

## The reflective journal

Your writing group could spend 20-30 minutes of each session writing in their reflective journals. Through writing, students become aware of some of the issues they are interested in or curious about, and can then discuss them with the group. This writing is not for public viewing unless the writer offers it to the group.

According to philosopher and educator John Dewey (1933), we begin to reflect on a complex situation when we face that situation and ask ourselves what needs to be done

Reflective Practice is an approach that emerged from Donald Schön's work in education and action research (Schön 1983). Jasper (2005) suggests that reflective writing intends to be transformative particularly 'in terms of knowledge generation from the exploration of practice, the development of analytical and critical thinking and the potential for creativity and connecting disparate ideas'

For the research student, a reflective journal is a developmental text that documents the process of thinking about research-making and research-writing. Some writing groups use the reflective journal as the starting point of every session. Through writing in the journal, members identify questions or issues they would like to explore in the group. The objective is to bring about some kind of understanding, a new strategy to apply, or a change in direction or approach.

Research shows that the more we write about what we are doing and thinking, the clearer our ideas become. Repeated writing on a theme allows for the development of abstract ideas and complex relationships. Furthermore, when we return to earlier entries in our journals, we may discover we are able to answer a question, or we may suddenly understand the importance of a certain thought to the development of our work.

For students who are infrequent writers and/or do not enjoy writing, the idea of keeping a journal can be threatening, especially if they are asked to write in 'real time'.

### **Guidelines for starting and maintaining a reflective journal:**

1. Only one person is going to see the journal, and that's you!
2. Write, quote, draw, paste, doodle – in multiple languages.
3. Use the first person 'I'. This will help you to relate directly to your writing.
4. Write down questions you want to investigate through your work.
5. Make lists of things to do.
6. Comment on issues and offer explanations or possible solutions or ideas to work on, for example:
  - 'Cultural' differences in writing or talking about 'work' (institutional, national, language-based, discipline-based)
  - Research or ideas from the literature that are of interest
  - Research methods – what am I doing, and how's it going?)
  - Candidate-supervisor relations
  - Discussions with colleagues
  - Problems organising or measuring data
  - Issues emerging from testing ideas
  - Thoughts based on a 'stimulus'. For example, after seeing a dance performance, what do I understand about physical properties/the embodiment of emotion etc. that is relevant to my research?
  - Specific skill gaps – identifying what you need to learn in order to move forward.
  - Specific comments about reading.
7. Keep the journals until your dissertation is completed (if you are committed, you will have many journals by the end), or until you no longer have any use for them. Keep them until you use them as data for your memoir!

### **Example 1 (Generic sciences)**

*How come Smith's study (what year again?) and Wang's study (2009) got different results when they were meant to be replications? Can I find any information in the articles that will help to solve this anomaly? Hmm, I wonder if it had anything to do with the environment under which the tests were conducted? Or had technology changed over time to produce variations in results? I DON'T KNOW! Back to the drawing board!*

## Example 2 (Media and Communications)

*Can I explain the difference between classical script and grass script in terms of emotional impact? I wonder if all scholars were 'enculturated' to **feel** similar things when they 'appreciated' specific calligraphic forms. For me there is a very real difference between these forms; the standard version is all about looking for the meanings built into the parts of the character – for example the character **grass** at top left has two ears of grain at the top (the radical or root component), the sun in the middle, and the number ten below. In contrast, the cursive script is all about the flow, the motion, the dance of the ribbon (caidai wudao 彩带 舞蹈) around a central, sometimes invisible core.*



*What primary sources can I find that might describe the impact of grass or cursive script on 'the scholar's' sensibility?*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cursive\\_script\\_\(East\\_Asia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cursive_script_(East_Asia))

## References:

- Dewey, J. (1933). *How We Think. A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Revised Edition. Boston: D. C. Heath. Also available from: <http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education/reflectivepractice/reflect/what%20is%20reflective%20practice.pdf>.
- Jasper, M. (2005). Using reflective writing within research. *Journal of research in nursing*. 10(247). Retrieved from: <http://jrn.sagepub.com/content/10/3/247.full.pdf>
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