

# WRITING AN ACADEMIC REFLECTION

Reflective writing aims to help you focus on significant new insights you have gained through course work, practical placement (WIL), academic reading, etc. A reflective assignment may require a series of individual reflections, or focus on one. This outline presents an approach to writing a reflection, using the 'DIEP' strategy. \*

## 1. Choose something to reflect on

- Identify an **insight** (an interesting or illuminating new thing you learned) from reading, course work, studio, placement, etc.
  - Focus on something that may change your thinking (or be important for you) that you hadn't realised.
  - Think about what the significance of this new insight might be for your learning and future practice.
- Note any important details about the insight—where, when, who with, etc. If the insight came from reading, note all the important details of the idea, and include the author, publication, references, etc.

## 2. Brainstorm

- Bring your ideas about this new insight together on one page to:
  - identify the significance of your new learning: question why it is important
  - detect connections between this idea and other ideas or material in the course or program
  - locate possible course material and other sources of information that support/explain your insight/s
  - give you the beginnings of a plan.
- Write questions to answer or use a mind-map to clarify your thinking about your insights

## 3. Plan an initial structure

- Use the DIEP strategy (overleaf) to decide on your main points. Use headings to guide your planning.
  - Decide on your main insight. Plan a brief description of how this insight came about for the first paragraph.
  - Organise the body paragraphs. This is the interpretation and evaluation of the insight: draft possible topic sentences. Make connections with course work and other learning, and with the literature.
  - Draft some points for the final paragraph: indicate how this new learning will transfer to your future study and professional practice (and personal life?).

## 4. Conduct your research

- Look for academic material that connects with your new learning. Start with general reading, using course material, recommended texts, and books from the library.
- Identify search terms from this reading to help you conduct a more refined search of academic databases.
- You may need to research in areas outside your immediate discipline area, in addition to course material.

## 5. Refine the structure and focus your research

- Use search terms from your earlier research to locate precise support/ academic detail (e.g. from journals).
- Expand each point you want to make, focusing your research to expand on your main points.

## 6. Write

- Write using a detailed plan for each reflection: describe, interpret, evaluate and plan for future application.
- Write the body paragraphs containing one main idea (interpreting and evaluating the insight) stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences explain, support and give detail, with evidence from research and/or examples. Integrate theory and include references as you go. Expect to write a number of drafts.

## 7. Edit

- Check that the reflection is focussed and specific, your points are relevant, and are linked to the insight.
- Save additional copies of your submitted reflection in other locations e.g. RMIT H-drive, USB, laptop etc.

# DIEP STRATEGY

DIEP\* is a strategy to help with writing a critical or academic reflection in four paragraphs.

The four steps in this approach are to **describe** an insight (new understanding), to **interpret** and **evaluate** it, and to **plan** how it might transfer to future practice or learning.

First, select an experience or insight to reflect on. Then attempt to:

- analyse your learning and deepening understanding
- evaluate your gains in understanding and development, while acknowledging any complexities
- integrate the concepts taught in courses (including references to the literature, where relevant)
- focus on your developing confidence and cognition, and verbalise your feelings about your learning
- make connections with theories in your course and/or program, and other relevant ideas/experiences
- demonstrate transfer of learning to your study, practice, and to your future professional life.

## **D – Describe** objectively what you learned

Choose a new insight. It might be something that you understand now (that you didn't before). Focus on what you learned and give the details of what happened.

Answer the question: 'What did I learn?'

Some suggested **starting phrases**:

The most interesting (surprising/ important/ significant/ ...) (insight/ theory/ thing ...) I read (saw/ heard/ realised/ learned...) this week is that ...

One thing I realise (understand ...) now is that ...

A significant issue I have not addressed in my previous writing is ...

Continue the paragraph with details of what, where, when, etc.

## **I – Interpret** the insight (in one or more paragraphs)

Explain the meaning of the new insight: your understanding/ hypotheses/ conclusions/ connections with other learning/ possible complexities/ questions unanswered/ etc. You can refer to ideas and theory in your course material, in research literature and from other sources to support your explanation of the insight/s.

Answer the questions: 'What might it mean?' 'How might this affect other perceptions, concepts, etc.?'

Some suggested **starting phrases**:

This realisation may have important relevance for three reasons. First, it implies ...

A possible implication/meaning of this new idea/understanding is that ...

This (new) understanding of ... is likely to mean three things. It could be ...

## **E – Evaluate** what you have learned (in one or more paragraphs)

Make judgments about the value of what you have learned connected to observations you have made. Refer to theory from your courses and the literature here too, to show how your insight is connected to discipline knowledge and how your thinking has changed for the better.

Answer the question: 'How is this useful for my deeper understanding of the topic?'

Some suggested **starting phrases**:

This concept of ... is valuable for .../ will change the way I approach ...

This understanding is important in a number of ways. First it ...

This insight is connected with (theoretical approaches to .../ theories/ concepts/

Having realised that ..., I wonder if .../ I intend to develop ...

## **P – Plan** how this learning will be applied in practice

Comment on relevance to your course, program, future profession, life...

Answer the question: 'How might this learning apply in my future?' Use future tense in this paragraph to show transfer of knowledge to the future. A suggested **starting phrase**:

This (new insight) will be useful in this course, in the (bachelor) degree, in my future career as a ..., and in my life. In this course, (understanding ...) could ...

\*Adapted from: Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985, *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*