

REFLECTIVE WRITING

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing is different from most other types of academic writing because it encourages you to explore your **personal** responses to a given topic or situation. Importantly, you need to go beyond simply describing course content. Good reflective writing should **critically engage with** and **form links between** your own and others' ideas.

Structure

One common framework for structuring your reflections has three major elements:

1. **Description** What happened? What concept/s are being examined? Try to keep this section short and to the point. Select the most relevant and significant examples of the idea or experience you are reflecting on.

2. **Interpretation** What is the most important aspect of the topic/experience for you? Why is it interesting/relevant to you? How does it differ from your own perspectives/experiences?

3. **Outcome** What have you learned? What does this mean going forward as a learner and/or professional?

Another way to think about these three steps is to simply ask yourself: **What? So what? Now what?**

Please note that this is just one possible model to use. Reflective writing comes in a variety of different formats so make sure you check the specific requirements of your assessment.

Writing style

While there is a fair amount of freedom in the content you can include in reflective writing, you should still organise your thoughts using some of the major conventions of academic writing.

Make sure your writing:

- has a clear and logical line of reasoning,
- uses complete paragraphs with topic sentences and concluding statements,
- uses evidence and/or examples to support your reflections.

Reflective writing requires you to make frequent use of the **first person** (I, me, we, our etc.) to show that you are writing about your own point of view. Some possible phrases you can use include:

For me, the most meaningful/important/relevant...

Based on my personal beliefs/experiences...

Having read/experienced... I now think/realise/question...

Looking back, I now consider...

As a next step, I should...



Reflective writing is commonly used to reflect on a theory/set of ideas, or to reflect on a professional placement.

Reflecting on theory

You may be asked to reflect on a given reading, theory or topic discussed in class. This is an opportunity for you to explore the ideas that you found the most interesting. You can also acknowledge any pre-existing beliefs that you hold and reflect on how they are challenged or supported by the topic at hand. In doing so, it may be useful to ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are the main ideas? Which of the ideas stood out for you?
2. What did you originally think about the topic?
3. How does the topic fit with or challenge your own beliefs?
4. How does the topic set other works/ideas in context for you?
5. How will this change your perspective going forward?

Reflecting on practice

It is common in professional degrees (e.g., education, health, business) to reflect on your own practice and/or the practice of others. This type of reflective writing usually requires you to link your practice back to key ideas or theories within your course. It also gives you a chance to critically examine your own strengths and weaknesses. Some useful questions to consider include:

1. What were the most important aspects of your experience?
2. Are there any theories that you have learned about in class that seem relevant or applicable to your practice? How did these theories play out in a real life context?
3. Which aspects of your practice went well? Which aspects need development?
4. What can you learn from observing other professionals in your field?
5. How do you plan to improve in the future?

In sum

Reflective writing is about making sense of your learning and experiences. It is an important process because it helps you to become a self-aware and critical thinker. It is also an essential part of developing as a professional because it allows you to identify your strengths and weaknesses, learn from experience, and connect theory with practice.

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