

STUDENT REFLECTION TOOLBOX



CSL

Co-creating Knowledge

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Reflection – start on toolbox CSL2

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Reflection lies at the heart of meaningful Community Service Learning (CSL).

“Reflection is the process of engaging the self in attentive, critical, exploratory and iterative interactions with one’s thoughts and actions, and their underlying conceptual frame, with a view to changing them and with a view on the change itself” (Nguyen et al., 2014).

When students collaborate with communities, they step into unfamiliar contexts, challenge assumptions, and experiment with new ways of thinking and acting. To truly learn from these experiences, they need structured moments to pause, look back, and make sense of what happened. Reflection helps them connect practice with theory, see their own growth more clearly, and recognise how their choices shape real-world outcomes.

For teachers, reflection is one of the most powerful tools to activate deep learning in CSL. It creates space for students to articulate how they approached a societal challenge, what they discovered about themselves, and which competencies they are developing along the way. It also allows teachers to track learning processes that are not always visible in a traditional classroom, such as collaboration with stakeholders, navigating uncertainty, or taking initiative in complex environments.

Reflection can happen in many different forms. Sometimes students think quietly and individually. Sometimes they engage in dialogue with peers or in conversation with a community partner. Sometimes reflection happens before starting the project, sometimes during the work, and sometimes only after everything is completed. The key is to choose a method that matches the goals of your course and the type of learning you want to encourage.

This toolbox offers eleven practical reflection techniques that you can use to bring reflection to life in your CSL course. Whether you prefer quick, low-threshold prompts or more structured approaches such as journals, portfolios, or 360-degree feedback, each method includes guidance on when and how to use it, what it can achieve, and how it supports student development. You can pick one technique that fits your course design, or combine several techniques to create a continuous reflective learning journey.

Use this toolbox as an inspiration guide and feel free to adapt, remix, and experiment. Reflection becomes most powerful when it fits your teaching style, your students’ needs, and the unique context of your collaboration with the community.

Overview of reflection techniques

In this toolbox, the reflection map of Eyler is used to provide an overview of the variety of different reflection techniques that can be used in higher education, both individually, in a group, or with a community partner. The reflection techniques are summarized in the table below and described on the next pages to enable you to facilitate usage of the techniques in your courses.

	Individual	Group	Community partner
Method			
360 degree feedback	X	X	X
Video reflection	X	X	X
Portfolio	X	X	X
Reflective vlog	X	X	X
Reflective journal	X		X
Reflective essay	X	X	
Layered text	X	X	
Intervision/peer consultation		X	X
Service-learning contracts and logs	X	X	X
Socratic method		X	
(Light evaluation) reflection questions or questionnaire	X	X	X

1.360-degree feedback

Description	Feedback and reflection are acknowledged as the crux of the learning process of a student. 360-degree feedback (also known as multi-source feedback) is a process through which feedback from students, teachers or community partners, as well self-reflection by the student itself is gathered. 360-degree feedback is named because it solicits feedback regarding a student behaviour from a variety of points of view. 360-degree feedback provides interactive feedback instead of top-down feedback.
Goals	1. The student gains insight into his or her own performance from different perspectives. 2. 360-degree feedback encourages individual reflection and the awareness of the learning process.
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community Partners
Implementation steps	1. Formulate the learning goals 2. Effective and frequent feedback is critical, to increase the engagement of the students. 3. The students do not get a grade for a particular project or assignment, but feedback (Oral feedback or feedback based on an assessment matrix). 4. Monitor the group. The cooperative learning process provides the opportunity to create a safe environment for the students. The group size needs to be kept small, because in this way the student feels safe to share their perspectives and to give peer feedback.
Teacher	The teacher acts as a team member. It helps to reduce the power relationship between the students. The teacher must be aware to create a safe environment for all the students and the group dynamics. (Mixed Classroom)
Time and frequency	360-degree feedback can be used in a whole course, or in separate assignments.
Time needed for students	Fully dependent on the time scheduled by the teacher. Ideally a full project period.
Example from VU	Honours course - Vorming in vloeibare tijden (VU, UVA & AUC)

	In the honours course: <i>vorming in vloeibare tijden</i>, 360-degree feedback is used as an adequate method to provide insight in the study process. instead of a grade, the student will receive substantive feedback from other students, the teachers, externally public and personal growth. The student will also learn how you can give, receive and validate the feedback. Feedbackfruits Feedbackfruits is an on online Tool: - The tool streamlines how students assess their peers' collaboration skills. The teacher specifies the criteria students use to evaluate their peers' contribution to group work - Peer Review enables instructors to create assignments for students to provide feedback to their peers on deliverables like documents or videos based on predefined criteria. - The tool facilitates teacher feedback on activities - Automated Feedback, powered by AI, enables students to receive formative feedback on their academic writing skills based on criteria set by teachers.
More information	360-degree feedback Tee, D. D., & Ahmed, P. K. (2014). 360 degree feedback: an integrative framework for learning and assessment. <i>Teaching in Higher Education</i>, 19(6), 579–591. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.901961 Feedbackfruits https://feedbackfruits.com/tool-overview Giving feedback https://www.ou.nl/en/-/gratis-beschikbaar-app-voor-feedback-en-reflectie-bij-online-samenwerkend-leren Mixed classroom https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/mixed-classroom 360-degrees feedback tool https://high5test.com/360-degree-feedback-platform

2.Video

Description	The use of Video can stimulate self-reflection and deep learning. It is also a method for fellow students and for teachers to comment on one another's video. Recording reflections in video form could inspire confidence in students who struggle to organize their thoughts or find their voice when they sit down to write.
Goals	- Student self-reflection - Giving constructive feedback to other students.
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community partners
Implementation steps	1. Formulate the learning goals and the assignment. 2. The attention of the peers must be stimulated by the videos. 3. Conclude whether the video-based reflection suits the learning needs of the students. 4. Create a safe environment. The student must be willing to create a video to obtain feedback from others. 5. The video can also be a tool to reflect on a previous assignment. The STARRT method can be used (See more information) The diagram illustrates the STARRT method cycle. At the center is 'Video'. To its left is 'Peers' and to its right is 'Individuals'. A clockwise cycle of arrows connects them: Peers → Attract → Create → Reflect → Respond → back to Peers. The cycle is divided into four quadrants by dashed lines. The top-left quadrant is labeled 'Attention' and contains 'Attract'. The top-right quadrant is labeled 'Confidence' and contains 'Create'. The bottom-left quadrant is labeled 'Satisfaction' and contains 'Respond'. The bottom-right quadrant is labeled 'Relevance' and contains 'Reflect'. (Cheng & Chau, 2009)
Teacher	The teacher will give feedback and is responsible to create a safe environment (Mixed classroom)
Time and frequency	Depending on the course. Ideally a video is created after a whole project.

Time needed for the students	It is a time-consuming activity, because of the filming process, the editing and the reflection part.
Example from VU	Traintool Traintool is an application that serves as a tool for students when they want to train their communicative skills. The application allows students to practice their skills through Smart Video Role Play. In a short video a certain situation is presented to the student. Then the student records their reaction to this situation. They can share the recording with teachers or students, who can give feedback on it. Based on the feedback the student can choose to record an improved version of the video.
More information	Traintool https://traintool.com/en/ Video reflection Cheng, G., & Chau, J. (2009). Digital video for fostering self-reflection in an ePortfolio environment. <i>Learning, Media and Technology</i>, 34(4), 337–350. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439880903338614 Startt method: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=163&v=WMhFn50SNho&feature=emb_logo Potential video recording https://www.teachthought.com/learning/watching-potential-video-recording-student-reflection/

3. Portfolio

Description	Student portfolios could contain any of the following: service-learning contract, weekly log, personal journal, impact statement, directed writings, photo essay. Also, any products completed during the service experience (i.e., agency brochures, lesson plans, advocacy letters) should be submitted for review. Finally, a written evaluation essay providing a self-assessment of how effectively they met the learning objectives of the course is suggested for the portfolio.
Goals	1. This type of documentation has become a vital way for students to keep records and learn organizational skills. 2. Self-reflection and learn from others feedback.
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community partners
Implementation steps	1. Encourage the students to take photographs of themselves doing their project, short explanations (like business reports), time logs, evaluations by supervisors or any other appropriate "proof" which could be used in an interview. For example, Padlet and Canva can be used (see more information) 2. Require them to make this professional. Keep reminding them that submitting it at the end of the term is only one reason for doing this. "The real reason is to have documentation to present at future interviews.
Teacher	Guide the students throughout the process of reflection. Giving feedback and monitoring the student.
Time and frequency	Ranging from one course period to one semester depending on the length of the project
Time students	Fully dependent on the time scheduled by the teacher. Ideally a full project period, so frequent feedback can be gathered.
Example from VU	-
More information	Padlet https://nl.padlet.com/ Canva https://www.canva.com/nl_nl/onderwijs/

	Portfolio KU Leuven https://www.kuleuven.be/onderwijs/werkvormen/docs/fiche-portfolio-def.pdf Portfolio University of Waterloo https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/catalogs/tip-sheets/eportfolios-explained-theory-and-practice
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4. Reflective vlog

Description	Vlogging is blogging via video. You can share the video with other students, teachers, community partners.
Goals	1. Provides frequent feedback between the students and the instructors and it helps to match the expectations. 2. Helps to develop critical thinking. 3. Self-reflect about your own learning.
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community partners
Implementation steps	Formulate the learning goals and the assignment. -The teacher can use the stars method (Situation, Task, Action, result, Self-reflection) Questions for the student (vlog) 1. Why does the student have to make a vlog? (The assignment) 2. How did the student handle the situation / assignment / learning moment? What was the role of the student? 3. What was the result of the student's action? 4. Why is the student satisfied or proud of the result 5. What could the student improve the next time. Create new learning goals. 6. Create a moment for feedback.
Teacher	The teacher has a coaching role. The central point of a vlog is the personal growth of the student during the project.
Time and frequency	Ideally the student vlogs a whole project, frequent vlogs are necessary. The student can reflect on their own learning goals and progress.
Time needed for students	Fully dependent on the time scheduled by the teacher. Ideally a full project period.

Example from VU	-
More information	Stars method https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/interview-advice/the-star-method Tips and tricks for reflection vlogging https://sofiesleerreis.nl/vlogtips

5. Reflective Journal

Description	Journals are reflective textual accounts of performed tasks during a course or community partner project. Other specific types are: - personal journal - dialogue journal - highlighted journal - key phrase journal - double-entry journal - critical incident journal - Three-part journal
Goals	1. Enabling reflective qualities in students for self-criticism 2. Implementation of critical reflection in projects 3. Improving academic accountability and self-awareness 4. Increasing academic writing skills
Actors	- Students - Community partners (project dependent)
Implementation steps	1. formulating journal learning goals 2. establishing journal requirements 3. designation of a time frame Community Service alternative: 4. Peer-review with community partners 5. journal exchange (mutual reflection journaling)
Teacher	The teacher remains central in this method as the prime supervisor of the students and/or community partners. Teacher supervises the development of the journal periodically, in accordance with the

	appropriate time frame. Teacher organizes periodical check-ups and sharing moments for student journals in class. Teacher evaluates journaling ideally with community partners if available.
Time and frequency	Ranging from one course periode to one semester depending on the length of the project. Ideally, journaling would take longer than shorter since reflective efforts usually take time to take shape.
Time needed for students	Fully dependent on the time scheduled by the teacher. Ideally a full project period.
Example from VU	Taken from the Health and Life Sciences course “health in the city”: “We would like to see a document made within student groups with 3 coherent paragraphs on: 1. the strengths of the research design/implementation (what went well and why) 2. the weaknesses in research design/implementation (what can be improved and why) 3. suggestions for improving research in the future. Keep in mind that in the general part of the report there should also be a bit of reflection, this because you also have to show the client that you look critically at your own research, and can appreciate your findings!”
More information	See bullet point 15: https://www.teachthought.com/learning/15-reflection-strategies-help-students-retain-just-taught/ University College Dublin handbook: https://www.ucd.ie/teaching/t4media/learning_journals_logs.pdf How to write a reflective journal?: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyxT91mJnVk

6. Intervision/peer consultation

Description	Intervision is a group-led method for critical reflection (without an expert from the outside, like supervision), mainly used to describe and reflect on positionality and critical moments.
Goals	1. Develop a critical support group for students 2. Strengthen group dynamics 3. Develop reflective qualities individually and as a group 4. Allowing different perspectives to emerge through reflective discussion
Actors	Students (if possible, community partners)
Implementation steps	1. Formulate learning goals 2. Organize students in groups, according to class size 3. Ensure group rules, agree upon them collectively to engage in open-minded behaviour 4. Schedule intervision moments 5. Periodically review intervision goals, are they met? 6. (optional) let students write reports on their personal and professional development through intervision
Teacher	Guide the intervision group(s) throughout the process of reflection, ask questions and formulate problems together with students (and community partners) to discuss and reflect upon.
Time and frequency	Depending on the course intensity, once a week at minimum, considering that student projects are continuous.
Time needed for students	One class or part of the class per week depending on course intensity.
Example from VU	-
More information	Staempfli, A. and Fairtlough, A., 2018. "Intervision and Professional Development: An Exploration of a Peer-Group Reflection Method in Social Work Education." <i>British Journal of Social Work</i>, vol. 49, 1254-1273. Intervision in professional settings: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWzly0iopAw

7. Service learning contracts and logs

Description	Learning objectives in relation to service learning are formalized into 'contracts', which are kept track of by logs. Students reflect on their abilities through extensive logs which enable them to review their trail throughout the community service.
Goals	1. Students learn to formalize course learning goals into tangible community service learning goals 2. Students learn to summarize their activities and academic development in relation to community service 3. Students learn to reflect on their position
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community partners
Implementation steps	1. Course teacher establishes learning goals 2. Students formalize learning goals into tangible service learning contract objectives 3. Students keep track of their service learning development through active logging 4. Plenary and group discussions about obstacles and difficulties are being held 5. Students compile a written text, reflecting on their logs and composed service learning contracts. This can be included in a service learning portfolio.
Teacher	Establishes learning objectives for students and guides student development in community fields. The teacher needs to make sure contracts and logs are maintained and regularly discussed.
Time and frequency	Reflection cannot start before a few weeks, since students need to assess their skills and assets in relation to the community field first. From there onwards weekly meetings to reposition students every service moment. Reflective reports should be written at least every two weeks.
Time needed for students	One class or part of the class per week depending on course intensity.
Example from VU	-

More information	University of Sydney – reflective writing PDF https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/students/documents/learning-resources/learning-centre/writing/reflective-writing.pdf Learning contract: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1MaC1ipFoE Learning logs: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGsiWprN9bE
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8. Socratic method

Description	The socratic method is very to the point when it comes to reflection. This method in short is ‘answering every question with a question’. It drives every participant of the conversation to reflect on all elements of it.
Goals	1. Students and teachers interactively reflect on their positions, both in positionality and in ideas 2. Students learn to self-criticize 3. Students learn to incorporate multiple perspectives in the classroom
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community partners
Implementation steps	1. Organize discussion groups, these can vary from 3-20 students 2. Set a core element or elements which need to be discussed 3. Designate a secretary or secretary group who notes the development of the discussion 4. Collect the secretary notes to reveal the reflective processes taking place in the classroom
Teacher	Teacher guides discussion and organizes roles within the classroom. Afterwards, the teacher evaluates the written results of the socratic method.
Time and frequency	Depending on the course or community project, at minimum once every week.

Time students	Students only have to prepare discussion points following experiences from course material, community projects or other relevant topics to the course.
Example from VU	-
More information	What is the socratic method? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CPLu3qCbSU Mixed classroom https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/mixed-classroom

9. Reflective essay

Description	Students write a reflective essay about an academic or community problem. How did they approach the problem? What is involved in this problem? It challenges students to actively question issues from different perspectives while training their academic skills.
Goals	1. Students develop their academic writing 2. Students learn to academically criticize their academic position 3. Students learn to incorporate different perspectives in their academic approach
Actors	- Students
Implementation steps	1. Teacher sets goals for paper direction; 'case' 2. Teacher directs students into reflective thinking and gives examples and guidelines 3. Students write essay 4. (optional) students share results into discussion groups or peer reviews
Teacher	Guides and sets goals for essay
Time and frequency	Can be done every course week, depending on course intensity. Optimal use = practice- reflective essay - practice - reflective essay and so forth.
Time students	Depending on essay length, 3-8 hours a week
Example from VU	-
More information	Reflective writing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qol67VeE3ds Steps for writing a reflective essay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk2GjRIRBlk

10. Layered text

Description	A layered text is a digital document that is 'layered' with comments, questions and active discussions. The text becomes filled with all the thoughts and ideas students have on a certain text. The text can be preset or written by students or teachers.
Goals	1. Students learn to critically examine academic or non-academic texts 2. Students learn to understand different perspectives in the classroom 3. Students learn to interact with peers on reflective practice
Actors	- Students - Teachers - Community partners
Implementation steps	1. Teacher designates text to be written or read by students 2. Setting a minimum input for comments, questions or ideas 3. Teacher picks a few 'hot' topics from the text and discusses these points in class 4. (optional) student groups discuss the results of the layered text and try to answer the questions collectively
Teacher	Teacher guides the process and sets targets for the text and student input. Teacher can also expand on results of the layered text and use this in further course organisation.
Time and frequency	At minimum every two weeks since students need to read the text and write comments, which will take at least one class in every step.
Time students	One class per week, two weeks (3 hours)
Example from VU	Perusall digital program: https://vu-ntl.nl/index.php/onderwijsinnovatie/vu-ntl-projecten/perusall/
More information	See Perusall

11. ('light') Reflection questions and questionnaires

Description	The easiest way to incorporate reflection in your course is by asking students a few direct questions about their service-learning experiences. This light evaluation does not aim for the depth of structured methods such as reflective journals or essays, but it still encourages students to pause and consider their role as a societal actor, the new contexts they encountered, and the skills they may have applied outside a traditional classroom setting. By embedding short reflective moments, students begin to connect their academic work to broader personal, interpersonal, and civic development.
Goals	1. Let students stop and consider the (potential) added value of societally engaged education. 2. Support students in recognising and articulating cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills gained during the experience. 3. Encourage low-threshold self-criticism and self-awareness without overburdening students or staff 4. Provide teachers with a quick and accessible way to gather feedback on student learning outcomes.
Actors	- Students - Teachers - (optional) Community partners
Implementation steps	1. Decide on the timing (end of course, end of project, or after key milestones). 2. Select 3–5 short reflective questions tailored to the course context. For example: a. How did you experience working with the external commissioner or community partner? b. Did the practical component add value compared to traditional academic assignments? Why or why not? c. What specific skills or knowledge did you gain that you might not have developed in a classroom-only course? d. What was the most rewarding or challenging part of this experience? e. What will you do differently in the future as a result of this experience?

	3. Collect responses in a format that fits the course (short survey, online form, group discussion, etc.). 4. Review and, if possible, share back main insights with the students to close the loop
Teacher	The teacher takes on a facilitating role, ensuring questions are framed clearly and responses are treated respectfully. In this light format, the teacher does not need to provide extensive feedback but may highlight recurring themes or insights in class discussions.
Time and frequency	Can be implemented once at the end of the course, or at several checkpoints (e.g., mid-project and end-project).
Time students	5–15 minutes, depending on the number of questions.
Example from VU	-
More information	-

Further Reading

If you are interested in the ideas behind experiential and reflective learning, the following texts offer accessible overviews of the educational traditions that inspired this toolbox:

John Dewey – Experience and Education (1938)

A classic exploration of how meaningful learning grows from experience and reflection.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Education and experience*.

David Kolb – Experiential Learning Theory (1984)

Introduces the experiential learning cycle, widely used in CSL to understand how students learn through doing, analysing, conceptualising, and experimenting.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experience as the source of learning and development*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Joseph A. Raelin – Public Reflection as the Basis of Learning (2001)

Argues that public reflection—discussing and examining experiences openly with others—strengthens learning and professional development in organizational and community contexts.

Raelin, J. A. (2001). Public reflection as the basis of learning. *Management Learning*, 32(1), 11–30.

Donald Schön – The Reflective Practitioner (1983)

Discusses reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, essential for learning in professional and community-engaged contexts.

Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Eyler – Creating Your Reflection Map (2001)

A practical framework for designing reflection before, during, and after community engagement, and across different social settings.

Eyler, J. (2001). Creating your reflection map. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2001(114), 35–43.

Reynolds – Critical Reflection (1998)

Explores how reflection helps learners examine underlying assumptions and become more aware of social and ethical dimensions of their work.

Reynolds, M. (1998). Reflection and critical reflection in management learning. *Management Learning*, 29(2), 183–200.