before the exam performed better on the test by half a grade.

Dictionaries and diaries are old friends; what better way to learn new words than expressing your thoughts in writing? We welcome this bit of educational news as an excuse to talk about the precise origin of “[diary](http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/diary?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028)” and some of its history.

Diary comes from the Latin word [*diarium*](http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/diary?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028). You’ll recognize the first part of that word as [di](http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/diary?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028)-, “day” in modern English. The suffix “-arium” and its more modern equivalent “-ary” show up in many words you use every day: library, stationary, revolutionary. If you haven’t guessed already, the suffix means “in connection with or pertaining to.” A diary is just that, a daily log that records the events that happened over the course of the day. The playwright [Ben Jonson](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Ben%2BJonson?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028), a contemporary (an author who wrote at the same time) of Shakespeare, was the original shortener of diarium to diary. The word first appeared in 1605 in his play *Volpone*.

Diaries differ from journals in that they are updated daily. In the modern use of the word, a diary is of a private nature, often written for an audience of one. Recently, diaries have moved online as web logs, or blogs. These differ from the personal, handwritten sort of diary by aiming for a large audience. The linguistic qualities that make a person’s writing and speech unique are their [idiolect](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/idiolect?__utma=1.706846887.1285330329.1307040369.1307361768.25&__utmb=1.3.10.1307361768&__utmc=1&__utmx=-&__utmz=1.1301314614.3.1.utmcsr=(direct)|utmccn=(direct)|utmcmd=(none)&__utmv=-&__utmk=95952028). A diary is a sort of gym for the idiolect.

Respond in your writer’s notebook:

Do you keep a diary (something that you write in every single day)? We all keep a journal in this class. Have you found it a useful remedy for anxiety or other emotions? Will you continue to keep a diary or a journal after this class?