**THIS IS HOW I TEACH**

# Reflection Guidelines

**What is meaningful reflection?**

Reflection is an integral component of experiential learning – it links the ‘concrete experience’ to the ‘learning’, facilitating the connection between the theory learned in class and the practical experience gained. Within the context of the academic program/content, reflection requires thinking critically about:

* The activity that was undertaken
* how the experience evoked any emotional response
* how the learning was achieved through the process itself

Meaningful reflection allows students to make more informed decisions, take actions they may not have taken, set out new learning goals and increases overall awareness. It is successful when students can answer: What? So what? Now what?

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| **What?**  Report the facts and events of an experience, objectively. | **So What?**  Analyze the experience. | **Now What?**  Consider the impact of the experience on you and the organization/community |
| What happened? | Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest? | What seem to be the root causes of the issue addressed? |
| What did you observe? | Did you experience anything that surprised you? | What other work is currently happening to address the issue? |
| What issue is being addressed or population is being served? | How is your experience different from what you expected? | What learning occurred for you in this experience? |
|  | What impacts the way you view the situation/experience? (What lens are you viewing from?) | How can you apply this learning? |
|  | What did you like/dislike about the experience? | What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue? |
|  | What did you learn about the people/community? | What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties? |
|  | What are some of the pressing needs/issues in the community? | What information can you share with your peers or the community? |
|  | How does this project address those needs? | If you could do the project again, what would you do differently? |

*Source: Adapted from* [*http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/info/reflection.html#Sample*](http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/info/reflection.html#Sample)

Reflection is *not*:

-a didactic retelling of the events of an experiential learning activity.

-simply an emotional outlet for feeling good about doing something or for feeling guilty about not doing more.

-an exercise that closes an experience.

**When should reflection take place?**

Reflection is ongoing. It should take place pre, during and post experience.  Depending on the nature of the activity, the reflective exercises may look different.

**What types of reflection exist?**

Cognitive – looks at new knowledge and skills learned by student

Affective – looks at how the student feels from the experience

Process – reflects on the steps taken in the process

**How can I integrate reflective learning in my courses?**

Below are some best practices:

1. **Move beyond the doing or theory by asking students to go deeper into their learning.** There’s no right or wrong answer, it’s what they got out of the experience that counts.
2. **Giving feedback is crucial.** If you want students to do deep, be prepared to offer deeper feedback to meet them halfway.
   * Be kind. A reflection may make a student feel vulnerable.
   * Providing honest feedback means making yourself vulnerable too.
   * Be ready to hear shallow responses like, “The experience was great,” or a detailed description of the activity rather than what they have learned. Respond to confusion about the “right way” to answer a reflective learning question by challenging the student to look deeper. For example, ask another question like “Why was the experience great?”
3. **Provide a safe environment where students can explore and articulate emotional responses.** When learning new concepts, we can experience a feeling of uncertainty and disequilibrium until we can make sense of the new information and/or experience.
4. **Consider your class size.** Assessing and providing feedback takes time. You may want to create structured feedback loops through peer evaluation and discussion activities.
5. M**odel the reflection process.** Show students how to engage in reflection and an example of a good reflection. Be sure to set expectations by presenting the criteria you will use to assess the reflections (ex.: mention of skills you’ve developed, etc.). A rubric will facilitate a successful peer-feedback activity.
6. **Connect the activity to a learning outcome(s) for the course.** Give the activity context by showing them why it’s relevant to the course they’ve signed up for.

Sources:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/planning-courses-and-assignments/course-design/critical-reflection>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/metacognitive>

**How can reflection take place?**

There are many ways reflection can be presented including oral reflection, written, individual, and group. Reflections often make use of the arts, multi-media, games and simulations, stories, case studies, role-plays and many other activities which enhance learning. Examples are:

* Presentations
* Blogs (public to peer community) or individual blogs
* Traditional written reports
* Vlogs
* Photo sharing
* Journaling
* Website creation
* Skype conversations
* Coffee chats
* Back to School Debrief
* Resource sharing
* Peer to Peer exchanges and feedback

**A framework for authentic reflection**

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|  | **Description** | **Varied formats and contexts** | **Advisor Strategies** |
| **Pre-reflection** | Using some form of goal setting, students should reflect on what they would like to get out of their experience (reflect on assumptions, expectations, strengths, weaknesses, goals) | Group and individual meetings, video or audio journals, writing (e.g. blog, creative writing, poetry, journals) | Monitor progress, discuss challenges, develop alternative solutions, assist self-observations, discuss thoughts and emotions |
| **Ongoing Reflection** | Students reflect while they are undertaking their experiential learning activity, while they are actively engaged. (reflect through self-observation, questioning, modifying) | Group and individual meetings, video or audio journals, writing (e.g. blog, creative writing, poetry, journals) | Monitor progress, discuss challenges, develop alternative solutions, assist self-observations, discuss thoughts and emotions |
| **Post-reflection** | Students look back at their learning journey(reflect through self-observation, questioning, modifying) | Group or individual presentation, summative writing (e.g. essay, blog, creative writing), video or audio journals, group or individual meetings | Congratulate, celebrate, probe next steps, identify areas of growth, discuss how students addressed challenges |

*Source: Perry., S and Martin, R. 2016. Authentic Reflection for Experiential Learning at International Schools, International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement 4(1).*

A mid-term check-in is helpful.Students can review their learning objectives (individually or with supervisor) and complete an evaluation, while supervisors can evaluate the student's progress. A learning plan is very useful to track progress.

**Key elements of the framework:**

* Reflection should be done before, during, and after the experience.
* Students should be provided with different ways to reflect.
* Supervisors must guide students throughout the reflection process and offer timely feedback.

# **Reflection Summary**

a. What goals were met during the experience?

b. What goals were not met and why?

c. What were some of the strengths you have developed during the experience?

d. What skills do you still need to improve and what ways can improvements be made?

e. What academic courses were helpful in preparing you for this?

f. What academic courses would have been helpful in preparing you for this activity?