

Reflective writing

Reflective writing is a type of assessment that goes by many names:

- Journal or diary entries
- Portfolios
- Narratives
- Reflections on practice or placements
- Blogs

It may also be part of assessments such as:

- Online discussion forums (in Stream)
- Group work and group or peer evaluations

These assignments ask you to be reflective and to write your responses to an experience (for example a reading, a teaching experience, or a nursing or social work placement). You may need to describe the experience, but this is not the reflection. The reflection or journal needs to make links between the experience, yourself, and the concepts or theories in the course you are studying and any criteria that were developed in relation to the task(s).

Why are they used?

Reflective assignments are seen to encourage deep and evaluative thinking; reflection helps people become better at what they do. Reflection is also part of learning in the workplace. Therefore, reflective assignments allow you to be “real,” to identify your own values and assumptions, and demonstrate your personal and professional development.

How are reflective assignments marked?

This depends on the lecturer or course coordinator and how the assignment fits with the other assessments in the course. However, what the lecturer/course coordinator is looking for are the links you have made between the material and yourself and your experiences.

Reflection on a reading or tutorial topic

A reflection based on a reading consists of your analysis of your reactions to the reading; what it made you think about, and whether it helps you understand or be able to explain some aspect of your own life or the life of someone else whom you know well. Does it relate to an event that has been in the media recently? Did it make you research further because it was so new, interesting, exciting, or complex? You may also discover that you find yourself writing on how a particular reading opened up your thinking about writings on the same topic by other

authors.

You can help yourself by thinking about the content from different perspectives:

- Personal
- Social
- Organisational
- Cultural
- Other members of the team/group involved

Reflection on a placement

A reflection based on a placement or field trip experience needs to focus on the outcomes for you, personally and culturally, and possibly for others (for example, students or clients). You will probably reflect on successes and problems and therefore, what you learnt from the experience and what effects that learning will have on you and your interactions in various situations in the future. Your reflections will have links to course concepts as you will be evaluating your experience through the theoretical constructs that are relevant. You will also use relevant theories and concepts when you explore other possibilities and solutions.

Reflective tasks are challenging. Make sure you keep track of your thoughts, ideas, problems, and solutions regularly. Some lecturers/course coordinators will want evidence of your record keeping. You will write a much better reflective assignment when you have your notes to work from rather than trying to brainstorm a whole lot of thoughts about what happened over a period of weeks.

Reflective analysis: Two stages and five steps

Stage 1

1. Focus on an experience or event

- What was outstanding or meaningful, negative or positive?
- Brainstorm ideas for five minutes
- Then consider each idea for follow up
- Other ideas may emerge, so consider them too
- Talk about the experience to stimulate a range of perspectives

2. Describe the experience

- Consider the sequence, outcomes, and feelings
- Use free writing for 10 minutes
- Create a draft that is filled with your thoughts, that explores some ideas more than others
- Use this as a basis for a later draft that will bring in more conclusions as you continue to reflect

3. Conduct an evaluation / critical analysis

- Why did the event(s) occur in that particular way?

- What factors contributed to the outcome?
- Did you achieve your goals?
- Did your goals change?
- Did other people achieve the set goals?
- Were there any problems with resources?
- How did your actions influence the situation?
- How did other people influence the situation?
- How did the situation affect you?
- Could you have reacted differently?
- If you had, what might have happened?
- Why did you react in that way?
- How might this experience affect you in the future?

Stage 2

4. Seek out your key points and the issues of significance

- The data you collected in Step 3 allows you to identify the important aspects of your reflection on your learning
- You may find that you have formed new attitudes or values
- Did you learn anything about yourself that was unexpected?
- What changes do you expect to make in yourself or your work?

5. Identify solutions for similar events

- Develop a new perspective by conceptualising the situation differently
- Communicate the results of your reflection clearly

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students s an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).