Reflective writing

ANU Academic Skills
What is reflective writing?

• Reflective writing is all about you. If you don't appear prominently in the writing, it is not a reflection.

• It is not simply a summary of what you have learnt; you must relate your learning to your past courses, work experiences or everyday life.

• Having related to your past, you then need to reflect:
  • How has your thinking changed? What is new? What will you do differently in the future?
Why do reflective writing?

• reflecting on your learning will help you to become better at it.

• Professionals of all kinds reflect often to learn from their mistakes.

• Articulating your own learning process is a key academic skill.
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
Discussion

• Have you done any reflective writing in the past?
• How do you normally go about it this task?
• What challenges do you have, if any, in writing reflectively?
A reflection has three parts:

**Retell** the facts, summarise the main points, describe the significant concepts or details.

**Relate** this to your previous experiences by giving examples and making connections. Compare and contrast your retelling to your previous knowledge and experiences.

**Reflect** what it means and what you have learnt. Apply your judgement, give your opinion and communicate your insights.
Don’t just
• describe what happened, when etc.
• provide a summary of what you learnt and observed from your experiences

Do
• show that you are thinking deeply and critically about your learning and experience
• show the development of this thinking and ability to apply concepts and theory to your own experiences, and conduct additional research throughout the semester.
• identify the ‘key thing’ that you’ve learned about the topic and why it matters – develop a cohesive message.
Let’s pretend you’ve been tasked with writing a reflection on your learning:

• designed to help you connect your existing knowledge with information, concepts, ideas and issues associated with the course.

• asks you to think critically about the ideas and information presented in the readings, presentations and discussion

• demonstrate your engagement with the course material and your wider interests and goals.
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 think week? Why?
- What were you puzzled by this week? Why?
- How did this week’s lecture / reading affirm, extend or contradict your previous understanding?
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?
The reflective process

**Previous knowledge**
What did you know about the topics discussed prior to this course / experience?
- What was the source of this understanding? That is, 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, or social issues that have sparked a change or has deepened your understanding of this topic / theme / solution.

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

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

• Overall, create a narrative of your learning journey (based on your coursework or experience)

• Because reflective writing is still academic, write to persuade your reader of your key reflections.

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

• Choose points to support that reflection

• 2-3 paragraphs
What is your argument/ key reflection?

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

Summary: overall reflection
Implications: why is it important?
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
Set aside time to edit your Learning Journal. Edit for one thing at a time.
• Think about what you currently know about the topic
  • ‘I used too 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...’

  • ‘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?