

Reflective Writing At University

An academic reflection involves describing an academic experience, thinking about what you learned from it and how you felt about it. Consider the following scenario: You're in a clothing store trying on something new. You think about how you look, feel and like about it and wonder what you could change (e.g., a different colour, size or design) and why. You may also ask for someone's opinion, listen to their suggestions and decide if you will purchase the item or continue shopping for the right outfit.

Now consider an experience that you recently encountered in your learning as a student e.g., an experience in a science laboratory; an internship; a class discussion, or a journal article you read to prepare for a tutorial. As you reflect on your learning experiences, ask the same questions:

- How did the experience look to you?
- How did you feel about it?
- What did you like or not like about it and why?
- Is there anything about the experience that you would like to change? What would it be and why?
- How would you go about changing it?
- Will you speak to someone or read something to assist you with changing it?

Why do we write academic reflections?

Writing an academic reflection is not merely a descriptive exercise, but is about asking **what** and **how** we can learn from our experiences. This is done by reflecting on **what we think and feel** in relation to our experiences, and how the ideas of scholars can be used to complement our reflections.

Academic reflections require us to **analyse and think critically** about our learning experiences. Hence, they are a common assessment tool in higher education because they:

- Enable us to recognise what and how we can change as a result of our reflections;
- Connect our experiences to theory and evidence from research; and - Help us plan on how we can use our learning from the reflections.

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How do we write academic reflections?

To reflect is to think deeply and critically about your experiences as a learner, and there are various ways of how you can go about doing this. Often, in a reflective assignment, your unit coordinator will require you to use a reflective model. There are four models that are commonly used:

- The 4Rs;
- DIEP;
- Gibbs Cycle; and - Rolfe's model.

If your unit does not require you to use any model, you can follow the basic structure below.

	Thinking about the experience critically
Describe	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who was involved? Where and when did it happen?• How did you feel about it?
Analyse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What have you learned from the experience? How has it impacted you?• How does it relate to a previous or current experience? How has the experience changed the way you think about something?• Are there any theories or evidence from research that you can include to support your analysis of the experience?
Evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will what you have learned be of value and benefit to you?• What are some of the positives or negatives of the experience?• Are there any theories or evidence from research that you can include to validate your evaluation of the experience?
Apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How might you practically apply what you have learnt in your current experiences as a student or a future employee when you enter the workforce?

Citing sources in reflective writing

You will be required to consider the **link** between your readings and your experiences. Theories and evidence from research are used to **support** and **validate** your opinions and insights. Generally, we prefer that you **paraphrase** the information as this allows your voice to be prominent. In-text citations are compulsory, and this must be followed by full bibliographic details in a well-organised end-text (reference) list at the end of your reflection.

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To enhance the flow of your reflections, try using **reporting verbs** after an author-prominent in-text citation. An **author-prominent in-text citation** is an in-text citation that appears at the start or near the start of a sentence. For example:

*Crozier (2020) **states/explains/demonstrates/discusses/argues that...** or*

*As Smith et al. (2018) **discuss** in a study completed at Harvard University*

Let us look at an example of academic reflective writing.

Section	Analysis
Describe – I recently attended a lecture on the importance of effective communication in groups. The lecture was delivered by an industry expert, and I found her ideas on the importance of listening and empathy useful and thought-provoking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describes the experience or situation by stating the what ('lecture on effective communication'); who ('student and industry expert') and when ('lecture').</i> • <i>Feelings ('thought provoking') mentioned.</i>
Analyse – I have always known that it is important to listen when working in groups, but I learned that listening is also an attitude. This has changed my understanding on mutual respect and body language when communicating with people. The lecturer's point about building authentic relationships through listening also struck a chord with me. This is echoed by Crozier (2017) who argues that authenticity is key to building strong groups and is an element that I hope to bring to all my working relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Understanding of listening changed ('but I now know')</i> • <i>Describes the change ('attitude')</i> • <i>Connects 'attitude' with 'authentic relationships' and 'strong groups' and is supported by evidence from research (Crozier, 2017)</i>
Evaluate – Singh (2014) maintains that active listening is now a valuable attribute in management and leadership. I see active listening as a valuable part of building authentic relationships in the workplace and I plan to develop this skill further. One significant benefit of being an authentic relationships in the workplace and I plan to develop this skill further. One significant benefit of being an authentic listener is that it will lead to the creation of a workplace culture that is built on empathy, trust and compassion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Uses evidence from research (Singh 2014) to validate benefit to leadership.</i> • <i>Explains the value of active listening ('valuable part of')</i> • <i>Evaluates importance of new knowledge ('one significant benefit')</i>
Apply – I plan to attend more workshops and lectures on effective communication, I will also explore ways of how I can assess myself or ask my group mates to appraise the way I relate and communicate with them. I intend to do this throughout the remaining duration of my degree.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Specific goals ('workshops and lectures') are listed over a sensible time frame ('remainder of my degree') with some mention of how the goals will be measured through self-assessment ('access myself') and by peer appraisal ('group mates to appraise the way').</i>

Adapted From: UWA Study Smarter, RMIT Learning Lab

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