



Royal College of
General Practitioners



Health Education England

PROVIDING PRIMARY CARE WORK EXPERIENCE

**INSPIRING &
PREPARING**

**TOMORROW'S
DOCTORS**

REFLECTIVE DIARY



THINKING OF BECOMING A GP?

THE 4 STEPS TO THE STANDARD TRAINING ROUTE

1. APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

When applying to medical school you will need to:

- ▶ Achieve excellent exam results throughout your school career.
- ▶ Gain work experience.
- ▶ Complete a UCAS application including a strong personal statement.
- ▶ Take an admissions test.
- ▶ Attend an interview.

2. ATTENDING MEDICAL SCHOOL

During medical school you will:

- ▶ Gain relevant skills and experiences.
- ▶ Experience all aspects of medicine.
- ▶ Carry out a wide range of clinical placements.
- ▶ Be assessed in a variety of ways.
- ▶ Have opportunities to carry out an elective anywhere in the world.

3. FOUNDATION TRAINING

Foundation year one (F1)

- ▶ Developing the skills, knowledge and experiences you've gained at medical school.
- ▶ After successfully completing your F1 year, you'll receive your full registration with the GMC.

Foundation year two (F2)

- ▶ You'll continue general training whilst gaining continual exposure to a variety of medical environments. This will help you decide which area of medicine you wish to specialise in.

4. SPECIALTY TRAINING

General Practice Specialty Training (GPST)

- ▶ To become a GP in the UK, you will need to gain entry to the GMC's GP register by completing a minimum of 3 years (full time equivalent) specialty training.
- ▶ The training usually consists of 18 months in hospital posts and 18 months in general practice.
- ▶ The three-year specialty training programme for general practice also includes taking the MRCGP examination.
- ▶ Once your specialty training is complete, you'll receive a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) and gain entry to the GMC GP Register.

This reflective diary belongs to:

INTRODUCING YOUR REFLECTIVE DIARY

This reflective diary has been produced to support and guide you through your work experience placement. It is meant as an accompanying document to enhance your pre-placement, placement and post-placement experience.

You will have received this diary prior to your placement so that you can familiarise yourself with its content and also undertake the preparatory activities. These are clearly marked in the text and are designed to help you think about, and gain the most from, your placement.

Please remember to take this reflective diary with you throughout your placement and bring it along to the post-placement workshop as part of the session will refer to it and the notes you have made.

This diary has been created to aid your application to medical school and to help you get the most out of your experience.

CONTENTS

PART 1: PRE-PLACEMENT	
WHAT IS REFLECTION?	6
REFLECTIVE DIARIES	7
MAKING NOTES: WHAT SHOULD I WRITE?	8
TOOLS FOR REFLECTION	9
SIMPLE PROMPTS	9
WHAT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT	10
PART 2: PLACEMENT	
PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: PRACTICE OVERVIEW	14
PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: MEET THE HEALTHCARE TEAM	16
PRACTICE ACTIVITY: PRESCRIPTIONS IN GENERAL PRACTICE	17
WHAT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT EXERCISE	18
PART 3: POST-PLACEMENT	
POST-PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS	26
REFERENCE MATERIAL	27





1

PRE-PLACEMENT

**REFLECTION HELPS US
TO GET THE MOST OUT
OF OUR EXPERIENCES**



WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Reflection helps us to think about our experiences.

We can reflect on the past, the present or even think about the future. It helps us to understand and learn from situations, to develop competencies and to think clearly about career choices. You can use reflection to help you to appreciate what other people are thinking and feeling; and you can use it to explore your own emotions.

“

It allows you to take notes and makes you think about what you are observing whilst on your placement - so when you actually go to the GP practice you can reflect on what is going on. You then go into more detail during the post-placement workshop and now it's all gone into my personal statement.”

Participant, 2015



ACTIVITY: REFLECTING IN MEDICINE

An important part of being a doctor is the ability to reflect on their own practice. What do you think are the benefits of doing this?



KEEPING A REFLECTIVE DIARY

Using and maintaining a reflective diary will help you get the most out of your experience, whilst allowing you to explore your future career options. It can be used to help you remember what you have seen, challenge how it made you feel and think about the skills you will need to develop.

You should keep on returning to your diary as it can help you write your application to university, prepare for interviews and most importantly decide if this is the career path that you want to follow.

When should I use it?

A reflective diary can be used in a number of ways; be that in a GP practice, in a hospital setting, on a formal work experience programme, whilst carrying out a voluntary activity or even after an informal discussion with a healthcare professional.

REFLECTIVE DIARIES

Learning or reflective diaries (sometimes called learning logs, or learning journals), are similar to personal diaries - they allow you to record your own feelings and reactions to events or experiences as they happen. By keeping an up-to-date reflective diary you will find it easier to reflect upon your experience, its content, and its effect on your learning and personal development. Reviewing and reflecting upon your progress is an essential component of your work experience. Reflection allows you to embed learning and, crucially, apply it in our everyday or professional lives.

True and accurate reflection demands more than a mere description of events or experiences - it is your interpretation and analysis of events as they affect you and your development that is important. Therefore reflective diaries are unique documents that highlight and 'unpack' personally important learning experiences. Consider the following account of a learning experience by a recent participant of the GP Work Experience Programme at the University of Leeds.

“ I wasn't sure about the value of a reflective diary when I started the programme - they just seemed like another 'paper exercise'. I really couldn't get my head round how writing things down all the time would help my learning. How wrong I was! I found that keeping a diary made me note how I felt at the time about an activity or event. It's so easy to forget things when you are busy, but by writing my feelings down on paper I took more in. Keeping a regular journal has certainly helped focus my reflective reviews of learning. I found that by looking back on my thoughts and experiences (my reflective diary entries) throughout the GP placement helped me understand more about the subject matter. People skills are so important - observing how the GP behaved and spoke with different people was a real learning experience for me. I learnt about 'active listening', which is listening attentively to what people are saying and the way they are saying it - you learn so much more about the situation by listening in this way. Looking back, and reflecting in this way, I could also see how far I had travelled in my own learning! ”



ACTIVITY: STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Jot down some notes on the key points that stand out in the case study above. One or two bullet points is all that is required here.

Be prepared to share your thoughts on this activity with your peers at the pre-placement workshop.





MAKING NOTES: WHAT SHOULD I WRITE?

There is no right or wrong way dictating when you should use a diary or what you should write in it. Every diary is different. There are though some general points to follow. It should be:

- A record which is useful to you
- Help to jog your memory about what you have seen and how it made you feel
- An honest account of what happened
- Written as soon as possible after the event before you forget anything!

Reflective writing isn't always easy. It can be difficult because you should think carefully about the learning activities you embark upon - whether these are in the classroom or on your placement, you can reflect on all learning experiences.

As a starting point; it might be useful to bear the following points in mind when making your reflective notes:

1. Begin with a description of your experience.
2. Explore what you thought and felt at the time.
3. Provide an analysis of what was good and bad about the experience.
4. Draw some conclusions from your analysis and indicate how you would do things differently in the future based on your experience.

It is important to remember that to make the best use of your diary you should try to use reflective writing techniques rather than simple descriptive methods as illustrated below.



DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

- ▶ Account is descriptive with no reflection.
- ▶ It tells a story but from only one point of view.
- ▶ Emotions, if mentioned, are not explored.
- ▶ Ideas and/or external information may be mentioned but they are not questioned or linked to possible impact on behaviour.



REFLECTIVE WRITING

- ▶ Clear evidence of 'standing back' from the event, mulling over the material.
- ▶ Multiple perspectives have been included.
- ▶ Self-questioning is taking place whilst considering past experiences, current behaviour and even future development.

TOOLS FOR REFLECTION

There are many tools and techniques that have been designed to help you reflect whilst on your placement.

Many of these techniques can help shape the way you approach and deal with your experiences. We've provided examples of the most commonly used methods below.



SIMPLE PROMPTS

There are lots of prompt words and phrases you can use to help focus your attention around actions you've taken. Prompts such as those provided in the table below are great tools to help us reflect because they are easy to remember and apply to all aspects of your placement.

Prompt words or phrases	Questions linked to these
Good/Bad	What went well today/this week? What didn't go so well?
Erase/Rewind	If I could rewind time would I have done things differently? What might be my reasons for changing things?
Why did I do that?	Can I identify what shaped my actions in this instance?
Spot check	Am I clear about what is being asked of me? Could I explain what I'm doing right now to others if asked to do so?
Humble pie	Have I been challenged today in my thinking? Have I learned lessons from it?
Making a difference	What part have I played in making a difference today? Has the change been a positive or negative one?

ACTIVITY: ERASE / REWIND REFLECTION TECHNIQUE

Spend a few minutes, using this prompt technique to rewind through your last week in school or college.

Use the space below to jot down some notes. If you had the time back, what would you do differently and why?





WHAT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT

A slightly more structured approach to dealing with experiences and reflecting upon them are presented with reference to three distinct question areas. The first stage is to focus on 'what' - this requires a description of what has happened or what has been observed. The second element determines 'so what' - what did you learn or take from the experience. The final element focuses on 'now what' - what is the impact on you and your learning. There are additional prompt words and phrases you can use within each of the three areas to help support the development of your own detailed reflections.

We've included an example below (using the 'what, so what, now what' approach) of an experience you may have whilst on your placement. It provides a useful mechanism for exploring what has taken place, and provides you with some helpful prompts to initiate your reflections.

DATE	15th July
WHAT? Describe the activity or what you have observed.	Observed receptionist processing patients.
SO WHAT? What did you learn from this? What did you get out of it? What did you expect to get out of it?	The receptionist dealt with lots of people! It was non-stop. I thought this might be quite a boring part of the placement which would just involve form-filling and other paperwork. I was surprised at how varied the work of the receptionist is in a busy GP practice. Yes, the role does involve a lot of admin-type work but they are also the public face of the practice and the first person a patient sees.
NOW WHAT? What impact has it had on your thoughts? Have these changed in light of your experience?	I think a key point that I've taken from this is that reception staff are skilled at dealing with people - they need to quickly determine where to direct or send patients given the information they've received. Reception staff are important 'gate-keepers' in a GP practice but they are also important members of the team.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE

The word cloud below has been constructed by the General Medical Council (GMC) and outlines the duties of a doctor as listed in their document entitled *Good Medical Practice*. It outlines the areas of competency that you will develop in your future career.

You will need to demonstrate understanding and potential in these areas when applying to medical school. It therefore acts as a useful guide when reflecting upon your work experience.







2

PLACEMENT

**DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE
WILL ENRICH YOUR
PLACEMENT**



PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: PRACTICE OVERVIEW

At the start of your placement it is useful to get an overview of the practice - from the type of patients they see, to the services they offer. Please use the boxes below to fill in this information.

How many patients are registered in total?

On average, how many patients are seen in one day?

How many staff members are employed?

What clinics and services are provided?

How do the demographics of the local community impact on the services that are provided?





PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: MEET THE HEALTHCARE TEAM

As you meet with different members of the primary healthcare team find out a little bit about their roles, what skills they think are important for their duties and what academic journey they took to get into their professions.

ROLE	
DUTIES	
KEY SKILLS	
ROUTE INTO PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATIONS	

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PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: PRESCRIPTIONS IN GENERAL PRACTICE



Here is an exercise that you may wish to complete whilst on your placement. It will help give you an insight into the issues that patients and practitioners face when issuing a prescription.

How much does a prescription cost?

Under what circumstances may someone be exempt from prescription charges?

What is the most expensive drug that can be prescribed? What does it treat and how does it work?

Do you think it is fair that prescription charges exist? Why?

Does the GP practice currently use the Electronic Prescription Service? What are pros and cons of this service?



A TEMPLATE FRAMEWORK FOR YOU TO USE: WHAT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT

We've taken one of the most often-used frameworks for reflection and reproduced it as a template for you to use during your placement.

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3

POST-PLACEMENT ACTIVITY

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS



POST-PLACEMENT ACTIVITY: REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

We've included some useful reflective questions here to help you make the most out of the experiences you've gained whilst on your placement.

Summarise the main activities you participated in during your placement.

What were the highlights of your experience?

What skills do you think you have gained as a result of your work experience placement?

How has the work experience placement influenced your future career plans and aspirations?

How would a doctor utilise the skills you have gained?

Reference material

If you'd like to read more about reflection and reflective writing, take a look at the following sources:

Bolton, G. (2014) *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*. London: Sage.

Cottrell, S. (2011) *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument*. London: Palgrave Study Skills.

Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT A CAREER IN GENERAL PRACTICE

If you're interested in applying to medical school and becoming a doctor, we're here to help you find out more about general practice and the role of a GP.

For more information and to sign-up to our newsletter visit rcgp.org.uk/students or get in touch via schools@rcgp.org.uk



Royal College of
General Practitioners

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Is a Senior Student Education Service Officer with responsibility for Admissions and Widening Participation in the School of Medicine at Leeds. She has worked in the school for 7 years with a background in education administration and nursing. For the last 4 years, she has coordinating the school's outreach work and has been supporting development and delivery of the work experience programme.

Charlotte Smyrk, BSMS

Recently Charlotte joined the Brighton and Sussex Medical School as the Recruitment, Outreach and Widening Participation Co-ordinator after working with both the Widening Participation and Recruitment teams at the University of Sussex. Her role at BSMS includes the delivery of the Work Experience Programme amongst a variety of other new widening participation initiatives.

Chris Bull, RCGP

Student Engagement Manager at the Royal College of General Practitioners, responsible for engaging tomorrow's GPs, through enhancing access and exposure to general practice. He is supporting the project on behalf of the RCGP as part of the delivery of the College's Student Engagement Strategy which aims to inspire future leaders of general practice, to attract, engage and educate our future workforce.

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