

Methods of Reflection

Just as you cannot only lecture the entire semester and expect every student to learn via that single method of teaching, you cannot expect all students to reflect on their service experience through a reflection journal alone. You should find more than one mode of reflection and in this way, honor the diversity of learning styles in your classroom. Please note: These ideas are meant only to share a few possibilities. Be creative!

CRITICAL REFLECTION METHODS

SPEAKING

- In-class or small group discussions
- Oral reports
- Discussions with community members or experts on an issue
- Public speaking engagements about the project and/or experience
- Teaching the material to younger students, ie: K-12
- Statements and/or petitions to policy-making bodies, ie: school boards and legislatures

WRITING

- Essays or formal research papers
- Final reflective term papers
- Personal narratives, journals or blogs
- Narrative script for a video, film, or slideshow
- Newspaper, magazine, and other published articles
- Poetry, screenplays, and other creative writing outlets

MULTIMEDIA & CREATIVE ARTS

- Photography
- Slideshows or video essays
- Painting, drawing and/or collage
- Dance choreography
- Music composition
- Theater productions
- ePortfolio

CRITICAL REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

What? So What? Now What?

This is a very common and popular way to guide students through the process of reflection. The responses can be in any format and faculty can employ a variety of methods.

A.B.C – 1.2.3

Whatever method of reflection faculty members choose to implement in their course, the following format, or cognitive framework, is commonly used among faculty and is beneficial to student learning. Move students through this process:

A – Affect, feelings.

B – Behavior, actions.

C – Cognition, Making connections to course content.

Level 1 – Ego, self-focused statements.

Level 2 – Empathic, statements about others.

Level 3 – Global, statements about macro systems, systemic change, social justice, etc.

Journals

Journals are valuable tools for critical reflection and should be specifically structured to do so. That means instructors should provide questions or guidelines. It is very helpful to review these periodically and provide feedback that serves as a dialogue that deepens students' thought processes. Ask students to record thoughts, observations, feelings, activities, and questions in a journal throughout the project. The journal should be started early in the project and students should make frequent entries. Explain the benefits of journals to students; such as enhancing observational skills, exploring feelings, assessing progress, and enhancing communication skills. Faculty should provide feedback by responding to journals and responding to comments from class discussions surrounding the issues raised in journals or even assign further activities based on journal entries. It is crucial that journals are not narratives and/or travelogues, rather, the method by which students make connections between their service and the course learning objectives, as well as explore larger themes of civic and community engagement.

Structured or Guided Journals

Use structured journals to direct student attention to important issues and to connect the service experience to course learning outcomes. A structured journal provides prompts to guide the reflective process. Faculty members structure prompts beforehand and assign students to compose journal entries based on those prompts. Some parts of the journal may focus on affective dimensions while others relate to problem-solving activities.

Team Journals

Use a team journal to promote interaction between team members on project related issues and to introduce students to different perspectives on the project. Students can take turns recording shared and individual experiences, reactions, and observations and respond to each other's entries.

Critical Incidents Journal

Ask students to record a critical incident for each week of the service-learning project. The critical incident refers to events in which a decision was made, a conflict occurred, a problem resolved, an "Ah Ha" moment, etc. The critical incident journal provides a systematic way for students to communicate problems and challenges involved in working with the community and with their teams and can thus help in dealing with the affective dimensions of the service experience.

Case Studies

Assign the reading of case studies to help students think about what to expect from the service project and to help them plan for the service activity. Use published case studies or even instructor-developed case studies based on past service-learning projects.

ePortfolios

Ask students to select and organize evidence related to accomplishments and specific learning outcomes in their ePortfolio. The ePortfolio also allows students to document their goals and extra-curricular activities as well as to post their resume. Salt Lake Community College's ePortfolio initiative is a great way for students to make sense of General Education and share their learning experiences with friends, family, scholarship committees, and/or potential employers, or volunteer organizations. ePortfolios can include drafts of analysis of problems or community issues, project activities and plans, annotated bibliography, etc. Ask students to organize evidence by learning objectives. The portfolio could also contain a weekly log, selected journal entries, a photo essay, or any other products completed during the service experience.

Analytic Papers / Essays

Ask students to write an integrative paper on the service project. Journals and other products can serve as the building blocks for developing the final paper. These provide opportunity for students to integrate their service experience with readings, class discussion material and the lectures.

Discussions

Encourage both formal and informal discussions with teammates, other volunteers, and staff at community agencies to introduce students to different perspectives and to challenge students to think critically about the project. Guided discussion questions in large or small groups challenge students to critically think about their service experiences. In addition to questions, discussions can be built around readings, guest speakers, case studies and events in the community that the students attend together. Online discussions can compliment in-class discussions.

Oral Presentations

Ask students to present their service experience to their classmates. Ask students to specifically discuss their service in terms of the concepts and theories discussed in class. Class presentations are an effective technique to use during the middle and at the end of a course, and can be designed for individuals or groups. Students share their learning with peers through a video, bulletin board, PowerPoint or Prezi, Web page, panel discussion, or a persuasive speech. This is an opportunity for students to synthesize and summarize their learning over the entire course and connect the classroom knowledge and their service experience.

Community Murals

Creating a mural is a more nontraditional approach to student reflection. This technique enables students to express feelings and learning from the service experience and also allows for a creative collective statement about aspects of an issue facing a community. Students can use various sources (magazines, newspapers, other art materials) to build their mural. Display final projects at a community site or on campus.

Interviews

The faculty member can interview students about their service experiences and the learning that occurred in these experiences. Students may also interview each other.

Email Discussions, Blogs

Students write weekly summaries and identify critical incidents that occurred at the service site. Instructors can post questions for consideration and topics for writing. Students can respond to each other and faculty can facilitate an electronic discussion.

Contracts and Logs

Service-learning contracts and logs formalize the learning and service objectives for the course and may be used from the beginning to the end of the coursework. Together with the instructor and community partner, the student creates a contract that outlines learning and service objectives. Students can use the contract and the log to assess their progress toward meeting the identified objectives and reflect on how the experience affected their ability to achieve their goals and objectives.

Multi-Media & Creative Arts

The sky is the limit. Dancing, monologues, poetry, photography or collages shared with and explained to classmates, all are ways to keep students interested and engaged with reflection

