

STUDENT NOTES FOR SUCCESS

Reflective writing

In reflective writing tasks, we are required to think deeply and write about our *personal* experience or understanding of a topic or experience. Effective reflective writing will consider the link between theories you have learnt about, and your own practical experiences.

The value of reflection and reflective writing

Reflection (thinking deeply about things) is an important skill at university and beyond. Reflective writing tasks encourage you to practice and develop this skill.

Through reflective writing, we can **demonstrate our understanding** of key ideas and identify our strengths and weaknesses. It enables us to **learn from our mistakes**, and makes us more confident when we talk about ourselves

Different kinds of reflective writing

Reflective writing tasks come in many forms.

If you are asked to reflect on **professional experiences** (e.g. an internship), ask yourself:

- What went well, and what did not?
- Did any course ideas seem relevant to your experience? If so, how?
- What can you learn? What could you do better next time?

If you are asked to reflect on what you learnt in a **unit or a specific workshop**, ask yourself:

- What are your beliefs, and how have they changed? Did you learn anything?
- What were the key ideas? What parts did you agree or disagree with, and how did they affect your thinking?

If you are asked to reflect on your experiences in a **group or individual project**, ask yourself:

- What went well, and what did not?
- Why? What were the reasons for these successes and failures?
- What have you (and your group) learnt?

There is no single 'correct' way to reflect. Always follow your lecturer's instructions carefully.

How to think reflectively

If you are unsure how to reflect on your experiences, try following Gibbs' reflective learning cycle:



Adapted from Gibbs (1988)

Description: what happened?

Feelings: how did it make you feel?

Evaluation: what went well or poorly?

Analysis: why did things happen this way?

Conclusion: what else could you have done?

Action plan: what would you do in the future?

How to write reflectively

To structure and write your reflections, answer these three questions:

1. **What?** Describe the experience and how you felt about it.
What happened? What did I do? What did others do? What worked? What did not?
2. **So what?** Analyse and evaluate the experience using relevant theories.
Why is this important? What else do I need to consider? What have I learnt?
3. **Now what?** Consider alternatives for the future and potential next steps.
What could I do differently next time? How can I improve?



Conventions of reflective writing

When discussing your experiences, your writing should be **honest and personal**.

- Use **personal pronouns** like *I, my, we,* and *our* in your writing
*Example: In **our** second meeting, **we** agreed on a plan ...*
- **Be honest** about what you think and feel. Acknowledge both positive and negative aspects
*Example: Upon reflection, **I did not consider** the importance of...*
- **Avoid simple descriptions** and focus on analysing your experiences
Example: Looking back, I can see that I focused too much on the details and did not consider the broader strategy ...

While reflection is personal, your writing should still follow the **conventions of academic style**.

- Write complete, **grammatically correct** sentences and avoid spelling mistakes. **Avoid informal writing** (e.g. slang words and contractions like *won't* and *don't*)
- Write **analytically rather than emotionally**. It is not appropriate to rant or vent. Rather consider *why* you felt or thought a certain way.
- Use **evidence, examples and theories** (especially from the course) to provide a richer account of your experience. Make a clear link between your experiences and these ideas.

Unlike a report, there is no set structure for writing reflections. However, all reflections should be **clearly structured and easy to follow**.

- Write **complete paragraphs** with topic sentences to guide the reader
- Check your writing includes **description, analysis** and an **evaluation/outcome**.

Identifying poor reflective writing

*The other members of the group **were lazy, stupid,** or a combination of both. Why was I the only one doing anything? Whenever I suggested anything, they just complained that I was bullying them. After **heaps of** meetings when nothing got done, I gave up and did the assignment myself. The final project **wasn't** too*

*bad. I'm **totally** over group work – I **can't** stand lazy people. I wish I **could've** changed groups.*



- **Content:** this passage simply describes what happened and does not analyse *why* it happened. There is no mention of future steps or alternatives.
- **Features:** the **writing is informal** and displays a **negative attitude**. There are no specific examples and the writer does not consider theories or ideas.
- **Structure:** there is no topic sentence and the author expresses thoughts and feelings in an unstructured way.

Identifying better reflective writing

*The most pleasing part of the project was how we adapted our approach. Initially, we divided the sections between ourselves. After two weeks, however, I felt isolated. I did not understand how my task fitted into the overall plan. On reflection, we had fallen into what **Bowers (2014)** calls “the silo approach”. It was only when I mentioned my frustration that I realised others felt the same. In response, we decided to set aside time to work collaboratively. This change created a culture of mutual support (**Baker et al. 2010**) and allowed us to complete the project to a high standard. In future group work, I will...*



- **Content:** the passage includes **analysis** of *why* the project succeeded, and **considers future steps**.
- **Features:** the writing is academic in style and presents a **personal yet balanced perspective**. There are clear **links to theories and specific examples**.
- **Structure:** the passage features a **clear topic sentence**, and all the remaining sentences develop the idea being discussed in the reflection.

Find out more at the Academic Communication Development team's website: <http://bit.ly/BusinessACD>

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