



## THE PURPOSE OF REFLECTION

Both reflective thinking and writing involve looking back on an experience to try and **understand** what happened, **critically analyse** the experience, and **consider how** it will impact you going forward.

In doing so, you expand your knowledge and critical thinking skills by making observations about experiences or beliefs and considering the impacts these have on your learning, future work, or thinking. This deeper understanding comes from making connections between theories or key concepts you've been studying and how they apply to your experience. Considering alternate viewpoints, interpretations, and recent developments in your field ultimately allows for increased self-awareness and improved practice.

There are many professional fields where reflective thinking is important to ensure continual improvement, reduce mistakes and errors, and allow for new and innovative problem solving.



## TYPES OF REFLECTIVE WRITING

There are many forms that reflective writing takes at university. These can include reflective essays, journals, portfolios, reports, or blogs, among others. Each of these may have a slightly different style and structure, but the general reflective process is consistent across different reflective practices.

Reflections can be written on any learning experience you have. These can include, but are not limited to:

- A professional placement
- Experiences in the workplace
- Learning a new theory or concept
- A learning experience in class
- A role-play or simulation
- Reading or watching a given scenario

## REFLECTIVE THINKING MODELS

Just as there are many forms that a reflection may take, there are also several reflective models that can help you think about and analyse your experiences and what they mean. Some common models include:

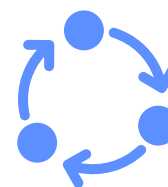
- Gibbs' Reflective Cycle
- The Kolb Reflective Cycle
- The 4 Rs (Report, Relate, Reason, Reconstruct)
- The What? So What? Now What? Model

While they differ slightly, each moves from a process of **describing** the event or experience, to **analysing and critiquing** the event, through to **considering outcomes or actions** for the future.

Thinking reflectively throughout the brainstorming, planning and research process will allow you to intuitively incorporate reflection into your writing, avoiding the common pitfall of creating a predominately descriptive piece. This process is often cyclical, meaning that it results in questions that require further reflection.



You may be required to apply a particular reflective cycle or structure to your assignments. As always, refer to your rubric or assignment guide for specific structure and content requirements.

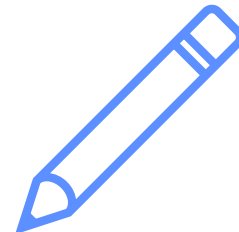




## STEPS TO WRITING REFLECTIVELY

Once you've done some brainstorming, it is time to transform your reflective thinking into writing. To achieve this, ensure you are incorporating a description, analysis, and action for each of the experiences or lessons you write about.

Depending on the type of reflection you are writing and which model you need to apply, this structure might take place within a single paragraph that describes a particular experience, or each step might be a separate paragraph over a whole assignment. Consider your assignment guidelines and rubric when writing.



### DESCRIPTION: WHO, WHAT, AND WHEN?

Begin with an explanation of the event, experience, theory, or concepts. This might include:

- What was the specific incident or challenge that had an impact on you?
- What happened and who was involved?
- Your observations about the experience: what did you see, do, think, or feel?
- What actions did you take?
- How do these relate to the specific questions you must address? (Refer to rubric and assignment instructions.)

### ANALYSIS: WHY AND HOW?

Next, aim to understand how the experience is connected to the literature and what it means. When analysing what happened begin to ask yourself **why and how**. This might include:

- Why did the event unfold the way it did?
- Why did you take a particular action?
- What else could you have done?
- What were the challenges, issues, and strengths?
- How does this connect to what you know or are in the process of learning?
- How does the literature help explain it: what is already known? what research outcomes, standards of practice or established guidelines exist?

[SEE THE GUIDE ON LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE](#)

### OUTCOMES OR ACTION: SO NOW WHAT?

Consider how the event connects to your learning journey and potential future situations. You may wish to use the literature to help you in this step. Think about:

- How has this impacted your thinking, views, or beliefs?
- What do you know now that would be helpful if you are in a similar situation in the future?
- How has your understanding changed?
- What are you going to do next time?
- What else might you need to find out?

**Note:** the structure of your introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion are consistent with an essay structure

[SEE THE GUIDES ON INTRODUCTIONS, PARAGRAPHS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR MORE](#)



## LANGUAGE OF REFLECTIVE WRITING

When writing reflectively, it is acceptable to use a personal voice and less formal language than you would when writing other kinds of academic work. Generally, this might mean using the **first person, active voice**. For example:

**'I found** the prospect of interviewing the patient much more difficult than I had expected. **I agree** with Smith (2020) who suggests that many students find ...'

Keep in mind that the language you use can differ depending on what you are discussing and what form your reflection takes. When analysing and linking theory to practice, you still need to use clear transitions and ensure evidence is logically linked to your interpretations or evaluations. When writing a reflective journal or blog, meanwhile, you may be more creative and personal with your language and expression.

Remember that this is still a university assignment and your marker needs to see how your thinking and understanding are developing!

SEE THE GUIDE ON WRITING STYLE FOR MORE

## EXAMPLE OF REFLECTIVE WRITING

The example below demonstrates some of the key features of reflective writing, most notably moving from a description of the event, through to analysing the event in relation to the literature, to considering the implications for the future.



This is a general guide only. Check your assignment guidelines and rubrics before writing your own reflection.

**Description** of the challenge using personal, reflective language.

**Analysis** of why this challenge was difficult with links to the literature.

A synthesis of how the analysis has led to **outcomes and actions**.

Following my last nursing placement, I was required to write about a challenging interaction I had with a patient. However, while reflecting on my thought processes and subsequent actions, I began to judge myself severely and negatively for the choices I had made. As a result, I was reluctant to openly and honestly express this in my written reflection, limiting my ability to learn from this experience. These feelings are not uncommon. The fear of being judged and tendency to hold back are common amongst undergraduate nursing students, and many feel overwhelmed by constricting, formalised reflection models. However, creating a judgement-free space for students in conjunction with writing informal, reflective poetry have been shown to invite freedom of expression as well as increase compassion towards patients (Coleman & Willis, 2015). With an understanding that I am not alone, and in an effort to take responsibility for my own learning process, I have begun to incorporate more creativity into my reflective thinking process. While it is important for students to have a safe space to have their experiences heard, I need to become less judgemental of myself during the reflective process. This will allow me to show myself the kind of compassion I aim to show my patients.

Coleman, D., & Willis, D. S. (2015). Reflective writing: The student nurse's perspective on reflective writing and poetry writing. *Nurse Education Today*, 35(7), 906-911. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2015.02.018>