



# Guidelines for designing your reflective exercise

The framework and prompts in this document will help you translate some general ideas about reflection into a plan for a specific reflective exercise appropriate to your STEP activity. You might wish to first review all the key design aspects and related questions below, and then begin with that set of questions/prompts you feel is most useful in your current stage of planning.

## 1. Frame the exercise and identify learning goals

*What are the objectives and/or desired outcomes ?*

To support student engagement, you might wish to communicate how the exercise contributes to immediate and longer-term learning goals and potentially the goals of the broader STEP framework. This might happen before students begin their reflection, or as part of their de-briefing.

To motivate students further, you might also discuss the role of reflection as a learning tool with wide relevance to undergraduate learning generally.

*Who are the students who will be participating?*

Consider students' undergraduate stage and disciplinary background and how much familiarity they may have with reflective practice. Also think about whether your exercise is accessible to students with diverse linguistic and learning backgrounds and accessibility needs. Such considerations may shape your activities and activity instructions as well as the support you provide in helping students complete the exercise.

*Create a safe, inclusive space for the activity.*

Consider whether the material you are eliciting may be sensitive, and whether you need to establish measures to support confidentiality. Ensure that the instructions are clearly communicated, particularly for those students unfamiliar with reflective learning and discussion of personal experience in an academic context.

## 2. Design the reflective activity: key considerations

*What event/experience are students reflecting on?*

For example, students might reflect on:

- the STEP activity itself
  - e.g. a discussion with alumni or an orientation event
- academic course material, or events
  - e.g. guest lectures or quizzes
- other experiences
  - e.g. prior learning, workplace-based experience, or co-curricular experiences
- personal values, interests, attributes and skills

*What connections should the activity will evoke?*

STEP activities provide opportunities for students to integrate their academic learning, their personal and/or professional experiences, and their values and goals. It may be useful to provide examples by illustrating an academic concept with reference to personal experience or identifying a career option that corresponds to academic interests and personal attributes.

*What is the time-frame of the reflection activity or process?*

Your reflective exercise might be a stand-alone activity that prompts students' thinking at a particular point, or, alternatively, a series of reflective exercises, sequenced throughout your STEP event. The latter allows students to track their evolving insights and plan proactively as well as gain competence in reflective practice. It typically includes pre-reflection, mid-session reflection and post-reflection.

*What kinds of activities/exercises might work best to prompt learning, creative and proactive thinking in relation to the object of reflection?*

You might use writing exercises, role-playing and scenarios, arts-based activities, mind-mapping, facilitated discussion, analysis of a text or experience, or other individual or collaborative activities. For examples on the implementation of a range such activities, see

- [Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Leaders and Educators - Activities](#)
- [Reflection Activities](#)
- [Service Reflection Toolkit](#)

## *How do I devise effective reflective activities and prompts?*

Revisit the learning outcomes or goals you've identified for the reflective exercise and for your overall STEP initiative, and make sure the activities and prompts you've designed or selected correspond to those goals.

Formulate clear and engaging questions/prompts to elicit students' reflective learning. Try and pose questions in ways that support and inspire unanticipated and personally meaningful lines of thought and association instead of directing student responses.

This is a good moment to run your activities and prompts by colleagues who can help you clarify ambiguity or potential confusion.

### 3. Provide an opportunity for de-briefing and meaning-making

In addition to prompting students to engage more immediately with the experience of the reflective activity itself, it is important to draw out the broader implications of students' experiences and plan.

The question "Why?" should feature in this moment of debriefing, encouraging students both to examine their own thinking and views, and to support their knowledge claims. Think of questions that encourage critical thinking and the examination of values, and build a capacity for lifelong learning.

This de-briefing can be done individually or, more commonly, through a facilitated discussion that allows for peer learning.

#### *Some examples of questions/prompts for de-briefing activities:*

- What was the one most important insight you had today? Why was it important?
- How does your experience in this activity relate to your classroom learning? Provide examples, and try and explain the connection.
- Have your views or assumptions (on this issue) changed in any way? Why do you think you hold those views? What values do they represent?
- Imagine some different ways of looking at this issue. How might others see this issue differently? How do you think Person X in Position Y would see this issue? Why?

*Some questions to elicit metacognition and awareness of learning processes:*

- How did you feel about this exercise? Why do you think you had that response?
- Did this activity give you any insight into how you learn?
- Can you see a connection between your emotions and your learning?
- How do you prefer to learn new things? What new forms of learning would you like to explore?
- How would you characterise the shifts in your perceptions, if any? And what are the implications for how you study, work, get involved?
- Did the activity reveal to you academic or professional skills you want to develop?

#### 4. Help students use their learning to set goals and make plans.

Identifying intentions and setting goals that emerge from connections between academic and other domains of experience is key to the STEP process. Prompts should specifically invite students to identify actions which will help them set future goals.

Examples of statements for students that prompt projection and action:

- What three concrete steps will allow you to explore this opportunity?
- What further questions remain? What further information do you need and how will you find it?
- Where do you plan to be in six months' time?
- Plan to return to this artifact or statement (writing, drawing, reflective account, set of goals) in one to three months and review your perceptions and conclusions.

*Decide whether you are going to follow up with students, and what form that will take.*

E.g. Students can respond to follow-up questions, submit a self-report, or be involved in a classroom discussion that reflects on their learning and progress.

*Think about how students' responses to reflection questions can be used as feedback to enhance future iterations of your STEP activity.*

E.g. if students misunderstand the questions or answer too vaguely, you can refine the prompts to better match the learning goals of the activity.