

Critical Reflection Summary¹

To reflect is to look back at something and consider it. A **Critical Reflection** is different. A **Critical Reflection** is the process of analyzing, questioning and reframing a personal experience to enhance learning and inform future behavior. It is a skill that medical professionals need to promote lifelong learning, self-care, and to improve outcomes.

Will Critical Reflection help me be a better doctor?

There is a wealth of theoretical data and a growing number of studies to suggest that it will. Specifically, reflection promotes life-long learning, self-care, and professional development by helping trainees and practitioners identify gaps in their abilities and knowledge and develop critical reasoning, problem-solving and self-assessment skills. Recent studies suggest reflection may decrease diagnostic errors and improve clinical performance. A reflective professional is one who has an open mind, ponders his or her own thinking, learns more deeply, connects with his or her feelings, considers perspectives other than his/her own, strives to learn from rather than deny or ignore errors, problems and learning gaps, and reframes his/her thinking to formulate reasoned approaches to clinically uncertain and complex situations.

As the culmination of the Capstone Scholarly Project, you are required to partake in a Critical Reflection. The following pages describe the Critical Reflection process – a process which involves Identification, Subjectivity, Objectivity, Assessment, and Planning. Use the detailed Guidelines on Page 3 to help you walk through the process. Then, at the end of this Critical Reflection process, you will summarize your reflection in a **Critical Reflection Summary**. While the critical reflection process will likely take your thoughts and feelings in several different directions, please choose one of the four prompts listed in the table below as the theme of your Critical Reflection Summary. Reflection summaries must be a minimum of 2 paragraphs.

Critical Reflection Summary Prompts
1. How does your current knowledge of the scholarly work compare to what you imagined it would be like going into the experience? Did anything surprise you? Are there differences between what you thought it would be like and what it was actually like?
2. Did you learn something about the field that you didn't know before? Does this new knowledge impact your opinion of the work and motivation to further engage in research in the discipline?
3. Consider the tasks involved in completing the Capstone – what tasks did you find came easy to you/you did well, and what tasks did you struggle with? Of those tasks you did well, did you enjoy them? If there were tasks you struggled with, are these areas where you want to challenge yourself to learn more and improve?
4. What did you learn about yourself – your strengths and weaknesses – through engaging in a scholarly experience? How do you plan to integrate and use this knowledge in navigating future personal and/or endeavors? Do you think your scholarly work will impact your future work as a clinician? Why or why not?

¹ Adapted from <https://www.mededportal.org/publication/9073/>

Before you Start the Critical Reflection...

1. Know that while the guidelines may seem restrictive, research shows that without such guidelines people write anecdotes with little or no evidence of learning.
 - ✓ Novice reflectors usually: 1) just describe their experience; and/or, 2) draw conclusions with no input from other people or sources. Even when done thoughtfully, this leads to missed opportunities for learning since people cannot know what they do not know or assume the experiences and interpretations of others will be the same as ours. This sort of reflection can (rightly) feel like a waste of time.
 - ✓ The guidelines serve an essential role in creating an effective analysis
2. Remember these are guidelines, not a cookbook. It is far more important to learn from the critical reflection than to follow the format precisely and/or answer every question.
 - ✓ You can first write out the experience then analyze it using the guidelines. Note that most of the learning from the critical reflection takes place not from transcribing the experience but from dissecting and analyzing it, so allocate your time accordingly.
3. Take time to choose an aspect of the Capstone experience from which you can learn.
 - ✓ The point of critical reflection is not to document past learning but to deepen or broaden your learning, identify training gaps, and create a meaningful plan for further professional development.
4. Think about the meaningfulness of the Critical Reflection
 - ✓ Weaker reflections: tell a story without analyzing it AND/OR consist largely of the reflector's opinion of what happened AND/OR include only vague generalizations about what the reflector might do to improve, i.e. "I need to slow down and listen more to patients." In these reflections, the reflector usually knew the outcome of the reflection when s/he started writing, so little was learned from the exercise.
 - ✓ Stronger reflections consider the reflector's thoughts, emotions, values, and assumptions AND include input from others, even (especially) when that input differs from the reflector's own impressions AND provide a clear articulation of a specific learning issue and a specific plan for approaching similar future situations. In these reflections, the reflector gathers information from multiple sources and uses that information to reframe his/her experience in hope of improving knowledge, skills or attitudes.

What can I do to improve as a reflective learner?

Like any skill, some people will have more inherent aptitude for reflection than others, but all will improve with practice and constructive feedback. Here are some tips for better reflective writing:

- Pick an experience in which you had a strong reaction
- Avoid digressions, excuses and complaints, and self-congratulation
- Don't make vague generalizations; use precise examples
- Work toward a new perspective, improved knowledge, skills or attitudes
- Remember the objective isn't beautiful writing, good storytelling or self-promotion but the demonstration of purposeful thinking, critical analysis and professional development

Guidelines for the Critical Reflection Process

IDENTIFICATION

Think about your journey to completing the Capstone Scholarly Project, and consider:

- where in your learning did you or did you not have the necessary knowledge or skills?
- what went well but you are not entirely sure why?
- what was complex, surprising, uncomfortable or uncertain?
- when in the process did you feel personally or professionally challenged?

SUBJECTIVITY: Subjectivity depicts the experience so others (peers or faculty) can follow your analysis and evaluate the effectiveness of your critical reflection for your learning.

Describe the experience as fully as you can, including its content, processes, and premises:

- Consider what happened: situations, context, thoughts and feelings at the time (*Content*)
- Discuss how it happened. How did you approach the situation/s? How did you perform? How did the behaviors/choices of others impact you? What did/did not go well? (*Process*)
- Consider why things happened as they did. What assumptions did you and others make? What system factors may have contributed to any problems? (*Premise*)

OBJECTIVITY: Objectivity should not include learning or data that was part of the initial experience but additional research, feedback or opinions/interpretations you sought when you realized you could learn more from the experience. Reconsider the experience:

- Use other people's perspectives, elicit opinions, interpretations and feedback from mentors, supervisors, other professionals, patients, families, and/or peers.
- Use new data: Consult the medical literature or other sources of relevant information.

ASSESSMENT: Assessment requires analysis of the experience to integrate the subjective and objective data and current with past experience. It should result in new understanding or identification of new learning goals with relevance for you beyond the specific event described in the subjective section. Synthesize your learning and look for larger learning/ professional development issues. Specify lessons learned or questions/learning issues identified.

- What educational, personal or professional strengths/weaknesses have you identified?
- How can you relate this experience to past experiences to identify important challenges?
- What personal/professional patterns have you identified?
- How has this analysis affected how you will approach similar situations in the future?

PLANNING: Plan should consist of action items which can be accomplished and evaluated in the upcoming weeks to months and can be revisited with an advisor, mentor or peer group to track your professional development and to make sure you are reflecting in a way that informs your learning and/or clinical practice. Make a plan to address future similar challenges. The plan should be *SMART*: *Specific*, *Measurable*, *Attainable*, *Relevant* and *Timely*. Include in this plan:

- what specific next steps you will take;
- where you can get the information or help you need;
- who you will check in with and when;
- how you will know whether or not your plan is working.

If the plan is SMART, you should be able to assess the utility of your action items for furthering your learning or practice in days to weeks or months at the most.