

REFLECTIVE WRITING LANGUAGE GUIDE

Why write reflectively?

- to show what and how you have learnt
- to show what you have done or experienced
- to show how this learning and experience relates to the theories, concepts, and models you are studying

How is reflective writing different to an academic essay?

Traditional Academic Essay

- Theory
- Third person
- Past tense
- A thesis (line of argument) and a well organised structure
- Formal Language

Reflective Essay- Academic

- Theory and personal experience
- First person and third person
- Tense: past, present, and future
- A thesis (line of argument) and a well organised structure
- Formal language

Can I use I?



Use first person when you are reflecting or describing your experience.

- I used active listening well in the beginning of the counselling session; however, I listened less effectively in the second part.
- For example / typified the role of middle child...
- / intend to improve my knowledge of

Use third person when reporting what other people said or did or summarising theory.



- The client seemed to feel at ease during the session and she showed signs of...
- Smith (2017) defines empathy as... He explains that empathy helps to build the relationship with the client.
- Participants responded well to the treatment and said that they felt more positive afterwards.

How do I write about the past and present?

When writing about your own experiences, you write in the past tense.

During this time, I observed and analysed the client's behaviour and reactions.

For example as a child I thought and felt that I should be seen and not heard.

You can write in the future tense when discussing what you would do differently next time. In an academic essay you would write in past tense, except, when you are integrating theory into your writing.

Past

For example:

When I first started learning about conflict resolution I was keen to apply it.

Present

For example:

I <u>am</u> anxious that <u>it takes</u> me so long to integrate my understanding of conflict into my real world conflict.

Future

For example:

I might say, "Take your time to answer. " Then <u>I</u> would be quiet.

How do I write about theory?

We use the present tense (now) to talk about theory. For example Smith argues/states/believes.

Rogers' theory (1959) is based on concepts of self, creativity and trust.

Corey (2005) states A key principle of cognitive behavioural theory is to change "faulty assumptions and beliefs" (p. 304)

How do I reference theory and reflection?

Incorrect	Correct
The client moved into the acceptance stage (Axelrod, 2016). Axelrod did not comment on the client.	Axelrod (2016) states the acceptance stage of the grief cycle is typified by
Reframing the situation might have helped my client (Boyes, 2013). Boyes did not comment on the client.	Boyes (2013) suggests that reframing situations may be helpful.
In my childhood I had unhelpful behaviours (Boden et al.,2012) Boden did not observe your childhood	An example of a faulty assumption or belief is maladaptive thinking resulting in unhelpful behaviours (Boden et al., 2012).

What does formal writing/academic style mean?

Even though are expressing your own experiences, you must convey this information in an academic style. Try to avoid emotive or subjective terms: for example,

The client seemed <u>so worried</u> when she began discussing <u>her heart-wrenching</u> <u>story.</u>

The client was <u>visibly distressed</u> when she began discussing <u>her situation</u>.

The client was <u>very unhappy</u> at the start of the session.

The teacher said that the class <u>were really</u> naughty.

I remember <u>feeling really worried</u> when I started <u>telling them stuff about what</u> I did in the past.

The supervisor said that the clothes I was wearing weren't a very good choice.

I didn't know what to do.

The client was visibly distressed.

The teacher reported that the <u>students did not</u> <u>behave well in the class.</u>

I remember feeling <u>very apprehensive</u> when I began to <u>disclose personal information</u> about my past.

The supervisor said that <u>my clothing choice was inappropriate</u>.

I did not know how to handle the situation.

How can I structure my paragraphs?

Topic sentence: Introduce the main theory, skill or idea from the literature. This is also the main topic of your paragraph.

Explanation: You may need to give further explanation about this theory, skill or idea.

Evidence/example: Provide an example. This could be an example from your practice or experiences, depending on your assignment topic.

Linking sentence: Conclude the paragraph by summarizing the main idea and linking it to the main idea of the next paragraph.

Note: You may need more than one sentence for some of these parts. Also remember one main idea per paragraph.

Sample paragraph 1-Counselling/Social Work

Topic sentence: Alfred Adler's (2005) theory of the family constellation explains that humans are a part of larger systems including the family, the community and all of humanity.

Explanation: Adler's (2005) theory explains that the birth order, or position in the family constellation affect a person's lifestyle, but only through one's own interpretation of their birth position. Leman (2009) argues that the middle child may be characterized by feeling neglected within the family, being an excellent negotiator and very diplomatic.

Evidence/example: As the second born of three girls, I typified the role of middle child. Growing up, I felt neglected and was often overshadowed by my older sister's achievements. I developed negotiation skills by trying to keep both of my sisters happy.

Linking sentence: These characteristics have affected my relationships within the family and more widely.

Sample paragraph 2-Counselling

Starts with a topic sentence using present tense to talk about theory

Past tense used for past experience

Vocabulary

for making

suggestions

A key principle of cognitive behavioural theory is to change "faulty assumptions and

beliefs" (Corey, 2005, p. 304). An example of a faulty assumption or belief is

maladaptive thinking resulting in unhelpful behaviours (Boden et al., 2012). For

example, as a child I thought and felt that I should be seen and not heard. This led to a

lifetime of being shy and anxious around people. Consequently, I avoided parties and

social functions. Therefore, my thinking could be seen as maladaptive. As an adult I

want to be a better role model to my children. I realise I have been developing social

anxiety and cognitive based therapy may be worthwhile for me in order to change. For

example Boyes (2013) suggests that reframing situations may be helpful, and this is

what I would like to learn to do.

Note:

Theory: Doesn't use I and is written in third person using present tense.

Reflection: uses I and tense varies depending on sentence.

Linking words

This example shows how the theory relates to life experience

This could be a link to the next paragraph.

Sample paragraph 3 – Reflecting on group work

Topic sentence
- what is the
main point of
the paragraph?

Use a study as evidence to support the idea

Tie in more theory and elaborate by connecting to your experience

Working in my group proved that face to face communication is the key to better team performance. I used to think that the success of a team lay in everyone having access to up to date information about the project. However, I have come to realise that face to face communication can be more effective because it is synchronous, and the participants are more engaged. Bodell and Levins (2012) found that a group of geographically dispersed therapists collaborating on a project online did not continue the rich and sociable communicative interaction that had been established initially face to face. Their interactions online became task oriented and information based. In the same way, I found that our best ideas and solutions grew out of the meetings. I have also realised that richer communication between team members can build rapport and enrich understanding of your team members. The regular meetings made me become more conscious of my teammates' personalities, skills, strengths and needs. For example, Sharifa was able to teach Reyan how to use some software that she needed. Cascio (as cited in Ebrahim et. al, 2012) cites "(the) loss of face to face synergies" as one of the five key challenges to virtual teams' success (p. 2660). The synergies of our skills became obvious in the face-to-face context and the confidence we had in each other increased. Meetings also built a sense of commitment to each other. We did not want to disappoint our team by missing timelines or making poor quality submissions. Consequently, I now think that a team can be more than the sum of its component parts. For any future teamwork, I am much more aware of the importance of the group meeting together. In a professional setting, I now consider that some incentive such as a free lunch or transport to get a group together, if necessary, would be a sound investment. In future, I will always try to join teams who can get together because I now realise how crucial this is to success.

Elaborate on topic

Connect the evidence to your experience

Critical analysis of evidence and experience

Elaborate on next step / future impact on practice / the result or conclusion. If followed by another paragraph, link to new topic.

Sample paragraph 4 – Reflecting on research

Topic sentence
- what is the
main point of
the paragraph?

Connect the evidence to your experience

During my interviews with elite groups, they were often bemused and yet intrigued at the same time about my role as a foreign female researcher. Kobayashi (1994) highlighted how gender identities play out during fieldwork, meaning women are often discriminated against on the basis of their sex. I did not experience discrimination, but I feel my being a woman helped me gain access to certain respondents that I never anticipated to access, because I was somewhat perceived as a damsel in distress who needed help. While the pity I received worked in my favour, it had no bearing within the interviews themselves as I was not able to acquire the data that I hoped to. Having a better understanding of the cultural nuances would have helped me to manage my expectations better. Indeed, researchers such as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have highlighted how a researcher's ability to gain access is shaped by personal characteristics, including gender. Looking back, believe my fieldwork project was fairly successful, mostly because of its ability to gain nuanced insight from the second sample involving slum dwellers. The major pitfalls of the project mostly pertained to the logistics of the project, specifically the lack of training for the research assistant, and the general lack of a research focus.

Adapted from: Oxbridge Essays (2018) https://www.oxbridgeessays.com/blog/example-reflective-essay/

Elaborate on next step / future impact on practice / the result or conclusion. If followed by another paragraph, link to new topic.

Use a study as evidence to support the idea

Critical analysis of evidence and experience

> Tie in more theory and elaborate by connecting to your experience

Sample paragraph 5 - Reflecting on practice

Topic sentence
- what is the
main point of
the paragraph?

Use a study as evidence to support the idea

Tie in more theory and elaborate by connecting to your experience

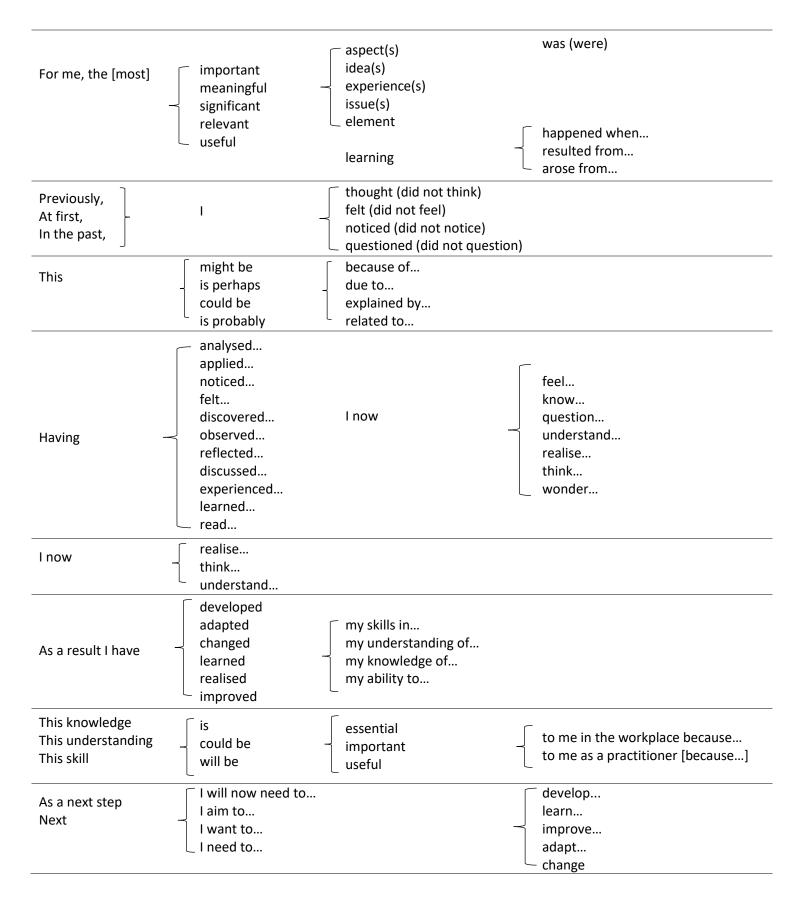
Transparency is crucial to completing positive work with people in social work. Congruence is an imperative aspect of this where the practitioner and the client have openness within themselves and with one another to foster trustworthiness (Platt, 2007). Though this can only happen if there is a genuine desire to be honest with one another. The professional should not hold up a facade and must attend to what the client is saying by staying in the present and remaining transparent. This may seem like a natural concept but was quite difficult to apply when working with Client A. I did not want to undermine her experience of being bullied by her peers by bringing my own personal experiences into the forefront. Yet, I thought if I told her she may not feel quite so isolated, which is a common feeling in teenagers with complex lives (Metzing-Blau and Schnepp, 2008). Ultimately, I began to question almost every piece of work I undertook with Client A, convinced that I would disappoint her and her mother. Seeking advice on being congruent with clients and starting daily reflective practice are steps I will now take to improve my practice.

Critical analysis of topic and evidence

Connect the evidence to your experience

Elaborate on next step / future impact on practice / the result or conclusion. If followed by another paragraph, link to new topic.

What are some vocabulary and sentence structures I can use?



^{*}Adapted from Hampton, M. (2010). Reflective writing: a basic introduction: http://www.port.ac.uk/media/contacts-and-departments/student-support-services/ask/downloads/Reflective-writing---a-basic-introduction.pdf

Have I remembered everything?

Technique	Completed Y/N
The paper is written into clear and concise paragraphs with 1 topic per paragraph.	
The paper uses first (for reflection and my experiences) and third person (for theory) throughout	
The paper support points with relevant theory drawn from coursework	
Good quality resources and research throughout the paper are used throughout.	
APA 7 th referencing style, both in-text and in the reference list, are used correctly throughout	
Formal academic language is consistently used	
The writer has answered the assessment task accurately	
The paper is easy to read and has a logical flow	
The writer has used critical reflection in their paper	
The writer has checked the spelling and grammar accurately	

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