How to be reflective in your writing

What is reflection?
“Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we may use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome or we may simply ‘be reflective’ and then an outcome can be expected. Reflection is applied to relatively complicated, ill-structured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding” (Moon, 2004, p.82)

Key aspects of reflective thinking
It is about a way of thinking and learning from that thinking (Focused).
It involves a set of actions/practices (Purposeful).
It is about asking questions.
It Links thinking, practice (or action) and learning (based on Experience).

Why reflection is valuable
Reflection can make you improve your practice and show deeper learning. It can also facilitate a change. It allows you to review a process critically – to take a step back and explore ideas on how to improve. It can help with personal and professional development.

There are many models of reflection that you can use to help you with the process. Two of the most commonly used models are ‘What? - So What? - Now What?’ and Gibb’s Reflective Cycle.
This is a simple three-stage framework based on asking yourself the questions ‘What? So what? Now what?’ (Borton, 1970 cited in Rolfe, Jasper and Freshwater, 2011). Firstly, you need to describe a particular situation. You then need to reflect on the meaning that underlies that situation, so that you can learn from it. In the third stage, you need to consider ways of improving the situation, focusing on actions you could take. According to Rolfe, Jasper and Freshwater (2011), this final stage is key for improving practice.

Here is a list of questions that you may choose to answer in response to the three elements (Rolfe, Jasper and Freshwater, 2011).

What?
- What was the problem/situation?
- What was my role?
- What happened?
- What did I want to do?
- How did other people react?
- How did I feel about it?
- Was the experience positive or negative?

So what?
- What are the implications from the experience?
- What does this say about me, my behaviour and how I work with others?
- What other knowledge can I bring to the situation?
- Is there anything I could have done differently?
- What did I learn from the situation?

Now what?
- What do I need to do to improve?
- What do I need to think about to make the action/situation more successful?
Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Gibbs' reflective cycle is fairly straightforward and encourages a clear description of the situation, consideration of feelings, evaluation of the experience, analysis to make sense of the experience, conclusion where other options are considered and reflection upon experience to examine what you would do if the situation arose again. (University of Edinburgh, 2019)

Stage 1 – Description
- Where were you?
- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Was there anyone else there?
- What were you doing?
- What were others doing?
- What was your part?
- What were the parts of others?
- What was the result?
Stage 2 – Feelings
- What was going on inside your head at the time?
- How were you feeling at the start / lead up?
- What were you thinking when it happened? How did you feel?
- How did other people’s action affect how you felt?
- How did you feel about the outcome?
- Looking back – how do you feel about it now?
- Consider the range of emotions that you have gone through
- Which was the most significant / most important to you?

Stage 3 – Evaluation
- To evaluate something we give that thing a value, or measure it against a standard
- What was good about the experience?
- What was bad / didn’t go that well?

Stage 4 – Analysis
- This is breaking down something into its component parts. You can then explore each component separately.
- What went well?
- What did I do well?
- What did others do well?
- What went wrong, or turn/not turn out as expected?
- In what ways did you contribute to this?
- What knowledge / skills did you lack?
- What alternative courses of action could you have taken?
- What was the contribution of others?
- Why might these things have happened?

Stage 5 – Conclusion
- This is where you develop insight into your behaviour and the behaviour of others and the contribution of each to the event.

Stage 6 – Action Plan
- Looking forward. If the event happened again, what would you do differently?
- Plan what you would do the same / differently.
Writing reflectively

The following vocabulary aid may assist you in thinking of how to phrase your reflection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>meaningful</th>
<th>aspect(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>significant</td>
<td>element(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me, the (most) important</td>
<td>experience(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relevant</td>
<td>issue(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful</td>
<td>idea(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For my learning, was (were) arose from...

happened from...

resulted from...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previously,</th>
<th>thought/did not think</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At the time</td>
<td>felt/did not feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At first</td>
<td>knew/did not know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initially,</td>
<td>I noticed/did not notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsequently,</td>
<td>questioned/did not question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later,</td>
<td>realised/did not realise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This might be because of...

is perhaps due to...

could be explained by...

is probably related to...
This is similar to… because

is unlike…

read…

feel…

experienced..

think…

applied…

realise…

Having analysed… I now wonder…

discussed… question…

analysed… know…

learned…

(Additionally,) I have learned that…

(Also,)

(Importantly,)

I have significantly developed my skills in…

slightly improved my understanding of…

However, I have (sufficiently) improved my knowledge of…

my ability to…

This means that…

This makes me feel…
This knowledge is essential
to me because...
This understanding could be useful
This skill will be important
did not...
have not yet...
Since I am not yet certain about...
I will now need to...
am not yet confident about...
do not yet know...
do not yet understand...

I now need to...

(Adapted from Hampton, no date)

References

