

Reflecting on yourself and your experiences

You and your thoughts and experiences are the starting points for reflective writing.

Something happens ...

A group of first year Product Design students meet for the first time to work in a large team ...



This is, of course, mind reading – an impossibility! Any written account of an experience comes after, and will be edited in some way. That said, the sooner you make notes or write down your experiences, the better you will remember not only your feelings at the time but what actually happened.

Feelings are so strong! And we all tend to focus on the negatives ...

Unconfident ... impatient ... annoyed ... resentful ... rejected

Rather than trying not to think about the experience (which many people do with an experience they'd prefer to forget!), these students have to concentrate on it and **analyse** their reactions.

What happened?

On the next page are some of the written comments the students made soon after the short group project was completed, in response to the question:

What was the most challenging aspect of the project for you personally?

I found it was difficult to get a message across ...

Working with new classmates ... we didn't know each other and didn't know what each one was good at ...

... a group of people formed the core of the group and dominated decision making ... I had to fight my way ...

... the language barrier ... the others might not understand what I was saying ... I felt a bit brushed off ...

... trying to take a leading role without looking like a control freak ...

... I know that a quiet person can have an idea or opinion which is just as good as those of an outspoken one ...

... I come from another language and culture ... So there was an invisible gap amongst all of us ...

... trying to take an important role ... it was all too easy to let others get on with it ...

A few moments of reflection leads to analysis and a more balanced view of the situation.

Reflecting on how you learn

In the comments below, you can see how each writer analyses their experience of learning, and shows self-knowledge in their reflection:

- ▶ *'I have been a last-minute person since school years and it has extended into university years. I feel more motivated when I am doing my work at the very last minute.'* (Education student)
- ▶ *'I found the exercises required me to think in ways I wouldn't necessarily do naturally.'* (Medical student)
- ▶ *'My brain is splitting with trying to learn so much in such a short space. Working in the hotel is so different from what I imagined.'* (Business and Hospitality student)
- ▶ *'I love the rush of idea generation, sketch development and the tension of the process.'* (Creative Arts student)

These kinds of comments may form part of a reflective journal, in which the writer looks back at past experiences to inform their future development:

When I was at school, there was not a strong emphasis on learning another language. English was/is seen as the key language to the world ... I feel a lot of my resistance to learning another language has been influenced by this attitude ... and attending lessons was a chore I didn't want to do ...

As an adult, I can see how many of the lessons were uninspiring and I had no reason to believe that learning would be to my advantage ...

As a teacher I hope to be able to ...

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You can see how the writer's reflections move through time:

from the **past**: *When I was ... I didn't want to ... I felt*

to the **present**: *I can see now ... I find that ...*

to the **future**: *I hope to be able to ... I'd like to ...*

Chapter 6 takes a closer look at the language to use in reflective writing.