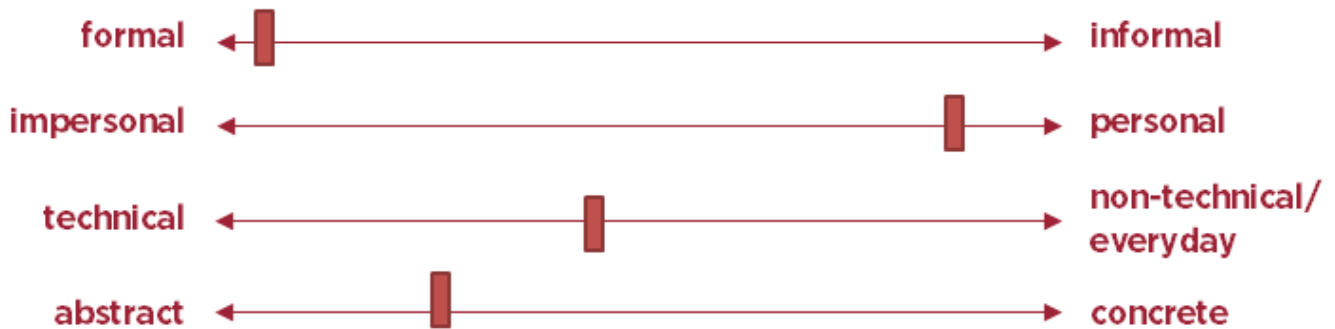




## Tone of reflective writing

The tone of reflective writing can be quite different to other forms of academic writing. Although it should still be a formal piece of academic writing, it will be more personal and may be slightly less technical and abstract than other kinds of academic writing such as Essays and Reports.



Check the instructions and marking criteria carefully, but if they do not say otherwise, the following probably apply:

**Formal:** Just because reflective writing is a personal exercise, it doesn't mean all the rules go out the window. You still need to write in complete, grammatically correct sentences with accurate spelling and punctuation. If it's for your eyes only, then do what you like, but if your reflection is going to be marked you need to make sure it's readable and abides by the marking standards.

To make your language sound as formal as possible, you should avoid using language features that are characteristic of spoken casual conversation, such as:

- colloquial or slang words (e.g. use 'children' instead of 'kids')
- contractions (e.g. use 'is not' instead of 'isn't')
- abbreviations (e.g. use the word 'maximum' instead of 'max')
- spoken-like grammatical structures such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments. If you are discussing a conversation you had, you may need to write in spoken-like language to represent what was said. But you can use quotation marks to show which parts were originally spoken and set it apart from your formal written reflection.

**Personal:** Reflection is subjective, whereas academic essays usually need to be objective. In reflective writing, you are expected to reflect on your personal experience and how you felt about things you did. So your writing should be personal, while still formal. Different text types come with different conventions.

Use first-person pronouns, i.e. I, me, we, and our. You are reflecting on yourself, your thoughts, and your understanding, so you really do need to use the first person. We know, this goes against everything you've been taught so far that says 'I' has no place in academic essays. We promise it's OK in a reflection, because you are talking about your own experiences.

Be honest and say what you think and feel. There's no point in lying to yourself or your marker. Take some time to really think through your perspective, and don't feel that you need to make things up to provide a more interesting experience for the reader. Your authentic experience is enough in itself.

**Technical:** You are reflecting on your experience in relation to a specific topic in a specific academic discipline, so you should use technical terms associated with that topic and that discipline. However, because you are also reflecting on your experience in a real-world situation, you may also refer to more everyday concepts in your reflective writing than you would in an essay.

Part of the purpose of reflective writing is to connect theory with practice, so using technical and theoretical terms shows that you're developing an understanding of the special categories and terminology used in your discipline.

Tips for learning to use the technical terms of your discipline:

- When you read your course readings, highlight terms that are not familiar to you. Do they seem to be specific to the discipline? Or are they just new words for you? You can check this by reading other sources in the same discipline, using the Library Search Box, or asking your tutor or fellow students.
- Note down key terms from your lectures and tutorials.
- Keep a glossary of the new terms you are learning.
- Take note of how scholars in your discipline use the terms, e.g. do they define the term for the reader or do they assume the reader knows what it means? Do they format it in a special way, e.g. using a capital letter(s) or an acronym? Do they contrast the term with other terms that have a similar meaning to clarify its scope?

**Abstract:** Because you are reflecting on your experience in a real-world situation, you will probably use some concrete terms to refer to the people involved and what they did. So your reflective writing will probably be a bit less abstract and conceptual than an essay. For example, if you are reflecting on an experience in a teaching placement, you may need to refer to the children in the class, the classroom equipment and materials (furniture, books, pencils, electronic whiteboard, etc.), and the physical actions of the people in the class.

However, your discipline has developed technical ways of discussing things so that everyone can be more precise and be sure they're talking about the same thing. So you do need to use those technical and abstract terms as well.