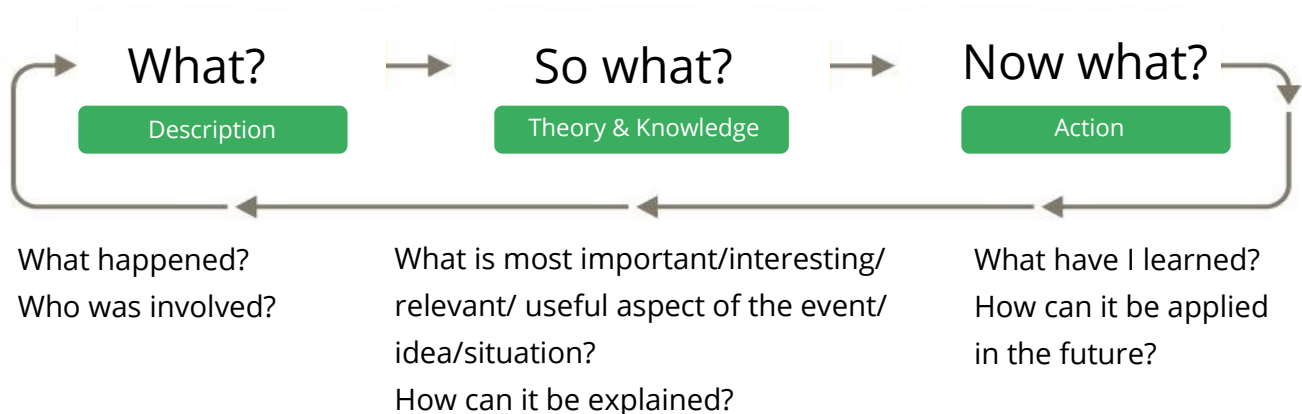


Reflective writing is a bit different from the academic writing students might be more familiar with. Lecturers usually set reflective assignments to have students reveal their personal thoughts about a learning experience - what happened, why it happened, and what can be learnt from it. It is not simply describing something but **exploring** it. You probably often think reflectively without even realising it. Have you ever run out of money before your next pay, then thought "from now on I'll make a budget"? Then you have thought reflectively!

A reflective model

For those new to reflective writing it may be wise to follow a simple but effective model which can be used to guide the writing process. Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001) created a reflective model based upon three simple questions: What? So what? Now what?



The *What?* part is simply describing the situation. The *So what?* part is where what happened is analysed and explained, often in relation to supporting literature. It is where most of the references will be, if required. Rolfe et al. consider the final part *Now what?* as the one that can make the greatest contribution to practice.

What to include

- **Don't just describe:** explore and explain what happened.
- **Be honest:** it's ok to admit to making mistakes as well as success. However, you should also show how you understand why things happen and what you are going to do to improve.
- **Be selective:** you don't have to write about everything that happened, just key events or ideas.
- **Look to the future:** reflect on what happened in the past and how it will have an impact on future ideas or activities.

Reflective writing

Examples of reflective questions based on the “What? So What? Now what?” model

Use some of these questions to stimulate ideas for your writing.

What happened?

What did you think would happen before you started?

What was your role?

What did you notice?
(5 senses)

What are the facts?

What issue(s) were addressed?

What?

What do you feel about them?

Who/what helped me at the time?

What did you want to know before you got started?

What did you observe?

How did you act in that situation?

What new skills did you learn?

How did you feel it went?

What worked or didn't work?

What surprised you?

What “ah ha!” moments did you experience?

What was one thing that made you feel most effective?

Why did it happen this way?

So what?

How does this relate to your past experiences?

What other ways can you look at the issue/problem/activity?

How can the results be explained? How do they compare to the literature?

What did you like or dislike about the experience?

What connections can I make between the event and other things from my study or work?

What things will you do differently or the same next time?

What would you do to learn more about this project or issue?

Which of your skills do you need to further develop, and what will you do to develop them?

What will you do to ensure future success and/or prevent future failure?

What have I learned?

Now what?

How can I apply this in the future?

What is the best way for me to move forward from this event?

What goals have you set for yourself as a result?

What supports will you need to work on areas that are of concern

How and where might I use my new knowledge and competencies?

Structure

The structure of a reflective essay is very similar to the structure of most academic writing. It contains an **introduction** that sets the scene for the essay. There is a **body** of paragraphs that detail the reflection process, with each paragraph addressing one key issue and linking logically from one to the next. It finishes with a **conclusion** that draws together all of the main points covered in the essay.

There are two main ways reflective writing can be structured around the *what, so what, now what* model. An individual issue could be highlighted and then applied to all three processes. A single paragraph may then encompass all three parts. Or, the body of the essay could have three main sections, first a description of the event as a whole (What?), then an analysis of what happened (So what?), finishing with how new learnings can be applied in the future (Now what?).

Pronouns

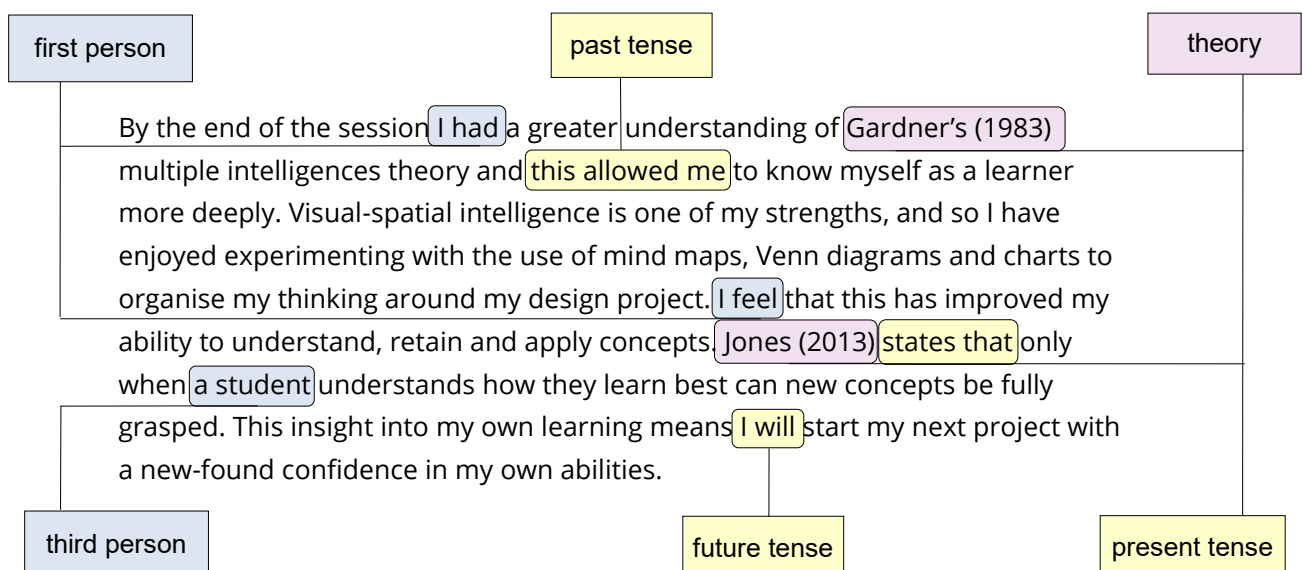
In contrast to most academic writing, **first person** narrative is used in reflective writing. 'I' becomes necessary when describing personal observations and feelings. However, it is also common to move between **first** and **third person** writing when making general comments and referring to the literature. See the example below.

Tenses

Reflective writing often requires movement between **past**, **present** and **future** tenses, depending on whether actual events are being recounted, a more general comment is being made or a projection about the future is proposed. See the example below.

Referring to the literature

It may be a requirement of the assignment that theory is used that supports a reflection, and obviously all sources for ideas must be acknowledged. These can be placed in a reflective essay similar to any academic essay. See the example below.



Reflective vocabulary

It is important to use appropriate language which highlights the various stages of the reflection process.

What?

This part should include descriptive language that helps the reader understand what happened. Try to be brief by only focussing on the significant details, such as who, when, where, why and how.

So what?

The phrases below will help you to show how you **interpreted the issue being discussed**:

- For me, the meaningful/significant/important/relevant/useful/aspect/element/issue/idea/experience/learning was/arose from/happened when/resulted from....

You should then explain **how this affected you and your understanding**:

- Previously/at the time/at first/initially/subsequently/later
- I thought/felt/knew/noticed/questioned/realised (or 'did not think/did not realise') that/why/how/if....

Following this, try to make clear **why you understood it that way**:

- This might be/is perhaps/could be/is probably/because of/due to/explained by/related to....

Now what?

Now you need to show how this has allowed you to develop your practice or understanding:

- Having reflected on/analysed/read/understood/developed
- I now feel/think/realise/wonder/question

The last thing to look at is what **effect it will have on your future practice or understanding**:

- I can now/will now/have to/am now able to improve(d)/understand/gain(ed)/better/use/develop