INTRODUCTION TO HOW TO SELF-REFLECT

The key to good reflective writing is to move beyond just describing what happened. You do need to do some describing, in order to provide some context for your learning, but the writing isn’t reflective if you haven’t considered why things happened and what the consequences were, and demonstrated what you have learned from a particular experience.

Reflective writing is different to academic writing as it is a personal account, not one where you consider the views of others. When writing self-reflection, use personal pronouns (I, we) and concentrate on what you think about the situation, even if that involves considering the actions of others and how they may inform the way you might do things differently in the future. You are contemplating an experience rather than arguing a particular view and justifying it with evidence.

Self-awareness is a key part of self-reflection as you need to know yourself and why you behaved the way you did. Self-awareness is also important for employability as it allows you to monitor your own behaviour and attitudes at work and adjust according to the context and the requirements of the task at hand. It also helps you better cope with constructive criticism and learn from your mistakes.

So, here is a summary of the key characteristics of good reflective writing:

- Think about what happened in a given situation – describe what happened but also think about why things happened the way they did, what you might do differently in the future, and what you learned.
- There is no right or wrong answer – it is what YOU got out of an experience.
- Remember the ‘so what’ factor – don’t just describe what happened but evaluate what it all means and how and why it is important for your development.
- Be honest – it’s OK to admit to your successes and your mistakes. The important thing is to demonstrate that you understand why things happened and what you did or can do to improve.
- Be selective – you don’t have to write about every little detail of what happened, just the key events or ideas.
- Look to the future – it is vital that you consider what happened in the past and how it will have an impact on the way you think or behave in the future.