



## Nurturing Higher Education Students in Writing Reflective Journals

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### Abstrak

Reflective journal writing is a type of writing that contain description of actual events by incorporating reflective components and providing context for an event that encompasses feelings and distinct personal circumstances. Writing a reflective journal essay is one of the outcomes of the community service program for students, especially at IAIN Langsa. In practice, some students found writing reflective essays challenging. To offer assistance in producing these kinds of articles through a mentorship program is considerably needed. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is the approach employed in this project, which looks at the potential within the community – in this case, the higher education institution. A total of six sessions mentorship program were held from December 13th to December 29th, 2024. 30 students from Tarbiyah and the Teacher Training Faculty of IAIN Langsa participated in the program. The activity involved coaching by integrating theory, practice, and feedback. The result demonstrated that the participants can identify structure and elements of reflective writing and they can determine writing angels and elaborate them in their writing. The program also creates an interactive learning environment where the participants can discuss and share knowledge as well as work collaboratively. Additionally, by giving students feedback throughout the program, it fosters their learning autonomy and enhances their writing abilities. Above all, they are able to complete the tasks on schedule.

**Kata Kunci:** Reflectice journal, Writing, ABCD



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## 1. Introduction

A reflective journal is one of the non-fictions writing genres besides opinion and essay. It is a piece of writing that is typically used to record detailed descriptions of particular experiences or ideas. The fundamental characteristics of this genre lies in the presentation of writing based on the author's experiences, observations, appreciations, feelings, and perceptions of the things he or she encounters and experiences. Good story telling skills are the primary asset of reflective journal writing. [Gs \(2021\)](#) demonstrates story telling through the art of writing. Through his book entitled *My Life, My Humor: A Story from a Storyteller*, Prie offers several techniques for writing that involve feelings, experiences, and in-depth observations.

It will be easier to imagine a narrative being told if the storyteller is a skilled writer as compared to someone who is not. However, this viewpoint is frequently refuted by the notion that writing skills should be gained through effort. According to [Laksana \(2020\)](#), a teacher as well as a writer, writing is a skill that needs practice. The ability to write reflective journals is crucial for students as it allows them to develop their critical thinking skills ([Ezezika & Johnston, 2023](#)).

One form of assignment that university students frequently have to complete is writing reflective journals. Unfortunately, the majority of students find writing challenging. According to [Pakaya & Nabu \(2022\)](#), two common challenges are a lack of proficiency in mechanics and an insufficient understanding of writing organization. Other short comings include the inability to formulate a thesis statement, generate ideas, and create an engaging introduction ([Nenotek, Tlonaen, & Manubulu, 2022](#)). At IAIN Langsa, one of the required tasks that students must accomplish at the end of their community service program is writing a reflection journal. It is a piece of writing that describes actual events while also offering a perspective on the event and providing context for feelings, emotions, or specific personal circumstances. Students required to write a thoughtful essay regarding an activity they completed as part of their community service program. Depending on their program, the subject may include life skills, sports, health, the arts, juvenile behavior, and tutoring. However, in practice the majority of students struggle in creating reflective journals. Among the challenges they faced were their inability to comprehend reflective writing frameworks, difficulty to distinguish between the format of scientific proposals and essays, their inability to identify the writing aspect, and build ideas. Few students who submit their essays by the deadline demonstrates these challenges.

Many studies have been conducted on reflective writing, which explores the benefits of acquiring skills in writing reflective journals. These skills help improve individuals' writing abilities, enhance their ability to reflect, promote professional development for teachers, and support the collection of research data ([Ahmed, 2020](#)). Writing reflective essays enhances the writer's capacity for critical thinking and analytical skills. Additionally, it has a role in enhancing pupils' cognitive abilities and fostering their creativity ([Jasper, 2005](#); [Wati, 2023](#)). [Christensen & Warnsby \(2023\)](#) conducted a research study on the teaching of writing skills in social work. The findings indicate that engaging in writing activities enhances individuals' knowledge of their own learning processes and promotes their active involvement. They assert that the practice is appropriate for diverse classroom as it encourages students' inclusion and engaged learning. Additionally, several studies demonstrate the use of reflective journal writing in professional education as an effective pedagogical technique for preparing students for professional practice ([McGuire, Lay, & Peters, 2009](#)). Reflective journal writing is a highly successful method for enhancing students' writing skills and overall learning process ([Baresh, 2022](#)). However, there is a lack of research specifically examining mentorship or tutoring programs that aim to improve reflective writing skills.

In order to address these issues, a reflective journal writing program was implemented to provide support the students in meeting their needs to enhance their writing abilities and to complete their assignments while participating in community service programs. This program was arranged for a total of six sessions. Each session has a duration of two hours and takes place over a period of three weeks. Regular activities take place on Wednesdays and Fridays, starting at 14.00 to 16.00 pm. The activity was conducted as a coaching clinic, which involved training, hands-on writing practice, and feedback.

One of the goals of facilitating the coaching activity is to improve students' writing skills. This practice enhances the students' understanding of the characteristics and structure of reflective journal writing. Students will acquire the skills to cultivate clarity, consistency, and creativity in their writing, as well as the ability to articulate their ideas proficiently through written communication. Consequently, they are capable of generating suitable essays. Furthermore, it enhances the students' academic achievement.

Engaging in the practice of writing reflective diaries enables learners to establish a connection between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Furthermore, the objective is to provide students with the necessary information and practical skills to excel in their future careers. Reflective practice is a skill that is required in numerous occupations. Through the process of experiential learning, individuals can effectively adjust and respond to new and demanding situations. Ultimately, the purpose of this activity is to foster the practice of reflection in order to enhance students' individual abilities and strengthen their academic progress.

Moreover, this practice offers the benefit of creating a supportive environment for students to enhance their writing abilities. Students will engage in the process of writing as part of a collective group. Individuals may engage in interactive learning, a pedagogical approach that fosters collaboration, critical thinking, and the exchange of ideas. Furthermore, students are afforded the chance to obtain immediate feedback on their writing, enabling them to figure out their strengths and places areas for improvement. The coaching also assists individuals in enhancing several facets of their writing abilities, including grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and style. Furthermore, pupils are provided with consistent opportunities to practice and receive positive feedback, so potentially enhancing their self-assurance in the realm of writing. Subsequently, the activity will assist students in establishing specific schedules to accomplish their objectives, consequently encouraging them in maintaining focus and motivation while completing their tasks.

## 2. Methods

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This community service employs the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) methodology. ABCD, or Asset-Based Community Development, is a method of community development that focuses on identifying and utilizing the strengths and resources that already exist within a community. Subsequently, this potential is used as a valuable resource for the advancement of the community (Alkausar, 2019). This project is aimed at assisting students in fulfilling one of their community service objectives, which is to create a thoughtful essay about one of the community service activities they carried out. The assets encompassed in this particular setting consist of human, social, and geographical elements. Human assets refer to the range of qualities that students possess, such as their capacity to produce ideas, proficiency in constructing written discourse, critical thinking skills, effective communication skills, and task completion abilities. The participants' abilities such as critical thinking and self-reflection, serve as valuable assets that enable them to select and decide on community service activities, which can then be documented in writing.

The participants' aptitude for expressing ideas is a notable asset that must be guided to enable them generate ideas effectively, establish a clear direction, and elaborate on ideas in written form. In addition, social assets refer to the participants' capacity to engage and collaborate with others. This is demonstrated by the pupils' capacity to promptly and articulately provide responses, viewpoints, or ideas on a discussed matter. The cultivation of the capacity to value and acknowledge differing viewpoints, while refraining from underestimating the challenges encountered by others, is a skill that may be further developed through this activity. Consequently, individuals will foster mutual respect and effectively address prevailing issues through collaborative problem-solving. Each individual will gain a comprehensive understanding of the many processes that others experience by completing their community service assignments.

The following asset refers to the location. The Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training offers comfortable facilities, including large classrooms, stable internet connections, well equipped chairs, tables, and whiteboards, which facilitate the successful completion of this coaching activity. Therefore, the presence of resources from several dimensions such as human, social, and environmental elements, along with the necessary facilities and infrastructure, contribute signific. The asset-based campus community development model, or ABCD, consists of various stages in its implementation. These stages include discovery (evaluation), dream (vision), design (planning), define (establishing goals), and destiny (self-determination). These five stages serve as a framework for this empowerment action. The first phase is the stage of discovery, which involves evaluating the community's potential. This level evaluates the proficiency and abilities possessed by each participant. The purpose of this evaluation step is to examine the requisite abilities necessary to facilitate growth. The second phase is characterized by anticipation, encompassing aspirations, ambitions, or desires. The purpose of this step is to categorize each participant based on their intended objectives and ideas for their potential. This stage represents a state of deep thought and reflection, combined with a strong sense of excitement and determination to achieve the desired goal with the greatest effort. The next step is design, which involves creating a substitutional planning. Design encompasses the systematic and deliberate planning and execution of systems or procedures to accomplish essential goals or dreams.

Define and destiny are the ultimate stages or components of ABCD. This stage encompasses methods for establishing and confirming the objectives that will be pursued. Once the goal has been designed, the following step is to implement actions that align with the existing potential. There are challenges in the execution of this. Obstacles occur from the participants themselves in relation to their involvement, as well as external hindrances, such as the limited availability of time to attend the training. The training programmed participants consist of students enrolled in the Tarbiyah and Teacher Training faculty at IAIN Langsa. The coaching was conducted during off-campus activities. There were 30 students, from various department, participated for the activity. Participants are requested to bring a laptop and other necessary stationery for the session. The trainer included a lecturer from other faculty at IAIN Langsa, who have in-depth experience and reputable recognitions in writing.

### 3. Results and Discussion

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The purpose of this community service activity is to help the participants meet their community service requirement by writing a reflective essay about one of the community service activities they participated in. The training session was conducted for six sessions, encompassing aspects of theory as well as practice.

#### 3.1. First Activity

The first meeting took place on Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The topic covered in the session included an overview of reflective journals, the essential components that should be included in reflective journals, and techniques to generate writing ideas. During the meeting, students also shared and discussed on their accomplished community service activities. They were instructed to identify their main subject and ascertain the perspective or angle of their writing.





Figure 1. Coaching Session

The accomplishment of this session was that every participant comprehended the notion of reflective journal writing, and they discovered a writing angle to be further develop in their writing. The activity started from 2 pm to 4 pm. This activities shows on Figure 1.

### 3.2. Second Activity

The second session, held on Friday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, involved the development of a writing framework. This framework was constructed using the 5W-1H pattern and subsequently developed into paragraphs. The notable outcome of the workshop was that students successfully produced a preliminary version of their reflective writing.

### 3.3. Third Activity

The third meeting took place on Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The session started from 2 pm to 4 pm. The writing class included exercises aimed at enhancing writing skills through the incorporation of specific and comprehensive material, the inclusion of thoughtful analysis on the completed activities, and the development of ideas through written expression. The participants were provided with feedback on the initial draft of their writing, which was intended for further revision.

### 3.4. Fourth Activity

The fourth activity took place on Friday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 from 2 pm to 4 pm (Figure 2). In this session, the participants engage in a writing exercise where they focus on including the essential components of reflective writing. Previously, they were instructed to construct a writing framework. This writing framework aims to consolidate ideas and enhance the systematic nature of writing. Once the writing framework is constructed, individuals are instructed to elaborate those points into written form. Following the completion of their writing, individuals receive comments on their work and refine the content of their writing based on the received input. Mentors provide individualized input.



Figure 2. Coaching, Sharing Session, and Writing Practice

### 3.5. Fifth Activity

The fifth activity was held on Wednesday, December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (Figure 3). The objective of the session was to continue developing their writing by considering the feedback they received. During the writing process, the participants and mentors engaged in discussions regarding the specific elements that they should address in their writing. Mentors offered solutions to the challenges encountered by the participants while writing directly. During that session, mentors also emphasized the construction of concise and impactful phrases that adhere to relevant grammatical aspects.



Figure 3. Writing Practice, Sharing Session, Feedback

### 3.6. Sixth activity

The sixth meeting convened on Friday, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. During this session, the participants engaged in revising and editing exercises for the completed writing. This revision process involves carefully considering the components of reflective writing that need to be included in the writing, as well as adhering to other standards for effective writing. The review and editing process was conducted in multiple stages. In the first stage, each participant revised and edited their own text. The subsequent phase involves collaboratively editing with acquaintances in an alternating manner. Additionally, the final revision entails enhancing the text depending on the obtained ideas and completing it. The duration of this exercise was 2 hours.

The participants received instruction and support, along with a designated space for discussing activities that would be documented through reflective writing. This program has expanded the participants' perspectives on reflective journals and their implementation. During the implementation of the students' community service activities, students engage in empowerment, coaching, training, and preservation efforts. These activities involve the participation of the entire school community, including pupils, teachers, other school members, and students' guardians. The activities were then recorded in a reflective writing or journal, which not only includes the planned procedure, implementation, and outcomes of the activity, but also include their personal impressions and emotions towards the action.

The coaching clinic has had a beneficial effect on the participants, leading to the enhancement of the students' knowledge. The attendees of this program were provided with knowledge and concepts on reflective writing. An advantage of this is that they possess the ability to comprehend the nature of reflective writing and can differentiate it from other forms of writing. Students also acquired an understanding of the essential components that must be included in reflective writing.

As a result, students are not only having the ability to produce reflective essays and accomplish one of their community service outputs, but their essays also have a greater chance to be selected and printed in the institution's anthology.

Mastering proper writing techniques is the initial stage towards creating captivating written content. There is a strong correlation between the two. Consider students who are studying English, as an illustration. Without a real commitment to mastering the grammar of the English language, it is not feasible for them to acquire an English accent. Writing accurately entails ensuring that each sentence is well-constructed and solid. Coherent sentences are constructed to establish cohesive paragraphs, allowing for the systematic flow of transmitted ideas. After completing the initial step, the subsequent phase involves the task of writing in a captivating manner.

There are numerous interpretations regarding the nature of engaging writing. Frequently, captivating writing involves wandering without purpose, employing vocabulary that lacks direction, and even descending freely in the selection of metaphors, such as 'hair poking out from under a helmet.' Furthermore, some individuals propose that captivating writing is conveyed in a lyrical and melodious fashion. However, this is not true. According to [John Hersey \(2018\)](#), it is possible to create appealing writing with a straightforward and unadorned style. He accomplishes this in the famous documentary 'Hiroshima: When the Bomb Dropped'. The article was initially published in *The New Yorker* magazine. Harsey's writing effectively controlled the ongoing debate on the ethical limits of the choice to deploy the atomic bomb. Harsey does not exhibit condescending behavior. He writes from the perspective of someone who personally witnessed the devastation of Japan caused by the bomb. Harsey's writing exemplifies exceptional journalistic reporting as it meticulously incorporates all the essential elements of journalism, particularly statistics. Harsey's writing can serve as an illustration for understanding the structure and style of reflective journal writing.

Furthermore, the activity enhanced the pupils' writing proficiency. The participants were instructed in the principles and methods of reflective writing, including strategies for generating ideas, identifying the central theme, and organizing thoughts into coherent paragraphs. In their study, [Sudirman, Gemilang, & Kristanto, \(2021\)](#) discovered that students who engage in reflective journal writing develop the ability to concentrate on several aspects of writing, including order, unity, coherence, cohesiveness, content, and structure of ideas. The students' viewpoints on various parts of reflective journal writing were mostly focused on both macro- and micro-level linguistic concerns, as indicated by the interview findings. The act of writing a reflective journal required them to rephrase their thoughts, offer specific information, and resolve issues. Moreover, the cultivation of critical thinking, metacognitive skills, and self-reflection played an increasingly significant role in facilitating the students' progress in writing reflective journals. In a similar vein, [\(Sani, Kurniawati, & Nurwanti, 2017\)](#) suggest that engaging in reflective writing helps individuals enhance their overall writing skills. It aids pupils in enhancing various aspects of writing, including content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Thus, it contributed to developing students' overall abilities in writing including narrative texts and creative writing [\(Amalia, Syahid, & Mirza, 2024; Habibi, Eviyuliwati, & Kartowisastro, 2017; Ramadhanti, 2024\)](#).

In addition, the activity enhanced the participants' autonomy in accomplishing their tasks. This mentorship activity enables participants to engage in a systematic process of reflective writing, allowing them to generate a preliminary version of their writing and refine it into a comprehensive piece. Moreover, the participants successfully completed the work within the designated deadline.

Reflective journal writing has profound effects on students, encompassing personal, relational, and intellectual activity. Additionally, it provides students with the opportunity to delve into self-discovery, self-inquiry, and critical concepts (Sudirman *et al.*, 2021).

## 4. Conclusion

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Acquiring the ability to create reflective writing is crucial for university students. Reflective writing journals are frequently utilized as a compulsory requirement in university activities, such as the community service program at a certain institution. The coaching activity has had a beneficial influence on students in various ways, including enhancing their comprehension and expertise in reflective journals and enabling them to effectively compose them. Students have the opportunity to delve into many approaches for writing reflective journals, such as identifying a unique perspective, formulating specific subjects, elaborating on thoughts through paragraphs, and including other essential components necessary for a well-crafted reflective essay. This activity achieves a harmonious equilibrium between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Furthermore, this mentoring activity offers an opportunity for students to seek guidance and engage in discussions regarding the topics and content of reflective writing. The program provides the students with valuable knowledge and hands-on experience that will enhance their abilities to successfully complete future academic assignments. Future iterations of these exercises will be conducted to provide students with the necessary knowledge and experience to effectively communicate their expertise through writing.

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