Tip Sheet Reflective Assignments

At university, you might be asked to write a reflection for an assessment task or it may be part of a larger assignment.

This tip sheet explains what reflective writing is, why it should be practised, how to structure a reflection, the style of writing to use in a reflection, and some useful tips for writing reflections.

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing is different from most other types of academic writing as it is based on personal reflection rather than research.

Personal reflection means:
- thinking deeply about your responses to experiences, situations, events or new information and
- analysing them in order to gain a better understanding and learn from them.

Why practise reflective writing?

Reflective writing is becoming an increasingly important aspect of learning because it improves:
- your self-awareness, an element of emotional intelligence,
- your critical thinking skills, and
- your ability to become a more effective practitioner in your field.

Which university assessments tend to require reflective writing?

Reflective writing assignments come in a number of different forms such as:
- learning journals documenting your reflections on unit materials,
- portfolios analysing your experiences on a workplace practicum,
- summaries outlining personal reactions to issues,
- peer reviews critiquing and providing feedback on another student's work, or
- self-assessments analysing and evaluating your own work or skills.

How do you structure a reflection?

There are various different models which can be used to guide reflective writing. You may be asked to use a particular model or you may be able to choose one.

Generally speaking, all models contain a:
- description (which sets the scene),
- interpretation and evaluation (this is where you analyse the situation and draw conclusions),
- outcomes (what was the result or what happened as a consequence), and
- plans for the future (explain what you learnt and what you will do in the future).

Examples of commonly used models reflective writing models include:
- Gibbs Reflective Cycle, and
- DIEP model.
What style of writing is used?

In reflective writing you should:

- adopt a more informal and personal tone but respect the usual conventions of academic writing;
- avoid colloquial expressions or slang;
- use the first person (I, my) to describe experiences, make observations, and state your opinion or feelings; and
- use the language of reflection.

What are some useful tips for a good reflection?

Start early
Start a journal to record interesting things that happen as soon as they happen. This will make it so much easier to write about them later, rather than trying to remember what happen weeks later.

Don’t just describe!

Describe emotions
Identify your emotions that relate to the task. Think about how these emotions have influenced your behaviour. This is important as emotions can have an impact on current and future outcomes.

Contact
If you have any questions about this material, please contact ECU’s Learning Advisers at learningadviser@ecu.edu.au