

## On Second Thought: Writing Reflection Papers

There are two common types of reflection papers assigned at CST: those focused on experience and practice and those focused on academic readings and ideas. Some require integration of academic theories or theology with spiritual formation or practice. Before you start your assignment, make sure you know whether your professor requires personal voice or more formal, third-person, academic language.

**Reflect:** verb “to think carefully and often for a long time about something, or to express this type of thought”/ **reflection:** noun “careful thought, or an idea or opinion based on this”/ **reflective:** adj. “someone who is reflective thinks carefully and deeply about things” (Longman’s Advanced American Dictionary, 2000)

A reflection paper is an opportunity to write about your ideas as you reflect on a topic or assigned reading. It is an essay with an argument. Evidence for the argument may be taken from an experience and/or a reading assignment. A reflection paper is neither a reaction paper nor a book review. The purpose is to think deeply and carefully about an experience or text and analyze how that experience or text has changed your thinking and/or practice or thinking and/or practice in your field. Professors like to see integration between new ideas and/or experiences with previously held ideas, application of what you learned to practice or ministry, and critique reflecting what you’ve learned from lectures and other reading assignments. A reflection paper **does not focus on summary or quotes**, but on how the readings or experience challenge or cause you to reevaluate your beliefs or ministry. Even though a professor may give you a list of questions, a reflection paper should be an essay, not a list of answers to questions. Often these essays critically reflect on several main themes. Reflection does not mean stream of consciousness. Basic conventions of form, style, and rhetoric still apply.

These are some questions to help you get started:

1. Summarize the main ideas, themes, or arguments in the reading in your own words or summarize the experience using precise descriptive language. 1-3 sentences.
2. If you are writing a reflection paper on an article or book, how do the ideas in the reading fit in with other ideas in the field? What contribution do they make?
3. Where and how does the reading or experience challenge you theologically, culturally, or socially? What bothers, disturbs you, or draws your attention?
4. Does the reading or the experience make you change your thinking in any way? Does it provide background information that changes the way you will deal with people or situations? How will it change the way you do ministry? Be specific in your answer. Tell how your thinking or behavior will change and why.
5. Is there an important question that arises as you read this paper or reflect on this experience?
6. Is there any important fact, idea or issue that you think needs to be considered? Did the author(s) leave anything out that you consider important?
7. Is there something that you want to criticize or disagree with? Does anything make you uncomfortable or contradict your upbringing?
8. How do the ideas connect with other readings, lectures, or experiences you’ve had? How would you integrate these ideas or facts with what you already know or think about this subject? How could you apply what you experienced or learned?
9. Is there anything in your past experience, cultural or ethnic background, or identity that resonates with or clashes with this reading or experience?