# ACE Quick Guide to Advanced Reflective Analysis

## The Purpose of Reflective Writing:

The practice of reflection enables us to gain clarity and **better understand our experiences**, facilitating the process of learning and self-improvement.

Through reflection, we also develop a questioning, **critical approach** to professional and academic practice – **identifying areas of strength and weakness**. This learning can be employed to generate original insights and **inform future decision-making**.

When reflecting academically, we engage with theories, models and concepts which encourage us to **interrogate our assumptions, behaviours, and motives** in the workplace and beyond. As we explore alternative perspectives, we **develop self-awareness** and freedom of thought.

## When Writing Reflectively...

✓ Ensure that examples of professional practice analysed are **specific and personal to your own experience**.

✓ Consider **counterarguments** and alternative methods / explanations and **justify your chosen approach**.

✓ Explore whether your **experiences are consistent with theories and models**. Does your experience challenge or negate these concepts?

✓ **Analyse the discrepancy between theory and practice** if your experience differs. Why does your experience contradict established theory? What does this mean in practical terms?

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## Improving Criticality in Reflective Writing

You can improve the criticality of your reflective writing by **considering the scope for counterarguments**. Try to do this with the example 'So What?' section of Driscoll's model included below. After, compare your counterarguments with the examples provided.

**Example of a Poor 'So What?' Paragraph:**
'As an apprentice working at the cutting edge of the industry, there is a limited amount I can learn from university modules. Soady (2024) demonstrates that seemingly current concepts in AI and Big Data can become obsolete within a few years and, as it takes roughly 6-12 months to publish a journal article (Seath, 2023) it is unlikely that my programme's reading list will reflect the newest ideas in the field. My company aims to 'lead the digital transformation in all its forms' (Organisation x, 2024) and so has already implemented many of the technological processes explored in the module, with the remainder being unsuitable for our workplace, and therefore irrelevant for my future practice.'

## Example Counterarguments

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| **1** | The assertion that 'concepts in AI and Big Data **can** become obsolete within **a few years**' is not a guarantee, and the '**6-12 months** to publish a journal article' should ensure the research's timeliness regardless. |
| **2** | The suggestion that 'it is unlikely that my programme's reading list will reflect the newest ideas in the field' **appears improbable** given the likely repercussions of an outdated course on learner enrolment / retention etc. |
| **3** | The claim that processes are 'unsuitable for our workplace' is **not evidenced with reference to professional practice** and deeming such processes 'irrelevant for my future practice' ignores the possibility of the learner's **career developing at a different company**. |

## Rewriting the 'So What' Section

Having identified potential counterarguments, the 'So What?' section can be rewritten to **evidence a growth mindset** where the learner **utilises theory** to **continue** their **professional development**. For example:

⊗ 'Soady (2024) demonstrates that seemingly current concepts in AI and Big Data can become obsolete within a few years… [so] it is unlikely that my programme's reading list will reflect the newest ideas in the field'

▽

✓ 'With aspects of AI and Big Data both evolving and growing obsolete so rapidly (Soady, 2024), apprentices must remain familiar with the newest research in the field.'

## Improved 'So What?' Paragraph

With aspects of AI and Big Data both evolving and growing obsolete so rapidly (Soady, 2024), apprentices must remain familiar with the newest research in the field. Most degree apprentices have reported finding it difficult to acquaint themselves with novel conceptual approaches during working hours (Perry, 2023) and so it is imperative to utilise self-study time to engage with the literature, especially as this has been shown to enhance the transferable skills of abstract reasoning and problem solving (Collins, 2023). While Organisation x has adopted many of the technological processes explored in the module (Wrigley, 2024), there is no guarantee that the company will retain market dominance in future, and so employees have the responsibility to upskill and be open to new approaches to ensure the company continues to 'lead the digital transformation in all its forms' (Organisation x, 2024).

## Engaging Critically with Theory

**Use theory to:**

- Suggest **reasons** and **explanations** for actions / outcomes.
- Identify possible **alternative approaches** to the situation.

**But also to:**

- Consider more than one theoretical approach / explanation.
- **Evaluate** the **merits** and **weaknesses** of each in your context.
- Identify which of these theories, singly or in combination, offers the best prospect for **better outcomes** in future.

# Reference List

University of Birmingham (2014) *A Short Guide to Reflective Writing*. Available at: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/asc/documents/public/short-guide-reflective-writing.pdf (Accessed: 03 January 2025).

University of Southampton (2010) *Writing at Master's Level*. Available at: https://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/6CF753BB278C48A2813BCB6E783A4D94/M_level%20presentation2011%20handout.ppt (Accessed: 03 January 2025).

# Additional Resources

The ACE Quick Guide to Evaluating Sources and Reading Critically offers additional guidance on assessing the strengths and limitations of scholarly resources in relation to your own professional practice.

The ACE Quick Guide to Relating Theory to Practice contains additional tips on bolstering the critical and evaluative component of your work by engaging in comparative analysis.

The ACE Quick Guide to Use of Sources examines how to synthesise source material into an academic argument and contains a phrase bank for engaging with scholarly ideas.

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