

Rolfe et al.'s (2001) reflective model

Rolfe et al.'s (2001) reflective model is based upon three simple questions: What? So what? Now what? Below is a list of questions that you may choose to answer in response to the three elements.

What?

- ... is the problem/difficulty/ reason for being stuck/reason for feeling bad/reason we don't get on?
- ... was my role in the situation?
- ... was I trying to achieve?
- ... actions did I take?
- ... was the response of others?
- ... were the consequences for the student? Myself? Others?
- ... feelings did it evoke in the student? Myself? Others?
- ... was good/bad about the experience?

So what?

- ... does this tell me/teach me/imply/mean about me/my class/others/our relationship/my patient's care/the model of care I am using/my attitudes/my patient's attitudes?
- ... was going through my mind as I acted?
- ... did I base my actions on?
- ... other knowledge can I bring to the situation?
- ... could/should I have done to make it better?
- ... is my new understanding of the situation?
- ... broader issues arise from the situation?

Now what?

- ... do I need to do in order to make things better/stop being stuck/improve my teaching/resolve the situation/feel better/get on better/etc., etc.?
- ... broader issues need to be considered if this action is to be successful?
- ... might be the consequences of this action?

Adapted from: Rolfe, G., Freshwater, D., Jasper, M. (2001) *Critical reflection in nursing and the helping professions: a user's guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reflective writing extract using Rolfe et al.'s (2001) model

The short text below shows you how you can use Rolfe et al.'s (2001) reflective model to write reflectively. The author begins by introducing the problem that they are reflecting on before making their observations about the issue and finally concluding by telling the reader what they would change next time.

What?

Specific tasks were shared out amongst members of my team. Initially, however, the tasks were not seen as equally difficult by all team members.

So what?

Cooperation between group members was at risk because of this perception of unfairness. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called ‘positive interdependence’, meaning cooperation (Johnson and Johnson, 1993, cited by Maughan and Webb, 2001), and many studies have demonstrated that “cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement” (Maughan and Webb, 2001).

Now what?

Ultimately, our group achieved a successful outcome, but to improve the process, we perhaps needed a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks were being shared out. In future group work, on the course and at work, I would probably suggest this.

Important things to remember with reflective writing

1. Include references

It’s important to remember to include references in your reflective writing. If you choose to use Rolfe et al.’s (2001) model, the easiest place for your references to sit is within the “so what” section. Think about using references to justify why you acted in a particular way – perhaps you read about a particular method that worked in a similar scenario, so you decided that you would also use the same method. You could also easily add in the literature you have read to your “now what” section – perhaps you have read about strategies that you could use to overcome the problems you identified in your reflection and you could tell your reader that you would use them in the future.

2. Keep your writing formal

Many students fall into the trap of writing a “chatty” account of what happened. This is because you are writing a personal account and it’s very easy to write about it informally. Make sure you avoid this and keep your writing academic and formal.