The following document provides a few structures for reflection sessions. It includes the “What, So What, Now What?” model, tips for success, time-sensitive reflection models, and tips for creating critical reflections. At the end of the document, there are template examples of reflections.

WHAT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT? MODEL OF REFLECTION

The structure below is popularly used within co-curricular contexts. It is a basic way to promote discussion that begins with reviewing the details of an experience, encouraging critical thinking, problem solving, and creating an action plan.


“What?”
Students describe the details, facts and events of their experience. It is best to use guiding questions such as:

- What did you observe?
- What has been your experience so far?
- What were some of the highlights/challenges?
- How did you feel about that (situation/event)?
- What surprised you?

“So What?”
Students can discuss their feelings, ideas, and/or analysis of the experience. It can be related to the meaning or importance to:

- The Participants (Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest? What feelings or thoughts stand out the strongest for you? How is your experience different from what you expected? What impacts the way you view the experience?)
The Recipients (Did the program empower the recipient in any way? What did you learn about the community you worked with? What might impact the recipients' views or experience of the program?)

The Community (What are some of the pressing needs/issues of the Community? How does this program address those needs? How, specifically has the community benefited? What is the least and the most impact on the community you can imagine for the project?)

The Group (In what ways did the group work well together? How might the group have accomplished its task more effectively? In what ways did others help you so far and today?)

“Now What?”
Encourage students to ask themselves: how they will change the way they think or act in the future as a result of this experience? Participants consider broader implications of their experience and apply learning. Some questions include:

- What seems to be the root causes of the issues addressed?
- What contributes to the success or hinders the success of projects like this?
- Who else do you need to see or talk with?
- What can we do to symbolize how we changed or what we have learned?
- How can you apply this learning?

FACILITATING A REFLECTION ACTIVITY: TIPS FOR SUCCESS


An effective reflection activity should:

- Have an outcome in mind (i.e. leadership, team building, improved critical thinking, acknowledgment);
- Be appropriate for the team/group/individual (age, culture, etc.);
- Happen before, during, and as soon after the experience as possible;
- Be directly linked to the project or experience;
- Dispel stereotypes, address negative experiences, increase appreciation for community needs;
- Be varied for different learning styles, ages, etc.;
- Actively involve the students;
- Be facilitated well for maximum participation, creativity, and learning;
- Use silence: Some people need some silence to reflect internally, more than others do. Ask the question, then provide ample writing time; and
- Ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to become involved.
The following is a collection of reflection activities, helpfully separated by the amount of time that is available for reflection. The intention is for reflection to be utilized in any small or large time frame, whether it be fifteen seconds or two hours.

15 – 60 SECOND ACTIVITIES:

- Posed question: Reflection does not require a product or a discussion. Gather the group, obtain silence, and ask a question (for ideas look above). Give a few more seconds of still silence.
- Snapshot: Create a silent snapshot of the project. One person starts with a pose or action related to the project, everybody else joins the “snapshot.”

1 TO 5 MINUTE ACTIVITIES:

- Question discussion: Randomly, or in a circle, each person responds to a posed question (such as “project highlight”)
- One to three words: Each person shares one to three words to describe the activity or how you feel about the activity or anything else regarding the project.
- Journaling: Each person responds to a question in writing
- Poetry/Writing Slam: Take turns; each day somebody else will write a short poem or sentence about the project, then share it with the group.

5 TO 30 MINUTE ACTIVITIES:

- What? So What? Now What?: To get to each step in the model, allow five to 30 minutes for group processing.
- Written Reflection: Pose three or four questions, using “what, so what, now what” model, and allow time for writing. (i.e. What you did, why/how you did it, how you could do it better)
- The Image: Prior to the project, each person writes or draws about the people or objects they will be working with (such as a tree for a tree-planting project or the community being served), the subject matter, or their feelings about the project. Revisit (or re-write/draw) it after the activity and discuss.
- Senses: Before activity, project, event or even before the first day, ask participants to share what they expect to hear, smell, see, touch and taste. The follow up after the day with what the participant actually senses.
• Pictionary: Have a Pictionary game about the experience and how you felt. Talk about it as a group.
• Parables/Stories: Read a piece of pertinent literature and have participants respond and draw correlations to their experience.
• Letter to self: Prior to a project, have participants write a letter to themselves about their personal and career goals regarding the project, or feelings about the project or community. Place it in a sealed envelope, mail it to yourself or hand out again to the team after six months and reflect.
• Masks: Make a two-sided mask from a paper plate. Draw an image of how others might see you on one side, and how you see yourself on the other. Discuss the contrast. Or, could be work self/free time self, actual work/dream work.
• Gingerbread Models: Draw a large gingerbread person at the beginning of the day, with drawings/writings of what makes a good (mentor, urban forester, team member, etc.). At the end of the day, share what you did well, how you thought you could improve.
• Yarn Web: Stand in a circle with a ball of yarn. Each person throws it to another and says one word that explains what they will bring to the next project, something they appreciated in the person they are throwing it to, what they learned, etc. The yarn forms a web supported by the group.
• Cartoon: Draw a cartoon that teaches something important regarding the project.
• All on the Wall: Put a large piece of paper up on one wall or all the way around the room. Participants write or draw feelings/thoughts/learnings on the paper. Facilitator leads discussion based on writings.
• Recommendations: Compose a letter to your site supervisor offering suggestions for working within the activity in the future.
• Object share: Each person brings in and passes around an object, and shares how the object is like them or the project they just did (pick a specific one) examples include: “what I contributed to the team, how I felt about this project, what I learned, etc.” The object can be something found in nature, a type of food, a book, etc. (pick one!)

30 MINUTE TO TWO-HOUR ACTIVITIES:
• Song, Poem, Collage, Sculpture, Written Story, Skit: Create something artistic as a large group, or individually then meshed together, to express what happened, how it felt, or what the experience meant to you. It can incorporate what was learned, accomplished, challenges overcome along the way.
• Interview each other: Break the group into pairs or triplets and have them interview each other about their experience, take notes, and summarize a couple of things to the group.
• Teach: Teach others what you learned through this experience. Put together instructions or references for learning more about it.
• Imitations: Each team member picks the name of another team member out of a hat, and
imitates that person relating two or three positive traits/contributions to the team, and one quirky habit (something light – judgment is essential)

- **Inventory:** Develop an inventory for the community being served or your own community, regarding the problem you are addressing or work you are doing. What are the resources, who are the local leaders, what roles to certain organizations play, what relationships exist, what other work has been done, what are the various attitudes about the project, what are the challenges, where are they, etc.

- **Media:** Build a skill as well as reflect by writing press releases, taking pictures, contacting media, and obtaining some media coverage of the project.

**APPRECIATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

- **Yarn Ball:** (see above for more info) Each person states what he or she appreciate about the person they are throwing the ball to.

- **Appreciation Cards:** Each person writes their name on a card, or slip of paper. Then, the cards are passed around the circle, and each person on the team writes (and draws, if desired) something they appreciate about that person. When they come back to the person of origin, have each person take time to read the cards and make comments.

- **Imitate-Exaggerate:** Each person in the team picks from a hat the name of one other person on the team, and imitates their positive qualities with exaggeration, until the other team members guess who that is. This can be done with the entire group at once, around some task or decision, than discussed afterwards.

**LONGER-TERM PROJECT OR TEAM EXPERIENCE ACTIVITIES:**

- **Scrapbook or Memory Box:** Create a scrapbook of your memories with the team or project, including pictures, quotes said, skills learned, challenges overcome, etc.

- **Letter to Yourself:** At the beginning of the year, write a letter to another person or yourself on something like what your expectations or goals are for the year or why you choose to do co-curricular activities. Collect, save and redistribute at the end of the year. Share and discuss.

- **Newsletter:** Pool your reflections, stories and pictures together to make a newsletter. This can be sent out to students, U of T staff or faculty, and/or community members involved in the project.

- **Journal:** A little writing, every day, goes a long, long way.
1. “Everything is reflection-worthy”: Few if any details are too small or insignificant to have meaning, and all experiences—whether designed for learning or serendipitous—as well as readings, observations, events, etc. present opportunities for a wide range of learning.

2. Critical reflection is the part of experiential learning that generates, deepens, and documents learning. When used in this capacity, it needs to be understood not as “touchy-feely,” non-grade-able, private, stream-of-consciousness but rather as a reasoning process that is analytical, integrative, assessable, subject to public critique, and structured/guided.

3. Critical reflection can generate learning outcomes that include knowledge, skills, attitudes/values, and behaviors. If it is to generate assessable learning, critical reflection should be guided in accordance with the desired learning outcomes.

4. Reflection can be guided by a facilitator orally, by a set of written prompts, or by other methods. This guidance should enable the learner to generate learning and then assist them in articulating it coherently and cohesively, in part so as to inform future learning and action.

5. Reflection activities can be written or oral or both, and they can be individual or collaborative or both; perhaps the strongest reflection combines all four possibilities. Reflection can involve physical movement, drawing, audio-visual elements … the possibilities are limited only by the facilitator’s creativity.

6. Critical reflection can be designed iteratively and therefore build on itself cumulatively. Relatedly, it is helpful to use a pre-mid-post structure that focuses the learner’s attention on changes in his/her assumptions and reasoning processes and on progress toward fulfilling objectives.

7. An overall reflection strategy may integrate multiple reflection mechanisms. A reflection strategy answers the questions:

   a. “When do we reflect?” (at what points during the experience or course or project)
   b. “Why do we reflect?” (toward what learning objectives)
   c. “Where do we reflect?” (in what settings, geographic or virtual)
   d. “Who reflects?” (learners alone or together, with facilitators, with other participants)

8. It is useful to begin designing a reflection strategy or mechanism by considering such questions as:

   a. Who are the learners (what experience, skills, etc. do they bring and not bring)?
   b. Who is the facilitator, if there is one (what experience, skills, etc. does he/she bring and not bring)?
c. What are the objectives?
d. What are the constraints?

9. Reflection requires a “safe yet critical” space: the risks associated with meaning making need to be acknowledged and minimized while adhering to high standards of reasoning. While reflection is not about generating one right answer, not all reasoning is equally valid. Reflection can be used to support learners in making reasoned judgments that are well-supported with evidence and that result from consideration of multiple perspectives—not merely expressing opinions.

10. Learning through critical reflection is often an unfamiliar (counter-normative) process, which requires intentional capacity building: many learners need to learn how to learn through critical reflection. Facilitators modeling reflection can be an important part of such capacity building and can enhance his/her own learning as well.
**WHAT?**

Describe what happened.

What did you see, hear, and smell?

Did you feel good about the service you engaged in today? Any frustrations?

Were there any stereotypes you held about this social issue or the people served?

What are some of the underlying social issues that influence this problem?

**SO WHAT?**

Did you make a difference? Why or why not?

Who benefited from your service?

What would happen if nobody did this service?

How does the service you did today relate to wider issues we hear about in the news?

**NOW WHAT?**

What more needs to be done?

What will you take away from this experience?

Did this change you or your ideas in any way?

Is there anything you would do differently in the future?