



An Introduction to Reflection

What is reflection?

Reflection is the process of proactively thinking about specific personal practices, experiences, emotions, actions, issues, motivations, processes, and outcomes to determine the advantages and disadvantages of a particular approach, the personal and professional learning that arose, and the lessons for 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? This can be remembered as the pattern of:

Describe
Interpret
Evaluate and
Plan

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. Reflection can and should inform future action, and is essential to both personal and professional development.

What does reflection look like?

Here is an example of an appropriate reflective writing style that you can use as a model. The task that was given to Sarah, a student about to start a teaching degree, was to reflect on her first semester in the education course. See if you can identify the stages of Describe, Interpret, Evaluate and Plan in Sarah's reflection.

Sarah's reflection

I wanted to do the Early Childhood Education course so that I can eventually own and run my own childcare centre. I enjoy working with children and think they respond well to me but I knew that there was a lot of specific knowledge that I didn't know. Unless I already possess the same or greater knowledge as those I employ, it will be difficult for

me to gain their trust and lead as I would like to. I am particularly excited about this course as it is helping me manage my own children!

It has been more than five years since I left school and I was never very good at writing so I was concerned that I would make a lot of mistakes in my written papers. However, I have found that the academic support people are used to people like me and have helped me develop my skills. I am still not sure how to reference academic papers and that kind of thing gets me very frustrated.

Because I have to travel an hour each way to attend the university every day, I have less time to spend with my husband. I continue to be concerned that this might cause problems in our relationship. I am also facing some financial pressure because of my study and this is making it difficult for me to concentrate as I need to.

I think before the next session starts that I might need to see if there are any government grants available to help ease the financial pressure while I study. I also plan on identifying all the contact details of student support services immediately and putting them into my telephone and email address lists so that I can be confident that help is only an email away. The library has advertised tutorials on journal databases so I will register for them as soon as I can and then practice the skills in my next assignment. I will set up my study area and create a study plan a week before each session starts so that I am ready to go. Finally, I intend to set aside time each week for a date night with my husband so I can make time to have some balance between my study life and my relationship, home and social life. These arrangements should improve my focus and performance.

