

Applied Mental Health and Advocacy

Reflective Writing and Reflective Commentary

What is reflection?



Reflection - reflective thinking and writing - is an important part of university life and work.

As Plato said, 'The life without examination is no life.'

The ability to reflect on your experience and knowledge, and use that to make improvements, is a key part of your university-level thinking and your subsequent working life.

What is reflective Writing?

In pairs discuss what you think reflective writing is?

Reflective writing is ?

- ❖ Evidence of reflective thinking!
- ❖ Tone of writing has to be academic and personal at the same time.
- ❖ Requires the writer to draw a relationship between a selection of evidence and to make new interpretations to inform practise.

In academic terms

- ❖ Analysing an idea or theory (thinking in depth and from different perspectives, and trying to explain, often with references to model or concept from within a specialised subject.
- ❖ Thinking regarding an idea or concept and what it means for you and your on going progress as a learner and/or practicing professional.

Reflective writing enables us

- ❖ to pursue these critical reflections on a deeper, more challenging level;
- ❖ to confront the challenge of explaining our ideas;
- ❖ to demonstrate our understanding of theory and course content;
- ❖ to link experience and knowledge;
- ❖ to use reflections to inform our practice in the field;
- ❖ to develop the skills necessary to become lifelong learners.

Reflective writing

- ❖ Will use good range of sources
- ❖ Draw on contrasting or alternative viewpoints
- ❖ Is used in order to explore an issue or theory in great depth
- ❖ References should support rather than replace your own argument
- ❖ The marker is looking to hear your voice through out the paper not just the voices of others

How to structure your writing

When you write reflectively, use the three W's:

- What? (description)
 - What happened?
 - Who was involved?
- So what? (interpretation)
 - What is most important/interesting/relevant/ useful aspect of the event/idea/situation?
 - How can it be explained?
 - How is it similar to/different from others?
- What next? (outcome)
 - What have I learned?
 - How can it be applied in the future?

Critical reflective writing vs. the academic

Critical reflective writing differs from the typical academic essay

- makes use of the first person;
- considers the self an object of inquiry;
- incorporates experience as a form of evidence;

However, like academic essays, critical reflective writing

- integrates secondary source material;
- uses formal English;
- incorporates discipline-specific vocabulary;
- follows academically appropriate citation and referencing guidelines.

This model, outlined by Hampton (2010), includes three parts:

1. DESCRIPTION

What happened? What is being examined?

2. INTERPRETATION

What is most important/ interesting/useful/relevant about the object, event, or idea?
How can it be explained with theory?
How is it similar to and different from other events or experiences?

3. OUTCOME

What have I learned from this?
What does it mean for my future in this field?

Reflective writing, then, essentially asks you to look at experience and offer

**DESCRIPTION
ANALYSIS
IMPLICATIONS**

Structure of Reflective Writing

INTRODUCTION

Identifies an issue and why it is important
May use theory to explain relevance
Outlines key themes that the paper will address

BODY PARAGRAPHS

Each paragraph introduces a theme or topic
Provides evidence from practice or current literature/theory
Introduces multiple perspectives

CONCLUSION

Restates the issue
Reiterates key points
Emphasizes the implications of the points
May suggest possibilities for the future

How does the writer indicate that he/she is addressing or responding to something he/she has been involved in or observed?

Use of personal pronoun "I"; use of thinking and sensing words such as "I feel", "I realize", "I question", "I wonder". "I am aware"

How does the writer indicate how the event took place?

Use of temporal language, such as "previously", "first", "then", "afterwards", "subsequently".

- How does the writer demonstrate knowledge of the counselling discipline?
- Use of terms and technical language specific to the field of counselling
- How does the writer relate this event to similar incidents of personal experiences?
- Use of comparison/contrast language ("similarly", "unlike", "alternatively"); use of example.
- (adapted by Ryan 2011)

How does the writer demonstrate interpretation of events?

Use of phrases such as "the most significant element...", "initially I questioned...", "the relevant aspects were...", "probably because of...", "this issue may have resulted in.."

How does the writer reason and explain why things happened the way they did?

Use of causal language, such as "because", "since", or "due to the fact that"; use of references to literature and practice as evidence.

- How does the writer look to the future and indicate how he/she will reconstruct and apply new knowledge?
- Use of words indicating the future, such as "will", "going to", "should", "may" or "can".
- How does the writer reinforce the implications?
- Use of phrases such as "this knowledge could be useful to me as a practitioner because..", "this understanding will be important to me as a learner because...", or "this skill is essential for..."