

Reflection

As part of your course work, you may be instructed to write a reflection paper on an experience (internship/PPE/field trip) or on an assignment/project. "Reflecting means being intentionally thoughtful about defining an experience, explaining that experience, and determining future implications and actions" (Parkes, Dredger and Hicks).

One way of reflecting on an experience is using a three-step model:

1. What? (Describe what happened)
2. So what? (Analyze the event)
3. Now what? (Anticipate future practice based on what you learned)

When asked to complete a reflection statement or essay keep in mind these basic questions to answer:

What?

1. What was the assignment/project?
2. How much did you know about the subject before you experienced the assignment?
Have you done something similar in the past?
3. What problems did you encounter while you were working on this assignment? How did you solve those problems?
4. What resources did you use while working on this assignment? Which ones were useful?

Example of the "what":

"Undertaking the task of writing a paper on the "Cellular and Molecular Mechanisms of Paralysis from Spinal Cord Injury" was an enormous challenge that tested my critical thinking and organizational skills. My neurobiology professor challenged us to select a topic that interested us, dive into the relevant journal articles, analyze the findings, and create a final product of excellent quality. Despite feeling overwhelmed, I approached the task step-by-step, reading one journal after the other, and using my available resources to help me prepare. After numerous drafts and revisions, I submitted the paper, and it earned me an A which reinforced my dedication and hard work."

So what?

1. How did you ultimately feel about this assignment? What parts did you like or dislike?
2. What was especially satisfying to you about the finished product?
3. What insights did you gain from this assignment?
4. What is the most important thing you learned personally during this activity/assignment?

5. What did you learn about yourself as you worked on this assignment?
6. What personal strengths/weaknesses did this situation reveal?
7. Why did you or did you not, experience difficulty working/interacting with other people?
8. What might you do differently next time to minimize difficulties working with others?
9. Did you reinforce or challenge an assumption or social system by the way you acted?
10. How did leadership emerge in this situation, on your part and/or the part of others?

Example of “so what”

“This experience taught me invaluable lessons about preparation and organization, which I can apply to other aspects of life. I not only researched my topic, but also familiarized myself with the best practices for writing a paper of that size. This helped me discover useful resources and applications that aided me in keeping track of the vast amount of information I needed to read, summarize, and cite. With these skills, I could effectively manage dozens of articles, citations, photographs, and other sources, leading to the success of my paper.”

Now what?

1. How will this influence the way you approach future projects?
2. How have you changed or grown because of this experience?
3. How will you apply what you learned from your experience?
4. Did this advance your understanding of the topic?
5. If you had to do this experience again, what would you change about the next revision of the assignment/experience?

Example of “now what”

“Through this experience, I realized the importance of being organized and prepared, and I know this will be an asset in any career, including sales. It has taught me the value of breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, using available resources, and being organized in managing information, all essential skills in a sales position”.

Source: Documenting Your Learning and Personal Growth: Critical Reflection by Lynn Meade.
<https://uark.pressbooks.pub/eportfolio/chapter/reflective-expression/>

Parkes, K., Dredger, K., & Hicks, D. (2013). ePortfolio as a measure of reflective practice. *International Journal of ePortfolio*, 3(2), 99–115. <http://www.theijep.com/pdf/IJEP110.pdf>

Reflection Toolkit. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/producing-reflections/academic-reflections/structure>

Another Example:

Xavier Smith, Career Counselor at the University of Arkansas helps students write about their experiences while studying abroad. Here is his advice and an example.

What?

“While studying abroad in Belize, I collaborated with 10 classmates to coordinate rural health clinics in villages in Belize. My classmates and I performed basic diagnostic tests such as the hip-waist test and blood-glucose readings.”

So What?

“Because the village was removed from the city, the locals had limited access to health assessments. I was able to connect with the locals and help work towards better overall community health. The experience allowed me to learn culturally competent communication. It was important that I meet the locals where they were to be able to connect with them. Additionally, I learned how to organize a health clinic and collaborate with local community leaders to be able to build rapport with the community.”

Now What?

“The project informed me of the importance of actively listening to the people I am working with instead of trying to impose my values on them. As a career counselor, I am learning how to listen to the experiences of others and help them discover their unique path. Because of my time in Belize, I am extremely considerate of the perspectives and culture that people bring with them to any space. I intend to continue to grow in understanding through active listening to maximize the efforts of the students.”

Personal Reflections

Name: _____

Assignment/experience: _____

What?

So What?

Now What?