

## **Reflective Writing Strategies**

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Reflective writing provides students with an opportunity to synthesize what they have learned by writing about it. Reflective writing is different from academic writing in which students write as an expert and the opinions they express are based on objective evidence. Reflective writing is subjective and provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning experiences. As students reflect on the learning experiences, they are able to slow down their pace of thinking, process their learning and

- make links between concepts and skills;
- integrate new and prior knowledge;
- develop and deepen their understanding;
- explore their own feelings and thoughts, and
- self-reflect on their behaviors, thinking, and knowledge during the learning experience.

Reflective writing provides an opportunity for students to self-assess. Students may identify the successes they had during a learning experience and consider how they might apply those principles to new situations or they may identify mistakes they made which can help them avoid repeating those same mistakes in the future.

The purposes of reflective writing are varied and can take place before, during, or after completing a task or learning session. The purposes of reflective writing include:

- Before learning experience – weigh different aspects before deciding on a particular approach;
- During learning experience – think on your feet about what you're learning;
- After learning experience – look back at what you learned.

Reflective writing can be formal or informal. Formal reflective writing includes examples such as Case Study or cover letters for a resume or portfolio or editorial. Reflective writing that is for the *writer only* can be informal. Some examples of the types of informal reflective writing include:

- self-reflection about how they might incorporate the new learning into practice;
- ideas about how they might use the new learning;
- explore connections or new ideas for research;
- summarize the key points from the lesson;
- identifying the most important thing they've learned during the lesson, or,
- expressing an opinion about an idea or concept.

### **Variations:**

**Two Minute Papers:** This strategy provides an opportunity for students to synthesize their learning. Provide each student with a half-sheet of paper three-to-five minutes at the end of a class period or lesson. Record two questions on a chart so all students can see it and tell the students they have two minutes to record their responses to the questions.

Sample Questions:"

- What was the most important thing you learned today?

- What did you learn today that you didn't know before class?
- What important question remains unanswered for you?
- What would help you learn better tomorrow?

Two Minute Papers can also be used as an activator for students to access what they know about a topic prior to learning.

**Compose a Tweet:** Students synthesize their thinking about a topic by composing a summarizing message this is 140 characters or less to "TWEET."

**What? So What? Now What?:** Students process their learning by thinking about

- WHAT they learned, did, saw, etc.;
- SO WHAT explores the relevance of the "what" such as values or beliefs, feelings, reasons why it matters, etc.;
- NOW WHAT considers the implications or consequences of the learning.

**Notebooking or Journal Entries:** Provide students with a prompt that is associated with the topic being studied. Provide students with three-to-five minutes of time to record their responses to the prompt in their notebooks or journals.

**Line of Learning:** Have students draw and date a line after an initial focus question or prompt and record their current thinking on the topic of study after engaging in a learning activity.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- FOSS: Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, CA.  
[http://lhsfoss.org/fossweb/news/pdfs/Science\\_Notebook\\_FOLIO.pdf](http://lhsfoss.org/fossweb/news/pdfs/Science_Notebook_FOLIO.pdf)
- Keeley, Page. (2008) *Science formative assessment: 75 practical strategies for linking assessment, instruction, and learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.
- Mintz, E., & Calhoun, J. (2004). Project notebook. *Science and Children*, 42(3), 30-34.