

# Reflective Writing & Thinking

Reflective writing and thinking is an important part of your university life, personal life, and working life. The ability to reflect on experiences and knowledge and using this to make improvements is a key to encouraging thoughtful and balanced university-level thinking and work. Reflection offers the opportunity to consider how personal experiences and observations shape thinking and the acceptance of new ideas. Professors often ask students to write reading reflection and they do this to encourage exploration of ideas, and expression of opinion as opposed to summarizing the opinions of others.

Reflective writing can assist in improving analytical skills because it required an expression of thought, and more significantly, how and why you think this way. Additionally, reflective analysis asks you to acknowledge that your thoughts are shaped by your assumptions and preconceived ideas. In doing so, you can appreciate the ideas of others, see how their assumptions and preconceived notions have shaped their thoughts and perhaps even recognize how your ideas support or go against what you have read.

In order to reflect, and write reflectively, you need to know how to think reflectively, how to write reflectively – including the difference between reflective and academic writing. Including how to structure your writing, what to include, and how to identify what is good reflective writing.

Reflection is:

- **Self-Awareness:** thinking about yourself, your experiences and your view of the world
- **Self-Improvement:** learning from experiences and looking to improve some area(s) of your life
- **Self-Change:** putting you in control of making those changes and behaving differently

## Inside

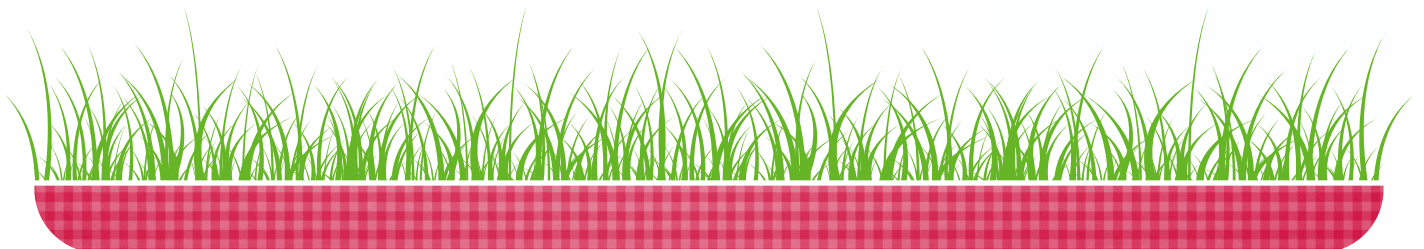
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## Additional

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Reflective Writing Vocabulary



### How to Write Reflectively

It is important to first understand that there is a difference between Academic Writing and Reflective Writing.

Reflective Writing is more personal as you are describing your experiences, whereas Academic Writing can be more of an impersonal account of the views of others.

## What is Reflective Thinking?

In order to think and write reflectively you need to:

- Experience something
- Think about what happened
- Learn from the experience

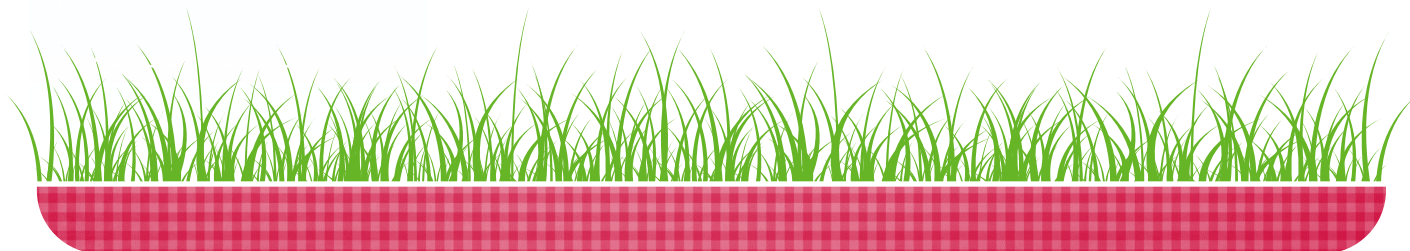
When you are asked to reflect upon an experience in a placement, you do not only describe your experience, but you evaluate it based on the ideas and readings presented in class. You can assess a theory or approach based on your observations and practice and then evaluate your own knowledge and skills that you learned in-class as well as through your program/courses.

Thinking about your choices, actions, successes and failures is best done within a specific framework, like course themes, course readings or even work placements. Concepts that may appear abstract tend to become more concrete and real to you when you have considered them within the context of your own experiences, and reflection on these experiences allows you to make plans for improvement.

You may not even realize that you are thinking reflectively all of the time, for example: Have you ever missed the bus and thought to yourself that next time you'll leave earlier to avoid this happening again? This is one example of you being reflective in daily life. You thought about an experience, learned from it, and made a change to improve upon it.

## Reflective Writing vs. Academic Writing

Reflective Writing	Academic Writing
Personal account	Impersonal account
Consider your personal views	Consider the views of others
First person	Third person
Contemplates	Argues and justifies
Finds solutions to problems	Compares and contrasts

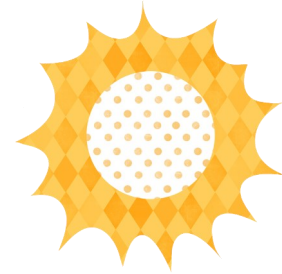


## How to Structure Your Writing

As with all written assignments or reports, it is important to have a clear focus for your writing. You do not need to discuss every experience or element of your placement. Instead, select a few that you can explore within the context of your learning. For reflective responses, identify the main arguments or important elements to develop a stronger analysis which integrates relevant ideas from course materials. The writing must be organized and introduces the topic and points that you plan to make about the experience and learnings. Develop your thoughts and depending on the structure of the reflection assignment you should maintain a formal tone throughout, keeping in mind that first person and personal pronouns are acceptable to use.

NOTE: Confidentiality and anonymity of clients, patients, employees or students from your placements is to be upheld. If necessary use pseudonyms and mask all identifying factors.

Critical reflection is a meaningful tool which can require just as much time, work and dedication as traditional essays or reports because it asks the student to be purposeful and engaged participants, readers and thinkers.



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*"Reflective writing can assist in improving analytical skills because it requires an expression of thought, and more significantly, how and why you think this way."*

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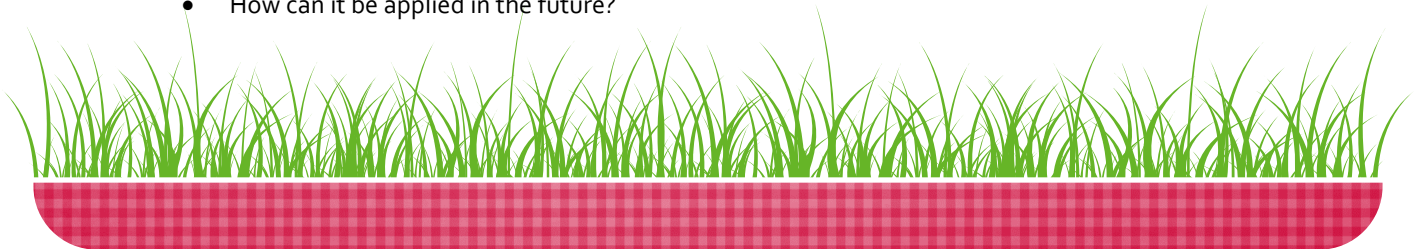
When writing reflectively, use the three W's:

- What did you do? (description)
  - What happened?
  - Who was involved?
  - Etc.
- What did you learn? (interpretation)
  - What is the most important/interesting/relevant/useful aspect of the event/idea/situation?
  - How can it be explained?
  - How is it similar to/different from others?
- What can you do? (outcome)
  - What have I learned?
  - How can it be applied in the future?

Discussing your experiences in a placement setting within the context of personal or organizational goals is a good start. It provides important insights and perspective for your own growth. For your reflection exercise it is important to balance personal insights with critical reflection and analysis. Consider the following:

- Contextualize your Reflection
- Provide Important Information
- Analytical Reflection
- Lessons from Reflection

Examples provided on following page...



## How to Structure Your Writing Continued

Examples of balancing personal insights with critical reflection and analysis:

- **Contextualize your Reflection**
  - What are your learning goals?
  - What are the objectives of the organization?
  - How do these goals fit with the themes or concepts from the course?
- **Provide Important Information**
  - What is the name of the host organization?
  - What is their mission?
  - Who do they serve?
  - What was your role?
  - What did you do?
- **Analytical Reflection**
  - What did you learn from this experience?
  - What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn from working in the field?
- What did you learn about societal factors?
- **Lessons from Reflection**
  - Did your experience fit with the goals or concepts of the course or organization?
    - Why or why not?
  - What are your lessons for the future?
  - What was successful?
    - Why?
  - What would you do differently?
    - Why?
  - How will you prepare for a future experience in the field?

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*"...identify the main arguments or important elements to develop a stronger analysis which integrates relevant ideas from course materials."*

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## What to Include in Your Critical Reflection Assignment

It can be difficult to know where to begin when writing reflectively. Like any other academic piece of writing, a reflection requires a narrow focus and strong analysis. The best approach for identifying this is through interrogation – an introspective into your experience.

- Don't just describe, explore and explain what occurred
- Be honest and admit to making mistakes and successes. Show your understanding of why

things happen and what you are going to do to make improvements.

- You don't have to write about everything that happened, be selective. Include key events or ideas.
- Reflect on what occurred in the past and how it will impact or shape future ideas or activities.

NOTE: See Reflective Vocabulary for tips on the use of language and phrasing.





*Scrabble tiles spelling out Writing*

## How Reflection is Assessed

It may appear that reflective writing assignments are simply observations and personal accounts and that these are difficult to assess. Questions may come up such as what is my Professor looking for? How can my experiences or ideas be right or wrong? Your Professor expects that you critically engage with the concepts from your course by making connections between your observations, experiences, and opinions to that of the course materials. S/He is expecting you to explain and analyze these concepts from your own point of view, eliciting original ideas and encouraging active interest in the course material. To determine whether the learning goals for the course/placement have been met or exceeded.

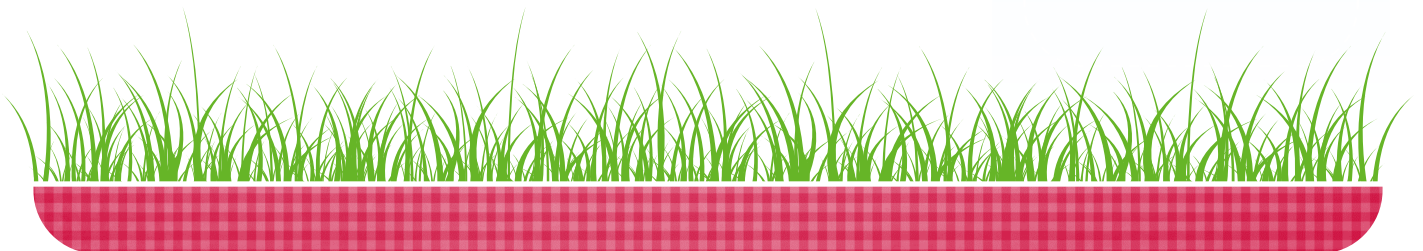
It is important that you identify how to prepare critical reflection pieces that will allow your Professor to easily identify the concepts and goals.

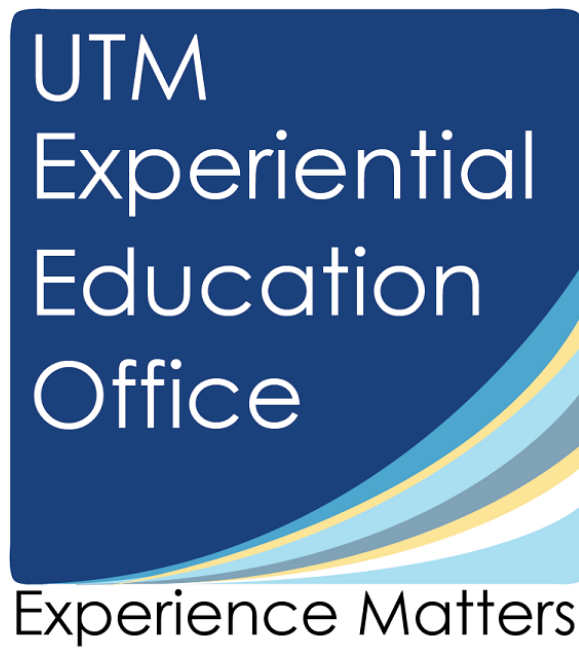
Referenced from:

<http://mycourse.solent.ac.uk/mod/book/tool/print/index.php?id=2732>  
<https://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/documents/Reflectivewriting.pdf>

### Reflective Writing Vocabulary

For tips on reflective writing vocabulary visit: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/experience/students/tips-students>





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