



Student Assessment - Reflections

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What Is Reflection?

Reflection is often viewed as an essential component necessary for students to critically interpret course content and service-learning experiences but is often difficult to define. The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2008) describes reflection as “the process of deriving meaning and knowledge from experience and occurs before, during and after a service-learning project”. Hatcher and Bringle (1997) define reflection as the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives. They identify five key guidelines to effective reflective activities: 1) they must link experience to learning objectives, 2) they are guided, 3) they occur regularly, 4) they allow feedback and assessment, and 5) they include the clarification of values (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997). In addition, Dewey (1933) describes reflection as a cognitive process that consists of a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking that needs to happen with the interaction of others while Kolb (2015) demonstrated the cognitive reflective process through his experiential learning cycle which includes abstract conceptualization, active experimentation, concrete experience and reflective observation. Ash, Clayton and Atkinson (2005) linked the assessment of student learning outcomes with reflection contributing to improved students’ higher order reasoning ability and critical thinking skills. Effective reflection needs to include both the cognitive process as well as the structured learning activity to accomplish learning outcomes (Karasik, 2013; Silcox, 1995). It is important to note that reflection is NOT designed to be only: a retelling of events, an emotional outlet, an excuse for soap-boxing or a simple exercise to close a lesson or an experience (Ahmed, Hutter and Plaut, 2008). Meaningful, critical reflection encourages students to think about their learning rather than just passively experience it; thereby generating, deepening and documenting learning, which allows for personal growth, civic learning and/or academic enhancement (Ash and Clayton, 2009).

Implementation

1. **Pre-plan:** To implement reflections in your course, you need to first pre-plan by identifying clear learning objectives that are linked to course content/experiences. Consider linking content/experiences to career development, civic engagement, personal growth, values, etc. The reflection can then be designed to achieve the desired learning outcome(s).
2. **Assessment:** Decide if the reflection will be part of their grade/assessment of students’ learning outcomes and the percent value you are assigning to each reflection (not all reflections need to be graded). However, students should receive some opportunity for feedback, either formal or informal, in order to receive the greatest benefit from the reflection.
3. **Facilitation/Guidance:** Reflections need to be preplanned with an outcome in mind and be directly linked to the course content/experience as well as actively involve the students. This requires the instructor to provide clear guidance on expectations as students often find



reflection difficult. Effective facilitation of student reflection should also include an emphasis on the value of reflection to enhancing the overall learning process. Two different models are commonly used to design critical reflections:

- a. **DEAL Model.** It consists of three sequential steps with prompts provided by the instructor at each step: 1. **Description** of the content/experience objectively; 2. **Examination** of the learning experience relative to one or more learning outcomes and 3. **Articulation of Learning** with goal setting for future learning/practice. Although reflection during the first step may be primarily a descriptive summary of the experience, steps 2 and 3 require the students to deepen their learning as they reflect on the meaning of the content/experience.
 - b. **What? So What? Now What? Model.** Each question enhances learning but focusing on all three moves the students toward critical thinking, problem solving and broader insight. **What** is descriptive and reports what happened objectively. **So what** shifts from descriptive to interpretative and encourages students to analyze the content/experience and discuss their feelings and ideas relative to what they learned. **Now what** put the content/experience into context and considers the broader implications for future learning, actions and goals.
4. **Types of Reflection:** Reflections can consist of a variety of formats; they also may vary in length from a few minutes to a multi-week process. Any of the following strategies can be used:
- **Oral/Discussions** which can include presentations, short speeches, show and tell, interviews, think-pair-share, storytelling and debate.
 - **Written** reflections which can include journals, 1-minute papers, an analytical paper, essays, and poetry.
 - **Projects** which may consist of portfolios, artwork, photo essays, videos, posters, digital stories or other creative works.
 - **Other** possible types of reflections include Blackboard discussion groups, group exercises, and role plays.

The Other Resources provided below include a variety of reflection activities with instructions that could be incorporated easily into a course.

Frequently Asked Questions

- a. *What types of prompts are effective in stimulating critical reflection?* You can use directed readings, case studies, sentence stems or even song lyrics or quotes to initiate student reflection.
- b. *How frequently should I have my students complete a reflection?* There is no set number of reflections that are necessary. Reflection before, during and after key content/experiences are often the most effective at stimulating critical thinking in students and may enhance their overall learning. However, you should incorporate reflections into your course where you feel they are most appropriate, whether that is one time or weekly.
- c. *How can I assess my students learning if I use reflections?* There have been several rubrics developed to assess reflections that you can use (see other resources) or you can develop your own rubric. All reflections do not need to be graded and so you also may use the reflections to help you understand the depth of your students' learning without assigning a letter grade.

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Other Resources

DEAL Model for Critical Reflection. PHC Ventures.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51a00182e4b00ebfe3c66f62/t/522645cbe4b05edb50d791a6/1378239947935/DEAL+Model+for+Critical+Reflection.pdf>

Reflection Activities: Tried and True Teaching Methods to Enhance Students' Service-Learning Experiences compiled by Diane Sloan. <http://www.usf.edu/engagement/documents/s-l-reflection-activities.pdf>

Reflection Toolkit. Developed by Northwest Service Academy, Metro Center, Portland, OR. <https://www.servicelearning.msstate.edu/files/nwtoolkit.pdf>

Service Learning Reflection Toolkit. Developed by Gateway Community College. https://www.gtc.edu/sites/default/files/files/documents/Service_Learning_Reflection_Toolkit.pdf

Ten Tips for Designing Critical Reflections by Patti Clayton. PHC Ventures. www.curricularenagement.com/handouts

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Silcox, Harry (1995) *A How to Guide to Reflection: Adding Cognitive learning to Community Service Programs*. 2nd edition. Philadelphia: Brighton Press, Inc.

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