

Reflective Writing: Prompts

Reflective writing tasks encourage you to think deeply about your views and experiences, such as a work placement, and how these relate to key theories and course materials. This combined perspective provides a lens for analysing and improving your professional practice. This helpsheet includes questions to guide your reflection and support drafting your assessment task.

Describe: What | How | Who | When

The context, episode, material, situation, or occasion for reflection, including:

- What did you observe?
 - Consider interactions between yourself and others
 - Consider your role in the episode or situation
- What did you think and feel? (consider visual, auditory and other cues)
- Can you name your personal reactions? (e.g., disbelief, shock, frustration, fear)

Limited reflection only describes feelings in response to an experience. Without considering *why* those feelings arose, little can be learned. The next important step is:

Interpret/Analyse

- In what ways were your beliefs challenged or confirmed?
- What key 'sticking points' emerged (e.g., tensions in values, knowledge, or power)?
For example, what is challenging your value system?
- Which course theories or perspectives are relevant or help explain the experience?
- What alternative perspectives can be applied to analyse the situation?
- What worked well, and what could have been improved?

Summarise

- Have your initial feelings, assumptions, or knowledge been reinforced or changed?
- Which of your preferences, if any, have shifted?
- What have you learned in completing this reflection?
- What new knowledge do you have that will influence future choices and actions?
- What will you do differently in a similar situation in the future?

Apply

- What actions will you take now to build upon your practice?
- What steps will you take to improve your understanding and/or technique?
- What changes will you make to your actions or interactions?
- In a scenario or placement reflection, what is your timeframe for these steps?

Adapted from: Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford.

Tips

- To begin with, write freely and spontaneously—don't edit yourself—as this can deepen your reflection.
- Capture your initial reflections in whatever form suits you, such as a quick note or a voice recording on a personal device.



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Blending Reflections and Research

Writing about your personal experiences uses a different style from writing about academic theories and research. You might feel unsure about this, especially if you have been told to avoid using "I" in academic work.

In reflective writing, however, personal language (such as *I, me, my, I think, I feel*) is appropriate and necessary. Your writer's voice is central to reflecting on your own experiences and thinking.

At the same time, you still need to support your ideas with evidence from relevant literature. Moving between personal reflection and academic support can feel challenging at first, but like any skill, it becomes easier with practice.

Example 1

Identifies an aspect of the situation

The writer's voice is present

The teacher's focus on conforming seems like a behaviourist approach to me, one that prioritises positive and negative reinforcement and looks for external drivers of behaviour (DeNobile et al., 2017).

Applies theory to the reflection

Example 2

Identifies an aspect of the situation

Applies theory to the reflection

Research shows that the skill of rapport-building can be improved. According to Vallano et al. (2015), the service provider can show genuine interest in the client's story through their body language, for example by slightly leaning forward. The main lesson for me to apply in my future practice is to use non-verbal communication techniques such as this to show interest in the story the client is sharing.

The writer's voice is present

Example 3

The writer's voice is present

Identifies an aspect of the situation

As a future social worker, I am required by the code of ethics to avoid applying my personal values, stereotypes, and discrimination to my clients' situation (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020). However, Valutis and Rubin (2016) illustrate that this practice is not simple. They assert that it creates potential conflict between personal and professional values, so continuous self-reflection will be necessary to grasp the complexities of value conflicts in my professional practice.

Applies theory to the reflection

Related Helpsheets

- Reflective Writing
- Reflective Writing: Phrases



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