Some Basic Guidelines for Reflective Writing

What is involved in reflection?

Reflection is to do with thinking and learning. It involves looking back on an experience in order to learn from it. Reflection can be fairly unstructured and intuitive, and is often bound up with feelings but when you become more aware of the reflective process it can become more structured and purposeful. Reflecting involves you, your feelings and your reactions, but to be at its most effective and beneficial, reflection should be approached in an organised, analytical way. This is often best done by using a reflective framework such as Kolb’s Learning Cycle (1984).

Why is reflection important?

Structured reflection can support deep learning. It encourages you to:

- Evaluate your performance
- Notice gaps in your learning
- Seek feedback
- Become an independent learner
- Stand back and view experiences you have had more objectively
- Develop better strategies for future challenges

How do I get started on a piece of reflective writing?

It can be helpful to use the following key prompts to get you started:

1. What happened? Briefly describe the event or experience. Include not just what you did, but also possibly:
   - What were the main challenges?
   - How did you react?
   - How did you feel?
   - Was anyone else involved?
   - What surprised you?

2. So what? Consider the implications of what happened, using a framework relevant to your discipline. Consider the following:
   - What is your evaluation of your performance?
   - What criteria are you using to measure this?
   - Which framework best supports your approach or your area of study?
   - What feedback do you have?
   - Has anyone provided a different perspective?
   - Have you done any reading on this topic?
3. What next? Outline some key lessons learned to implement next time, and consider, for example,

- What specific steps will you take?
- Is anything likely to hold you back?
- Can anyone help you?
- Do you have a short and a long-term plan?

What is does good reflective writing include?

- A brief description of an event or experience
- Acknowledgement of own feelings
- Awareness of others’ feelings/perspectives.
- Linking with other relevant situations
- Analysis using a conceptual framework
- Clear indication of points for learning and details of action to be taken in future
- Conclusion showing something has been learned.

How is reflective writing different from other academic writing?

- It includes personal opinions, viewpoints and emotions
- The writer can use the first person “I ...”

How is reflective writing similar to other academic writing?

- It uses concepts and theories to explain what is going on
- It is analytical
- It considers different perspectives
- It requires a clear, concise and formal style
- It requires the writer to stand back from events and evaluate

What should I avoid when writing reflectively?

- Only describing what happened
- Simplistic judgements about what is right or wrong, good or bad
- Apportioning blame
- Stating what you think the tutor will want to read, i.e. giving stock answers