Reflective practice is about using your imagination to untangle through writing what is going on around you so that you can more fully understand what is happening. By imagining other possibilities and ways of thinking you are more able to forecast or predict human behaviour and determine a more appropriate response. Reflective practice allows us to imagine and see our professional relationships with others within a framework of possible role models so that we can get closer to understanding a given situation.

What is not reflective writing — is delivering information that is neat, highly organised and provides a detailed description of what occurred in a given situation. It does not provide specific answers or make claims or recommendations about the rights and wrongs of something. Neither does it provide a simple remedy to a specific problem.

That said, there is no right or wrong way of doing reflection. Rather, it is about developing a writing practice that allows you to explore your own life experiences, thoughts, feelings, values and assumptions through stories and open-ended questions to generate meaning and understanding.

In relation to your learning as a student at Curtin, your reflective writing exercises and assignments have a particular purpose. They will include different pieces of information, knowledge, emotions and insights as to how you are experiencing and responding to your life as both a student and individual outside of Curtin. Reflection is a process through which the kinds of things you are pondering on in your mind are transferred and worked through as you write. Writing in this way helps you to untangle and consolidate your thoughts and to recognise and make sense of what you are learning. It can assist you in clarifying particular areas in your study or life where your thinking or understanding is unclear and/or still weak.

Reflective writing creates a portrait of our human experiences so that we can learn from them. In the process of developing your reflection skills you draw on your own life experiences as a writing vehicle for deepening your awareness and understanding of your world reality in relation to other people.

Being reflective means being aware of the unknown — appreciating that life is a mystery and that not all things are knowable. If you think of reflective practice as a craft in which you develop your writing skills — what you are doing is writing yourself through the unknown into understanding.

Helene Cixous says:

Writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: it is preknowing and not knowing, blindly with words (1993, 38).
Think about reflective writing as a ‘method of inquiry’ (Laurel Richardson 2000). **Reflective writing is a method for discovering things about yourself and your area of interest.** Writing oneself into knowing is concerned with learning how things work and evolve through the process of untangling what appear to be conflicting occurrences. Writing your thoughts down allows you to make comparisons between your reality and the reality of others; it creates a border crossing through which you can imagine multiple layers of reality. Reflective writing allows you to discover not only new facets about yourself and how you are positioned in a particular situation but it also reveals how you have been shaped or changed by your experience. It also offers you the opportunity to develop your writing skills — a necessity for your life as both student and eventual professional.

**Reflective practice creates a safer place for uncertainty in our lives.** It pushes us to dig deeper into asking open ended questions that can lead to seeing the complexity and multifaceted nature of reality — where one’s discoveries rarely lead to just one answer but rather to a whole range of possibilities. Reflective practice demands that you engage with struggle — **the struggle to untie your own inner biases as a method** for interpreting the events you are writing about.

**Activity:** Try out Activities One and Two, on the right-hand side of the screen, for some reflective writing exercises.

How do you cultivate the art of reflection?

Telling stories is an essential aspect of living. No matter who you are or where you come from, as a human being like everyone else you have unique experiences, which form part of our life story. **Our stories create the fabric of our everyday reality** — they create a coherent framework that captures not only our experiences but also shapes the way we perceive the world. Our stories show how we are interconnected with others. **The task in good reflective practice is to tell your story well.**

**Activity:** Now complete Activity Three, on the right-hand side of the screen, and remember to refer back to the reflections you wrote in Activities One and Two.

To cultivate the art of reflection you need to be able to abandon the principle of absolute certainty. You need to be prepared to take risks and open yourself up to the unknown. It’s about preparing yourself to act when it’s not clear what form any action should take.

Good reflective practice is not about writing pure description, listing information or posing the crux of an argument. Good reflective writing presents the full story — it captures the essential aspects of a particular event through the 5 W questions — who, what, where, when and why countered by how.
What is Reflective Practice?

Real reflective practice requires confidence. It means believing in your own experiences and capabilities. It also demands listening and responding to your feelings. Our feelings activate our bodily responses to personal values. Feelings can be understood as trigger points that signal our ethical values — Feelings perform as our moral compass.

Important questions to reflect on whilst writing

- How can I prevent my negative feelings from undermining my daily life?
- As a professional, student, and human being, what and how can I learn from my suffering?
- When I feel shame, when I am stressed, frightened and worried, no matter if it’s concerned with my profession, studies or private life, what can I do to improve the situation I find myself in?
- How might I learn from my feelings and mistakes as well as from other people too?
- How might I transport myself into the lives of others so that I can learn to empathise with those who have different life experiences to mine?

Topics for you to use to practise your reflective writing

- You have been struggling with time management in preparing and submitting your assignments — what can you do to change the situation?
- What do you need to do to improve your learning processes?
- What kinds of life and non-work experiences do you have that contribute to the course you are studying?
- What knowledge have you gained from your life experiences prior to entering university?
- You received a low pass/fail mark for a recent assignment — what did you do or not do? What do you need to do to not repeat the same mistakes and improve your performance?