Reflective writing
ANU Academic Skills
Poll: Have you done any reflective writing in the past?
For those of you who have, how did you find the experience?
Outline

• What
• Why
• How
What is reflective writing?

• all about **you**

• **not** a summary of what you have learnt or what happened

• narrates your learning journey

• states how your thinking changed and what you will do differently in the future
Why do reflective writing? Why do your course conveners assign this genre?

• Highlights your critical thinking skills
• Helps you gain professional skills
• Avoid academic integrity breaches with this authentic assessment
• Discover how the course has impacted you
Different styles of reflective writing

- informal reflections on your **learning**, such as learning journals or portfolios.
  - regular entries that detail how your understanding has changed

- formal reflections on an **experience**, like an internship or group work

- formal reflection on your **learning**, more in the format of an academic essay, with references
What makes good reflective writing?

• shows that you are thinking deeply and critically about your learning experience
• shows how you’re thinking has developed
• Shows your ability to apply concepts and theory to your own experiences
• identifies the ‘key thing’ that you’ve learned about the topic / experience and why it matters – develops a cohesive message.
Group discussion

• Have you done any reflective writing in the past?
• How do you / would you normally go about this task?
• What challenges do you have, if any, in writing reflectively?
How to write reflectively
Let’s pretend you’ve been tasked with writing a reflection on your learning. Where to start? Ask yourself questions:

• What key issue/s, theme/s or idea/s emerge for you during the reading and lectures?
• What most interested you so far? Why?
• What were you puzzled by? Why?
• How did a lecture / reading affirm, extend or contradict your previous understanding?
Use the reflective process to come up with your key message

**Previous knowledge**
What did you know about the topics discussed prior to this course / experience?
• What was the source of this understanding? How did you arrive at those ideas?

**Reaction to learning experience**
- Connect previous knowledge with your experience
- Identify sources of thinking: specific concepts, theories, examples, instances or social issues that have sparked a change or deepened your understanding of this topic / theme / solution / experience.

**Reflect on learning**
What is the key learning insight?
• Does this insight represent a significant change in you? What remains the same? What has deepened in terms of your understanding?
• How much have your ideas or skills shifted or developed?

**Significance of insight** – so what?
• Why does your new insight about this topic matter?
• Implications of insight for future research / development / career path.
Structuring your reflection

• write to persuade your reader of your key reflections.

• Start with the topic context, and your overall reflection (key message)

• Create a narrative of your learning journey in your body paragraphs

• Choose and elaborate on points to support that reflection
What is your argument/ key reflection?

Topic sentences: key reflection for paragraph
Evidence: retell, relate

Summary: overall reflection
Implications: why is it important?
How could you extend this reflective journal entry?

The notion of the stakeholder challenged many of the assumptions I have about the role of corporations in society. I hope to run my own business one day, and the distinction between stakeholders and shareholders really makes me think about what responsible leadership might look like. What I appreciate about Friedman’s (1970) view is its simplicity – the idea that companies pursuing their own profits creates the best outcomes for society. However, adopting a stakeholder orientation (consistent with Freeman 1984), and managing multifarious accountabilities and balancing trade-offs between them, would seem to be much more complex and a far greater challenge for leaders to navigate. Today’s internet age allows stakeholders to have global reach and a powerful voice, so corporations are held accountable to stakeholders. Therefore I don’t think that it would be easy to silence or ignore them in pursuit of profit.
Reflective essay (1500 words)

What is the most important thing you have learned in the course? Why is this important to you?'
Overall reflection in intro: I believe that responsible leadership is not as simple as Friedman (1970) presents it; it has become much more complex. The increasing global reach and power of stakeholders’ voice in today’s connected world means that corporations can no longer afford to ignore stakeholders’ needs in pursuing profit.

Body paragraphs

• Para 1: Friedman’s (1970) simple proposition is at first appealing and corresponds with my previous views

• Para 2: I found that in practice what responsible leadership looks like is much more complex due to the growing global reach and agency of stakeholders, and thus consistent with Freeman’s (1984) ideas. Give social media example and relate to experience. The internet is therefore a game changer when it comes to how companies are held accountable to stakeholders and interact with stakeholders in general.

• Para 3: Ultimately what this means is that companies can no longer easily ignore stakeholders – if they do, I believe that they risk their future profitability and survival. I recently discovered that this is already happening...Give example and relate to experience

• Para 4: I will definitely not be ignoring stakeholders when I establish my own business in future...

Conclusion

I believe that corporations have a broader role to play than profit-making and understanding this has significantly challenged how I would do business, especially how I would interact with stakeholders...
Your structure should

• Help develop the argument in a logical fashion
• Help ideas flow smoothly
• Aid coherence
• Group ideas together
• Be signposted

Tip: Use topic sentences to manage the smooth flow of argument
Student sample

• In the following outline of a student’s reflective essay, identify whether:
  • There is a clear message or overall argument. If so, what is it? Is it signposted in the introduction?
  • The line of argument is systematically developed at the topic sentence level.

What changes, if any, could you make?
# Topic sentences

## Student sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>As a result of my previous work and academic experiences, I believed the roles of corporations in society were limited to generating shareholder wealth, in accordance with...However, after being exposed to a range of perspectives in undertaking this course, my view of corporate social responsibility has broadened...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Para. 1</td>
<td>The reason why I now adopt a view consistent with Freeman (1984) is because I believe a corporation should hold responsibility for any individual who is affected by the corporation’s actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para. 2</td>
<td>One group of stakeholders I particularly feel strong towards is local communities, in particular, indigenous groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para. 3</td>
<td>My view also expands to include the natural environment as a corporate stakeholder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para. 4</td>
<td>It is comforting to know that not only I have shifted to a stakeholder-orientated approach, our society in general is transitioning and placing greater importance on the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para. 5</td>
<td>After learning about the forces for change to society’s expectations, one factor that particularly caught my interest is digital technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con.</td>
<td>I have firmly reached the conclusion that although corporations should have the principal goal of profit maximising in mind, they should take a stake-holder-orientated approach which places particular importance on indigenous communities and the environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Topic sentence states the **point** - the reflective lesson for paragraph

Supporting sentences
**Retell** – some description of what happened, significant concepts
**Relate** – this to your previous experience and knowledge, give examples and make connections
**Reflect** – what did you learn and what is the impact of this learning

Concluding sentence summarises the reflection
Activity: editing for paragraphing

Read the following two paragraphs

• What is the student arguing (the key message) in the paragraph?
• Does the student provide evidence? Do you see elements of Retell/Relate/Reflect?
• How does the student conclude the paragraph?
• What changes, if any, would you make?
One group of stakeholders I feel particularly strong towards is local communities, in particular, indigenous groups. This is due to the fact indigenous cultures are often underrepresented and are not given an opportunity to have a voice. It is unethical to sacrifice the human rights of indigenous cultures for the purposes of industrial development, as seen in the Jabiluka mine case where mine developments were planned to be built on land belonging to the Mirarr Aboriginal people. Therefore, this course has taught me that local communities should not be ignored and must be considered as an important stakeholder when making corporate decisions.

My view also expands to include the natural environment as a corporate stakeholder. This is mainly due to the environment being a critical part of a corporation’s existence, as well as the inability of proxies to fully give a voice and represent the environment. As I grew up in New Zealand surrounded by picturesque rivers and mountains, I fully appreciate the beauty of nature. After familiarising myself with the environmental disaster that occurred in the BHP Billiton OK Tedi Copper Mine case, I was outraged that a corporation would resort to dumping such a large amount of waste causing significant pollution of a sacred river, just for the purposes of cutting costs. However, BHP did pay a price for damages caused. This case now serves as a reminder to myself and other corporations, illustrating that in this present day and age, corporations should consider the natural environment as a stakeholder, and must hold ethical environmental values to be successful.
What if you are asked to reflect on an internship or group work experience?

Ask yourself questions:

• What did I expect this experience to be like, and what was it actually like?

• What was most challenging about the experience?

• What most surprised me about this experience?

• What did I learn from this experience? How do I know that’s what I learned? What particular moment of the experience gave me this insight?

• What was the best part of this experience? What did I find the most exciting or intense? Why?

• When did you make a mistake? What did you learn from it?

• What do you still need to work to improve upon?
Reflections on experience example:
A student’s reflection on the co-op experience, Justin Shea, BMSc

My co-op experience in community pharmacy has taught me that pharmacists must be able to stay calm under pressure and work quickly and efficiently. My first shift was on an extremely busy night. At one point, I looked at my preceptor and noticed that he was cool and collected despite all the chaos around him. He radiated an aura of calm that helped me and the technician relax; he even managed to soothe some of the frustrated patients. The technician — a former nurse with 30 years of experience — was extremely competent and had the patience to teach me even though she was busily performing multiple tasks.

Communication is another key aspect of being a pharmacist, and the co-op work experience has contributed to my understanding of its importance in everyday practice. A pharmacist needs to know what kind of information and language is suitable for patients, physicians and fellow pharmacists. In the community pharmacy setting, I have improved my ability to listen to patients, as well as gather clues from their body language and unspoken meanings. I have learned several communication tips to use when dealing with difficult patients; the most important lesson, in my opinion, being “it’s not what you say; it’s how you say it.” Telling the patient that you “can’t” or “won’t” be able to help him will arouse aggravation, whereas telling him “we’ll work on this” or “I’ll have it done by this other time” can help calm him, while still communicating the message.
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Set aside time to edit your reflection. Edit for one thing at a time.
• **Think about what you currently know about the topic**
  - ‘I used to think/believe that the topic was just...’

• **Make explicit connections** between this knowledge and understanding and what you’re learning, observing and/or experiencing
  - ‘My thinking/understanding/perspective, however, has changed...’
  - ‘I realised...when...’ ‘It was not until X that...’
  - ‘These new ideas about...for example...’

• **Reflect on extent of learning and why** (source of learning)
  - ‘This was a major learning experience for me as it taught me...’ ‘The experience has helped me to...’
  - ‘I attribute this shift in understanding mainly to...’

• **So what? Why does it matter?** Implications of insight for future practice and development.
  - ‘I feel that X has made a huge difference...’ ‘I will therefore...’
  - ‘The fact that the my ideas about X changed the least suggest that in future...’
Remember

• It’s all about you and your connection to the course materials!
• Indicate a shift, extension or new insight in your thinking, backed by evidence from the course
• Discuss the source/trigger for the change
• Develop your argument/key reflections systematically across and within paragraphs
• Take a big picture view – what are the implications of your new insights?
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