Writing Style

Because it concerns your thoughts, reflective writing is mostly subjective. Therefore in addition to being reflective and logical, you can be personal, hypothetical, critical and creative. You can comment about your experiences, rather than solely drawing on academic evidence.

Reflective writing is an activity that includes description (what, when, who) and analysis (how, why, what if). It is an explorative tool often resulting in more questions than answers.

A reflective task may allow you to use different modes of writing and language:

**Descriptive** (what, when, who)
- outlining what something is

**Expressive** (I think, I feel, I noted)

**Analytical and explanatory** (how, why, what if)
- explaining how it came about and analysing why it is like that

Use full sentences and complete paragraphs for your reflections. Reflective writing is often less formal - you can usually use personal pronouns like 'I', 'my' or 'we' - but keep colloquial language to a minimum (eg, kid, bloke, stuff).
What can I discuss?

- Your perceptions of the course and the content.
- Any questions you have.
- Experiences, ideas and observations you have had, and how they relate to the course or topic.
- What you found confusing, inspiring, difficult, interesting and why.
- Possibilities, speculations, hypotheses or solutions.
- Alternative interpretations or different perspectives on what you have read or done in your course.
- How new ideas challenge what you already know.
- What you need to explore next in terms of thoughts and actions.

You can also discuss how you:

- solved a problem;
- reached a conclusion;
- found an answer;
- reached a point of understanding.

It's also helpful to make comparisons and connections between what your are learning and your prior knowledge and experience and your prior assumptions.

Getting started

Be clear about your task

Reflective writing assignments can take many forms, so check the guidelines in your course outline before you begin. Clarify any questions or uncertainties with your lecturer or tutor.

Clarify the practical aspects

Find out what form your task should take. You may need to submit a book or folder or complete an online component. In addition to writing, you may be able to include pictures, diagrams, media clippings etc.

Gather your ideas

Before you write, you need to think and reflect. Start by drawing up a Mindmap.

Mindmapping is a technique that can help you expand your thinking, structure your ideas and make connections. You can use a Mindmap to plan your assignment and arrange items to create the structure of your writing.

1. Write your topic in the centre of a blank page.
2. Draw related ideas on ‘branches’ that radiate from the central topic. When you get a new idea, start a new branch from the centre. Include any ideas, topics, authors, theories, experiences associated with your topic.
3. Map quickly, without pausing, to maintain a flow of ideas. Associate freely and do not self-edit; at this stage anything and everything is OK.
4. Circle the key points or ideas. Look at each item and consider how it relates to others, and to the topic as a whole.
5. Map the relationships between the ideas or key points using lines, arrows, colours. Use words or phrases to link them.

Resources on Mind Mapping

- Mind Map Gallery - The Buzan Centre Australia / NZ
- Brainstorming and mind mapping for assignments - Language and Learning Online, Monash University
- Concept or mind-mapping - Study Guides and Strategies web site

Tips to help you in your reflective writing process

- Think of an interaction, event or episode you experienced that can be connected to the topic
- Describe what happened
• What was your role?
• What feelings and perceptions surrounded the experience?
• How would you explain the situation to someone else?
• What might this experience mean in the context of your course?
• What other perspectives, theories or concepts could be applied to the situation?

See next: Examples of reflective writing