Reflection Prompts and Questions

Whether a written, oral or meditative-style of reflection is chosen, reflection facilitators can select one or multiple prompts from the list below to ‘get the ball rolling’. Ultimately, a good start to any reflection will depend on the nature of the co-curricular activity, organization, role(s), and/or the duration of time spent, and thus included in this guide are general, academic, descriptive, personal growth-oriented, and community-oriented reflection prompts to choose from, as well as quotes that may also be used as prompts.

GENERAL REFLECTION PROMPTS


- What were your hopes, fears, and expectations about your involvement in the activity?
- What were the issues, tasks, or problems with which you were dealing?
- What went really well? What did not go well?
- Did this experience confirm or challenge your previously held assumptions or stereotypes? In what ways?
- How does what you learned through your experience contribute to what you are learning in class or as a student leader and vice versa?
- How might your experiences inform or relate to other situations you might encounter in the future?
- What were your first impressions of the setting? Describe the environment and the people.
- What would you do differently if you were in charge?
- How has this experience impacted on your future career choices, educational experiences, voting/activism practices or job opportunities, if at all?
- Describe a problem the team may have been having. List possible solutions.
- Make a list of the skills used and learned on this project
- What have been the best and worst parts of this project?
- Describe a person you met on your project. What are their attitudes about the project, where might those attitudes have come from?
- What are some of the problems facing the world today? Does your involvement connect or address these issues?
What is one way in which you expect the community/ campus you are working within to nourish, nurture, or satisfy you? What are two ways you will take responsibility for that community/ campus?

Summarize the most important things that you will take with you from the experience.

Think of something this year that you found difficult doing, but you kept doing it the best you could. What can be learned from this?

**JOURNALING PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION**

*SOURCE: Service Reflection Toolkit. Northwest Service Academy, Metro Center, Portland, www.northwestserviceacademy.org*

Below are some suggestions on how to lead specifically written-reflection sessions:

**Clusters:** Have people shout out words or phrases that describe the day. Ask each person to take two minutes to write five or six words in random spaces on their journaling page.

**The Critical Incident:** Choose an incident that involved the entire team and give them a couple of minutes to think about the incident. Then ask them to write a detailed, factual report of what happened, making sure to answer the four “W” questions, “who, what, where, when.” You can then have participants share their stories to see how they differ from one another.

**Different Perspectives:** A great one for developing empathy skills, ask participants to recall a specific occurrence from the day that involved some degree of conflict or challenge. Ask them to assume the viewpoint opposite that which they actually held during this conflict (or the viewpoint they were the least empathetic with) and write a description of the conflict/challenge from this perspective. This can include what happened, their role in it, what they want, what they envision as the ideal solution. Good debrief questions are: “How did it feel to do this writing? How were you able to get in their shoes? How was it difficult? What is one thing you realized through this exercise?”

**The Fly on the Wall:** Ask participants to take a couple moments to reflect on the day (where they’ve been, what they’ve done, whom they’ve worked with, tools they’ve used). Then ask them to pretend they were a “fly on the wall” observing but not participating in the scene, and write a short descriptive passage based on their observations. You can also use any animal or plant or person that was near the project site.

**Guided Imagery:** Encourage participants to relax, close their eyes, get comfortable, notice their breathing, etc. and read a guided imagery or meditation. Then, ask the participants to free-write about what they experienced.

**The Free Write:** This is the easiest and perhaps most effective journaling method, wherein people that think they “can’t write” or “have nothing to say” realize how much and how well they can write. For a predetermined amount of time, participants should engage in continuous
writing by keeping their pens moving. Even if only to write, “I don’t know what to write,” it is helpful to trigger the free-write with an open-ended sentence such as, “I don’t think I’ll ever forget…” or, “If I could do one thing differently, I would…”, or make up your own. Let participants know when they are nearing the end of the writing time, and then discuss with them how it went.

The Letter: Have participants write a letter to themselves, a relative, a historical figure, a political figure, etc. describing the project/activity completed and what it means to them, or ask for some piece of advice, etc.

DESCRIPTIVE PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION

The following descriptive prompts, while simplistic, might be best utilized in helping students digest co-curricular experiences that involved something that occurred that was: out of the ordinary, overwhelming, emotionally taxing, or that involved heightened senses, to name a few examples. Another example in which these types of questions could be helpful would be to assist a new team reflect on teambuilding or a conflict that arose from working together.

- When did this experience take place?
- Where did it take place?
- Who else was there? Who wasn’t there?
- What did I do? What did others do? What actions did I / we take?
- What did I / we say or otherwise communicate?
- Who didn’t speak or act?
- Did I / others laugh, cry, make a face, etc.?
- What did I / we hear? See? Smell? Taste? Touch?
- Why did the situation occur?
- What did I learn?
- How did I learn it?
- Why does it matter?
- What will I do in light of it?

ACADEMICALLY-RELATED PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION

Source: Excerpted from Ash, Clayton, & Moses. Teaching and Learning through Critical Reflection. Center for Excellence in Curricular Engagement, NC State University 23

Below are reflection prompts that aim to directly connect co-curricular experiences with academic learning:

- What specific elements of academic material relate to this experience?
- How was I able to apply a skill, perspective, or concept related to the academic
material?
- What similarities and differences are there between the perspective on the situation offered by the academic material and the situation as it in fact unfolded?
- Does this experience challenge or reinforce my prior understanding of the academic material?
- Based on analysis of the experience in light of the academic material, is the material (or my prior understanding of it) adequate? What reasons might there be for any differences or inadequacies?
- What questions should I ask to put myself in a better position to judge the adequacy of the material?

**PROMPTS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH-ORIENTED REFLECTIONS**

The following prompts are most suitable for co-curricular activities that involved personally impactful experiences. As always, use discretion when selecting prompts to ensure correlation with the goals and nature of the experience being reflected upon.

- What assumptions or expectations did I bring to the situation? How did they affect what I did or didn't think, feel, decide, or do? To what extent did they prove true? If they did not prove true, why was there a discrepancy?
- How did this experience make me feel (positively and/or negatively)? How did I handle my emotional reactions (e.g., what did I do as a result of my feelings)? Should I have felt differently? Why or why not?
- How did I interpret the thoughts, feelings, decisions, and/or behaviors of others [e.g., How do I think others felt? What assumptions and expectations do I think others brought to the situation (including their assumptions about me)? What evidence do I have that my interpretations were or were not accurate?]
- In what ways did I experience difficulties (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks,) and what personal characteristics contributed to the difficulties (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)? In what ways did I succeed or do well in this situation (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks, handling difficulties) and what personal characteristics helped me to be successful (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)?
- How did this situation challenge or reinforce my values, beliefs, convictions, (e.g., my sense of right and wrong, my priorities, my judgments)? My sense of personal identity (e.g., how I think of myself in terms of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status,
The traditional notion of community is based on similarities – of location, identity, values, faith, interests, conditions, and genes. The values of Western society, additionally, place a high importance on diversity and multiculturalism – at least in rhetoric, if not in practice. But there is an inherent contradiction between community and diversity.

“Educational, social, and political theory have generally assumed that diversity, despite its moral and practical benefits is necessarily in tension with solidarity and community – that individual or group differences are intrinsically a source of conflict, and need to be overcome or transcended through the recognition of creation of commonalities.”

Some advocates of multiculturalism assume that community solidarity is based on similarity, while social theorist, Joseph Maxwell, argues that notions of solidarity and community are based on contiguity – the way people interact, meet one another’s needs, and thereby come to know and care about one another.

Community, then, can be thought of as the process in which we communicate, participate, collaborate, and contribute. Community is active and interactive.

How do you define “community”? Did your co-curricular experience cause you to feel a greater belonging to your campus or larger community? Are there communities to which you could belong, but choose not to? If so, why?