

Appendix A: Weekly Reflection Prompts

Sample Prompts

Week 1

New places, new faces, new work, and new words to learn! Training week presents so much so quickly. Such major changes bring both positive and negative responses and raise many questions. As you think back over your first week's experiences, focus on your responses to and questions about the KEYS Program so far. In your 500-word reflection:

- Identify one or two things you like and explain how you would recommend making them even better.
- Identify one or two things you don't particularly like and explain how you would recommend improving them.
- Identify two or three specific questions that you need answered.

Week 5

When you are stretched beyond what you are used to, you are bound to experience some failures or frustrations. Often, although not always, these difficulties are caused or made worse by how we communicate with one another. As you think back over the past five weeks' experiences, focus on the challenges you have faced in the KEYS Program. Your 300-word reflection should:

- Focus on the most significant challenge you have faced (this may involve communication or it may be in any aspect of the program).
- Explain how you have worked to overcome or reduce this challenge.
- Discuss how you think dealing with this challenge will help you during the rest of the program and in the future.

Anatomy of Weekly Reflection Prompts

Context-setting: Interns know that their weekly reflections will always be about their KEYS experience. The opening sentences of each week's prompt establish the more specific aspect of the program. This context setting also activates their thinking about that aspect using key trigger words and phrases.

Focusing directions: The first sentence stipulates both the timeframe for the reflection and the specific topics to think and write about. The second sentence stipulates the approximate length.

Action items: These bulleted directions stipulate thinking and writing activities that will generate suitable reflections.

As these examples show, the cognitive demands increase over time while the suggested length decreases. The Week 1 prompt does not ask interns to reflect as deeply as the Week 5 prompt, but it does require them to make judgments and hypothesize changes, as well as explain their thinking. The Week 5 prompt pushes the interns to think ahead to apply their KEYS experience to imagined future experiences—and to relate it briefly. In effect, the weekly self-reflection prompts challenge interns to increase their critical thinking while communicating it in more concise ways.

Many interns choose to respond to the early prompts in somewhat formulaic ways (e.g., one paragraph per bulleted action item). This method of response is both efficient and reasonably effective. It tends to mirror most interns' early approach to their lab work: get it done and make as few mistakes as possible. Over time, they realize that they need to think and work differently, taking more chances and synthesizing their ideas more. The increased demands of the weekly reflection prompts mirror what interns are experiencing as they complete work on their research, create their posters, and prepare to explain their projects during the showcase.