

Resource : Samples of Reflective Writing

The following two examples demonstrate the difference between reflective writing and documentation or report writing.

Example A: The placement is in 24hr Fantastic Fitness (a fictitious fitness facility). The student, Barry (a fictitious BPHE student), has been at the placement for only a few days. He has been asked to assist in the gym over lunchtime, which is one of the busiest times of the day.

Friday, January 16th, 2014 10am to 3pm – 5hrs

Today the gym was full and many people wanted to use the treadmills. I think that Mr Freddings (the manager) was a bit caught off guard because it had been very quiet the last few days and he had told two of the regular staff not to bother to come in until later. I helped out at the front desk this morning – doing some paperwork and cleaning up. Jan, the lead fitness instructor, said that I would be needed to get equipment ready. I was a bit shocked because I had not done this before. I was embarrassed when she took me out and told me what to do in front of some of the clients, but I suppose I did need to know. I was left in a situation in which some clients knew that I am new to this, and others did not. On the whole, I decided to pretend that I had been doing it all my life. Jan told me how to write down what people needed, and told me her type of shorthand which I have been trying to use. On the whole it seems to work, - I did make one or two mistakes when I had to go back to the instructors and clients to ask again what they wanted again. One client was really nice when this happened because she had seen me being taught what to do. Another, a bit later, was quite abrupt. I guess that I had become a little over-confident by then. I backed off and realised that I have a lot to learn even in this simple matter of basic equipment preparation.

A bit later there was a difficult incident that I got involved in. There was a party of three women – I think that they work at the big company that makes furniture up the road. They had booked but were a bit late and, because it was quite busy by then, we had to tell them that the spin bikes that they had reserved were all full. They grumbled and then decided to stay so they could use the cardio equipment. Then it got really busy and staff could really hardly cope so it made it even longer that they had to wait for treadmills because they were all full. She asked me to go and tell them that they club apologized for the situation, but they would have to use the sign up list to use the cardio equipment. She told me what to say – to be polite but firm and not to get drawn into stuff about how they had booked – because, as she said, it was their fault because they were late. Anyway, the women treated me as if it was my fault. I fell apart a bit, not sure what to say apart from sorry lots of times. I got away and went back to the front desk. By then Mr Freddings had come in and he and Jan had decided to offer the women some free passes for personal training. I wished they could have thought of it earlier. Again, I had to take out the message. The women were cross and made a huge fuss about not wanting the free passes, and said how the gym had gone down-hill and it used not to be like that. I just had to stand and listen and wished I

had not pretended to have been there all my life. It all made me feel upset especially when, at last, grudgingly they said they would take the personal training passes.

I brought out their passes and now they were all smiles because they thought they had got a bargain because what they had been given was expensive. They were nice to me I think I learnt quite a bit about waiting all in a short time.

These are some of the things that I learnt from today...(she lists 6 topics).....

Example B: Jackie (a fictitious BPHE student) has just given a presentation as part her placement in a dance studio.

I have just done a presentation at the dance studio. We were asked to choose any subject this time but next time we will be giving a presentation on a topic associated with our subject. I choose to talk about my background in dance. I was third to go. I was nervous because the last time I gave a presentation was at school and then I knew everyone well. This is a new module so I do not yet know people. There were 6 of us, and the coach.

I talked about my experience– and how I missed training. People seemed to be listening. I talked about the first day I went to lessons. It was cold and I told them how I was a bit scared – then there were two years that I didn’t compete because I was recovering from an injury. In my dance career we travelled a lot. There were competitions in Canada and throughout the Commonwealth. I had some bad experiences travelling to competitions, and after my injury I decided after a while that I would start coaching instead.

I talked for the six minutes that was required. I fitted in most of what I had to say. I then had to ask if anyone had any questions. There were three questions. Sam asked how old I was when I started training. Beckie asked where I trained most often when I started school and if I had ever changed coaches. I told them that I had started training when I was four because my parents had also been dancers. I also mentioned that I switched coaches about four times in my career.

Then it was over. I think I did the presentation well and people listened. I do not think that I would do anything differently next time.

Note the contrasts between Example A and Example B!!

Barry has examined his situation and reflected upon what he has learned about himself and others, and what he might do differently next time. Jackie, on the other hand, has given us a clear account of what happened in her presentation, but has she really learned anything from reflecting on the experience?

Undergraduate report / essay writing/documentation	Reflective writing
The subject matter is likely to be clearly defined.	The subject matter may be diffuse and ill-structured.
The subject matter is not likely to be personal.	The subject matter may be personal.
The subject matter is likely to be given.	The subject matter may be determined by the writer.
The purpose of this kind of writing is set in advance, usually fairly precisely in a title / topic	There may be purpose, but it is more of the nature of a 'container' or direction, not a precise title that predicts the outcome.
Most of the ideas drawn into an essay / report will be predictable and will be determined by the subject matter	Ideas will be drawn into reflective writing from anywhere that the writer believes to be relevant. What is drawn in will be determined by the sense being forged by the writer
There will be a conclusion	There may be a conclusion in that something has been learnt, or there may be a recognition of further areas for reflection.
Essays / reports are more likely to be 'one off' – finished and handed in.	Reflective writing may be part of a process that takes place over a period of time.
There is likely to be a clear structure of introduction, discussion and conclusion	There is not necessarily a clear structure other than some description at the beginning and some identification of progress made. Structures, such as questions to prompt reflective activity may be given.
The writing style is likely to be relatively objective – probably without use of the first person.	The writing style is likely to be relatively subjective, with involvement of the first person
An essay or report is usually intended to be a representation of learning.	The intention underlying reflective writing is likely to be for the purpose of learning.
An essay / report is likely to be the product of a thinking process, tidily ordered.	Reflective writing usually involves the process of thinking and learning, and it is therefore not necessarily 'tidy' in its ordering.

Reference:

This is a section of 50 pages from Moon, J (2004), *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, Routledge Falmer, London.