

Critical Reflection Papers

Overview

A critical reflection paper is a combination of two types of thinking: reflective and critical. The goal of reflective thinking is to learn more about ourselves and our work by considering our thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The goal of critical thinking is to fit an idea or experience in with the ideas, concepts, and theories presented by others. Therefore, critical reflection is about conceptualizing and understanding the relationship between theory and practice. Often, we are critical in our reflections without realizing it!

Critical reflections are generally their own piece of writing and are mostly found in academic settings. For example, you might be asked to critically reflect on a placement experience or your role in a group project. In fields that often require self-reflection, like nursing, social work, or education, you may also find critical reflection papers in professional writing, such as case studies or journal articles.

Some questions to consider:

- Does my experience follow any theory or practice technique I have learned in class? Which ones?
- Am I applying the concepts I have read about to my own experiences?
- What preconceptions or assumptions did I have going into this experience? How have those assumptions changed?
- How does my recent experience compare to my earlier experiences? My peers' experiences? My supervisor's experiences?
- Did anything in my experience remind me of something that has been talked about in class?
- What might theorists in my field think about my actions?
- What would I do differently next time? Why would I do it that way?
- What are my personal development goals and learning objectives? How does my experience fit with those?
- What has this experience taught me? How will it inform my future decisions and actions?

Other things to consider in your paper:

- Often, it can be helpful to start your paper with an account of your experience. Generally, your professor's guidelines or the length of the paper will dictate how detailed your narrative should be.
- Don't be afraid to use "I"! While a critical reflection is still an academic piece of writing and should have some degree of formality, you are discussing your own experiences. Using the first person and, in many cases, a slightly more relaxed writing style is fine.
- You can often conclude by setting out goals, next steps, or solutions to a problem.

- Because critical reflections draw on personal experiences, and will likely vary considerably between individuals, students often wonder how their work will be evaluated by their professor. Most often, they will be looking for depth of analysis, and to see that you are drawing connections between your experience and the material covered in class.
- As with any academic assignment, sentence structure, punctuation, and grammar are important! While it is okay for the writing style in your reflection to feel less formal than an argumentative essay or research paper, it should still be free of grammatical errors, run-on sentences, fragments, and/or any incorrect punctuation that could make it difficult for your reader to understand.

How We Can Help

If you are working on a critical reflection paper, you can visit SLS Writing Support for feedback and guidance at any stage of the writing process! You can book an individual in-person or remote appointment with one of our writing consultants, drop by our designated office hours, or attend the workshops we offer throughout the semester. Visit our website <https://www.torontomu.ca/student-life-and-learning/> for workshop schedules and online resources, or to book an appointment.

Resources

[Texas A&M University, Critical Reflection](#)

[Trent University, Writing a Reflection Paper](#)