Reflective versus academic writing

Reflective writing differs from general academic writing because it focusses on your own experiences. Have a look at the table below to see how the two styles of writing differ.

Reflective writing	Academic writing
Based on your own experiences	Based on the literature you've read
Includes your own view	Compares the views of others
Written in the first person to comment on practice (I found this experience…) but tends to use 3rd person to comment on research/theory	Written in the third person (It could be argued that this experience…)

It is just as important to realise that there are, however, a number of similarities between reflective and academic writing, as shown in the following table.

Writing	Academic writing
Written in a formal writing style	
Include references	
Have a formal structure	
Use appropriate terminology for your subject area	

The most important thing to remember is to keep your writing formal and include references – have a look at the short extract below and think about the writing style that the author has used and also how they have included other literature in their own reflective writing. You can then read feedback on the extract that highlights where the author has demonstrated a reflective writing style.

Extract

Specific tasks were shared out amongst members of my team. Initially, however, the tasks were not seen as equally difficult by all team members. Cooperation between group members was at risk because of this perception of unfairness. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called 'positive interdependence', meaning cooperation (Johnson and Johnson, 1993, cited by Maughan and Webb, 2001), and many studies have demonstrated that "cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement" (Maughan and Webb, 2001). Ultimately, our group achieved a successful outcome, but to improve the process, we perhaps needed a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks were being shared out. In future group work, on the course and at work, I would probably suggest this.

Extract taken from: www.port.ac.uk

Feedback on the extract
A number of features of reflective writing have been identified for you in the extract and are presented below.

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1) Note the author's use of the ==first person== which is expected in reflective writing but not in general academic writing. It is still important to only use the first person where you need to. Note that the author does not use this feature when referring to the literature, for example.

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2) Note that the author still uses a ==formal writing style==. Some examples of the formal writing used by the author have been highlighted for you below. Many students fall down at this hurdle because they struggle to write formally about something personal. Just remember that you are writing for your course and not in your personal diary.

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3) Note that the author includes <mark>references</mark> in their account and it is important that you also do the same. An ideal place for references is to use them to justify why you did something a particular way (perhaps you read somewhere that a particular method was successful). You can also use the literature you have read to explain why you feel you encountered a particular problem (like the author does here) and also why you would do something differently next time.

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4) Note that the piece of text has a very <mark>distinct structure</mark> and has three clear sections which are brought together to form one coherent paragraph. The author begins by introducing the problem that they are reflecting on, before making their observations about the issue and finally concluding by telling the reader what they would change next time.

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