

Reflective writing and journals



Charles Sturt
University

Academic Skills
Division of Student Success

Reflective writing helps you think about and understand your learning experiences.

Reflective writing can be included in a variety of different assignment tasks. It can include keeping a reflective journal or learning log with multiple entries – particularly for professional placements – or it may be part of an essay or report.

[Watch our video on reflective writing](#)

What is reflection?

Reflection is the process of proactively thinking about specific personal practices, experiences, emotions, actions, issues, motivations, processes and outcomes.

In doing this, students can determine the advantages and disadvantages of a particular approach, identify the personal and professional learning that arose, and consider how they should act in the future.

It should be explicit, deliberate, focused, and related to personal and professional growth and development.

The process of reflection answers the questions:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- How do I feel about what happened?
- What were the significant factors?
- How could I improve the outcome in a similar situation in the future?

The DIEP strategy

This is a four-step approach to reflection:

- **Describe**
- **Interpret**
- **Evaluate and**
- **Plan**

Adapted from: Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (1985). Reflection: Turning experience into learning. Routledge-Falmer.

How to use the DIEP strategy

For your journal/diary entries you should attempt to:

- ✓ analyse your own performance as a learner,
- ✓ evaluate your gains in understanding and completing tasks,
- ✓ articulate how you feel about your learning,
- ✓ make connections with other experiences and ideas,
- ✓ demonstrate the transfer of learning,
- ✓ integrate the concepts taught in courses (including the literature where relevant).



Describe objectively what happened

Describe what you:

- did,
- read,
- saw,
- heard.



Interpret the events

Consider why events happened in the way they did.

Explain:

- what you saw and heard,
- your new insights,
- your connections with other learning,
- your feelings,
- Your hypotheses and/or conclusions.

Answer the question: “What might this mean?”



Evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the experience

Make judgments that are clearly connected to observations you have made.

Answer the questions:

- What is my opinion about this experience?
- What is the value of this experience?
- Why do I think this?



Plan how this information will be useful to you

Consider in what ways this learning experience might serve you in your:

- course,
- program,
- future career,
- life generally.

Answer the question: “How will I transfer or apply my new knowledge and insights in the future?”

Why do we reflect?

Reflection brings together theory and practice. It enables professionals to systematically find effective, practical ways of applying theoretical knowledge in the contexts in which they work.

- ✓ Top tip: reflection can and should inform future action and is essential to both personal and professional development.

Example: Debbie's reflection

Here is an example of an appropriate reflective writing style that you can use as an exemplar. The task that was given to Debbie, a student doing a teaching degree, was to reflect on aspects of her work placement.

On my placement, I was interested to observe the way that one of the room leaders managed the transitions between different activities during the day. The 'Butterflies' room always feels very calm and the children always seem relaxed. The Butterflies room leader plays a particular piece of music about five minutes before children need to move to another activity. When I first started my placement there, I was told that during this time, I should go to children to remind them what activity they would be doing next or help them pack up.

This seemed to be an important part of creating that calm atmosphere since everyone (including staff) was prepared well for completing one activity and going to another. In this room, I have never seen an activity delayed or a child getting upset at having to stop before they were ready.

I asked the room leader whether it took long for children and staff to get used to doing transitions in this way. She said that it takes about three weeks for everyone to get used to it, but after that, it settled into the routine that I observed. Watching this in action was a powerful demonstration of both the effectiveness of using music to enable smooth transitions in the early childhood classroom and the importance of properly briefing staff about daily transitions. I was reminded of the Register and Humpal (2007) reading where children also sang the actions they needed to take (e.g., "Come to the circle, the circle, the circle. Come to the circle and sit right down.").

Since I can't sing, I thought that I would never be able to use music in the way that Register and Humpal (2007) outlined, but this experience has shown me that you don't need to be able to sing to use music to facilitate transitions. This has inspired me to apply the same method in my own teaching because it seems to work extremely well. I have already created a Spotify list of recordings that I am going to try out.

Can you identify the stages of Describe, Interpret, Evaluate and Plan in Debbie's reflection?

Reach out for help

The Charles Sturt Academic Skills team is here to help you develop your learning skills. You can also:

- ask a question on our [Ask an Academic Skills Adviser forum](#),
- join one of our [Academic Skills workshops](#), or
- access further information about all of our available services and learning resources, including assignment writing feedback, at csu.edu.au/academicskills.