

The Art of Reflective Practice: Making the Most of Your Internship Experience - Guidelines for the Internship Experience Report

The Internship requirement seeks to cultivate the habits of reflective practice. The guidelines outlined below are intended to facilitate this objective by raising questions about your experience which you may find useful in the preparation of your internship report. You should consider these guidelines as a stimulus for reflection rather than a rigid protocol for the organization of your report. Consequently, we expect your report to dwell on those portions of the guidelines which seem most relevant to your experience.

You should be well prepared to deal with the internship through course work you have taken, previous work experience, and conversations with your fellow students. Still, there will be times when you are unsure about what your experience means to you or how you could best render it in prose. At those times, conversation is important. Talk with other graduate students who are doing internships or have done them in the past; talk with your adviser and teachers; talk to your spouse, friends and workmates. Learning is not a solitary endeavor.

When you write your report, you should attempt to address the purpose of each of the five sections of the guidelines listed below. How you accomplish this is a matter for your own judgment. The explanations and questions which clarify the purpose of each section are only illustrative.

Section I. Internship Experience

Purpose: To describe internship experience, its goals and activities.

Explanation: This introductory section is merely descriptive of your experience.

Describe the original goals for this internship experience with respect to the knowledge you expected to gain and the skills you expected to attain.

Describe the specific activities you performed as part of your internship.

Section II. Aging Theory and the Internship Experience

Purpose: To observe how theories of adult development and aging are reflected in actual service settings.

Explanations: This is the section of the report that deals with the relationship between theory and practice. Here are several ways that you might connect your reading and your observations.

Do your own observations tend to confirm propositions from the literature of adult development and aging or not? For example, does your experience indicate that the services in your internship agency are built upon what we know about the older population? Cite literature from class to substantiate your observations.

Do you recognize in your internship experience any signs of major trends in the American aging policy, e.g., loss of public confidence in government authority, new

relationships among the public, nonprofit and private sector organizations, rise of single-issue groups, etc?

Section III. Describing the Aging Service Agency

Purpose: To describe the agency in which you worked.

Explanation: This section of the report is to reflect on the context in which aging services are delivered. Contexts both enable and contain activities. Organizational histories and culture shape not only what services are delivered but how they are delivered.

Describe the agency in which you had your internship. Is it public or private? How is it funded? How large is the staff and what are their professional background? What services are provided?

Reflect on the opportunities and challenges facing the agency. How are they handling these opportunities (e.g., exploring or implementing new programs) or challenges (e.g., making program cuts).

How does the staff in the agency describe their “mission”? What are their ethical concerns in the delivery of their services? How do they evaluate the effectiveness of their service?

Section IV. The Personal Meaning of Professional Practice

Purpose: To cultivate the habit of reflective practice.

Explanation: Reflective practice, sometimes called “double-loop learning” requires asking oneself the constant question, “What do I think I’m doing here?” The way we express our practical lives in our personal narratives is also, to a large, extent, how we conduct our careers. Thinking about how your organizational experience fits into your life story is a good way of clarifying your intentions and improving your ability to be a good practitioner.

Skills – What does your experience suggest you are especially good at? What do you see as areas of lesser competence?

Knowledge – what do you know pretty well and what do you need to know better?

Temperament – what things do you do easily and well? What things are more likely to leave you frustrated? Is your temperament compatible with a career in this sort of administrative practice?

Values – what elements of your work reinforce values which are important to you? What elements of your work do not fit easily into your sense of values?

Aspirations – what kind of career do you guess you would have in this sort of practice? Does that career satisfy your present aspirations?

Section V. Sharing the Lessons of Experience

Purpose: To share the lessons of experience with those who need to know.

Explanation: Students who are anticipating internships have much to learn from the experience of those who have been there before them. As one who has just emerged from a thorough reflection on your own internship, you are the freshest expert on what to do to make the experience a good one and what to avoid. Others need to learn from your trial and errors as much as you do.

So, in the fifth section of your report, you need to do two things:

Write a brief assessment of your own internship, paying special attention to the things you did which, knowing what you know now, you would do differently next time.

Briefly list several ways you can extend the benefits of your experience to others.

Section VI. What to Include and What to Do with Your Organizational Experience Report

Field notes/diary – Many interns find it useful to maintain field notes or a diary of their daily observations and reflections. One former intern urges that you write lots of notes. Quantity is important, she points out, because at the time you're writing your daily notes, you don't really know what will turn out to be important later. That's what you're here to learn.

Field notes may be kept in any useful form. They may be handwritten or typed. They may be entered on cards or loose-leaf paper. If you are uncertain about the form or content of your field notes, consult your adviser.

Other documentation – If you have other materials which document your skills or validate any part of your report (e.g., a memorandum you wrote which indicates your skill, the characteristic medium of your practice, or some strategic consideration) you may attach them to your report as Appendix B.

Length, style and other matters – Most reports are 15-20 pages in length, excluding appendixes. The report should be typewritten, double-spaced and conform to any commonly accepted style (for example, American Psychological Association, The American Society for Public Administration, Turabian Style Manual, etc.).

Submit a copy of your report advisor. It will be evaluated and returned to you. If you do not wish others to have access to your report because of the sensitivity of the material, please indicate in writing that you wish your report to be placed in your personal file.

Submit a two-page summary of your internship experience to the IOA office coordinator. These summaries are made available to other certificate students to learn how other approached their internship, and what internship opportunities are possible with different agencies.