

Reflective Writing: Prompts

Reflective writing tasks are designed to get you to think deeply about your particular view on a topic, or your involvement and experience in a certain situation, such as a work placement. Your views, preferences and assumptions, when set alongside key theories in your field and the course materials, provide you with a lens through which to observe, describe, and improve your professional practice.

This helpsheet poses a series of questions to prompt your reflective thinking. Your responses will contribute to a first draft of your reflective assignment.

Describe: What | How | Who | When

- The context, episode, material, situation, or occasion for reflection, including:
 - What did you observe?
 - Interactions between yourself and others
 - Your role in the episode or situation
 - What did you think and feel? (consider visual, auditory and other cues)
 - Can you name your personal reactions? (for example, disbelief, shock, frustration, fear, etc.)

Limited reflections are those that stop at describing the feelings we have in response to stimuli. If we do not reflect on why those feelings were evoked, we cannot learn from the experience. So, the next important step is:

Interpret/Analyse

- Have your personal beliefs been challenged or confirmed by reading the course material?
In what way?
- What are the 'sticking points' for you or for others, relating to actions, beliefs, knowledge, or power dynamics? For example, what is challenging your value system?
- What perspectives or theories from your course material are relevant to the experience, or could explain the issue you are reflecting upon?
- What *other* perspectives can you use to analyse your scenario or incident?
- In a scenario or placement, analyse what worked well and what could have been better.

Summarise

- Have your initial feelings, assumptions and knowledge been reinforced or changed?
- What preferences of yours have changed, if any, since your initial thoughts or beliefs?
- What have you learned in writing this reflection?
- What new knowledge do you have that will influence future choices and actions?
- What will you do differently in a similar situation in the future?

Apply

- What actions, if any, will you take now to build upon your practice?
- What steps will you take to improve your understanding and/or technique?
- What changes will you make to your practice (your actions and interactions)?
- In a scenario or placement reflection, set a time limit to complete these steps.

Adapted from: Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*.

Tips:

- Try to be spontaneous and write everything down that comes to mind without editing yourself as it can result in a deeper reflection of your experience.
- Capture your initial reflections on a scenario or placement in any way that suits you, including as a voice recording on your phone.

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Blending reflections and research

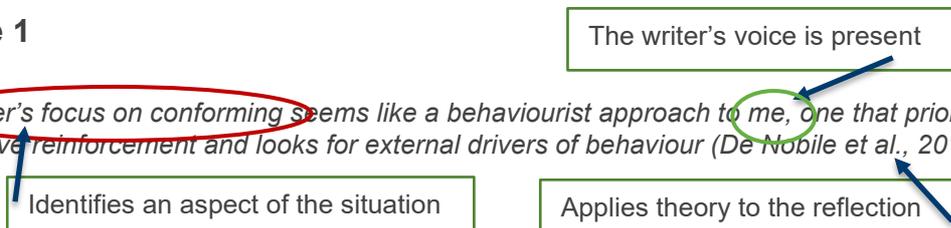
Writing about your personal experiences requires a different kind of language compared with writing about academic theories and research. You may even feel conflicted about the style of writing this kind of task demands, particularly after being advised to avoid using “I” in academic writing generally.

As reflective writing is centred on your own experiences and thinking, it is acceptable and indeed necessary for you to include ‘personal language’ words such as ‘*me, my, I feel, I think,*’ etc., in a piece of reflective writing. The ‘writer’s voice’ is an important part of reflective writing.

However, you must also draw on the literature to support your claims with evidence. This can be a challenge as you switch between personal and academic writing styles. Like any skill, the process of incorporating research into your reflective writing will become easier with practice.

Example 1

The teacher’s focus on conforming seems like a behaviourist approach to me, one that prioritises positive and negative reinforcement and looks for external drivers of behaviour (De Nobile et al., 2017).



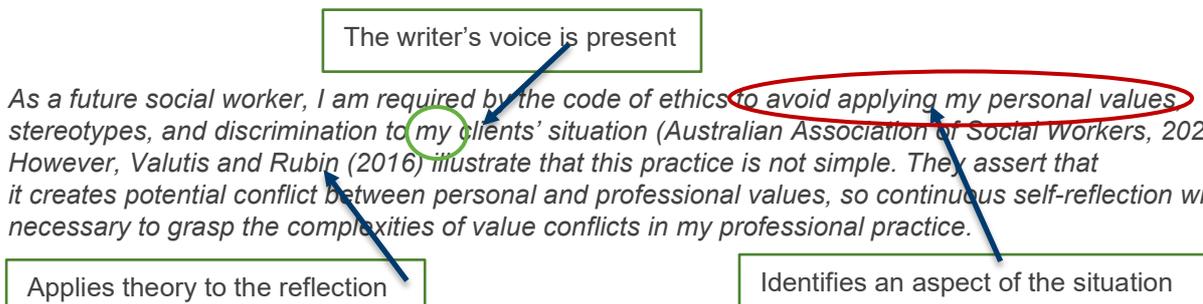
Example 2

Research shows that the skill of rapport-building can be improved. According to Vallano et al. (2015), the service provider can show genuine interest in the client’s story through their body language, for example by slightly leaning forward. The main lesson for me to apply in my future practice is to use non-verbal communication techniques such as this to show interest in the story the client is sharing.



Example 3

As a future social worker, I am required by the code of ethics to avoid applying my personal values stereotypes, and discrimination to my clients’ situation (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020). However, Valutis and Rubin (2016) illustrate that this practice is not simple. They assert that it creates potential conflict between personal and professional values, so continuous self-reflection will be necessary to grasp the complexities of value conflicts in my professional practice.



Other helpsheets available

- Reflective Writing: Phrases
- Writing in an Academic Style
- Sentence Structure