A variety of topics include an assignment which requires you to reflect on your learning, possibly during a practical placement, on a particular aspect of a topic or even on an entire topic.

**WHY?**

The process of writing a reflective journal can help you to focus on the connections between your prior knowledge and experience and your new knowledge and experience. It can help to make clearer the links between theory and practice, and can also focus your thoughts on:

- points and issues which you have found challenging
- aspects which you are not sure about
- aspects you might want to explore further
- what and how much you have learned
- how your professional thinking might have changed in the process.

Your lecturers will be looking to see how deeply you have reflected on your learning. Your reflections will give them an insight into how your professional skills and knowledge have progressed.

**WHAT YOU MIGHT INCLUDE**

There are many aspects that could be included in reflective writing, depending on whether you are reflecting on a practical experience, a topic or a particular aspect of your program. These include:

- comments on your readings, activities, contexts, etc.
- the main points you have learned
- what you have found interesting and why
- what you have found easy or difficult and why
- how the experience has compared to your prior experiences/learning
- what you had assumed but found to be incorrect
- what would have been useful to know
- questions you need to raise
- points you would like to clarify
- your reactions to aspects of your learning or experiences
- changes to your thinking about your learning, the course, the profession, etc.
- areas of special interest you might like to pursue later.

Remember to label and date your journal entries as you go and aim to make regular entries rather than reflecting back over a long period of time. You and your lecturer can then see how your learning and thoughts have progressed over time and it can also serve as a reminder to ask questions on points you do not understand.

**ORGANISING YOUR THOUGHTS**

If your particular assignment requires you to make regular reflections on your learning, it may be useful to make up a table with consistent headings for each entry, as below:

| Name |  
| Date |  
| Session title |  
| Content covered |  
| Comments on readings/practicals etc. |  
| Most interesting points |  
| Most difficult points |
Some tutors may accept this as the final record of your journal or log. Others may want you to write up the main points from logs like this into full paragraphs.

**HOW TO STRUCTURE A REFLECTIVE PIECE OF WRITING**

Read your tutor’s instructions closely about your particular assignment, as expectations will differ between topics and tutors. Reflective journals (sometimes called reflexive journals) can take many forms. They can sometimes appear unstructured and episodic as they are quite personal.

If a particular structure is required, your assignment instructions should provide details. If in doubt, read assignment guidelines or talk to your tutor.

**WRITING STYLE**

As reflective journals are quite personal, it is acceptable to use ‘I’, The writing is less formal than other academic texts.

e.g. ‘I found the prospect of interviewing the patient much more difficult than I had expected. I had assumed the patient would be quite willing to talk but she seemed to be very irritated. I didn’t quite know how to deal with this so I …’

Avoid being completely informal and using words like ‘kids’, ‘cops’, ‘other stuff’ etc. Rather, use ‘children’, ‘police officers’, and be clear and specific. It is important to remember you are writing a university assignment for a particular audience (even if that audience is your tutor).

Consider the level of personal information you wish to divulge and be careful about revealing personal information about other people (e.g. respect anonymity when talking about a patient in a clinical placement or a child in a teaching placement).

**HOW YOU WILL BE GRADED**

Your tutors will give you information about how long they expect your reflective writing to be and/or how much time they expect you to spend on it. This should give you a guide as to how much detail to include to get a reasonable grade.

Tutors are looking for evidence that you have engaged in the learning process, reflected critically on your learning experiences, and developed your capacity to be a reflective professional. Make sure you follow the assignment requirements so that you communicate this in the desired format.