

## Reflection Journals

### What is a Reflection Journal?

In experiential learning students are both a participant and observer. As a participant students will be contributing to the organization in which they are placed and learning new skills. But this is not what makes the experience worthy of academic credit. The academic component of students' community service results from their ability to systematically observe what is going on around them. This requires a kind of mental gymnastics that does not come without training and tools. A well-written journal is a tool, which helps students practice the quick movements back and forth from the environment in which they are working to the abstract generalizations they have read or heard in class.

### Key features of reflective writing:

1) **It integrates theory and practice.** Students identify important aspects of their reflections and write these using the appropriate theories and academic context to explain and interpret those reflections. Students may be expected to use their experiences to evaluate their course theories - can the theories be adapted or modified to be more helpful for their CEL experiences?

2) **It identifies the learning outcomes of your experience.** Students can identify what they would do differently, their new understandings or values, and unexpected things they learned about themselves as a result of their CEL experience.

### What Should Students Write in Their Journal?

Here are a few of the ingredients that go into a keeping a great journal:

1. Journals should be snapshots filled with sights, sounds, smells, concerns, insights, doubts, fears, and critical questions about issues, people, and, most importantly, yourself.
2. Honesty is the most important ingredient to successful journals.
3. A journal is not a work log of tasks, events, times and dates.
4. Write freely. Grammar/spelling should not be stressed in your writing until the final draft.
5. Write an entry after each visit. If you can't write a full entry, jot down random thoughts, images, etc. which you can come back to a day or two later and expand into a colorful verbal picture.

Adapted from University of Portsmouth, *Reflective Writing: A Basic Introduction*, retrieved from <http://www.port.ac.uk/media/contacts-and-departments/student-support-services/ask/downloads/Reflective-writing---a-basic-introduction.pdf>

Below are some examples of the depth reflection can have for students writing:

### Observation

“We went to the seniors’ home and met a lot of the old people that lived there. They seemed really sad. Nobody paid attention to them.”

“When we arrived at the seniors’ home, I was struck by how empty it seemed .The residents kept mostly to themselves and very few had visitors. It was extremely quiet and I got the impression that people were lonely. One woman told me she hadn’t seen her family in six months. I wondered how the residents would describe their quality of life.”

### Personal Relevance

“After visiting the Hospice three times, I thought about my grandfather. It would have been great if our city had a Hospice when he was ill.”

“After visiting the Hospice three times, I am impressed with the services they provide to people who are dying, and their families. When my grandfather passed, he was in a hospital. Only 2 people could visit at a time, and the room felt very cold and sterile. This project has made me think about how we treat people near end of life. I think we have a long way to go and I am hopeful that our project will make a difference.”

### Connection

“We talk in class about how to improve access to exercise programs for seniors. It seems like the centre we visited is doing a good job in this area.”

“In class, we read an article about lack of access to exercise programs for seniors. The author mentioned that transportation was a key concern and I hadn’t really thought of that before. Working with the folks at the centre has allowed me to witness the issue first-hand and I am surprised at how few seniors know about the transportation service they provide. It will be important for the staff to consider a marketing plan moving forward.”