

## Reflection Paper Example

**Course:** Social Work Practice and Ethics

**Key Concept:** Strengths-Based Practice and Ethical Assessment

During my field placement at a community support agency, I worked with clients experiencing housing insecurity and financial instability. Early in the placement, I approached intake assessments with a strong focus on identifying risks, needs, and immediate service gaps. I viewed this approach as efficient and aligned with agency protocols. At the time, I believed that thorough problem identification was the primary marker of professional competence. This assumption later became central to my reflection.

One intake interview in particular prompted me to reconsider this approach. While completing a standardized assessment form, I guided the conversation toward housing status, employment history, and barriers to stability. The client answered cooperatively but remained disengaged. When the conversation shifted briefly toward past coping strategies, the client became noticeably more responsive and detailed. This contrast led me to question how my assessment focus shaped the interaction.

Course material on strengths-based practice emphasizes that assessment is not a neutral process. It frames how clients understand themselves and their role in intervention. According to this framework, effective practice identifies capacities, resilience, and existing resources alongside challenges. Reviewing my assessment notes alongside the course readings revealed that my initial approach reflected a deficit-oriented model. I prioritized documentation of problems while overlooking indicators of agency and adaptability.

Applying this theory to the intake experience helped me identify a misalignment between ethical intent and practical execution. The strengths-based model discussed in class positions clients as active participants rather than passive recipients of services. In contrast, my assessment structure positioned the client primarily as a collection of needs. This realization marked a shift in how I understood the ethical dimensions of assessment practice.

The evaluation phase of reflection required examining the consequences of this approach. While the assessment met procedural requirements, it limited rapport and reduced opportunities for collaborative goal setting. The client provided accurate information, yet the interaction lacked engagement. This outcome highlighted how assessment methods influence not only data quality but also the working relationship. The course emphasized that ethical practice includes respect for client dignity and self-determination. Viewed through this lens, my approach met technical standards but fell short of relational ones.

Further analysis clarified how institutional pressures shaped my decision-making.

Time constraints, documentation requirements, and performance metrics all incentivized rapid information gathering.

I initially interpreted adherence to these pressures as professionalism. Through critical analysis, I began to see how unexamined reliance on standardized tools can narrow practitioner judgment. The course material framed ethical practice as an ongoing process of reflection and adjustment rather than rule compliance alone.

Reflecting on my role in the interaction also exposed assumptions about effectiveness. I equated efficiency with competence and neutrality with professionalism. Strengths-based theory challenged this view by demonstrating that intentional engagement and client-centered inquiry improve both outcomes and ethical alignment. Recognizing this tension required me to reconsider how I define professional responsibility in practice settings.

Applying theory to the situation suggested practical alternatives. Integrating strengths-based questions into the initial assessment could have balanced required documentation with relational engagement. Asking clients to describe past problem-solving strategies or sources of support would have produced evidence-based observations while reinforcing client agency. These adjustments align with ethical guidelines discussed in the course and support more sustainable intervention planning.

This reflection also contributed to my development as a social work practitioner. It highlighted the importance of reflective practice in navigating competing demands between agency structures and professional values. I learned that ethical decision-making often occurs within constraints rather than ideal conditions. The ability to critically examine one's approach becomes essential in maintaining alignment with social work principles.

In conclusion, this intake experience reshaped my understanding of assessment as an ethical act rather than a procedural task. By applying strengths-based theory to my own practice, I moved from routine documentation toward evaluative analysis of my professional assumptions. The reflection clarified how assessment frameworks influence client engagement, ethical integrity, and intervention quality. This insight will guide my future practice by encouraging deliberate integration of strengths-based principles within institutional contexts, even when efficiency pressures are present.