

Reflection: A Tool for a Sustainable Dissertation Process

Reflection helps develop sustainable writing habits

Working on a dissertation demands extended and sustained writing. Beyond the dissertation, your life as a scholar (as well as in many other professions) also involves constant scholarship and writing. We cannot sustain intense, burn-the-candle-at-both-ends writing processes. To complete a dissertation, we must develop productive and holistic habits. We can do this by first understanding how we write and how to build extended writing processes, before balancing these against other demands on our time and energy. Reflection is a powerful way to learn to do this.

Good reflection leads to clear and effective action

Reflection builds an explicit awareness of our writing process and helps us to keep writing consistently. When we reflect on our writing process, we discover patterns of thought and action. This helps us strengthen what works for us and gives us more control over correcting habits that slow us down. Reflection brings self-awareness that helps us to track our progress, balance writing with the rest of life, and correct our course when we need to. Reflection ensures that we are constantly moving forward toward our goals.

Reflection includes the following steps:

- OBSERVE** **Just the facts.** A neutral, non-judgmental observation of the situation in the light of the question you are responding to.
- SENSE** **How I feel.** A neutral, non-judgmental sensing of how you feel about what you have observed.
- ANALYZE** **What does this mean?** Non-judgmental evaluation and analysis of what you have observed and felt. What insights have you discovered about yourself in relation to the question or situation? Can you see strengths you could build on? Are there barriers, weak actions/behavior/thinking that you must erase?
- ACT** **What will I do?** What specific actions can I take? Are there questions I must get answers to? What are my resources and sources of strength moving ahead?