

A stylized, light gray background illustration of an apple tree. The trunk is a thick, curved line on the left side. The branches are represented by several long, curved, leaf-like shapes that fan out towards the right. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

# APPLES

*Service-Learning*

## **SERVICE-LEARNING SERIES: REFLECTION RESOURCES**

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## Service-Learning Series Overview

This pedagogy guide offers foundational information about service-learning practice and implementation. It serves as both reference documents and a set of primers on the possibilities for service-learning inside and outside of the classroom. The series provides information on planning and designing service-learning courses, developing community partnerships, resources for service-learning written reflections and examples of forms that facilitate service-learning activities.

### **Introduction to Service-Learning**

- Defining Service-Learning
- Faculty and Instructor Expectations
- Service-Learning Course Components
- Service-Learning Course Rubric

### **Course Planning and Design**

- Course Planning Timeline
- Service-Learning Syllabi
- Course Goals and Objectives
- Bloom's Taxonomy Verb List
- Assessment and Evaluation

### **Community Partnerships**

- How Does Service-Learning Differ from Volunteering?
- Community Partnership Models
- How APPLES Can Help You Get Started
- Best Practices of Service-Learning Partnerships
- Developing Community Partner Relationships
- Meeting with New Community Partners
- Community Partnership Agreement

### **Reflection Resources**

- Written Reflections and the DEAL Model
- Reflection through writing resources

### **Service Learning Forms**

- Student Service Learning Agreement
- Choosing a Community Partner
- Service-Learning Time Log

## Written Reflections and the DEAL Model

Reflection is one of the most crucial pieces of the service-learning course, because it is the means by which students integrate the academic learning with the experiential learning. However, it is also one of the most difficult pieces of the course to get right. Students often struggle with reflecting in a meaningful, consistent way over the course of the semester.

While learning can also be articulated orally, through a drawing, through the creation of a concept map, through physical imagery, etc., writing is generally the best way to facilitate critical thinking in your students. The DEAL model of written critical reflection offers a structured template for students to use in their reflections.

### The DEAL Model for Written Critical Reflection:

- **DESCRIBE** in fair detail and as objectively as possible the experience, the activity, the reading, etc.
- **EXAMINE**, in accordance with the learning objectives, through responding to prompts, engaging with a quote, playing games, etc.
- **ARTICULATE LEARNING**
  - What did I learn?
  - How did I learn it?
  - Why does it matter?
  - What will I do in the future, in light of it?

Remember that learning is a process embedded in the act of reflection, not a prerequisite. Do not begin a reflection prompt by asking, “What did you learn?” The purpose of reflection is to *generate* learning and to help students to become *aware* of their learning. “What did you learn?” is a good last question for reflection, not a good first question.

Students often mistake description for analysis and this holds true in reflection activities as well. Remind your students that, while the act of reflection often begins with description, they are not the same things.

If you are going to use journals or other written reflections, give students specific prompt questions to follow. Students are generally not comfortable with, or skilled at, the activity of reflection in the early part of the course and will produce fairly shallow reflections. With continued instructor feedback, specific, probing prompt questions and successful models for students to learn from, students may find the reflection process more fruitful and generative.

The following page offers sample reflection questions, however, you will want to craft ones most appropriate for your learning goals and course content.

*Materials adapted from:*  
<http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/info/reflection.html>

## Possible Reflection Prompts

- What is your role at the community site?
- What were your initial expectations? Have these expectations changed? If so, how? Why?
- What about your community involvement has been an eye-opening experience?
- How has the course content informed your service with your community organization?
- Discuss any dissonance between the course content and your experience with the community.
- What specific skills did you use at your community site?
- Describe a person you've encountered in the community who made a strong impression of you, positive or negative.
- Do you see benefits of doing community work? Why or why not?
- Has your view of the population with whom you have been working changed? If so, how?
- How has the environment and social conditions affected the people at your site?
- What institutional structures are in place at your site or in the community? How do they affect the people you work with?
- Has the experience affected your worldview? If so, how?
- Have your career options been expanded by your service experience?
- Why does the organization you are working for exist?
- Did anything about your community involvement surprise you? If so, what?
- What did you do that seemed to be effective or ineffective in the community?
- How does your understanding of the community change as a result of your participation in this project?
- How can you continue your involvement with this group or social issue?
- How can you educate others or raise awareness about this group or social issue?
- What are the most difficult or satisfying parts of your work? Why?
- Talk about any disappointments or successes of your project. What did you learn from it?
- During your community work experience, have you dealt with being an "outsider" at your site? How does being an "outsider" differ from being an "insider"?
- How are your values expressed through your community work?
- What sorts of things make you feel uncomfortable when you are working in the community? Why?
- Complete this sentence: Because of my service-learning, I am...

*Materials adapted from:  
Adapted from <http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/info/reflection.html>*

## Reflection through Writing Resources

The following is a list of possibilities for integrating and structuring reflective writing in a service-learning course. While any of these assignments work with traditional low-tech formats, they all also work in discussion forums, team site spaces or blogs. Choosing which higher tech option works best depends on the level of privacy deemed appropriate for the students' writing and the purpose and audience for the assignment.

### **Directed journals**

Ask students to respond to a specific question relating their community experiences and course work on a weekly basis. Questions might be designed to build upon one another. Specify an audience for these entries.

### **Class journal**

Ask students to post entries about their community experiences, respond or comment on one another's experiences, react to assigned readings, and connect ideas or threads in the discussion. This writing can be highly student-directed or highly instructor-moderated depending on your course goals. Orchestrating and shifting roles among students (some students write new posts, some students respond to others' writing) can enrich the conversation. Clarifying the purpose and audience for the journal entries is important for success.

### **Reading/Service log**

Assign students to summarize course readings and relate what they read to their community experience. You can assign this task to groups of students or half of the class at a time. (The whole class does not need to write every time.) Ask students to trade logs once a week and read others' entries. Make sure everyone writes and reads an equal amount.

### **One-page weekly papers**

Assign students to write and post about some aspect of their service in one page (250 words). You can leave the topic open-ended or give them a topic or issue to address. Regularly select writing to read out loud at the opening or close of the class period as a point of further discussion or to provoke further thinking. You can distribute this assignment throughout the semester—one part of the class writes during the first third of the course, another group during the second third and so on.

### **Theory/Application writing**

Like problem/solution writings described below, ask students to summarize a theory in the course and then discuss how it is or is not appearing in their service experience. Later in the semester, ask students to write again, either revising their initial thoughts (hopefully with more information or complex understanding from their experience) or ask them to apply a different theory to the same situation. Add rounds as described above.

### **Group writing**

Create groups of three. Assign students to write a group report related to their community experiences using a team site space or email exchange. The topic of the report may be open-ended or focused as suits your course, but the students should be clear about the purpose and audience (as determined by you) of the report—why and to whom are they writing?

### **Five-minute in-class writings**

At the beginning of class, ask students to respond to a question related to the day's topic and their community experiences. Let them write for five minutes, then conduct a class discussion addressing the question.

### **In-class presentation**

Ask students to give a five-minute presentation about their placement and their contributions and course-related observations periodically throughout the semester.

### **Problem/solution writing**

Early in their community experiences, ask students to describe, in a paragraph or a page, a problem that they have observed at their placement (this problem might be practical, conceptual, logistical, ethical, etc.) Later in the semester, ask them to propose solutions (or if that isn't possible, further articulate the complexities of the problem) in another similar length assignment. You can add another round by asking students to share the original problem with another student and have the other student propose their solution to the problem. An additional exercise would ask the original writer to compare the two solutions and explore why the problem has not been solved in the actual situation. Eventually, students might compile their pieces into a case study.

### **Portfolios**

Ask each student to compile a service-learning portfolio throughout the semester to submit for a grade at the end of the semester. In addition to sharing their portfolio with you, students may want to think of this as material they may use in a job interview in the future or as a personal scrapbook of the experience.

Portfolios could include:

- *Writing about the site* (description of site, history of the organization, mission statements, journal entries, case studies, personal statements about this experience, volunteer service in general, role of organization in the community, etc.)
- *Evidence of completed projects or nature of service* (photos, flyers, memos, chart of progress on project, quotes from participants at the site)
- *Evaluations by supervisors*
- *Case study* drawn from the site
- *List of skills gained at the site* (initialed by supervisor, if appropriate)
- *List of completed projects*
- *Book/article reviews of related readings*
- *Annotated bibliography of related readings*

### **In-class presentations**

Ask students to give a five-minute presentation about their community experiences and their contributions and course-related observations.

### **Note card questions**

Ask students to submit questions on note cards once a week on the course material and their community experiences. Draw one or two out of the hat to add to class discussion each class period.

### **Observation paragraphs**

Each class meeting, assign a few students to express something they have observed from their experience in one paragraph and make copies for the whole class (or distribute through a listserv). At some point in the semester, ask students to write another paragraph that responds to another person's observation and share their response with the original writer and with you. You might ask them to respond several times to a variety of people. For example, each student must write three observations during the semester and three responses during the semester.

### **Observation bullets (speaking variation on observation paragraphs above)**

Each class period, ask a few students to prepare three bullet points or talking points about their community experiences. At the beginning or end of class, ask these students to stand up and present their three observations to the class.

### **Critical incident journal**

This focuses the student on analysis of a particular event that occurred during the week. By answering one of the following sets of prompts, students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future: Describe a significant event that occurred as a part of the service-learning experience. Why was this significant to you? What underlying issues (societal, interpersonal) surfaced as a result of this experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior? Another set of questions for a critical incident journal includes the following prompts: Describe an incident or situation that created a dilemma for you in terms of what to say or do. What is the first thing thought of to say or do? List three other actions you might have taken. Which of the above seems best to you now and why do you think this is the best response?

### **Book/article review**

Mid-semester, ask students to research and review a book or article related to the community experiences. Copy the reviews and put them on reserve. Ask students to read one and then respond to the review in a one page paper.

### **Site survey**

Ask students to investigate the context in which they are serving. Ask them to collect the organization's mission statement, published materials, organizational chart of the staff and history. Requiring an interview with staff members may be helpful when practical.

### **Politics of site**

Ask students to research and write about the larger context of the organization they serve. Where, why, how did the organization come into being? Where does it receive its funding? What challenges does it face in the community?

### **Self-assessment**

Ask students to assess their roles, effectiveness and impact in the organization during the semester. What did they bring to the organization? In what ways, (maybe unexpected ways) were they able to serve?

*Materials adapted from:  
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