The Reflective Essay

Task: To write a reflective essay about your semester abroad to support the documents you submit in your portfolio and to prepare for the PL Oral Examination.

Length: 5 pages/ 2500 words

Deadline: March 30, 2020

It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively. (Gibbs, G. 1988. Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. London: Further Education Unit. p. 9)

Thus, the purpose of reflective essay is to help you learn from your semester abroad during your BA at the TU Chemnitz. It will help you to make connections between your expectations before embarking on the semester abroad, what you learnt at your host university and the experiences that you gather and how you may be able to utilise these lessons and understandings in the future.

Starting Point: Before you left the TU Chemnitz for your semester abroad you will have had to write an academic essay on “*How I will profit from studying abroad*” comprising 2,000-5,000 words. In this essay you will have described:

* Subjects, methodologies and perspectives that you found particularly interesting in your studies that far
* discussed various aspects and preconceptions of a semester at a (your) foreign university intensively
* how the semester abroad would relate to your previous studies
* the direction the semester abroad would allow to plan for when you: return to Germany later on in your studies, thesis and life in general.

Use this essay as a starting point for evaluating the semester that you spent abroad and start you thinking about the experiences, surprises and outcomes that you can take from the time away. Thereafter think about the expectations you had, any surprises that you encountered, changes in the program of study that you made (and reasons why), differences compared to home (classes, programs, cities, cultures etc.), the outcome of the semester abroad and the outlook that you have gained from the period abroad (for the rest of the BA and the BA Thesis and any other future plans).

Organisation of the essay:

# Whilst you are free to structure the essay in any way you see fit, an suggested organisational structure could be: (Adapted from: Gillet, A. Hammond, A. & Martala, M., 2009. *Inside Track to Successful Academic Writing*. Pearson, UK)

**DESCRIPTION**

Introduction

*Describe your situation, where you went, dates*

Personal report

*Report what you did and/or what happened.*

**FEELINGS**

Personal report

*Report how you felt. What did you like or dislike?*

**EVALUATION**

Reflection on action

*Report what was good/bad, easy/difficult, pleasant/unpleasant etc., compare and contrast your experiences, explain why things may have been different to what you were expecting.*

**ANALYSIS**

Reflection on teaching/ the experience of being away from home

*Report what have you been taught, what you have learnt living in a foreign city, describe what you know, have you acquired a new perspective on certain things?*

Evaluate your practice, drawing on your knowledge & experience

**CONCLUSIONS**

Identify gaps

*Describe any gaps in your knowledge, what did not happen that you were expecting to happen, explain how you can fill these gaps, generalise how this experience will help you in the future*

**ACTION**

Action plan

*Produce action plan for future (learning + practice), justify your action plan – this could be in reference to the BA Thesis/ topics. How will you be able to bring these experiences into fruition?*

**CLOSE**

Advice

*What advice would you give others opting to study at the host university in the future. What, with hindsight, would you have done differently?*

Remember:

Reflective writing should include both descriptions, analysis and thoughts about what you have experienced. It should be written in an academic, formal style but, unlike other academic writing, reflective writing is usually written in the first person perspective and should definitely include your thoughts and opinions e.g. *"I read the handout before the lecture as was recommended. I was therefore well-prepared for the lecture and understood it well. I will continue to read the handouts before the lecture"*.