

Reflective writing

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing is a personal style of writing. It is expected when you are asked to reflect on and think critically (analyse and judge in relation to the theory) about ideas and practices that relate to you personally (e.g. your teaching practices). Its purpose is to help you to understand your course material better, to help you create links between your past and present learning and clarify the relationship between theory and practice.

You can write your paragraphs to give your opinion (interpretation/analysis) first, then the supporting evidence, as in Example 1. Or you can present the theory first to provide the basis for your subsequent opinion, as in Example 2. If you do not link your opinion to the theory, then your opinion lacks credibility, as in Example 3.

Features of the language of reflective writing

- You can write in the first person when you are reflecting. That is, you can include yourself (I, me, we) in your writing when you are expressing personal experiences, observations or opinions.
- When you are referring to theory or other writers you should write in the third person. That is, refer to other writers by name and do not use I, or me.
- The actions (verbs) when you reflect are usually those of feeling and thinking e.g. feeling, felt, considered, experienced, wondered, remembered, discovered, learned.
- When you are reflecting, if your opinion is not all that strong, you can modify or soften it by using words like may, perhaps or might.

Examples

Example 1: Your opinion (interpretation/analysis) followed by supporting theory

Note how paragraph structure is used to:

- state a reflection/opinion
- give explanation and an interpretation about that reflection
- provide a theoretical justification for the interpretation. This adds credibility to the interpretation
- draw a logical conclusion.

On contemplation, I realised that some of my values are in conflict with one another. One value is that financial security brings happiness. Another value of mine is that education is extremely important. These values are in direct conflict because the second (education) prevents me from achieving the first (security from monetary gains). As Egan (1977, p. 12) explains, conflict occurs if different values get in the way of one another. This conflict of values probably explains why I have been feeling distressed and anxious about coming to university

Actions of thinking and feeling

Example 2: Theory followed by interpretation/evaluation

Note how paragraph structure is used to:

- state and explain the theory
- provide the basis for opinion
- give the personal example and interpretation of that example in relation to the theory
- draw the ideas presented to a logical conclusion i.e. an evaluation of the relevance of self-disclosure to the communication within the relationship.

Theory written in the third person i.e. no I, we, me, my etc.

Self-disclosure is an important component of developing good communication in a close relationship. According to Johnson (1999, p. 45), self-disclosure is the act of letting people know personal information about oneself. It usually occurs within a personal relationship where there is a lot of trust involved or when there is a need to disclose personal information, for example, to a health professional. Early in my relationship with my partner, I felt that we had a good relationship based on trust and so I gradually disclosed things about myself. I remember feeling very apprehensive when I disclosed some of the mistakes that I had made as an adolescent, but being relieved that my partner accepted this and was not judgmental. After this, I felt that my trust in my partner was confirmed. I feel that this has probably contributed to the continued development of good communication within our relationship.

Note how the language used modifies the judgement.

Example 3: Reflection/evaluation BUT with no credibility

Here the writer presents his/her own thoughts and feelings, but does not link these to the theory. For example, does the literature say this is unusual?

The reason for my choosing this relationship for analysis is that it intrigues me how two people can become such close friends when all we really have in common is the friendship itself. Ours is also a rare friendship in that we are both unfailingly honest with one another. Sometimes we even surprise ourselves at the depth of obligation to the truth and at the candid nature in which we can express it.

What justification is there for this evaluation? As there is no link with the theory, this statement is not credible. It appears that the writer has NOT read nor utilised any reference material. So it reads like an entry in a personal diary and not like an assignment.

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