



Critical Thinking

Top tips for reflective practice and reflective writing

The benefits of reflective practice and reflective writing are that they can:

- Encourage independent learning and help you to take control of your learning and development
- Help you to order your thoughts and responses in an structured way, and to apply what you learn at university to your lived experience (and vice versa)
- Assist you to achieve 'deep', as opposed to 'surface', learning
- Enable you to identify your personal strengths and areas for development
- Improve your written communication skills

Many students struggle with reflective practice and writing. Here are some tips that may help:

Start by getting some idea of **what form your reflection should take** – is there a template that you can use, or guidelines about what you should cover? How often should you write up and/or submit your reflections? What kind of word count is expected? If you're in any doubt about these things, check in with your lecturer or tutor about what is expected of you.

Reflection is **not merely a description** of what has happened or what you did, although some description will usually be necessary. It is much more important that you **reflect** on your experiences – that is, that you think and write about such things as what went well, what didn't go so well, what you have learned, and what you might do differently next time around.

Reflection requires a great deal of **honesty**. Some students are hesitant to open up and be really honest about their experiences. You may find it particularly difficult to either acknowledge the positive (for example, something that you feel you did very well) or the negative (for example, something that went wrong or that you could have dealt with in a better way). It's important to be as honest as possible about your achievements, your failures, your strengths, and your weaknesses.



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Reflection involves attempting to **'stand back' from ourselves** in order to see ourselves and our patterns of behaviour more clearly. It is very difficult for most of us to consider our own beliefs, behaviour or actions objectively. If you find it difficult to think or write about yourself objectively, try using the third person (for example, instead of saying "I came close to tears when I realised that I had forgotten to write up my case notes", try saying "He/she came close to tears when he/she realised..."). In other words, write about yourself as if you were an outsider observing your behaviour, actions and responses. You can rewrite the material up in the first person afterwards.

It might be helpful to keep a **daily record or journal** that you can draw upon for your reflection. Memories fade quickly so it is good to have a record to look back on when the time comes to write up your reflections. Jot down anything of note or of interest that occurred, and your response, while they're still fresh in your mind.

If you are finding it very difficult to get started with your reflective writing, it might help to **frame your writing in response to questions** that you can make up for yourself to answer. For example, you may have a vague idea that you are a bit disorganised, but when you sit down to write about this, you find yourself staring at a blank page with no clue where to start. It might help to jot down some questions and start to write in response to these. For example: What kind of organisational skills are needed for this role? Do I have these skills? If not, what are the potential consequences? How am I going to improve these skills?

Remember that your reflective writing **will not be assessed on what you did or failed to do**; it will be assessed on your ability to write honestly and comprehensively about your experiences and your learning.