



# Reflection: Getting Learning Out of Serving

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*"Experience is not what happens to a man;  
it is what a man does with what happened to him." Aldous Huxley*

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Community service, in itself, can be meaningful, pointless, or harmful. Reflection is the key to getting meaning from your service experience. What is reflection? A process by which service-learners think critically about their experiences. Reflection can happen through writing, speaking, listening, and reading about the service experiences. Why is reflection important? Learning happens through a mix of theory and practice, thought and action, observation and interaction. It allows students to learn from themselves.

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## What Should I Write in My Journal?

Here's a few of the ingredients which go into a keeping a great journal:

- Journals should be snapshots filled with sights, sounds, smells, concerns, insights, doubts, fears, and critical questions about issues, people, and, most importantly, yourself.
  - Honesty is the most important ingredient to successful journals.
  - A journal is not a work log of tasks, events, times and dates.
  - Write freely. Grammar/spelling should not be stressed in your writing until the final draft.
  - Write an entry after each visit. If you can't write a full entry, jot down random thoughts, images ,etc.
  - which you can come back to a day or two later and expand into a colorful verbal picture.
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## Structuring Your Writing:

- Use the journal as a time to meditate on what you've seen, felt, and experienced, and which aspects of the volunteer experience continues to excite, trouble, impress, or unnerve you.
  - Don't simply answer the questions listed below, but use the questions as a diving board to leap from into a clear or murky pool of thought. Use the questions to keep your writing/"swimming" focused.
  - Final journals need to be edited for proper grammar and spelling.
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## The Three Levels of Reflection

- **The Mirror (A clear reflection of the Self)**

Who am I? What are my values? What have I learned about myself through this experience? Do I have more/less understanding or empathy than I did before volunteering? In what ways, if any, has your sense of self, your values, your sense of "community," your willingness to serve others, and your self-confidence/self-esteem been impacted or altered through this experience? Have your motivations for volunteering changed? In what ways? How has this experience challenged stereotypes or prejudices you have/had? Any realizations, insights, or especially strong lessons learned or half-glimpsed? Will these experiences change the way you act or think in the future? Have you given enough, opened up enough, cared enough? How have you challenged yourself, your ideals, your philosophies, your concept of life or of the way you live?

- **The Microscope (Makes the small experience large)**

What happened? Describe your experience. What would you change about this situation if you were in charge? What have you learned about this agency, these people, or the community? Was there a moment of failure, success, indecision, doubt, humor, frustration, happiness, sadness? Do you feel your actions had any impact? What more needs to be done? Does this experience compliment or contrast with what you're learning in class? How? Has learning through experience taught you more, less, or the same as the class? In what ways?

- **The Binoculars (Makes what appears distant, appear closer)**

From your service experience, are you able to identify any underlying or overarching issues which influence the problem? What could be done to change the situation? How will this alter your future behaviors/attitudes/and career? How is the issue/agency you're serving impacted by what is going on in the larger political/social sphere? What does the future hold? What can be done?

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