



Samples of reflective writing

Accounts 1-3 on the following three pages show different levels of reflection. They are based on a critical event that happened to a 22-year-old in the workplace after graduating. There are three accounts of the same event: giving a presentation at a team meeting.

Each account is written with three different levels of reflection:

- **Descriptive writing:** This is a description of events. There is no discussion beyond description and there is no evidence of reflection.
- **Descriptive reflection:** There is a basic description of events as well as evidence of deeper consideration in relatively descriptive language. There is no real evidence of the notion of alternative viewpoints in use.
- **Critical reflection:** There is a 'stepping back' from the events, with an exploration of the role of self in events and actions. There is consideration of possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesising, and it links factors and perspectives.

When producing your own critical writing, you could compare it against these different accounts:

- Which account do you think you've written like?
- Do you need to be more critically reflective?

Account 1: Descriptive writing

I had to talk about the project that I am on. I was confident but I did spend quite a bit of time preparing. During the presentation, I became nervous when I realised they were all waiting for me to speak and my nerves made my voice wobble. Afterwards, I was disappointed that my presentation did not seem to have gone well. My boss suggested that I do a presentation to the team next week to improve my performance.

Comments:

- This account is only descriptive writing. The author does not consider how previous experiences could have had an impact on preparing for the presentation.
- When writing about the presentation, the author does not talk through their feelings; for example, why did they have nerves? How did they realise colleagues were waiting? How did this make them feel? There is also no consideration of different perspectives, such as whether colleagues thought the presenter came across as nervous.
- After the presentation, the author has not 'stepped back' from the event and considered how they felt, why they felt the presentation did not go well and why it had such an impact on them.
- Finally, although the boss suggests another presentation, there is no discussion about the impact this has on them. There is no evidence of learning from the previous presentation and how they would do things differently the next time.

Account 2: Descriptive reflection

I was scared about not saying the right things and not being able to answer questions properly. I did a presentation in my course at university and had felt the same about it initially.

During the presentation, I realised that I was desperately trying to prove that I could present as well as my colleague. I wanted to impress everyone. Early on it went wrong and I began to panic. Trying to pretend I was confident made the situation worse because I did not admit I needed help. The more I spoke, the more my voice wobbled.

Following on from the presentation, my self-esteem is low at work now. However, partly through talking over the presentation and the things that went wrong, I can see several areas that I could get better. I am hoping to have a chance to practice with some of the team.

Comments:

- This account is descriptive reflection because there is some evidence of reflection. At the start, the author is referring to a past incident – their presentation at university. However, they do not consider how other prior experiences (such as watching other presentations) could have had an impact on the event.
- When reflecting on the presentation, the author shows some reflection (how they felt), but haven't included any alternative viewpoints (such as what the audience thought of the presentation).
- The author talks about how they felt after the presentation and identified the impact it had on their self-esteem at work, but not in a wider setting. Also, they missed the opportunity to hypothesise why the presentation has had such an effect on them.
- Finally, although the author engaged with others to discuss the presentation, there is no evidence of recognising that their views may change after the next presentation.

Account 3: Critical reflection

I had to talk about the project that I am on. I spent quite a bit of time preparing it in the way that I have seen others make similar presentations.

When it came to the presentation, I really wanted to do it well – as well as the presentations were done the week before. Maybe I wanted too much to do well? My efforts to be calm failed and my voice went wobbly – that’s how it felt to me anyway. My colleague said afterwards that I looked quite calm despite what I was feeling.

In the event, the session was a disaster and has left me feeling uncomfortable in my work and I even worry about it at home. I need to think about why a simple presentation could have such an effect on me.

I am feeling more positive generally and I can begin to analyse what I could do better in the presentation. It is interesting to see the change in my attitude after a week. I need to think from the beginning about the process of giving a good presentation.

Comments:

- This account is critically reflective. At the start, the author describes the event, reflects on the whole process (preparation) and recognises that interaction with others (colleagues’ presentations) can have an impact on their behaviour.
- They have written about how they felt during the presentation (engaging in an internal dialogue) and also reflected deeper by looking at different perspectives; for example, how their colleague thought the presentation went.
- They have reflected on how the incident has made them feel in a wider context (home and work) and have also considered why such an event has had an impact on them – trying to hypothesise reasons for this.
- Finally, the author has stood back from the event and considered what they could do differently next time. They demonstrate the concept that reflection can change over time (talking about next week), by taking on new ideas and trying again.