Critical Reflection Papers

The purpose of a Critical Reflection paper is to demonstrate competency and ultimately mastery of a specific program domain. The Critical Reflection serves as a "cover document" for each competency area and the associated artifacts that will be shared. It should weave theoretical understanding and fluency together with knowledge of and reflection on the seminal works (primary literature associated with the specific competency); it should also demonstrate a participant's specific experiential learning, and practical application in each associated competency area. A Critical Reflection paper typically includes three well-blended elements. *These elements are woven together throughout the work and should not stand alone as separate sections.* Learning experiences should be intertwined with relevant theories and concepts, explanations, understanding and analysis of what learning occurred, along with what might have happened if a different plan of action had been followed. Let's examine the elements more closely.

A description of the experience and of the learning. This might include what you have done related to the competency area and what the measurable outcomes were. It might also include a summary of your strategy going into the experience, your perceptions as the experience unfolded, what behaviors you engaged in during the experience, and how the experience influenced you and others. It is important to cover not only the facts of what happened, but also the perceptions and impressions of those facts as they transpired. It might also be relevant to compare what happened in the experience to what happened in other experiences similar to this or other experiences in which you have participated. Remember that the purpose is to demonstrate learning (what has been learned).

Identify, relate and analyze relevant conceptual and seminal material (theories) related to the competency area. The point is to demonstrate "ownership/understanding" of the theoretical constructs that are identified. Ownership involves being able to describe and communicate the concepts and theories and how they relate to the specific environment and the learning. In the best critical reflection papers, the paper demonstrates competence in relation to the related concepts and theories. The identification of this relevant conceptual material should be woven into the situation as it is being analyzed. Don't assume that the reader knows this information. The point is not whether the reader knows the information – the point is whether the writer knows it. Also, there is a tendency in a Critical Reflection paper to try to explain as many concepts or ideas as possible. Don't fall into this trap! Explaining too many ideas could inhibit providing enough depth to really demonstrate your ownership / competency. Stick with core concepts that can be identified as central to the focus.

Use the concepts and theories to analyze what happened in the experience. Another aspect of demonstrating ownership/competency with the central concepts and theories is the ability to apply them successfully and insightfully. That application may include using them to explain why what happened in the experience happened. It might include using the concepts and theories to explain how or why you (or others) might have behaved differently, and what might have happened if you had. It might include using the concepts and theories to suggest what you should do the next time you find yourself in a similar situation. These elements of the Critical Reflection paper are fundamental to illustrating that you USE the concepts and theories to drive your analysis of this experience. Thus, it is not sufficient in the analysis to know what to do; you must also correctly explain why to do it. Using concepts and theories to explain "why or why not" is what applying / discounting theory is all about. The assessment of the Critical Reflection paper will reflect the following rubric / scale.

Critical Reflection Rubric

Expectations	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Competency	Mastery
Creates an organizing structure establishes context & relevance	Does not select and summarize key ideas to set context. Writing is disjointed and there is little evidence of organization.	Attempts to select and summarize key ideas to establish context but selections may be invalid, insufficient, or unclear. Attempts an interpretive claim/assertion in the form of a thesis but thesis may not address the prompt or may be invalid or unclear. Uses an organizational structure that causes confusion. Shows some elements of organization.	Selects and summarizes key ideas to establish context appropriate to audience by using tools such as precise language, descriptive language, and authoritative voice. Establishes an interpretive claim/assertion in the form of a thesis when responding to a given prompt. Uses an organizational structure that allows for a progression of ideas to develop. Includes an opening, body, and closure.	Skillfully selects and summarizes key ideas to establish context appropriate to audience by using tools such as precise language, descriptive language, and authoritative voice. Establishes an insightful claim/assertion in the form of a thesis when responding to a given prompt. Uses an organizational structure that enhances the response. The opening, body, and closure are well organized.
Analysis of Relevant Experiences, Thoughts, Constructed Knowledge	Experiences do not relate to competency and reflections do not demonstrate understanding of competency.	Experience descriptions and reflections begin to demonstrate relation to competency, but little or no insightful commentary.	Experience descriptions and reflections adequately relate to competency, and provide acceptable insight.	Experience descriptions, reflections, are in-depth and relate to competency while providing clear insight.
Synthesis of Theory and Experience	Demonstrates a broad array of experience but does not connect it to appropriate theoretical constructs. Unacceptable referencing to support context.	Demonstrates a broad array of experience but only connects it to the appropriate theoretical constructs in a weak and superficial manner. Inadequate referencing to support context in valid manner.	Demonstrates a broad array of experience and clearly connects it to appropriate theoretical constructs. Adequate referencing to support context in valid manner.	Demonstrates a broad array of experience and clearly connects it to appropriate theoretical constructs showing deep understanding and thoughtfulness. Exceptional referencing to support context in valid manner.
Demonstrates command of written language conventions and uses APA style	Demonstrates little control of usage, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction, and spelling. Numerous errors interfere with meaning.	Demonstrates some control of usage, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction, and spelling. Errors interfere with meaning. Some APA style conformity.	Demonstrates control of usage, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction, and spelling. Occasional errors do not interfere with meaning. Reasonable APA style conformity.	Demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, punctuation, sentence construction, and spelling. Consistent APA style adherence.