

What is a reflective journal?

A reflective journal is an account of your work in progress, but more essentially an opportunity for reflection on the learning experience. It should provide you with a means of engaging critically and analytically with module content.

What does a reflective journal look like?

There is no right or wrong way of presenting your journal, as this should take account of personal experience, preferred learning style and your independent research focus. Some journals are electronic (more like video or written blogs), and some take a diary form with visual & written material cut and pasted (literally) into 'scrapbooks'.

For this assignment, please produce a written journal. You can include images and other visual elements if you choose, but please remember the written content of your journal should not to exceed 4500 words.

You should also:

- Write in the first person.
- Be mindful that this journal is a public document, as in it will be read by the module convenor and another member of History staff, and therefore it is important to consider the reader as you write.
- We were not with you on this learning journey so some context is important.
- Content is more important than presentation. You can be creative in your presentation. Please do include images.

Your journal will be enhanced by evidence of:

- Progression through a learning journey.
- Evaluation of new approaches experienced in the period of placement/project.
- Teasing out assumptions underpinning practice.
- Critical evaluation of your own practice.
- Analysis of key or 'critical' moments from the placement/project, whether positive or negative, and what was learnt from them.
- Sensitivity to relationships with community organizations, members of the public or other members of the group or team.
- Taking a position and making an argument from your learning experience.
- Engagement with relevant reading.
- New understandings made from: reading, planning and or delivery, collaborative activities, and the questioning of previous assumptions.

How will your reflective journal be assessed?

- [The 20-point scale criteria will apply.](#)

But in addition, ask yourself is there evidence of:

- Effective organisation and presentation of material and or evidence.
- Academic reading used in a relevant way to inform, support and or shape your reflections.
- Critical engagement with, rather than description of, the project/placement; your own process; and the process of others.
- Evaluation of the limitations/potential of the work undertaken.
- Immediacy – did you reflect every time you met for discussions on the project or attended the placement?

A **first class reflective journal** will demonstrate the following elements *throughout the document*:

- familiarity with **relevant literature**
- ability to **think critically** and **evaluate** the existing sources
- shows **connections** between the literature and your experience
- **reflections** on your practice/experience and creates deeper meaning
- **understanding of** how aspects of your practice are **relevant** to the literature
- **values** your experience, shows how you **learn** from it and makes **recommendations** for future action/practice

In addition, your journal must be properly edited (for grammar and other errors), formatted according to the History Department style guide and structured.

Basic differences between a standard essay and a reflective essay

	<i>Standard essay</i>	<i>Reflective essay</i>
Subject	A research problem-oriented analysis; an often abstract and theoretical discussion of a specific topic.	A less specified and often self-selected discussion of your own practice/experience with relation to the existing literature.
Evidence	External. Uses primary sources and data largely created by others.	Uses primary sources created by others (documents, data, etc.) as well as yourself (your own observations and journal notes).
Voice	An impersonal and objective discussion, written in the third person.	Often asks for your own perspective; usually written in the first person.
Knowledge	Shows familiarity with the existing scholarship on the subject.	Combines scholarship and your original points derived from the experience of placement.

Introduction	Introduces concepts and outlines an argument.	Introduces concepts and indicates how they relate to own experience or learning. Also may include an brief outline of placement and organization.
Conclusion	Relatively predictable. Draws the various threads of the discussion together.	May focus on the personal learning points. Often includes recommendations for future practice.
Referencing	Often a mix of primary and secondary sources.	References to literature and own primary sources (notes from placement. Please include these as an appendix to your journal. They will not be assessed).
Bibliography/ Reference List	Formatted in the style appropriate in your subject.	Formatted in the style appropriate in your subject.

Tips for Good Reflective Journal

Good notes

Keep a journal and **record** interesting things that happen in your placement – they will become your database of **examples**. Comment on them and try to reflect as you go, but you should not include all the notes you made throughout your placement in your reflective journal. **I will NOT assess these notes; however, you can include them in the appendix of your reflective journal. They should NOT be included in your word count.**

Topic

Think what topics/problems interest you most in your subject and decide in what ways they are **relevant** to your practice/experience.

Be constructive

Your critical assessment of practice/experience does not imply focusing on the negatives. While **questioning** your choices, try to stand back, consider alternative viewpoints and demonstrate how you can learn from the experience, both good and bad.

Go deep

Go beyond mere description and use critical thinking to develop a deeper analysis. Limit description to elements that need reflective comment.

Emotions

Recognise your emotions and feelings with regard to the task/practice and consider their

role and influence. BUT: refrain from venting your frustrations; again, be constructive.

Journey

Keep an open mind about what you have **learned** from your practice/experience. Remember that not everything has to be immediately 'useful'. Try to demonstrate a sense of journey – intellectual, professional, personal – gained in the experience.

Style

Use the **past tense** when writing about your experience ('I felt') and **present tense** when referring to the literature ('Smith suggests').

Examples

These are two examples taken from external reference guides. Please refer to the Department of History style guide for the correct referencing style.

Example One:

The experience of working on producing a historical film has shaken my faith in history as an objective and detached record of the past, in the most classic Rankean sense.¹ Elements of subjectivity constantly challenged my commitment to telling the 'truth' and I spent a lot of time getting frustrated and writing angry rants in my journal. I felt like we were 'just playing' and couldn't appreciate the larger truths I was in fact discovering in the process. Having read Rosenstone's take on the role of film in history, however, I found the exercise a really good way to understand how history is told.² I wish I had approached the task with a more open mind. This may have resulted in a much better film.

Example Two:

During term one I found myself inwardly questioning the reliability and validity of scientific journals, as I came across conflicting studies and contradictory data in our weekly research and feedback sessions. I was surprised at how other members of the group appeared to automatically trust the content of peer-reviewed journals and I sometimes felt that what was presented back to the group was accepted as factual as long as there was a reference attached. This prompted me to read into what I now realise is referred to as publication bias and has been widely documented in recent years. For example, Martin Dawes argues that, although reputable journals adopt a robust peer review process, articles still get published with significant flaws:

Journals have to publish to survive and they want to publish articles that deal with topical

¹ Green and Troup, pp. 22-25.

² Rosenstone, 1995.

important issues of the day. Sometimes this imperative overrides the critical review process.³

Furthermore, Brooks highlights the fact that statistical significance increases the likelihood of a researcher's work being published, which might tempt some researchers to tamper with the data.⁴

I did not want to appear cynical to the rest of the group and kept these concerns to myself, which on reflection I perhaps could have volunteered for discussion. Instead I felt that in order to construct an accurate care plan at the end of each scenario I had to adopt a more robust approach in selecting appropriate journal texts.

After these realisations, I found it more helpful to employ the use of meta-analyses and systematic reviews for assessing research. I found that using systematic reviews saved time searching through numerous journals, and I found the Cochrane Library a useful electronic information source.

*Adapted from A Short Guide to Reflective Writing (University of Birmingham, 2015), Reflective Writing (University of Plymouth) and the IATL Module Handbook (University of Warwick)

³ Martin Dawes, 'Sicily statement on evidence-based practice', *BMC Medical Education*, Volume 5: 1 (2005), p. 6.

⁴ Brooks, p. 46.