Reflective Writing

Please analyse your reflective assignment question and marking guide carefully, as what is specifically required by your tutor may vary from this guide.

Reflective writing:
- records a process of describing, evaluating and thinking critically about relevant past professional practice, events/experiences/critical incidents (at work placements or work attachments).
- enables you to apply what is learnt from the past, in order to improve practice and decision-making in the present and future.

Some common types of reflective writing assignments:
- Journal: a written account of daily activities.
- Portfolio: it can be a collection of coursework and/or readings with reflective comments.
- Self-assessment.

The style for most types of reflective writing
- It is usual to use ‘I’ and ‘my’ when writing about yourself.
- However, formal language is still expected, and a conversational style of writing must be avoided. Pseudonyms (fictitious names) are often used to protect the privacy of individuals (Wilkinson & Bowker, n.d.).
Stage 1: **Description** - What …
- is the purpose of returning to this situation?
- exactly happened, in your own words?
- did you see?
- did you do?
- was your reaction?
- did other people do that was relevant to the situation?
- do you see as the key aspects of the situation?

Stage 2: **Interpretation** - So what …
- were you trying to achieve?
- were the reasons for the way you responded?
- beliefs and values influenced your actions?
- assumptions did you make?
- were your feelings at that time?
- are your feelings now? Are there differences? Why?
- "good" emerged from the situation e.g. for self, others?
- troubles you, if anything?
- were your experiences in comparison to your colleagues, etc.?
- were the feelings of others involved? How do you know?
- are the main reasons for feeling differently from your colleagues, etc.?
- knowledge did or should have informed you?

**The Usual Stages of Reflective Writing**

**Rationale:**
- Clarifies and develops insight into the nature of past events/experiences.
- Identifies, examines and builds insight into your personal aims, values, beliefs and assumptions.
- Critically analyses and evaluates the achievements and concerns/problems/failures.
- Compares, critically analyses and evaluates the perspectives, thoughts and actions of you yourself and relevant others.
- Relates past events and experiences to relevant theories and concepts; points out the extent to which specific aspects of theories account for certain situations.
- Incorporates new knowledge into your prior knowledge.

**Sample reflective writing** (exemplifying certain aspects of stages 1 & 2):

Specific tasks were shared amongst members of my team. Initially, however, the tasks were not seen as equally difficult by all team members.

Cooperation between group members was at risk because of this perception of unfairness. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called ‘positive interdependence’, meaning cooperation, and many studies have demonstrated that “cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement"
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3: <strong>Outcome</strong> - Now what ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- are the implications for you and others involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- needs to happen to alter the situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- happens if you decide not to alter anything?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- might you do differently if faced with a similar situation again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- would be the consequences of alternative actions for yourself, others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- information do you need to face a similar situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- are the best ways of getting further information about the situation should it arise again?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explores the possible responses or solutions, and the likely outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learns from what has happened, in order to improve future practice by making informed decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample reflective writing (exemplifying certain aspects of stage 3):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ultimately, our group achieved a successful outcome. However, to improve our achievement, we perhaps needed a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks were being shared out. In my future group work (on the course and at work), I would probably suggest this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Anglia Ruskin University Student Services, n.d.)

(Adapted from Hampton, n.d.)
Suggested readings:


Appendix (for nursing and midwifery students)

**Critical Incident**

In a clinical setting, a critical incident might include:

- a medical emergency
- an unusual condition
- a difficult situation
- a communication problem (eg. with a patient or colleague)
- an interaction with a patient which made an impression on you (either positive or negative)
- an incident that made you feel inadequate in some way
- a time when you felt confronted
- an incident which made you think differently, or caused you to question your assumptions or beliefs.

Critical incidents may relate to issues of communication, knowledge, treatment, culture, relationships, emotions or beliefs.