ACE Quick Guide to Advanced Reflective Analysis

The Purpose of Reflective Writing:

The practice of reflection enables us to gain clarity and **better understand our experiences**, facilitating the process of learning and self-improvement.

Through reflection, we also develop a questioning, **critical approach** to professional and academic practice – **identifying areas of strength and weakness**. This learning can be employed to generate original insights and **inform future decision-making**.

When reflecting academically, we engage with theories, models and concepts which encourage us to **interrogate our assumptions, behaviours, and motives** in the workplace and beyond. As we explore alternative perspectives, we **develop self-awareness** and freedom of thought.

When Writing Reflectively You Should...

✓ Ensure that examples of professional practice analysed are **specific and personal to your own experience**.

✓ Consider **counterarguments** and alternative methods / explanations and **justify your chosen approach**.

✓ Explore whether your **experiences are consistent with theories and models**. Does your experience challenge or negate these concepts?

✓ **Analyse the discrepancy between theory and practice** if your experience differs. Why does your experience contradict established theory? What does this mean in practical terms?

QA

Improving Criticality in Reflective Writing

You can improve the criticality of your reflective writing by **considering the scope for counterarguments**. Try to do this with the example 'Analysis' section of Driscoll's model included below. After, compare your counterarguments with the examples provided:

I learned that publication bias (Soady, 2022) has been widely documented in recent years, with Wrigley (2021, p. 138) arguing that although reputable journals adopt a robust peer review process, articles still get published with significant flaws as 'journals have to publish to survive.' Furthermore, Rollinson (2019) highlights the fact that statistical significance increases the likelihood of a researcher's work being published, which might tempt some researchers to tamper with the data. I did not want to appear cynical to the rest of the group and kept these concerns to myself, which on reflection I perhaps could have volunteered to foster free and open communication (Walker, 2022).

(Adapted from University of Birmingham, 2014)

Example Counterarguments

The claim that journals have a '**robust peer review process**' seems **inconsistent** with their **need to publish flawed work 'to survive'** and so surely further research is needed to prove or disprove this allegation.

Considering **counterexamples** and **evaluating academic evidence** to build a more compelling argument.

The suggestion that researchers might **alter their data for personal gain** is a serious charge and **appears improbable** given the likely academic repercussions.

The author's **reluctance to voice concerns** about 'publication bias' may have been **indicative of a lack of conviction**, alongside a desire not to appear cynical to colleagues.

Reflecting on **alternative interpretations of author's behaviour** for deeper insight.

QA

Analysing the Strengths and Limitations of Theory in Practice

When **reflecting on your professional practice** you should consider questions such as the following:

- Did a certain theory work exactly as specified? Why or why not?
- Did a particular approach have some advantages but also some limitations?
- Could two models be combined to mitigate the weaknesses of each?

Thinking like this is the first step to **evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of theories** by reflecting on professional practice.

Try to do this by writing the second sentence for this example 'Analysis' section of Driscoll's model below, and compare your critique **either positive or negative**) with those given underneath:

Smith and Brown (2010), and Evans (2011), both conducted large scale trials which show the benefits to healing time of leaving paediatric surgical wounds exposed rather than covered following surgery.

(Adapted from University of Southampton, 2010)

Example Critiques

'**However, personal experience** of children's distress at seeing their wounds and wanting 'a plaster on it' or it 'taken away' suggests that perhaps the authors have overlooked the psychological toll of this approach.'

The **universality of the theories is challenged** by drawing attention to **shortcomings / oversights** on the part of the theorists (Negative criticism).

'**This was proven correct in my case**, as the temporary discomfort felt by children with exposed wounds was outweighed by the dramatic increase in welfare as they rapidly returned to health, as confirmed in surveys with both patients and their parents (see Appendix A).'

The **validity of the theories is confirmed** by emphasising their applicability in the author's specific workplace context (Positive criticism).

Reference List

University of Birmingham (2014) *A Short Guide to Reflective Writing*. Available at: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/asc/documents/public/short-guide-reflective-writing.pdf (Accessed: 7 March 2024).
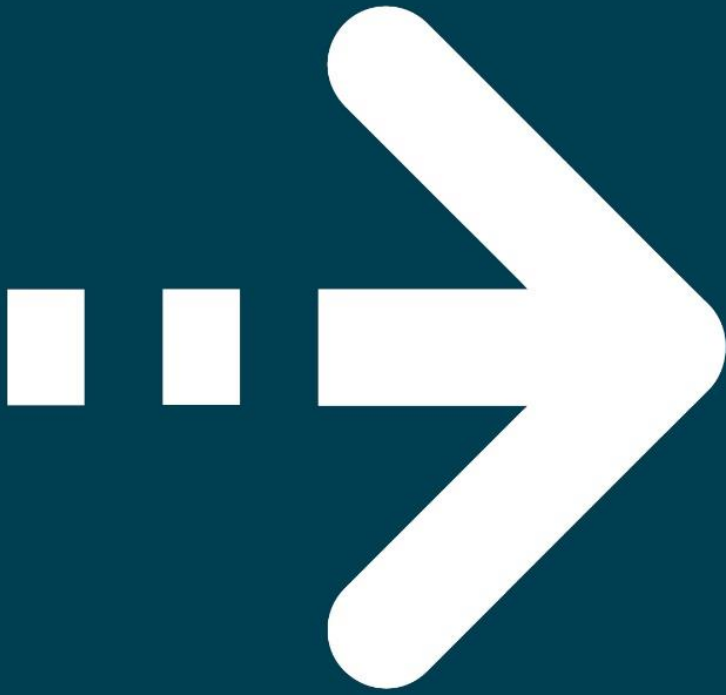
University of Southampton (2010) *Writing at Master's Level*. Available at: https://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/6CF753BB278C48A2813BCB6E783A4D94/M_level%20presentation2011%20handout.ppt (Accessed: 27 February 2024).

Additional Resources

The ACE Quick Guide to Evaluating Sources and Reading Critically offers additional guidance on assessing the strengths and limitations of scholarly resources in relation to your own professional practice.

The ACE Quick Guide to Relating Theory to Practice contains additional tips on bolstering the critical and evaluative component of your work by engaging in comparative analysis.

The ACE Quick Guide to Use of Sources includes an in-depth guide to synthesising source material into an academic argument and contains a phrase bank for engaging with scholarly ideas.