

Making Service Meaningful: A Guide to Reflection

What is Reflection?

Critical reflection is the process in which volunteers make sense of the service they performed and how it fits into the bigger picture. Reflection may take the form of a structured activity, a conversation, or simply posing questions. Reflection isn't always about finding answers to problems; it focuses on raising questions about personal, societal, or global issues.

Put it into action: Brainstorm what reflection is. Look up various dictionary definitions of the word and ask the group or yourself if they fit or if there is a better definition.

What's the point of reflection?

-
- Gives meaning to the experience
- Can help volunteers and service learners understand the limitations and opportunities of the service site or community organization
- Relieves tension and provides re-energizing and renewal forces
- Creates a sense of accomplishment
- Integrates service into the rest of one's life: spirit of service and civic-mindedness
- Improved service – as volunteers examine their behavior, they discover ways to improve the quality and quantity of their service.
- Creates a sense of closure after a service experience.
- Puts the service in the context of larger societal or global issues
- Creates a sense that one can make a difference
- Creates connections to other experiences & knowledge

Put it into action: Hang signs with the various benefits of reflection, have group members stand by the one they feel accurately represents reflection's main benefit. Discuss their opinions. Have at least one blank sign for students to fill in their own answer.

What types of reflection can I do?

1. Pre-service reflection

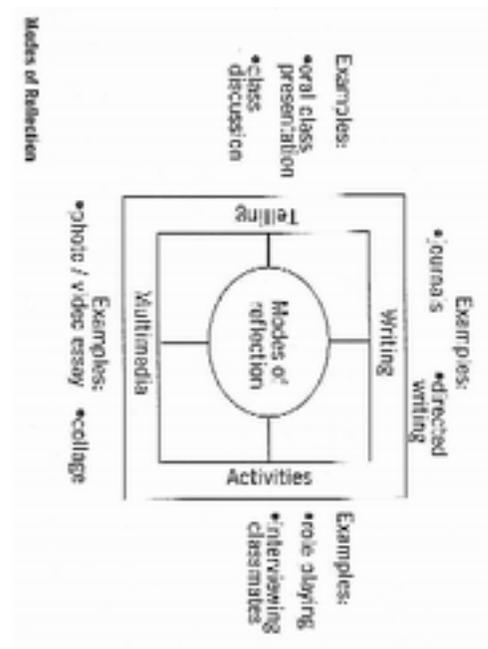
Activities before you begin a volunteer or service-learning project

- Training about what activities you will perform
- Orientation to the community organization and its mission
- Education to introduce issues/problems you might face.

2. Processing service reflection

Activities facilitated during service.

- Journaling
- What? So What? Now What?



From Learning Through Serving (Cress et al 2005)

- Creative Reflection

Put it into action: Which of these pre/during/post sections is most important to you? Consider what you or your group might be most interested in and design reflection activities around these topics and activities.

- Further education

3. Post-service reflection

- Presentations to the campus to educate/raise awareness
- Academic essays written for a class
- Host a Fundraising, Awareness or Advocacy Event

What different levels of reflection are there?

The following chart how volunteers and service learners progress from simple reflection based on personal opinion to complex reflection incorporating multiple perspectives, factual information, and societal influences.

Put it in action: Where do you fall on this continuum? Where do members of your group fall? How can your reflection discussions or activities help students to move to a more complex understanding?

Room to Grow – Level 1

- Gives examples of observed behaviors or characteristics of the client or setting, but provides no insight into reasons behind the observation; observations tend to be one-dimensional and conventional or unassimilated repetitions of what has been heard
- Tends to focus on just one aspect of the situation
- Uses unsupported personal belief as frequently as hard evidence
- May acknowledge differences of perspective but does not discriminate effectively among them

Quality Reflection – Level 2

- Observations are thorough but they tend not to be placed in a broader context.
- Provides a cogent critique from one perspective, but fails to see the broader system in which the aspect is embedded and other factors that may make change difficult
- Uses unsupported personal beliefs and evidence but is beginning to be able to differentiate between them
- Perceives legitimate differences of viewpoint
- Demonstrates a beginning ability to interpret evidence

Mastery in Reflection – Level 3

- Views things from multiple perspectives; able to observe multiple aspects of the situation and place them in context
- Perceives conflicting goals within and among the individuals involved in a situation and recognizes that the differences can be evaluated
- Recognizes that actions must be situationally dependent and understands many of the factors that affect their choice

- Makes appropriate judgments based on reasoning and evidence
- Has a reasonable assessment of the importance of the decisions facing clients and of his or her responsibility as a part of the clients' lives

Put it into action: Where are you in this cycle? Where is your group?

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

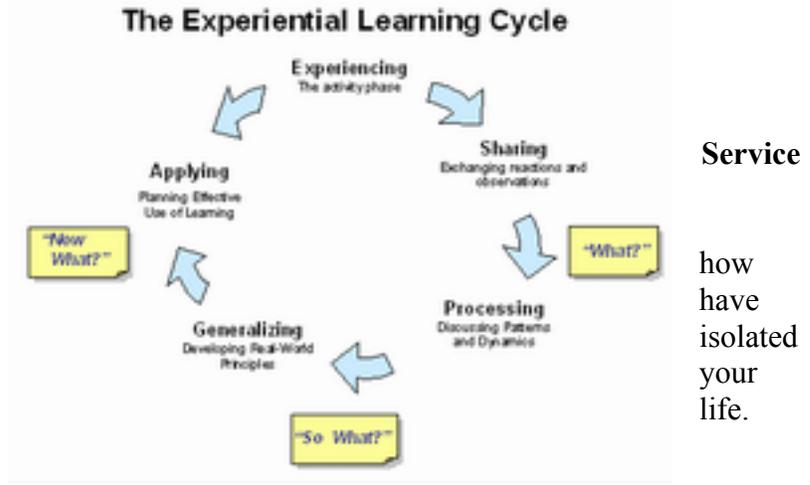
Adapted from: Looking In, Reaching Out, (Jacoby 2010)

Thinking Critically about

Critical thinking: processing experiences to understand why & things occur, what evidence you for these conclusions; connecting experiences to larger themes in personal, academic, or professional

Use the following steps to think critically about a part of your

experience. You might consider a big picture social problem you witnessed (homelessness, mental health) or a particular organization you worked with or an opinion you heard about a specific program.



Service

how have isolated your life.

service

1. *Categorizing* – place the information you have learned about a social problem, organization, or program into categories. Consider what you have read, heard, or observed. What items are similar or dissimilar? Are there broad categories present – obstacles, justifications, or underlying reasons?
2. *Contextual Analysis* – Consider a fact or opinion you heard or observed during your service experience about a social problem, organization, or program. What justification or evidence was there for the fact or opinion? Was it logical? What information wasn't considered? Is the fact based on truth? Do you agree or disagree with the opinion?
3. *Future Trends* – What do you think will happen in the future with the organization, social problem, or program? Based on what you have learned, make educated guesses about future problems or solutions.
4. *Synthesis* – Put all your information together to form an opinion about the social problem, organization, or specific program you have been thinking critically about. This opinion should be supported the evidence, both academic and personal, and grounded in logical reasoning.

Adapted from How to Guide for Reflection, compiled by Lorraine Parrillo.

Put it into action: Work through these steps individually; check your reasoning with a friend or mentor. Guide your group through these steps through these steps to form an opinion about a social problem you are witnessing.

How can I learn from my service?

Service experiences, whether they are one day, one week, or lifelong, offer volunteers the opportunity to learn – about community issues and organizations as well as people.

Consider how you have learned from your service.

- *Location*: Where did you volunteer? What did you learn about each organization?
- *Action*: What did you do? What did you learn about how to perform different tasks? What did you learn about working with others?
- *Skills*: What skills did you gain from your service?
- *Knowledge*: What facts did you learn about the community issue or organization? What did you learn about the people you worked with?

Connect what you learned – facts, opinions, and skills – to what you have learned from courses in college. What theories or concepts from your classes did you see in your service? What issue that you had read about did you witness during your service? How has interacting with the community partners and clients changed how you view the community issue or organization?

Adapted from Learning Through Serving (Cress et al 2005)

Tips for Facilitating Reflection:

For those who coordinate volunteer groups or service-learners

A facilitator is one who guides the group through the discussion allowing them to chart their own course. (Break Away)

“Facilitation is a way of providing leadership without taking control. The facilitator bridges ideas and perspectives in order to help a group work together effectively and assume responsibility for their own actions and decisions.” (Birdsall, 2010).

Put it into action: The leader doesn’t always have to facilitate. Have a group member lead the discussion.

What skills do I need to be a good facilitator?

- Keep the conversation or activity focused and on task
- Create safe space where participants feel comfortable reflecting on their experiences by establishing guidelines for participation, generated by the group
- Encourage participants to discuss challenging or controversial events respectfully
- Model polite conversation: don’t interrupt, raise your voice, use offensive language
- Be an active facilitator, stay present in the moment
- Encourage students to differentiate between fact, belief, and opinion

How do I run a good reflection?

- Utilize a reflection strategy appropriate for the group, context, and time available
- Encourage participation. If needed, use small groups to stimulate discussion

- Remain content neutral: don't force your own opinions on the group. Always distinguish fact from personal opinion. For example, "In my personal opinion..."
- Use silence as a tool: challenge participants to answer the question without answering it yourself or changing the subject
- Paraphrase what someone said or summarize to keep the group engaged
- Ask good questions such as open-ended question or big picture questions
- At the end, have students rate the reflection quickly with a thumbs up, thumbs sideways, thumbs down rating
- Start with individual reflection with written responses, and then move to group discussion.
- If people are dominating the conversation, step in and redirect answers while still validating the person.

Put it into action: Let the group brainstorm the discussion guidelines. Students are more likely to follow the guidelines if they generated them.

How can I get the group beyond one-word answers?

Ask follow up questions to the speaker:

- Can you talk more about that?
- Why do you think that happens?
- What evidence do you have?
- What does this remind you of?
- Do you see a connection between these?
- How else could you approach that?
- What do you want to happen?

Be sure to validate the speaker's opinions. In reflection, everyone's answers are important.

- Your reflections are important.
- Thank you for sharing.
- That's an interesting perspective.
- Everyone experiences this differently, thank you for sharing your experience.

Five questions to ask yourself before reflection

1. What are you trying to accomplish? Have an outcome in mind: team building, problem solving, discussion, myth busting, acknowledgment
2. What ages are in my group? What cultural or other experiences do they bring?
3. How much time do I have for this reflection?
4. Is this pre-service, in-service, or post-service reflection?
5. Is this interactive? Is it interesting? How will the group enjoy or learn from it?

Put it into action: Design your own energetic, active reflection activity. Take an activity you've done before, such as tag or soccer, and add a reflection component where you discuss teamwork and winning and fair play. Anything can be reflection!

What's so great about Journaling?

Journaling is a great way to allow for individual reflection. Many people process best alone, rather than in groups. As a service-learner, it can be a good way to start thinking about what you have learned from your service and process your experience.

Put it into action: Purchase small notebooks for yourself and/or your group and spend time decorating or personalizing the notebooks, then use them for journaling.

How do I get started Journaling?

The best way to get started is through a prompt. Try one of the prompts below or a quote you like. Remember that this is just a way to get pencil on the paper; students are free to use or ignore the prompt. The prompt can also be used later in a group discussion.

- What happened today?
- Describe the people you met or worked with today.
- What was the flow of feelings during the day – the highs, the lows, the quiet times?
- What does a typical day of service at your organization look like?
- What is the best thing that happened to you this week?
- What's the most difficult part of service for you?
- What connections were made through your experience to a course you have taken? (Think about specific concepts, readings, themes)
- What connections did you make to other experiences you've had?
- If you were in charge, what would you change about the organization? Your volunteer experience?
- Tell a story about an interesting person you met today.
- If a time warp placed you back at the first day of this program, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?
- What happened that made you feel you would or would not like to do this as a career?
- What is one thing you did today that made you proud?
- What questions did your experience raise for you?
- How do you think you will continue to serve after this experience ends?

What are some other writing activities we can do?

Traveling Journal

Designate a notebook as the “group journal.” Start the discussion off with a question or a thought. Pass the notebook to another student who answers the question or thought and poses a new question or thought. The journal passes through the entire group. At the end, make the journal available for students to read.

Everyday Ethics

Find a newspaper or magazine article about a current event that involves an ethical dilemma related to a social problem or issue. Ask students to write about the problem and how they would approach finding a solution. Share solutions among students.

Letter to the Editor

Help students formulate an argument for or against an issue currently in the public debate. Write a letter to the editor explaining your position.

What? So What? Now What?

Use this model but have students individually reflect on the answers.

Where can I go for more information about...

How to lead reflection

Facilitating reflection: a manual for leaders and educators
http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/index.html

Reflection Activities & Games

Games: www.wilderdom.com/games/gamesspecific.html
Using literature passages for reflection: <http://www.civicreflection.org/>

Reflection in general

<http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/index.html>
http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_reflection
<http://www.servicelearning.org/topic/reflection>

Results of large-scale study of service learning & reflection: http://gseis.ucla.edu/heri/service_learning.html

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Office of Community Engagement and Service

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Jacoby, Barbara and Pamela Mutascio. *Looking In, Reaching Out: a reflective guide for community service-learning professionals* (Campus Compact, 2010)

Service Reflection Toolkit. Northwest Service Academy. Portland, OR. www.northwestserviceacademy.org