

# Reflective Writing

## **Guidance Notes for Students**

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## **Aims and Objectives**

**Aim** To inform and support the production of reflective writing for work-based learning or work experience modules.

**Objectives** - Having worked through the pack you will have:

- Identified the characteristics of reflective writing
- Recognise how to deepen reflective writing
- Be able to start writing reflectively
- Locate resources to support your reflective writing

## **Using the Guidance Notes**

This pack is intended for your use, so you should feel free to write in it and customise it as you see fit.

The pack provides both background information, exercises to complete and reference material for further research.

## **Introducing Reflection**

There is increasingly much academic writing about the benefits of reflecting on practice for everyone involved in education. An excellent description of reflection can be found in the Harry Potter novel 'The Goblet of Fire'. In the paragraph below Dumbledore the chief wizard and head teacher is talking to Harry about having excess thoughts!

*'Harry stared at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original, silvery white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze.*

*"What is it?" Harry asked shakily.*

*"This? It is called a Pensieve," said Dumbledore. "I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind."*

*"Err," said Harry who couldn't truthfully say that he had ever felt anything of the sort.*

*"At these times" said Dumbledore, indicating the stone basin, "I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into a basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form.'" (Rowling 2000)*

## What is Required in Reflective Writing?

### Why Reflect?

*'It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively.'*  
(Gibbs 1988)

Reflective writing provides an opportunity for you to gain further insights from your work through deeper reflection on your experiences, and through further consideration of other perspectives from people and theory. Through reflection we can we can deepen the learning from work.

### The Nature and Content of Reflection

So what do we mean by reflection? One tentative definition of reflection is offered by Moon (1999):

*'... a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution'. (Moon 1999 pp23)*

She continues by outlining some of the purposes for reflection:

*'We reflect in order to:*

- *Consider the process of our own learning – a process of metacognition*
- *Critically review something - our own behaviour, that of others or the product of behaviour (e.g. an essay, book, painting etc.)*
- *Build theory from observations: we draw theory from generalisations – sometimes in practical situations, sometimes in thoughts or a mixture of the two*
- *Engage in personal or self-development*
- *Make decisions or resolve uncertainty ...*
- *Empower or emancipate ourselves as individuals (and then it is close to self-development) or to empower/emancipate ourselves within the context of our social groups.'*  
(Ibid pp23)

In this instance, whilst your reflective writing must relate to your work place experience, the exact focus and emphasis is for you to determine.

## **Deepening Reflection – Three Models of reflection**

When assessing your reflective writing your tutor will be expecting more than a superficial review of your experience, they will be seeking evidence of deeper reflection.

This means moving beyond the descriptive, and subjecting your experience to greater scrutiny.

In Learning by Doing, Gibbs (1988) outlines the stages for a ‘Structured Debriefing’, which are based on Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle and which encourage deeper reflection:

<b>Description:</b>	What is the stimulant for reflection? (incident, event, theoretical idea ) What are you going to reflect on?
<b>Evaluation:</b>	What was good and bad about the experience? Make value judgements.
<b>Feelings:</b>	What were your reactions and feelings?
<b>Analysis:</b>	What sense can you make of the situation? Bring in ideas from outside the experience to help you. What was really going on?
<b>Conclusions (general):</b>	What can be concluded, in a general sense, from these experiences and the analyses you have undertaken?
<b>Conclusions (specific):</b>	What can be concluded about your own specific, unique, personal situation or ways of working?
<b>Personal Action plans:</b>	What are you going to do differently in this type of situation next time? What steps are you going to take on the basis of what you have learnt?

Hatton and Smith (1995) identified four levels in the development of teacher reflection from teaching practice. In your reflective writing your tutor will be looking for evidence of reflecting at the higher levels.

**Descriptive writing:** This is a description of events or literature reports. There is no discussion beyond description. The writing is considered not to show evidence of reflection

**Descriptive reflective:** There is basically description of events, but shows some evidence of deeper consideration in relatively descriptive language. There is no real evidence of the notion of alternative viewpoints in use.

**Dialogic reflection:** This writing suggests there is a ‘stepping back’ from the events and actions which leads to different level of discourse. There is a sense of ‘mulling about’, discourse with self and an exploration of the role of self in events and actions. There is consideration of the qualities of judgements and possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesising. The reflection is analytical or integrative, linking factors and perspectives.

**Critical reflection:** This form of reflection, in addition, shows evidence that the learner is aware that actions and events may be ‘located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are located in and influenced by multiple and socio– political contexts’

Bloom (1964) identified different levels of thinking processes, which he presented in a hierarchy (figure 1); these can also be used as a framework for more thorough reflection. They move from knowing, evidenced through recalling information, through to evaluating, evidenced through making systematic judgements of value. In your reflective writing your tutor will be looking for evidence of these higher level processes.

	<b>Process</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Increasing Difficulty</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	Recognition and recall of information - describing events
	<b>Comprehension</b>	Interprets, translates or summarises given information - demonstrating understanding of events
	<b>Application</b>	Uses information in a situation different from original learning context -
	<b>Analysis</b>	Separates wholes into parts until relationships are clear – breaks down experiences
	<b>Synthesis</b>	Combines elements to form new entity from the original one - draws on experience and other evidence to suggest new insights
	<b>Evaluation</b>	Involves acts of decision making, or judging based on criteria or rationale – makes judgements about

There are other models that can help you to structure your reflective writing and which you may find more helpful. These can be accessed through library and web research. The search engine [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) is very useful.

## **Exercise in Reflective Writing – 1**

**Read the following three accounts of a presentation at a team meeting in the workplace by 22-year old after graduating. The accounts of the same event are written at three different levels of reflection.**

- **Read the accounts consider how they are written.**

### **The Presentation**

**A)** I had to take an agenda item to the weekly team meeting in my third week of working at PIGG PLC. I had to talk about the project that I am on (creating a new database for the management information system). I had done a presentation before and then I relied on my acting skills. Despite the acting, I spent quite a bit of time preparing it in the way that I have seen others make similar presentations.

The presentation at the last team meeting, given by my colleague, went well – she used Power Point and I decided to use it. I decided that a good presentation comes from good planning and having all the figures that anyone might request so I spent a long time in the preparation and I went in feeling confident.

However, I became nervous when I realised they were all waiting for me to speak and my nerves made my voice wobble. I did not know how to stop it. Early on, I noticed that people seemed not to understand what I was saying despite the Power Point. Using Power Point meant that people received my presentation both through what I was saying and what I had prepared on the slides. In a way that meant they got it twice but I noticed that Mrs Shaw (my boss) repeated bits of what I had said several times and once or twice answered questions for me. This made me feel uncomfortable. I felt it was quite patronising and I was upset. Later my colleagues said that she always does it. I was disappointed that my presentation did not seem to have gone well.

I thought about the presentation for several days and then talked with Mrs Shaw about the presentation (there was no-one else). She gave me a list of points for improvement next time. They included:

- putting less on Power Point;
- talking more slowly;
- calming myself down in some way.

I also have to write down the figures in a different way so that they can be understood better. She suggested that I should do a presentation to several of the team sometime next week so that I can improve my performance.

**B)** I had to take an agenda item to the weekly team meeting in my third week of working at PIGG PLC. I had to talk about the project that I am on. I am creating a new database for the management information system. I had given a presentation before and that time I relied on my acting skills. I did realise that there were considerable differences between then and now, particularly in the situation (it was only fellow students and my tutor before). I was confident but I did spend quite a bit of time preparing. Because everyone else here uses Power Point, I felt I had better use it – though I realised that it was not for the best reasons. I also prepared lots of figures so that I could answer questions. I thought, at that stage, that any questions would involve requests for data. When I think back on the preparation that I did, I realise that I was desperately trying to prove that I could make a presentation as well as my colleague, who did the last one. I wanted to impress everyone. I had not realised there was so much to learn about presenting, and how much I needed to know about Power Point to use it properly.

When I set up the presentation in the meeting I tried to be calm but it did not work out. Early on the Power Point went wrong and I began to panic. Trying to pretend that I was cool and confident made the situation worse because I did not admit my difficulties and ask for help. The more I spoke, the more my voice went wobbly. I realised, from the kinds of questions that the others asked, that they did not understand what I was saying. They were asking for clarification – not the figures. I felt worse when Mrs Shaw, my boss, started to answer questions for me. I felt flustered and even less able to cope.

As a result of this poor presentation, my self esteem is low at work now. I had thought I was doing all right in the company. After a few days, I went to see Mrs Shaw and we talked it over. I still feel that her interventions did not help me. Interestingly several of my colleagues commented that she always does that. It was probably her behaviour, more than anything else, that damaged my poise. Partly through talking over the presentation and the things that went wrong (but not, of course, her interventions), I can see several areas that I could get better. I need to know more about using Power Point – and to practice with it. I recognise, also, that my old acting skills might have given me

initial confidence, but I needed more than a clear voice, especially when I lost my way with Power Point. Relying on a mass of figures was not right either. It was not figures they wanted. In retrospect, I could have put the figures on a handout. I am hoping to have a chance to try with a presentation, practicing with some of the team.

C) I am writing this back in my office. It all happened 2 days ago.

Three weeks after I started at PIGG PLC had to take an agenda item to the team meeting. I was required to report on my progress in the project on which I am working. I am developing a new database for the management information system of the company. I was immediately worried. I was scared about not saying the right things and not being able to answer questions properly. I did a presentation in my course at university and felt the same about it initially. I was thinking then, like this time, I could use my acting skills. Both times that was helpful in maintaining my confidence at first, at least. Though the fact that I was all right last time through the whole presentation may not have helped me this time!

I decided to use Power Point. I was not very easy about its use because I have seen it go wrong so often. However, I have not seen anyone else give a presentation here without using it - and learning to use Power Point would be valuable. I was not sure, when it came to the session, whether I really knew enough about running Power Point. (How do you know when you know enough about something? – dummy runs, I suppose, but I couldn't get the laptop when I wanted it).

When it came to the presentation, I really wanted to do it well – as well as the presentations were done the week before. Maybe I wanted too much to do well. Previous presentations have been interesting, informative and clear and I thought the handouts from them were good (I noticed that the best gave enough but not too much information).

In the event, the session was a disaster and has left me feeling uncomfortable in my work and I even worry about it at home. I need to think about why a simple presentation could have such an effect on me. The Power Point went wrong (I think I clicked on the wrong thing). My efforts to be calm and 'cool' failed and my voice went wobbly – that was, anyway, how it felt to me. My colleague actually said afterwards that I looked quite calm despite what I was feeling (I am not sure whether she meant it or was trying to help me). When I think back to that moment, if I had thought that I still looked calm (despite what I felt), I could have regained the situation. As it was, it went from bad to worse and I know that my state became obvious because Mrs Shaw, my boss, began to answer the questions that people were asking for me. I am thinking about the awful presentation again – it was this time last week. I am reading what I wrote earlier about it. Now I return to it, I do have a slightly different perspective. I think that it was not as bad as it felt at the time. Several of my colleagues told me afterwards that Mrs Shaw always steps in to answer questions like that and they commented that I handled her intrusion well. That is interesting. I need to do some thinking about how to act next time to prevent this interruption from happening or to deal with the situation when she starts\*. I might look in the library for that book on assertiveness.

I have talked to Mrs Shaw now too. I notice that my confidence in her is not all that great while I am still feeling a bit cross. However, I am feeling more positive generally and I can begin to analyse what I could do better in the presentation. It is interesting to see the change in my attitude after a week. I need to think from the beginning about the process of giving a good presentation.. I am not sure how helpful was my reliance on

my acting skills\*. Acting helped my voice to be stronger and better paced, but I was not just trying to put over someone else's lines but my own and I needed to be able to discuss matters in greater depth rather than just give the line\*.

I probably will use Power Point again. I have had a look in the manual and it suggests that you treat it as a tool – not let it dominate and not use it as a means of presenting myself. That is what I think I was doing. I need not only to know how to use it, but I need to feel sufficiently confident in its use so I can retrieve the situation when things go wrong. That means understanding more than just the sequence of actions\*.

As I am writing this, I am noticing how useful it is to go back over things I have written about before. I seem to be able to see the situation differently. The first time I wrote this, I felt that the presentation was dreadful and that I could not have done it differently. Then later I realised that there were things I did not know at the time (eg about Mrs Shaw and her habit of interrupting). I also recognise some of the areas in which I went wrong. At the time I could not see that. It was as if my low self esteem got in the way. Knowing where I went wrong, and admitting the errors to myself gives me a chance to improve next time – and perhaps to help Mrs Shaw to improve in her behaviour towards us!

\*I have asterisked the points that I need to address in order to improve.

## **Features of the accounts that are indicative of different levels of reflection**

### **A) This account is descriptive and it contains little reflection.**

1. The account describes what happened, sometimes mentioning past experiences, sometimes anticipating the future – but all in the context of an account of the event.
2. There are some references to Marianne's emotional reactions, but she has not explored how the reactions relate to her behaviour.
3. Ideas are taken on without questioning them or considering them in depth.
4. The account is written only from Marianne's point of view.
5. External information is mentioned but its impact on behaviour is not subject to consideration.
6. Generally one point is made at a time and ideas are not linked.

### **B) An account showing evidence of some reflection.**

1. There is description of the event, but where there are external ideas or information, the material is subjected to consideration and deliberation.
2. The account shows some analysis.
3. There is recognition of the worth of exploring motives for behaviour
4. There is willingness to be critical of action.
5. Relevant and helpful detail is explored where it has value.
6. There is recognition of the overall effect of the event on self – in other words, there is some 'standing back' from the event.
7. The account is written at one point in time. It does not, therefore, demonstrate the recognition that views can change with time and more reflection. In other words the

account does not indicate a recognition that frames of reference affect the manner in which we reflect at a given time

**C) This account shows quite deep reflection, and it does incorporate a recognition that the frame of reference with which an event is viewed can change**

1. Self questioning is evident (an ‘internal dialogue’ is set up at times) deliberating between different views of her own behaviour (different views of her own and others).
2. Marianne takes into account the views and motives of others and considers these against her own.
3. She recognises how prior experience, thoughts (own and other’s) interact with the production of her own behaviour.
4. There is clear evidence of standing back from an event.
5. She helps herself to learn from the experience by splitting off the reflective processes from the points she wants to learn (by asterisk system).
6. There is recognition that the personal frame of reference can change according to the emotional state in which it is written, the acquisition of new information, the review of ideas and the effect of time passing.

**Multiple Perspectives in Reflective Writing**

Whilst your reflective writing will be based on personal experience, it will also need to draw on other sources and types of evidence if you are to better understand your experience.

When collecting evidence from primary sources, from the placement itself, there is a need to check the validity of your findings:

*‘The basic principle in data collection for case study is to check your data across a variety of methods and a variety of sources’. (Nisbet and Watt 1984)*

Moon (2001) calls this multi– dimensionality and explores this in the context of student teacher’s journals.

*Evidence of ‘multi-dimensionality’. Good journals will draw from and refer to a wide range of types of material. For example, a journal that does not display multidimensionality might consider ‘what I see happening in the classroom’ and relate it to one or two few standard references. A journal that is multidimensional will draw from a range of texts, quotations, pictures, relevant media items and so on. It may show evidence of the learner ‘standing outside the situation’ in order to observe self. It may show evidence of understanding of there being different viewpoints about an event. The opposite to ‘multi dimensionality’ is likely to be a very narrow journal mostly based on observation or expression of own feelings, with few references etc. As with presentation, most journals are likely to fall into a wide band of ‘adequacy’ in respect to ‘multi-dimensionality’. A few will lose marks because they are exceptionally narrow and a few journals will attract extra marks because they are exceptional in this respect. (Moon 2001)*

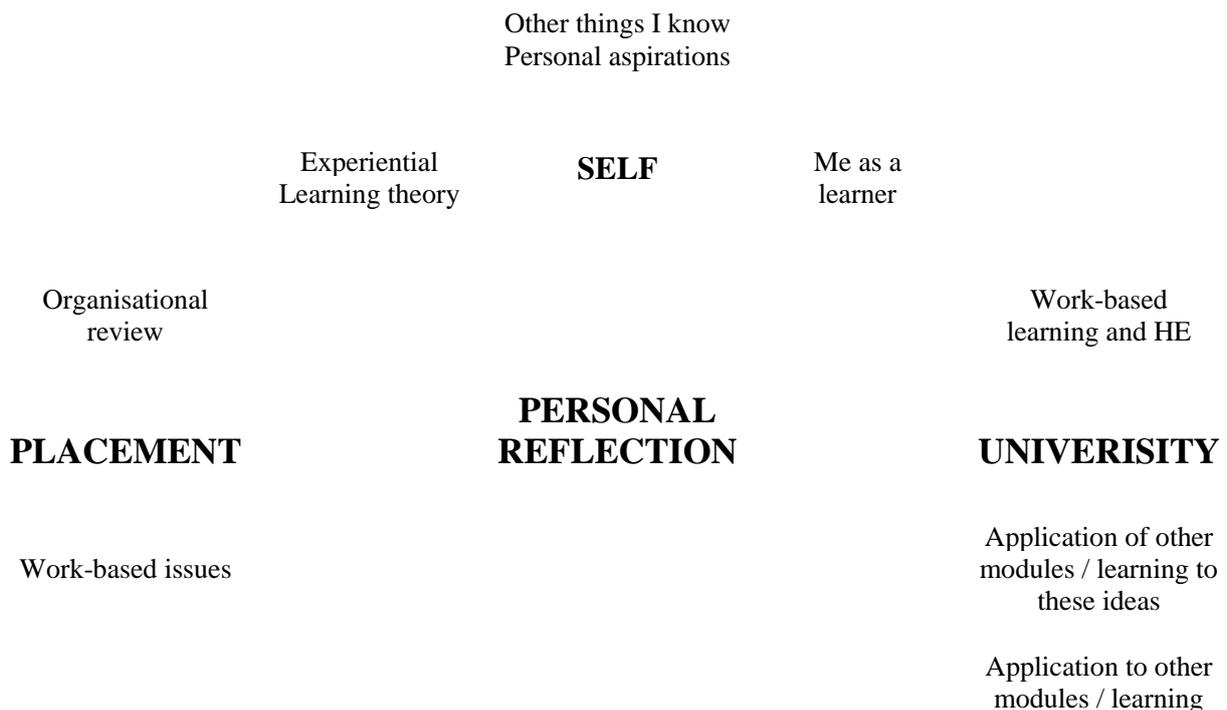
You gain a more reliable picture if you are able to draw on information from different sources. For instance, if you are considering the effectiveness of your organisation's communication systems you may have a variety of available evidence sources: company policy, newsletters, notice boards, minutes of meetings, staff surveys, customer surveys, etc. You need to find different perspectives, which can help to illuminate an issue: communication with your organisation may be seen differently by managers, supervisors, staff, or customers and clients.

Continuing with the example of communication, for example, you may have considered theories of communication through your course, which will help you to interpret your experience in the work place.

The common factor in any piece of reflective writing is the individual perspective; your personal reflections. The focus or topic can vary greatly. In a previous quotation from Moon (1999) the differing purposes for reflection were identified, all of which could provide a framework for your reflective writing. Figure 2 below shows some ways of considering the writing.

**Figure 2**

**Possible sources of evidence for reflective**



**Exercise in Reflective Writing – 2**

**Read the 4 different accounts of the same story below.**

## **Consider how are they written against factors discussed on pages 5 & 6.**

### **The Park (1)**

I went to the park today. The sun shone and clouds floated across the sky in a gentle breeze. It was really quite hot – so much nicer than the day before when it rained. When I got there, I went over to the children’s playing field. There were several children there and one, in particular, I noticed, was in too many clothes for the hot day. The children were running about and this child became red in the face and began to slow down and then he sat. He must have been about 10. Some of the others called him up again and he got to his feet. He stumbled into the game for a few moments, tripping once or twice. It appeared that he had just not got the energy to lift his feet. Eventually he stumbled down and did not get up but he was still moving and he shuffled into a half sitting and half lying position watching the other children and I think he was calling out to them. I don’t know.

Anyway, I walked on after a few minutes. I had to get to the shop to buy some fresh chilli peppers for the chilli-con-carne that my children had asked for tonight’s party. The twins had invited many friends round for an end-of-term do to celebrate the beginning of the summer holidays. They might think that they have cause to celebrate but it makes a lot more work for me when they are home. James, my partner, often says that we should celebrate when they go back to school but I would not like to tell them that.

It was the next day when the paper came through the door – in it there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in hospital and they said that the seriousness of the situation was due to the delay before he was brought to hospital. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying unattended for half an hour before one of the other children decided to do something about him. It said that that several passers-by might have seen him looking ill and the report went on to consider why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong. The article was headed ‘Why do they ‘Walk on by’?’

### **The Park (2)**

The event took place in the park. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit. I watched the children for a while and walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing.

Reading the report, I felt very guilty and I have found it difficult to shift the feelings. I did not stop because I was on my way to the shops to buy food for a meal that I had to cook. Though I saw that the child was ill, I chose not to act. If I had realised that he was so ill, I would have acted differently. I guess I did really know, but I did not want to do anything about it. I know that.

I should have gone over and asked him what was wrong – and even got one of the other children to call for help. I am not sure if the help would have been ambulance or doctor at that stage – but it does not matter now. If he had been given help then, he would not be fighting for his life.

I guess this situation has really shocked me. It reminds me of when my uncle died – but then again I don't really think that that is relevant. He was going to die anyway. My bad feelings about that situation were due to sheer sadness at his death and some irrational regrets that I did not visit him on the day before.

This event has really shaken me to my roots – more than I would have expected. It is making me think about actions in all sorts of areas of my life. Maybe it is the culmination of many events that have been happening recently and I need to consider what is going on in my life in a big way. I need to think about how to sort out all the different things that this has made me think about in my life.

### **The Park (3)**

I went to the park today. The light reminded me of a time that I was walking on St David's Head in Wales – when there was a hard and bright light and anything I looked at was in silhouette. Unlike on that occasion, this time, things were generally very satisfactory in my life I thought. In fact I was going to the supermarket to get some chilli peppers to make the chile-con-carne that I had promised the children. They were having one of their end of term celebrations with friends. I always thought that they were unfair on me when they did this. I find that their holiday time makes a lot more work. If I were to celebrate anything about their school terms, it would be the end of the holidays when they are about to go back to school. No – I joke (or do I? – I am not sure that I really joke. How I could do with a little less pressure on my life just at the moment).

Anyway, I was walking across the park and came to a group of children. I don't know why I stopped to look at them. I don't usually look at other people's children – I just did. Anyway there were a number of kids there. I noticed, in particular, one child who seemed to be very overdressed for the weather. His face was red. He was a boy of around 10 – not unlike Charlie. He was running around with the others but was beginning to look distressed. I felt uneasy about him but I did not do anything. What could I have done? Anyway, I remember thinking, I had little time and the supermarket would get crowded. I suppose that in retrospect I wish I had acted – but I still do not know quite how, at that point. Anyway he sat down, looking absolutely exhausted and as if he had no energy to do anything. A few moments later, the other children called him up to run about again. I felt more uneasy and watched as he got up and tried to run, then fell, ran again and fell and half sat and half lay. Still I did nothing more than look – what was going on with me?

Eventually I went on – it was to get to the shops, and to get the meal and all the other things I had to do, I told myself. It was the next day when the paper came through the door that I had a real shock. It made me feel as guilty as that awful trauma all those years ago. I do not usually do wrong, in fact I think of myself as a good person. In the paper there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in the hospital and the situation was much more serious because there had been such a delay in getting him to hospital. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying unattended to for half an hour before one of the other children decided to do something about him. One of my many reactions was to ask why the other children had not been more responsible. However, it went on to say that several passers-by might have seen him playing and looking ill and the report considered why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong. The article was headed 'Why do they 'Walk on by'?

The event affected me for some days afterwards but I did not know where to go or whom to tell. I did want to own up. I assumed that the bad feelings would eventually fade and they did – thank goodness. Next time I will not walk on by – I hope!

### **The Park (4)**

I went past the park on the way to the shops. There were children playing there. I thought I knew some of them. They are a gang of kids who are perpetual bullies to other children who are younger or weaker than themselves. They have caused problems to my children quite recently. I stopped and watched them and I thought that they seemed to become a bit nervous – they must have realised who I was. I suppose there was a bit of intimidation intended on my part. I guess they were worried about what I might do.

They were running about. The sun was hot. One boy - probably a bit older than Charlie's age - seemed more bothered and nervous than the others – rightly too – he was the main trouble-maker from what I recalled. He seemed to fall over – faking it in front of me I guessed. The others left him there anyway. That made me think even more that his was acting - I think he wanted me to feel sorry for him. I did not. Eventually the others called to him and he got up slowly – still faking it – then he fell again and I got fed up with his acting and went on to do my shopping. I felt cross. Thank goodness he was not coming to the party that my children were planning – though I am surprised that he had not managed to play-act his way into their sympathy given his current performance of manipulation.

Well yes – there was a bit more to the story. The next day's paper said that a child had been taken ill in the park the previous day – and that he had been lying there for some time and he was very ill. It did also mention that there had been passers-by who had seen him there and had not done anything about it. Even the headline referred to that – 'Why do they 'Walk on by'?' – what a silly headline! Well what could I have done? I thought things were different – he couldn't still be faking it at the hospital could he – or maybe the paper is short of news today and is exaggerating. Maybe he fell asleep on the ground and got cold and the other children eventually panicked – and maybe he decided to go on with his play-acting at the hospital. Knowing the family he comes from, I wouldn't be surprised.

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That is how I thought about it on the day afterwards anyway. I wrote it all down in my journal - but I was a bit plagued by it. It kept coming back in my mind and gradually – over the next few days - I began to think of him differently. Maybe he was ill when I saw him. Maybe I was caught up in the anger that the bullying activities of those kids had caused among some of us other parents and I could only see the boy in that light. Thinking of it in that way makes me realise that I should perhaps have acted differently. Bully though he might have been, I think now that he was ill – and maybe he was even coming near me in the hope that I might take pity on him.

But of course, I do not know the truth of the situation. I am sure that I would have acted differently if I had seen the situation as I did later. My reactions the next day would have been different and I would not be plagued as I am now by the feelings of irresponsibility. I guess I just hope that other parents don't misconstrue my children's actions in the way I misunderstood his – if I did.

This has all made me think about how we view things. The way I saw this event at the time was quite different to the way I see it now. It is a year later. The story ran in the paper for some time because the boy was very ill indeed and he nearly died and the paper kept going back to the theme of people who do not take action and just stand and stare when there is an incident.

Thinking back to the time, the bullying was on my mind – mainly because we had been talking about it at breakfast. It had actually happened a while before – but the conversation had brought all the anger and upset to my mind – and then seeing them there – well I thought they were the same children – it is even possible that they were not. It was just so much on my mind at the time.

So I can see how I looked at that event and interpreted it in a manner that was consistent with my emotional frame of mind at the time. Seeing the same events without that breakfast conversation might have led me to see the whole thing in an entirely different manner and I might have acted differently. The significance of this whole event is chilling when I realise that my lack of action nearly resulted in his death. But how could I have seen it differently when I was caught up in that set of emotions? What mechanism could I have used in order to see if there were any other ways of construing it? How can I know that my perceptions in respect of some event are not distorted in such a way that I act in an inappropriate manner?

## **The Park: comments on the quality of reflection**

### ***The Park (1)***

- *This piece tells the story. Sometimes it mentions past experiences, sometimes anticipates the future but all in the context of the account of the story.*
- *There might be references to emotional state, but the role of the emotions on action is not explored.*
- *Ideas of others are mentioned but not elaborated or used to investigate the meaning of the events.*
- *The account is written only from one point of view – that of Annie.*
- *Generally ideas are presented in a sequence and are only linked by the story. They are not all relevant or focused*
- *In fact – you could hardly deem this to be reflective at all. It is very descriptive. It could be a reasonably written account of an event that could serve as a basis on which reflection might start, though it hardly signals any material for reflection – other than the last few words*

### ***The Park (2)***

- *In this account there is a description of the same events. There is very little addition of ideas from outside the event – reference to attitudes of others, comments.*
- *The account is more than a story though. It is focused on the event as if there is a big question to be asked and answered.*
- *In the questioning there is recognition of the worth of exploring the motives for behaviour – but it does not go very far. In other words, asking the questions makes it more than a descriptive account, but the lack of attempt to respond to the questions means that there is little actual analysis of the events.*

- *Annie is critical of her actions and in her questions, signals this. The questioning of action does mean that Annie is standing back from the event to a small extent. There is a sense that she recognises that this is a significant incident, with learning to be gained – but the reflection does not go sufficiently deep to enable the learning to begin to occur.*

### **The Park (3)**

- *The description is succinct – just sufficient to raise the issues. Extraneous information is not added. It is not a story. The focus is on the attempt to reflect on the event and to learn from it. There is more of a sense of Annie standing back from the event in order to reflect better on her actions and in order to be more effectively critical.*
- *There is more analysis of the situation and an evident understanding that it was not a simple situation – that there might be alternative explanations or actions that could be justified equally effectively.*
- *The description could be said to be slightly narrow (see The Park (4)) as Annie is not acknowledging that there might be other ways of perceiving the situation – other points of view. She does not seem to be recognising that her reflection is affected by her frame of reference at the time or now. It is possible, for example, that her experience with Charlie (last paragraph) – or her question about knowing the boy have influenced the manner in which she reacted. It might not just be a matter of linking up other events, but of going beyond and checking out the possibility that her frame of reference might have been affected by the prior experiences.*

### **The Park (4)**

- *The account is succinct and to the point. There is some deep reflection here that is self-critical and questions the basis of the beliefs and values on which the behaviour was based.*
- *There is evidence of standing back from the event, of Annie treating herself as an object acting within the context.*
- *There is also an internal dialogue – a conversation with herself in which she proposes and further reflects on alternative explanations.*
- *She shows evidence of looking at the views of others (Tom) and of considering the alternative point of view, and learning from it.*
- *She recognises the significance of the effect of passage of time on her reflection – eg that her personal frame of reference at the time may have influenced her actions and that a different frame of reference might have lead to different results.*
- *She notices that the proximity of other, possibly unrelated events (the dinner-time conversation) have an effect either possibly on her actual behaviour and her subsequent reflection – or possibly on her reflective processes only. She notices that she can be said to be reconstructing the event in retrospect – creating a story around it that may not be ‘true’.*
- *She recognises that there may be no conclusion to this situation – but that there are still things to be learnt from it.*
- *She has also been able to reflect on her own process of reflecting (acted metacognitively), recognising that her process influenced the outcome.*

## Practising reflective writing

- Be aware of the purpose of your reflective writing and state if it is appropriate
- Reflective writing requires practice and constant standing back from oneself.
- Practice reflecting writing on the same event /incident through different people's viewpoints and disciplines
- Deepen your reflection / reflective writing with the help of others through discussing issues with individuals and groups, getting the points of others.
- Always reflect on what you have learnt from an incident, and how you would do something differently another time.
- Try to develop your reflective writing to include the ethical, moral, historical and socio-political contexts where these are relevant.

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### **Web Sites**

Reflective Writing [www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/wrp/rpwrite.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/wrp/rpwrite.html)

JEWELS Project: [www.jewels.org.uk](http://www.jewels.org.uk)

National Centre for Work Experience - [www.ncwe.com](http://www.ncwe.com)

# Reflective Writing

## Guidance Notes for Students

### Student feedback sheet

Please help us to keep improving the student pack by completing this questionnaire.

1. How useful were these sections of the pack?

	Not helpful		Very helpful	
What is required in Reflective Writing	1	2	3	4
Deepening Reflection	1	2	3	4
Exercises in Reflective Writing	1	2	3	4
Bibliography	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

	Not easy		Very easy	
2. How easy was the pack to use?	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

3. Do you have any other comments/suggestions you would like to make?