

The Reflective Review – A few pointers

One assessment component in your MA dissertation is the Reflective Review. These brief comments aim to give you a better understanding of what a reflective review is, what you are asked to do, and how your reflective review will be assessed.

What is the purpose of a reflective review?

The process of reflection is important in that it helps you develop more appropriate and effective ways of working. Moreover, it develops more independent learning, and fosters a problem solving, solution orientated approach to the learning process.

In your MA dissertation you wrote about your research topic and what you have found out about it. In your reflective review you are NOT asked to again write about your topic. Instead you are being asked to write about your **experiences** during the research process and the writing of your dissertation. The focus of the reflective review is to think about how writing the MA dissertation has contributed to your development as a researcher. In other words, the reflective review is more about you as a researcher than it is about your research topic, though the two aspects cannot be completely separated.

In your reflective review you are asked to

- Look back at your dissertation,
- Reflect upon how you have conducted your research, and
- Think about what you have learned from the experience and how this research experience is likely to influence you as a learner and researcher in the future.

Models for reflective reviews

There are several ways how to structure a reflective review but most of them involve three consecutive steps:

Step 1: Description

The first step is to describe the task you set yourself and to remember what you thought at the beginning of the research process? Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the task I have set myself?
- Why did I choose this particular topic?
- What might be the challenges of the project?
- What do I expect a good/bad outcome to be?
- What are my worries or hopes regarding my MA dissertation?
- Am I prepared for the task?

Step 2: Reflection

The second stage involves you reflecting upon the experience as a whole. At this stage you might **review the process** rather than the end product. Questions that you might consider include:

- What were the main challenges I was facing?
- What helped me to overcome these challenges? If not, why not?
- What were the moments when I felt that I was making good progress?
- What was my working pattern? Did I write regularly or in thrusts?
- Did I have the right resources / information, appropriate to this task?
- What other resources / information should I have used?
- Was my plan of work realistic?
- Did I make changes to my research plan? If yes, which ones?
- Could I have adopted a different approach to my research?
- What/who has helped me most during my MA dissertation?

You can either write in the present tense, as if you are still doing the task, or in the past tense, looking back at the experience and completed task.

Step 3: Outcome

- What are your insights immediately after, and/or later when you have more emotional distance from the event?
- In retrospect, how did it go? Was it harder than you expected or easier? Why?
- What aspect of writing your MA dissertation did you particularly enjoy or not enjoy?
- What would you do differently the next time you need to write a longer piece of research?
- What have you learned about your strengths and weaknesses as a learner?

How do I present my reflective review?

If you have written a research diary the above three-step pattern might have repeated itself frequently as you were tackling individual tasks. It is acceptable to submit your research diary.

However, if you have not kept a research diary while working on your MA dissertation, it is probably best to write a **continuous text of approximately 3000 words** in which you reflect on your learning experience in the way described above by answering the above questions.