

Introduction – reflective practice and reflective writing

A reflective practitioner constructs professional knowledge by integrating practical legal skills and knowledge of black letter legal principles with “know-how”. “Know-how” includes personal skills, strategies and values that you have developed and will continue to develop through experience. Reflection is a way of learning by thinking, it is a way of working on what we already know in order to generate new knowledge.

A simple definition of reflection is:¹

A form of mental processing – a form of thinking – that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is no obvious solution.

The ability to engage in reflective practice is a skill that it is expected QUT law graduates will be able to demonstrate.² Accordingly, students are required to engage in reflective practice in various subjects throughout their law degree.

Reflective practice is a cyclical process. Start by thinking about and describing an event or issue that you need to address. Then reflect on the event or issue by considering things such as what has led to it, how you feel about it and how you can explain what has happened (here theory or prior learning may be useful). The next step is to apply what you have learnt by this reflection to your own practice; you should plan future action based on what you have learned from your experience and your reflection. Finally, if you have an opportunity, you should put that plan into action. Of course, then you are back to the beginning, you can reflect upon your new experience!

Reflective writing is the verbal expression of the process of reflection. Reflective writing is only one means of expressing reflection. Reflection may also be expressed in speech, film, drawings, graphics or music. Mind maps in particular can be a useful way of organising your thoughts and may be used to plan a research paper, identify issues arising from a problem, or understanding a topic which you are studying.

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing is different from the usual style of academic writing. The following are some guidelines that may assist you to develop your reflective writing.

Reflective writing should not be merely descriptive

While reflective writing may contain some descriptive elements, **what is required is more than merely describing an event**. What is required will vary depending on the particular piece of assessment, but is likely to involve a

¹ Moon, J. A. (1999). *Reflection in learning and professional development*. London: Kogan Page Limited, p10.

² Queensland University of Technology (QUT). (2001a). *Embedding Graduate Attributes in Law: Large teaching and Learning Grant: Outline of Graduate Attributes Program in Law*. Retrieved February 1, 2006, from <http://oltfile.qut.edu.au/download.asp.rNum=168381&pNum=138516&fac=law&OLT>.

consideration of what has happened and why, what you have learnt (either about yourself or in relation to future action) and what should happen next. You should refer to the instructions and criteria for the particular piece of assessment for guidance.

Write in the first person

Because reflective writing involves constructing your knowledge (i.e. your learning) through your own experience and your reflection upon that experience, it will be useful to write in the first person ("I"). The usual rule of academic writing to avoid the first person should be ignored.

Your reflections should be based on your own experience and should not simply be a rehash of what was expected based on the material given in classes or in the study guide. It will be useful to refer to the criteria sheet for the assessment so you know the basis on which your reflections will be assessed. Depending on the type of assessment, you may be required to refer to relevant theory or literature in your reflective writing.

Resources

Moon, J., (1999) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*, Kogan Page, London

Moon, J., (1999a) *Learning Journals: a Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development*, Kogan Page, London

Moon, J., *Reflective writing – Some initial guidance for students* http://www.e-radiography.net/projects/relective_writing.htm

Karen Hinett, (UKCLE) *Developing reflective practice in legal education* <http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/reflection/index.html>