

WRITING REFLECTIONS

Reflective writing—although more personal at times—is still considered academic writing as is used as evaluation pieces in a variety of courses. With the growing popularity and usage of the Learning Portfolio, students at McMaster are being asked more than ever to reflect on projects, group work, assignments, and experiential programs, and so the ability to write reflective pieces effectively is an important skill.

Students often have trouble differentiating between reflections and summaries as there is a general assumption that they are the same thing. However, well-written reflective pieces tend to avoid simply summarizing events, but rather include both an analysis of the events that have taken place as well as a personal reflection of them. This document is going to break down exactly what should be a part of the analysis and personal reflection, accordingly.

ANALYSIS

Description

Think about the 5 W's: What is the topic you are being asked to reflect on, who was involved, and when did the topic occur? What was the result? Why did it happen? In some cases, a quick summary is necessary to give the reader some background to your topic, but not much detail is required at this point.

Benefits

This is where you should be thinking about how your subject contributes to the greater society and those in it. What are some strengths associated with the topic? Also question why the topic is important to you. Make sure to provide specific examples!

Limitations/Improvements

Now that you have named some of the strengths associated with your topic, you want to make sure to identify some weaknesses in the subject as well. Think about how the subject could be harmful or detrimental to society or a specific group of people, as well as how the topic could be improved.

Application

You should always be thinking about your subject in the context of the real world, and so it is important to address how your topic is useful and why. If you can, give some specific examples.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Initial Reaction

It is important to record your initial reaction and thoughts about the subject. Doing so allows you to return to those statements and talk about whether you hold the same opinion, after learning more about your subject.

ACADEMIC

What resonates with you?

Make sure to note how well your topic fits in with your own beliefs and state why the topic is important (or not) to you. You should also be letting the reader know what you want to take away from having studied your subject or pursued a certain experience. If your topic does not fit into your belief system, now is the time to question what about the subject or experience is causing you to feel negatively, and consider what would have to change for you to enjoy it.

Examples from your own life

If you can, try to make reference to any time you have experienced something similar to your topic or most recent experience. Have you previously considered the link between the topic and your life?

Integration into your own life

Here, think about how the subject or experience has affected you, based on what you have learned. Make a plan as to how you are going to integrate some of the skills or takeaways into your own life, by providing some specific examples.

Further questions about the subject

Even after all is said and done, what further questions are you left with, and how do you plan to find answers?

SOURCES

University of Northern British Columbia (2014). *Reflective Writing*. Retrieved from:
http://www.unbc.ca/assets/academic_success_centre/writing_support/reflective_writing_151211_copy1.pdf