

A quick guide to reflective writing

The aim of this paper is to provide some initial ideas about reflective writing and help you to approach the reflective case studies for your ASPIRE Associate Fellowship application.

We're not suggesting that this is the only way to write reflectively.

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing can be more demanding than other forms of writing as it involves writing about feelings, anxieties, and mistakes as well as what went well. It always involves more than simply describing what happened. Describing the context can help you to start writing if you feel stuck. The next step is to ask yourself questions about what happened.

Reflective writing usually involves ...

1. **Description:** Looking back at something, such as an event, project, initiative, module, session or incident
2. **Analysis and interpretation:** thinking about the event in depth and considering it from a number of different perspectives. For example, you might include your own thoughts, other people's views and how the relevant literature and theories apply to this situation.
3. **Outcome:** Thinking about what the event means for you and your development as a learner or professional and how your reflection on what happened will inform your future practice.

Questions to ask and a few useful phrases

Description – keep it short

Select the most significant parts of the event. If you try to describe every aspect of the event, you'll probably use up your word count on description rather than interpretation. Who were the key people involved? What happened?

Analysis and interpretation

What did I feel?	For me the most ... meaningful ... significant ... important ... relevant	... aspects ... elements ... experiences	... was/were
Why did I respond the way I did?	... useful ... learning	... ideas	... happened when
What are the most important aspects?	At the time ... At first ... Initially ... Subsequently ... Later ...	I thought ... noticed ... questioned ... realised ...	
What went well and what would I change about the experience? How do I know?	This might be ... is probably ... is perhaps	because of ... explained by ... related to	
Which aspects of educational research, theory or literature are associated with this event?			
How did my training or development influence me?	This reveals ... This makes me feels that ...		

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Outcome		
What have I learned?	Having read ... experienced ... applied ... discussed ... analysed ...	I now feel ... think ... realise ... question ... know ...
What would I change?	I have developed ... improved ... enhanced ... pioneered ...	my skills in ... my ability to ... my knowledge of ... a change in ...
Why is this important?		
What will I do next?	This is ... important ... essential ... helpful	in my development because ... as a practitioner because ... as a learner because ...
	Because I am not yet ... confident about ... certain about As a next step ... To develop further ...	I need to ...

Reflective writing differs from other forms of academic writing in that you'll need to use the first person and the past tense – 'I felt that ...' - to describe the events and your interpretation. When referring to any academic theory, use the third person and present tense – 'Biggs argues that ...', 'Constructivist theory recognises that ...'.

Hints and tips

- Point the assessment panel toward good and sustained student and colleague/peer feedback on the success and effectiveness of the activity
- Provide the panel with evidence. You could include student evaluation scores from MACE (Module and Course Evaluation questionnaires) or NSS (National Student Survey), external examiner feedback, student comments or quotes from colleagues, which provide excellent evidence of impact.
- It can be very helpful to reference the UKPSF (UK Professional Standards Framework) dimensions of practice explicitly within your case studies.
- Case studies should be no more than 500 words in length and the word count should be given.

It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively. Gibbs (1988)

Adapted from 'Reflective writing: a basic introduction' University of Portsmouth DCQE <http://www.port.ac.uk/media/contacts-and-departments/student-support-services/ask/downloads/Reflective-writing---a-basic-introduction.pdf> accessed 03 November 2016 and 'Guide to reflective writing', University of Wolverhampton Learning and Information Services <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/lib/media/departments/lis/skills/study-guides/LS006-Guide-to-Reflective-Writing.pdf> accessed 03 November 2016.