

## Incorporating Reflection in Learning

Thank you for joining the Student Life Studies assessment podcast. Our goal is to educate people about assessment resources and topics, so they can more easily incorporate assessment into their daily lives. Feel free to contact Student Life Studies by calling 979-862-5624, emailing [sls@tamu.edu](mailto:sls@tamu.edu), or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Let's get on with today's podcast.

I am a firm believer that learning takes place everywhere. But, deep learning requires reflection to internalize that learning. In student affairs, and co-curricular learning, we have many opportunities to insert reflection into the programs, services, and activities that we provide students. That said, not everything we do in student affairs has to include deep learning or reflection. Sometimes, it's not practical, and other times, it's not the purpose of what we are doing. And that's okay.

Getting students, and ourselves, in the practice of reflection is a good cognitive practice. It helps us make connections to other ideas, experiences, or environments. It can also help us clarify our values and beliefs. And it can help us solve future problems as we get into the practice of thinking and then applying new knowledge.

Reflection will look different depending on the activity taking place. It can be written or verbal, it can be one time or on-going, it can be formal or informal. As with any assessment and pedagogical decision, you have to know your audience, the learning outcomes you desire, the logistics of the process, and how you will use the information you gather.

If you are a student organization advisor or student supervisor and talk to the same students on a regular basis, you might start by asking them what they learned last week. It could be from their classes, their job, their co-curricular involvement, or something else. Students will appreciate you taking interest in their lives on an individual basis. Plus, they get used to you asking them questions like this, so they are more prepared as time goes by, and they might even be identifying learning experiences during the week to tell you about later.

One of the easiest formulas to use in reflection is the “What? So what? Now what?” model. It can be either written or verbal. Basically, you are asking participants to describe some experience. That’s the “what.” What happened, what did they think was going to happen, etc. Then, you can dig a little deeper with the “so what.” That gets to some of the meaning making and significance of the experience. Questions could center around who was impacted and how, what changes in opinions or values might have come from this, and how this experience might relate to other experiences or environments. The “now what” focuses on the future. What is the participant going to do in the future, what more do they want to learn, and how they will share new information with others.

For longer-term experiences, students might be asked to write in a journal, which could be online or on paper. Usually, there are set prompts to get students thinking about a particular topic. Journals can be a nice longitudinal example of learning, as you can see deeper or more complex thought as time goes by. This could also be matched with photography, allowing students to take pictures then describe the meaning behind the pictures to answer the prompt.

You will find that students get better at reflection the more opportunity they have to do it. Reflection doesn’t always have to be time consuming or too deep. It can be something fun and interesting that students look forward to. It will also prepare them to be critical thinkers even after graduation.

Thanks for listening to today’s podcast. Please let us know if this was helpful or if you have additional questions. You can contact us by calling 979-862-5624, emailing [sls@tamu.edu](mailto:sls@tamu.edu), or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Check out our website at [studentlifestudies.tamu.edu](http://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu) for more resources and information. We hope to hear from you.