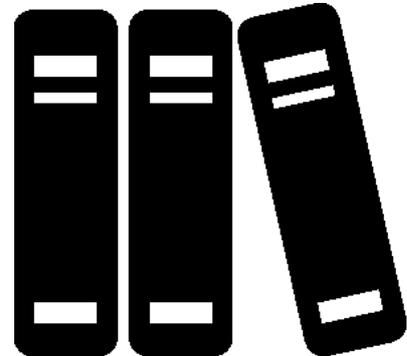


A guide to reflective thinking and writing

What is reflection?

Reflection can be described as “a process of looking back on what has been done and pondering on it and learning lessons from what did or did not work” (Conway, 1994). Reflective thinking and writing allows you analyse your work and help you to self-develop over time as reflecting requires deeper thinking and thus a higher level of learning.



A simple way to think about reflection is you need to:

- Experience something (this could be a topic or theory in your studies)
- Think about what happened
- Learn from the experience and thinking

Although the concept of reflection may seem new, you actually reflect all the time in your life, you just don't realise it! A simple example of a reflective process that you will have encountered is below. This is using the same principle as you will do while reflecting as part of your studies.

Example

Think about the last time you tried a new food. You **experienced** a new food or flavour. You then had to **think** about whether you liked the taste/texture/look. Then **learnt** from this i.e. if you liked it, you will have it again and if you didn't, you wouldn't.

Why should I reflect?

Reflection enables you acquire a deeper level of learning. Without reflecting, the learning that takes place can be surface learning. i.e. you have been given knowledge, you will remember it and potentially use this in the future. Although this is a good start, this doesn't allow you to truly understand the content nor does it make it easy for you to develop your own ideas about the topic.

Schön's model

Schön (1991) presented the concept of 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action':

Reflection in action	Reflection on action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing • Thinking on your feet • Thinking about what to do next • Acting straight away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about something that has happened • Thinking what you would do differently next time • Taking your time

Schön highlights the importance of reflection during the event itself, but also after where the emphasis is on the thinking and learning about the event.

Questions to aid your reflection

1. How did I feel during the task?
2. How did I feel after the task?
3. What things didn't go so well?
4. What could I have changed to make the outcome more favourable?
5. What aspects am I going to take forward into my next piece of work?

Top tips for reflective writing

1. **Don't be afraid to admit where you went wrong** – Finding your own weaknesses is a difficult skill to harness, reflection helps you do this but to do this you need to be honest with yourself to help you develop.
2. **Reflective writing is personal** – Don't be afraid to write about how your emotions and how you felt about the event.
3. **Try not to be too descriptive** – If your reflections are assessed, the marks are allocated for the analysis and evaluation parts of your reflection, rather than the descriptive aspects.
4. **Read your previous reflections** – Reflective writing is a continuing process and it is important to revisit your old ones to be sure you're improving over time.
5. **Make sure you are positive!** – Reflection should be a positive experience and if you follow the tips above.

References

Conway J. (1994) Reflection, the art and science of Nursing and the theory practice gap. *British Journal of Nursing* 3(1) 77-80

Schön, D. (1991) *The Reflective Practitioner*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.