

Narcissus' Pool: Just How Deep is Reflection?

Risks and barriers to effective reflection	Some suggested solutions
PURPOSE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because reflection can take so many different forms and have so many different purposes, people might be very confused as to what is expected of them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be clear about what the purpose is. Some examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Examination of personal feelings and reactions ➤ Reinforcement of focus on process, rather than product ➤ Integration of theoretical knowledge with personal experience ➤ Development of self-awareness of one's skills, strengths and limits ➤ Evaluation of one's knowledge, and where gaps in knowledge might be ➤ Exploration of an idea or concept ➤ Development of critical thinking, consideration of alternative perspectives ➤ Documentation of a process, procedure, or method to consider improvement ➤ Identification of future directions or next steps ➤ Demonstration of achievement, learning, or growth ➤ Demonstration of professional practice Take care that prompts aren't too limiting, as this can achieve the opposite effect (see below). Model the same types of reflections that you are asking others to do.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflection isn't deep enough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider carefully what is being asked for in the prompts, and the degree to which it is descriptive. Consider whether you are drawing from expert knowledge (where responses may often be automatic, rather than reflective) or novice inexperience (where responses may require imagination and innovation, rather than reflective skill).
AUDIENCE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For high-stakes reflections (eg dossiers, portfolios) people may doubt that their subjective experiences can be assessed fairly or objectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be clear on expectations and standards Be transparent about your own biases, or departmental or institutional culture. Share rubrics, evaluation criteria, and if possible, models with those who are submitting reflective work. Ensure criteria are not tied to specific personal experiences or achievements but to the purposes of the reflection.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflection isn't authentic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider whether the reflection is high-stakes or low stakes, and how awareness of audience (and potential power dynamics) might affect the content and quality of the reflection. Ask yourself how you know how authentic a reflection is. What may be uninspiring and pedestrian to one person may be great insight to another. Engage reflection with authentic problems.

PSYCHOLOGY/EMOTIONS/RESISTANCE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants may question the point of the reflection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide real and authentic problems for them to engage with. • Consider making reflection an invitation, rather than a requirement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people will find reporting on personal emotions very difficult. They are much more comfortable reflecting on concepts, ideas, or facts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inject distance into reflection activities where possible. Unless examination of deeply held feelings is critical to the exercise, create prompts that allow responses to “what if” scenarios.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reflection requires challenging deeply held beliefs, or taps into very sensitive areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for privacy and avoid assessment. • Take time to validate or normalize these types of reactions, and provide strategies to help work through the discomfort they might cause.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insecurity about being judged or found wanting for not having the “right” experience or insight may prompt people to focus on delivering the desired product, rather than engaging meaningfully with the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful about being too specific about what insights count. Is it fair, for example, to expect that someone should gain the insight that they “prefer to work with people who are like themselves” (cf Road Less Travelled) if that is simply not the case?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to envision alternatives and different perspectives may be constrained by personal experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid assumptions about the kinds of experiences people may or may not have. • Recognize that without certain relevant experiences, the exercise will be one of imagination, not reflection.
ASSESSMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment likely to feel like judgment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t insist that reflections be public, even to just a single evaluator. • Focus on the process and not the product.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulations of personal process may not fit with expectations or biases of those evaluating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When assessing reflective work, attend to your own personal biases. Challenging something you hold dear or consider very important doesn’t mean others have failed to achieve valuable lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of what types of insights should be had may run counter to the individual’s experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep prompts open-ended enough to give students scope to pursue questions from the direction they find most meaningful. • Avoid assumptions about the meaning of personal experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explorations can yield results that may not seem particularly realistic or feasible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give permission and freedom to explore without judgment; refrain from evaluating the quality of ideas unless this is a specific goal.