

## ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION INFO SHEET

### Academic Writing: Reflective writing (AW: RW)

#### What is reflection?

Reflection is thinking about something in a serious, deliberate way: a repeated problem-solving process. Reflection occurs through active thinking that enables the developing professional to gain an understanding of how personal, social and cultural experiences and theory are related to practice or professional knowledge.

#### Learn about:

- the purpose of reflection
- a simple model for writing reflectively.

See also **Info Sheets** on paragraph structure, and critical and analytical thinking.

During your university studies, you may be asked to reflect on your own experiences in a practicum or while studying a specific course. You may also be asked to reflect on specific readings for a course or an assignment, such as a group assessment. Some of the forms reflective writing can take include a journal, a daily log, a prac report, a folio, an essay and a case study.

#### Why reflect?

Reflection is all about deepening your learning. By reflecting, you are able to:

- get to know your own strengths and weaknesses
- discover your own underlying assumptions – and challenge them
- make connections between your own experience and what you are learning learn from your mistakes – and thus become a better practitioner.

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Your own thoughts, feelings, experiences and ideas are central to reflective writing.

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#### How to write reflectively

Reflective writing is more personal than other forms of academic writing. In this type of writing, *you* are central: what you are doing, seeing, feeling and thinking. For this reason, you should use the first person: that is, use the terms 'I', 'me', 'my', etc.

Even so, reflective writing is a form of academic writing and should contain:

- a clear structure (introduction-body-conclusion is the most common, but not the only structure you can use)
- formal language and correct grammar and spelling
- analysis and evaluation, which will often involve drawing on scholarly sources and referencing those sources

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Reflection takes time, honesty and a willingness to be open to discovering things about both your academic subject and yourself.

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## One approach to writing reflectively

One common approach to writing reflectively about your own experience is as follows:

1. Describe the experience you are going to be reflecting on. Do this in the form of a brief narrative or story.
2. Analyse the experience. What was it about the experience that made you think? How did it make you feel? Was there something about it that challenged your ideas about what you've learned? Or did it reinforce those ideas? How did your experience fit with the literature you've been reading, or with the course materials?
3. Evaluate the experience. Was it overall a positive or a negative experience for you? What will you draw from it? Will it lead you to change the way you do something? Will it lead you to change the way you think about something?

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### Example of description:

During the second week of my clinical study, I met a patient who needed an x-ray for her knee and hip joint. This was made more difficult because she was significantly over-weight and not very aware of my role as radiographer. She appeared distracted and had difficulty coping with her level of pain, sometimes shouting out. In terms of the x-ray procedure the patient was uncooperative – she did not follow our instructions and would not stay still after positioning. This made it very difficult to produce an adequate x-ray.

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### Example of analysis and evaluation:

What surprised me most about this incident was the attitude of the patient to the health professionals. In my culture most people treat health professionals with great respect, and acknowledge their authority; they are even sometimes intimidated by them. I realised that in the Australian context compliance from the patient cannot be assumed. The doctor has to gain the trust and cooperation of the patient, and this may not always be easy. In this case I found that talking quietly to the patient and explaining each requirement in detail reassured her, and ultimately led to a greater level of cooperation. However, this made the consultation much longer than it otherwise would have been.

Source: Monash University 2007, 'Common errors in reflective writing', viewed 3 July 2013, <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/medicine/reflective/7.xml>

### More Info

RMIT University tutorials and models for writing reflection

<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/writing-reflection>

Queensland University of Technology Reflective writing models:

<http://www.citewrite.qut.edu.au/write/4Rs-for-students-page1-v1.5.pdf>

Reflective writing in Education <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/education/reflective-writing/1.xml>

Reflection <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/els/docs/Reflection%202014.pdf> and <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/els/docs/Reflection.PDF>