

Introduction

Reflecting on your writing encompasses both revisiting what you have written and the thought process that has contributed to the development of your first draft. Looking at your ideas afresh can be quite daunting. At times students simply submit the first draft they come up with, fearful that rereading their drafts will expose them to errors in their writing.

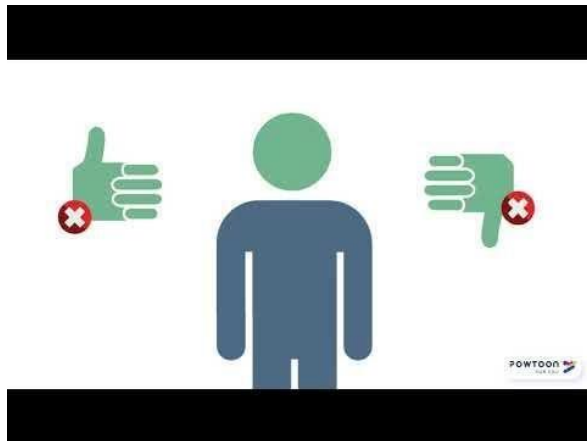
If the fear of finding errors does not motivate you to consider reflecting on your work, consider approaching reflection from the perspective of enhancing the value of your work. This unit will introduce you to the practical activities involved in the reflection process.

At the end of this unit, we hope that you will be able to:

- Implement reflection strategies to improve your writing
- Revisit your original ideas to assess if they are punchy and clear
- Examine how you have composed your response to writing instructions
- Implement peer review as a strategy to improve your writing

Learning Content

Reflecting means looking back in time carefully and critically to think about past actions, words, experiences, and images, to elicit any errors or mistakes. The purposes of reflection include self-evaluation and future improvement. When you reflect over your writing, you relive your decisions, thoughts, actions, as you were writing in order to understand your writing and yourself, as a student writer. This section deals with questioning as a reflection strategy. Take a look at this video before you proceed:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGyjF9Nqd8Y>

Giles (2010) describes reflection as the process where students think about what they are doing, while still in the process of doing it. While reflecting, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I addressed the topic?

This is a higher order question that you must ask yourself as a writer. The 'topic' in academic writing is usually an idea/ a concept/ a theory or a combination of these items. There often is some agreement on what could be considered 'fact' on a topic. Your work is supposed to reflect convincing efforts to address. This also means paying attention to contending views and any new information on your topic. If this aspect is not addressed in your writing, evaluators may remark that your work 'lacks substance' or 'lacks depth', or they may even say your work is too 'descriptive'. This means that you have not dealt with the topic to a satisfying degree. This could have been caused by failing to address all the necessary aspects on a topic. For example, some topics may require that you define the topic concerned, apply it to a specific situation, or provide examples.

- Have I kept to the topic throughout?

Patch-writing is a phenomena where writers connect irrelevant ideas on topic to achieve superficial length. This is very common among students. Some writing tasks do not necessarily require that you write everything you know on a topic; meaning, if you are asked to disc x stick to your discussion of x.

- Have I included any irrelevant/unnecessary information?

The above question will not be answered with any irrelevant/ unnecessary information.

- Have I made the purpose/aim of the writing task clear to the reader?

Academic writing tasks require you to state with clarity the purpose for which you are writing. This is often known as a thesis statement/ purpose statement/ argument. This is where you state in clear terms what you are writing to accomplish, and how you are going to achieve the objective for which you are writing. This is a way to hold you accountable as writer in the academy. If you say you are going to do something and not do it, you are easily marked down. Some inexperienced writers tend to avoid having a thesis or argument writing, because it is easy to fumble around with no direction. Another mistake that inexperienced writers make is assume that the lecturer knows the purpose of the writing task. Although that may be true, you are still required to state the purpose for which you are writing.

- Have I left out any important information or are there "holes" in the argument/essay?

Gaps on a topic are easy to spot if you are knowledgeable on the subject. In this regard, further reading on your subject can be a reflecting strategy. Reading should be aimed at getting further insight on the topic. You can read material from authors, who wrote on the same topic. Ultimately, you should add 'flesh' to skeleton. Reflecting can help you identify holes that in-deed require further research.

The importance of peer-review in the process of reflection

Many students underestimate the value of having another person read through their work. For many reasons, gaps in logic can be easily hidden to the writers. Various other inaccuracies, such as the omission of details, repetition, or lack of clarity, can also be easily spotted by a second or third reader. The University of Johannesburg has a unit called the Writing Centre, set up for the purpose of helping students with academic writing.

The Centre is staffed with postgraduate students, who have been trained to provide feedback on academic writing. The video below discusses the importance of soliciting peer feedback from a peer.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1PJRIQrqTo>

You can get more tips on reflection and peer-review here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1imhASrRAEDnNpbXHD_V50dUWl2s_zTAS/view?usp=sharing

Summary

Reflection means taking a break, and returning to look at your work with a new perspective. Soliciting the help of a knowledgeable peer is the second step of the reflection process. Remember, a peer does not necessarily mean someone who is studying in the same field as you. Anyone experienced in the practice of disciplined thinking can provide critical review of your work. The purpose of reflecting is mainly to assess if you have addressed and remained consistent with the topic throughout your writing. The next section focuses on proof reading and revising your drafts, and coming up with the final edit.