



REFLECTION WRITING

We consider “Urbanism” an integrative area of research and practice, gathering urban design, spatial planning, data analysis and modelling, urban studies and sustainable technology, among others. Each area of knowledge asks different (but complementary) questions anchored on different ontology and epistemology. Different questions demand different methods to answer them. Sometimes, the same question can be answered from different perspectives. The Method Sheets give an overview of methods, approaches, and concepts used in Urbanism.

WHAT DOES THIS METHOD ‘DO’?

You are about to write a reflection. But are you aware that reflective writing requires a tone and style of writing that is different from other academic writing styles? Perhaps not. This method sheet comes in handy to level up your reflection writing skills!

The objective of this method is to elevate your reflective writing to get your reflection to desirable standards. What tone should you use while writing a reflection? And what kind of elements elevates your writing from a descriptive level to an academic reflection writing?

This method is merely focussed on the writing style reflections should be written in. If you need some inspiration to kickstart your reflection and want to know what aspects you can reflect upon: Also take a look at the “reflection” method sheet.

WHY DO WE NEED THIS METHOD?

In order to give meaning to your experiences, you should develop a clear line of reasoning to link your experience to existing knowledge. Thus, your personal experiences are central to writing a reflection. But your personal experiences can hardly be expressed in the purely objective manner academic research papers are written; it calls for a writing style that aims for a balance between the right tone, academic practice and personal experience. So, even though it is largely personal, reflective writing still involves using language relevant to the discipline.

While focussed on your own experiences, simultaneously, reflection writing should encompass and show an understanding and appreciation of different perspectives. Somebody else’s experience, examples, or references are needed to position yours. Thus, the use of theoretical literature is desirable.

All in all, Reflection writing is about the skillful use of evidence of examples of personal experiences and thoughts on the one hand, and critical/analytical thought on the other. How to do this properly will be further elaborated upon on the backside of this method sheet.

TAKE OTHER EXPERIENCES
INTO ACCOUNT

LIMITATIONS & PITFALLS

Your own understanding is likely incomplete. Situations are rarely clear-cut or simplistic: different views can exist on the same matter. Therefore, do not assume your perspective is the only one. Taking other perspectives into account and examining them will strengthen your reflection and enhance your understanding.

Be aware that, in reflection writing, you are allowed to express what you felt and what you thought. Make sure to use thinking and sensing verbs like “I believe...”, or “I think...”, etcetera. But keep in mind you should not write a rant in the heat of the moment. Give yourself some time to process your feelings before putting them on paper.

Bear in mind that reflection writing is a balancing act between personal experiences, academic practice and argumentation. Hence, you should not turn it into a personal diary to say anything anyhow. Reflections are personal, but not dramatic.

Lastly, reflection writing is not just a description of what happened. Try to overcome descriptive writing, by using this moment as a foundation for learning, to get to reflection writing.

NO PERSONAL DIARIES PLEASE!

HOW DO YOU DO IT?



Dos and Don'ts

For academic reflections writing you should do:

- Descriptions as foundations for learning
- It requires structure and formal language
- Experiences must promote learning and be appropriate
- You can say what worked or did not work for you and how to use this elsewhere, but explain why and how things can be done differently
- Use evidence to show you learned something and how you will use it in the future
- Helps show your personal learning/development, and communicate your abilities

Correct use of Language

- Use clear and precise language. *For example: "A group project with three other students."*
- Be as objective as possible. Do not infer motivation.
- Be Concise.
- Be aware of tense: Use the past tense if possible, but the present tense if more appropriate. *For example: Use the past tense for past feelings, but if those feelings are persistent or current ones, chose the present tense instead.*
- Use temporal indicators, like specific dates
- Use transitional language. *For example: subsequently, lastly, etc.*
- When analysing or interpreting during the reflection use comparative and/or contrasting language. *For example: Similarly, unlike, in contrast to, etc.*
- When concluding or making connections, make use of causal language. *For example: as a result of, therefore, etc.*

Academic reflection writing is NOT:

- Descriptions of what happened
- A personal diary to say anything anyhow
- Self-disclosure - reflection is personal, but not dramatic
- To complement the course or teacher
- Make uncritical references
- A nuisance/waste of time

source: University of Edinburgh (2018)

Reflective writing vs descriptive writing vs evaluating

Reflection on your design is quite separate from whether things are right or wrong and whether targets are being met or not. These are aspects of evaluation rather than reflection. Reflection is all about being aware of how your perspective is affecting your experiences. The aim of a reflection is also not to describe or list everything that happened. Instead try to give meaning to what happened.

To help you understand the difference better, here are some questions generally related to evaluation and to reflection.

Descriptive writing

- *What happened?*
- *What did I observe?*
- *How did I behave?*
- *How did others behave?*
- *What were my reactions?*
- *What were the reactions of others*

Evaluation

- *Did you achieve what you set out to do?*
- *Are you happy with it?*
- *How does it answer the research question?*
- *Did you base some decisions on case studies?*
- *Did they work in simalar situations?*
- *Does that mean it will work in your project?*

Reflective writing

- *How does your research respond to current societal challenges?*
- *How has the work changed your personal beliefs and convictions?*
- *What are the limitations of your research?*
- *How did you function in your team?*
- *Why did you behave the way you did?*
- *What will you do differently next time?*

source: Moon (2004)

FURTHER READING

Moon, J. (2004). *Handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theories and practice*. Routledge Falmer.

University of Edinburgh (2018). *Academic reflections: tips, language and structure*. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/producing-reflections/academic-reflections>