

What is reflection?

When getting involved with a service-learning course, it is helpful to keep in mind one of the most important aspects of the learning process: **analytic reflection**. This reflection process can take many forms, including integrative papers, class presentations, journals, reflective essays, and class discussions. The reflective process has certain guidelines that need to be followed in order to make the reflections as useful as possible. Although the service-learning course is a valuable experience in itself, reflecting upon and analyzing your experiences can take your understanding to the next level, and can often provide *unexpected* realizations. Some students, for example, have discovered that the preconceptions they held about certain issues at their site changed drastically between the beginning of their internship and the end. A student from a previous service-learning course recognized a change in his beliefs in the thirteenth week of class, and then described his observation in a journal entry: *"Before taking this class I had previous ideas on the reasons behind homelessness, poverty, and illiteracy, which I will not mention here. Many of these ideas came from sources such as the news or television, and I have come to see that they are generally wrong."*

Another student also commented on the value of first-hand experience in her week-nine journal entry; again, the student compares what she has seen with what she has been told:

"Domestic violence...exists everywhere...and unlike the accounts given on shows like Maury and Montel, this abuse oftentimes goes unnoticed. A note I strongly want to make is that... [it is a misconception] that because a person is an alcoholic, they are abusive, and vice-versa."

Looking back on what you have accomplished at your learning site and reflecting upon these service-learning experiences can give tremendous insight into any changes that may have occurred over time. And although such changes are not always immediately obvious, they can often be seen much more clearly by analyzing past writings, and then making comparisons between specific issues.

Sample Reflection Questions:

1. What is your role at the community/volunteer site?
2. What were your initial expectations? Have these expectations changed? How? Why?
3. What about your community involvement has been an eye-opening experience?
4. How do you motivate yourself to go to your site when you don't feel like it?
5. What specific skills have you used at your community site?
6. Describe a person you've encountered in the community who made either a strong impression on you, positive (+) or negative (-).
7. How would you describe the benefits of doing community work?
8. Has your view of the population with whom you have been working changed? How?
9. How has the environment and social conditions affected the people at your site?
10. What institutional structures are in place at your site or in the community? How do they affect the people you work with?

11. How has this experience affected your worldview?
12. Have your career options been expanded by your service experience?
13. Why does the organization you are working for exist?
14. Did anything about your community involvement surprise you? If so, what?
15. What did you do that seemed to be effective or ineffective in the community?
16. How does your understanding of the community change as a result of your participation in this project?
17. How can you continue your involvement with this group or social issue?
18. How can you educate others or raise awareness about this group or social issue?
19. What are the most difficult or satisfying parts of your work? Why?
20. What have you learned from any disappointments or successes of your project?
21. During your community work experience, have you dealt with being an "outsider" at your site? How does being an "outsider" differ from being an "insider"?
22. How are your values expressed through your community work? And how you live your life?
23. What sorts of things make you feel uncomfortable when you are working in the community? Why?
24. Complete this sentence: Because of my service-learning project, I am...