Hints for Writing Spiral Reflections

by Lori Stewart

Note: Lori is a CCS grad and occasional marker for the Centre. These are some tips she provided for student on writing a spiral reflection – in which the writer starts from a Concrete Experience, and moves through Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation.

Some of you are experienced writers and some are learning how to write. Everyone is expected to write from their own place and perspective. You don't have to write like anyone else. Part of the intention of doing these papers is that you learn and grow from the experience of writing. As I have been marking I have observed students doing some good things in their papers. I have put together the following hints that may help you all. Do not feel you have to use them if they seem overwhelming or like too much information. You might just read them over the set them aside.

There may be a section of the spiral where you are weaker and you might work especially on that part in your next reflection. Or there may be one or two things that you want to improve based on my comments to you. Other markers may emphasize different things. There isn't one way of doing a reflection—I saw many good examples all with their own quirks. What is most important is that you write with your whole self.

General Comments

Save your file as a doc or docx file

Number your pages

Use headings for CE, RO, AC, and AE

Check your referencing system in detail. A good website or manual on your selected style will tell you how to do everything. Consult it closely.

CE

Tell a story about something that unsettled you, that you wonder about, that excited you rather than just making a statement about what you will reflect on and illustrating this with a number of examples, or not describing an experience at all.

Name an experience that emerges from the story

Write a sentence stating what it is you want to reflect on/explore (your interest).

Do not edit or interpret your experience at this point. Simply tell about it, as if you were observing it from outside yourself.

RO

Be sure to consider the feelings involved in the situation for you and others.

This section probably requires the most vulnerability on your part, which is uncomfortable for some and easy for others. It is an important way to consider another kind of knowledge that can lead you to deeper reflection in the next part of the paper.

Images are a way to deepen your reflection and help you open up your experience. You might name what the experience reminds you of and why or you might draw to figure out what you are feeling.

What are the questions that emerge as you do this piece? You might simply list them here and use them to guide your explorations in the next section.

AC

Analyze who the authors are and what their perspectives/positions are. Sometimes you can find out their backgrounds from a book, the internet, or other reading. Sometimes you have to deduce it from the ideas that are presented. Share what you figure out.

Bring in the ideas from other sources you've read.

Talk about how they connect to your original interest.

What are the new insights or questions or dilemmas they pose for you?

Make connections between one author and the next

- How does the new author's ideas connect to the first one--where is the overlap
- What does the new author add?
- What ideas are different, that also contribute to your interest?

You might want to give a brief example or illustration from your experience to show how you are integrating these ideas. You might simply name the emerging insights.

You only need one Scripture example but try to do some exegesis so you can discuss it fully.

Be creative about where you find doctrine e.g. hymns, policy documents on the United Church website, World Council of Churches or World Communion of Reformed Churches Statements.

You might consider many documents that are not helpful—state this simply and discuss more fully what you did find.

Write a statement summarizing what you have explored and where your reflections have brought you. What have you learned? This should not be a surprise to the reader if you have included your own reflections throughout the paper. Some people include this statement under a heading called "Integrative Statement"

AE

You might explore a range of possibilities of what you **could** do, fairly briefly

Write a statement of what you will do

Describe the context, constituency, and process involved in carrying out your chosen action in more detail.