

Reflective Writing

Reflection is an important part of learning and professional practice. For this reason, reflective writing tasks may be set as an assessment in some of your units, particularly if you are studying professional degrees in education, health, or business. But reflection is not only beneficial for these disciplines. Reflective thinking can be applied to all aspects of your academic and professional lives.

1. What is reflection?
2. A model for writing reflectively
3. Different reflective assessment tasks







1. What is reflection?

Reflection involves examining your personal reactions and responses to your educational, research, professional, or personal experiences. Through reflection activities, you have the opportunity to identify and question your own thoughts or reactions to the theories, philosophies, and knowledge by comparing them to your own past experiences. Conscious, purposeful, and critical reflection on your actions, thoughts, and behaviours can consolidate your learning, transform your future practice, and develop lifelong learning skills.

2. A model for writing reflectively

The 5Rs framework (Bain et al., 2002) provides a model that can help you to structure your reflective writing. Each stage increases in the complexity and/or abstraction of information required. Different tasks may require different levels of response.

Stage	Task	Useful language
Stage 1 Reporting 	describe a situation, incident, or issue that you observed or were involved in	What I did e.g., <i>I saw..., I witnessed..., I said..., I heard</i> Where and when it took place e.g., <i>in a meeting, in the classroom, during my first placement, on my last day...</i>
Stage 2 Responding 	explain your emotional or personal response to that situation, incident, or issue	What did I feel and think e.g., <i>I felt..., I thought..., I believe..., I think..., I remember...</i> How did I react to this situation , e.g., <i>distressed, frustrated, impressed</i>
Stage 3 Relating 	relate the situation, incident, or issue to previous experiences or to other knowledge that you have such as theories or other relevant literature	Compare and contrast my responses e.g., <i>in the same way, similarly, like, in contrast, although</i> Provide evidence e.g., <i>this demonstrates that..., Brown (2019) suggests that...</i>
Stage 4 Reasoning 	explore the situation, incident, or issue in more depth; look for explanations for causes and effects; draw on theories and other relevant sources	Think about cause and effect, reason, and result e.g., <i>because, as a result, consequently, therefore, thus</i> Use references to sources e.g., <i>according to Dunn (2020),...</i>
Stage 5 Reconstructing	draw conclusions about the situation, incident, or issue based on the understanding you have gained from the reflective process; plan how you might approach similar issues in the future	Think about different impacts or alternative outcomes e.g., <i>in these circumstances, teachers must reflect...</i> How I may behave differently in the future e.g., <i>I will..., Next time, I should ..., children must be encouraged to..., they could have done...</i>

3. Different reflective assessment tasks

There are different types of reflective tasks:

- **Journals** record new experiences and ideas encountered in classrooms, research, or on work placements. Note down how you feel about them and how they may challenge your existing knowledge and understanding. Journals can be a private, personal record or set as an assessment task. For assessment tasks, you should also refer to relevant literature to support your ideas (i.e., references to authors of your information sources).
- **Critical reflection** goes beyond description to consideration of the how and why of an event or what a reading means and how it will impact on your understanding.

References

Bain, J. D., Ballantyne, R., Mills, C., & Lester, N. C. (2002). *Reflecting on practice: Student teachers' perspectives*. Post Pressed.

Ryan, M. (2011). Improving reflective writing in higher education: A social semiotic perspective. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(1), 99-111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.507311>

Example reflective journal (Ji Eun Lee, Nursing student)

Report the incident	I met a patient with an eating disorder who was admitted to the paediatric ward in the hospital during my fourth placement. Her main problem was refusing to eat food, and also recently she disclosed that she heard voices saying that she needs to lose weight. Her speech was soft and passive, but also very adamant if I asked her to have a bit of food.
Relate incident to evidence	Harken et al. (2017) find that adolescents with eating disorders can react in this way, so communication can be difficult.
Explain emotional response	I felt like helping her in a warm manner using therapeutic communication that I'd learned, but I did not know where to start. She had a long history of mental health issues, and approaching her was not easy for me.
Plan how to approach this issue	I would like to improve my communication skills, so the first thing that I did was I observed how the nurses and doctor approached her, how they made a care plan for her, and what they thought the best care for her would be. I will start with general questions to stimulate her interests rather than thinking and questioning her too seriously. Because English is not my first language, watching Australian dramas might be helpful for me to understand the characteristics of Australians so I know what to expect from her and how to respond.

Example critical reflection paragraph (Education student)

Introduce topic or concept	For learning to be successful, it must have a relevant contextual basis.
Report/respond to an incident	In my observation of a lesson, I watched the teacher of a Year 5 class explain the concept of gravity to students. As I went around the classroom giving individual help to children, I discovered that most of them did not understand what she had taught them. They copied her explanation from the board, but they were not given the opportunity to experiment for themselves.
Relate incident to theory/evidence	Learning about the world through isolated facts and theories is not as conducive to genuine understanding as learning that is relevant to students' lives and that involves participation in hands-on activities (Fitzgerald & Smith, 2016).
Conclude by considering alternative practices to improve future practice	This teacher could have devised a series of classroom experiments that investigated gravity, thus involving the children in hands-on experience. Alternatively, children could be asked to design their own experiments to encourage them to reflect, speculate, and explain, thus making their learning both authentic and relevant.