

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing is different from most other forms of academic writing because, other than the initial introduction of the selection that is being addressed in the reflection, it does not require (usually) that you cite sources. Instead, it calls on you to express your own views on an experience, although you may have experienced it only in print or on the screen.

Rather than ask, "what is reflective writing," you might better ask "what is reflective *thinking*?" Writing, after all, is the process of making your thinking visible on paper. Consider the root word "reflect," meaning to give back an image. To think reflectively means to give a second look at your own experience in order to analyze and learn from what took place.

One purpose of reflective writing is to help you learn. The process of writing forces your brain to take action on the information, consolidating it and fixing it in long term memory. That is the reason note-taking while reading is recommended, and the reason journaling is often a requirement for a practicum or internship. Another purpose is to communicate your insights to others, either to enlighten them or to demonstrate what you have learned.

Reflective thinking fosters *metacognition*: that is, the ability to analyse and understand your own thought processes. Metacognition enables you to develop strategies for acting purposefully towards a goal. It is the opposite of unproductive random behavior—trial and error—that dooms you to repeat mistakes and prevents you from applying successful strategies from the past.

Reflective writing for an academic assignment, regardless of its purpose or setting, can be identified by these characteristics:

- **It is purposeful.** Reflective writing does not mean jotting down scraps of thoughts as they pop into your head. That might work for a personal diary, but not for reflective writing with an academic purpose. Start with a goal: What do you want to accomplish, to learn, to improve, to demonstrate, to understand better. . . ?
- **It is personal.** It explores a relationship between the writer and something else, namely, in this course, the written text. In each question, the writer is asked to consider his or her position in relation to something else.
- **It is perceptive.** Reflective writing is not merely describing or telling a story. It requires higher order thinking skills:
 - Analysis . What are the separate and underlying components of the situation, process, or argument you are reflecting on? What are the causes and effects?
 - Synthesis . How do those components relate to or react to one another? How are they different when considered together rather than apart? What would happen if you introduced a change? How can you summarize? What have you learned?
 - Evaluation . What is your attitude towards the subject? What is your degree of subjectivity? How have you been affected? What part will you accept or reject? How might you perceive or act differently in the future?

- **It is polished.** Although you may not use research sources, reflective writing must meet the standards of precision, clarity, conciseness, and correctness of any other styles of formal writing.
 - Plan to write and revise. Do not hand in the first draft.
 - Follow APA style in all aspects possible: Use formal punctuation, use complete sentences, insert page numbers and headings when appropriate, and maintain margins and paragraph indents.
 - Read the paper back to yourself, aloud. When you write from a personal perspective, it is easy to lose sight of your audience. Check for clear organization and graceful transitions.
 - Run the spell check.