

How to Write a Reflection in the IB DP CAS Diary or Portfolio

Here is a **student-friendly guide** you can use directly in the **IB DP CAS Diary/Portfolio**. It is designed to help students understand that a CAS reflection is more than a description of what they did.

What is a CAS reflection?

A CAS reflection is an opportunity to think about your experience, your learning and your personal development. It should show **what you experienced, what you learned from it, how you changed, and what you might do differently in the future.**

A reflection is **not simply a description of what happened.**

✗ Description:

Today we volunteered at the charity event. We prepared food and distributed it to visitors.

✓ Reflection:

Today I volunteered at the charity event and helped prepare and distribute food. At first, I was unsure how to communicate with people I had never met, but I gradually became more confident. I realized that effective teamwork requires listening and adapting to other people's needs. This experience helped me develop my communication and collaboration skills, and I would like to become more proactive in similar situations.

The 4 Steps of a Good CAS Reflection, a useful way to structure your reflection is:

1. WHAT? – What happened? Briefly describe the experience.

Ask yourself:

- What did I do?
- What was my role?
- Who did I work with?
- What was the purpose of the activity?
- What did I contribute?

Do not spend most of your reflection describing the activity.

2. SO WHAT? – What did I learn? Think about what the experience taught you.

Ask yourself:

- What did I learn?
- What skills did I develop?
- What surprised me?
- How did I feel?
- What was difficult?

- Did I overcome a challenge?
- Did something change the way I think?
- Did I discover something about myself?

This is the **most important part of your reflection**.

3. NOW WHAT? – How will I use this learning? Connect your experience to your future.

Ask yourself:

- What will I do differently next time?
- What would I improve?
- How can I use what I learned in another situation?
- Has this experience changed my goals?
- What will I do next?
- What new challenge could I take on?

4. EVIDENCE – What demonstrates my learning? Where appropriate, connect your reflection to evidence in your CAS portfolio.

For example:

- photographs
- videos
- project documents
- certificates
- presentations
- planning documents
- feedback from others
- products you created
- records of participation
- meeting notes
- journal entries

Remember: Evidence should support your reflection. A photograph alone does not demonstrate learning. **A Simple CAS Reflection Formula** You can use this structure:

I did... → I experienced... → I learned... → I developed... → I realized... → Next time I will...

For example: *During our CAS project, I helped organize a fundraising event. Initially, I found it difficult to coordinate everyone's responsibilities because each member had different ideas. By listening to others and dividing the tasks more clearly, we were able to work more effectively. I learned that successful collaboration requires communication, flexibility and compromise. I also became more confident in taking responsibility. In future projects, I will make sure that roles and deadlines are clearly established from the beginning.*

Questions to Help You Reflect You do not need to answer every question. Choose the questions that are relevant to your experience.

Before the experience

- Why did I choose this experience?
- What do I hope to learn?
- What skills do I want to develop?
- What are my expectations?
- What challenges might I face?

During the experience

- What happened?
- What was my role?
- How did I feel?
- What was challenging?
- How did I respond to the challenge?
- Did I work effectively with others?
- Did I have to change my original plan?
- What decisions did I make?

After the experience

- What did I learn?
- What did I learn about myself?
- What new skills did I develop?
- What did I learn from other people?
- What went well?
- What did not go well?
- What would I change?
- Did the experience change my perspective?
- How did I contribute to others?
- How can I apply this learning in the future?

Connect Your Reflection to CAS Learning Outcomes

A strong reflection can demonstrate one or more of the **seven CAS learning outcomes**.

LO1 – Identify own strengths and develop areas for growth

Think about:

- What am I good at?
- What did I discover I need to improve?
- How did I develop a new skill?

Example: *I realized that one of my strengths is organizing tasks, but I need to become more confident when speaking in front of a group. This experience gave me an opportunity to work on this area.*

LO2 – Demonstrate that challenges have been undertaken, developing new skills

Think about:

- What was new or difficult?
- How did I respond?
- What new skill did I develop?

Example: *I had never designed promotional material before, so creating the posters was challenging. I researched different design techniques and learned how to use a new digital tool.*

LO3 – Demonstrate how to initiate and plan a CAS experience

Think about:

- Did I help develop the idea?
- Did I set goals?
- Did I organize tasks?
- Did I create a plan?

Example: *I helped transform our initial idea into a realistic project by dividing the work into smaller tasks and creating a timeline.*

LO4 – Show commitment and perseverance

Think about:

- Did I continue when things became difficult?
- Did I maintain regular participation?
- How did I deal with setbacks?

Example: *Although our first fundraising idea did not work as planned, I did not give up. We discussed alternatives and adapted our approach.*

LO5 – Demonstrate the skills and recognize the benefits of working collaboratively

Think about:

- How did I communicate with others?
- Did I listen to different opinions?
- How did I contribute to the team?
- What did I learn from others?

Example: *Working with different people taught me that collaboration is not about having everyone agree with my ideas. Listening to different perspectives helped us find a better solution.*

LO6 – Demonstrate engagement with issues of global significance

Think about:

- What larger issue does my experience connect to?
- Did I learn more about poverty, equality, sustainability, human rights, cultural diversity or another global issue?
- Did the experience change my understanding?

Example: *Volunteering made me think more deeply about inequality and access to basic resources. I realized that problems that seem distant can also affect people in my own community.*

LO7 – Recognize and consider the ethics of choices and actions

Think about:

- Was there an ethical decision?
- Did my actions affect other people?
- Did I have to consider different perspectives?
- Was there a conflict between what was easy and what was right?

Example: *When planning our project, we had to decide how to present information about the people we were supporting. We realized that it was important to protect their dignity and avoid presenting them only as people who needed help.*

Reflection Sentence Starters

Describing the experience: *During this experience, I... / My role in the activity was... / The main purpose of the experience was... / I decided to participate because...*

Describing feelings: *At first, I felt... / I was surprised when... / I found it challenging to..." / I became more confident when...*

Describing learning: *I learned that... / This experience taught me... / I discovered that I am able to... / One important lesson I learned was...*

Describing challenges: *The main challenge was... / Initially, I struggled with... / To overcome this challenge, I... / When my original plan did not work, I...*

Describing personal growth: *Compared with the beginning, I now... / have become more... / This experience helped me develop... / I became aware that I need to improve...*

Looking forward: Next time, I would.../ In the future, I will.../ I would like to develop this skill further by.../ I can apply what I learned to...

Weak, Good and Strong CAS Reflections

✗ Weak reflection – Description only

Today I volunteered at the school event. I helped prepare the room, welcomed visitors and cleaned afterwards. It was a successful event.

Why is it weak?

It tells the reader **what happened**, but it does not explain what the student learned or how the experience contributed to personal growth.

Good reflection – Some learning: *Today I volunteered at the school event. I helped welcome visitors and organize the room. At first, I was nervous about speaking to people I did not know, but I became more comfortable as the event continued. I learned that communication is important when working with visitors and other volunteers.*

This includes **experience + feelings + learning**.

Strong reflection – Learning, analysis and future development: *During the school event, I was responsible for welcoming visitors and helping to organize the space. Initially, I was nervous because I had to communicate with people I did not know. However, after speaking to several visitors, I became more confident and learned how important it is to listen carefully and adapt my communication to different people. I also realized that successful teamwork depends on everyone taking responsibility rather than waiting for instructions. This experience helped me develop my communication and collaboration skills. In the future, I would like to take a more active leadership role when organizing similar events.*

This demonstrates:

Experience → Challenge → Response → Learning → Personal growth → Future action

Important: Reflection Is Not the Same as a Diary Entry

A CAS diary can record what you did: *We had our third meeting today. We discussed the posters and decided who would design each one.*

A CAS reflection goes further: *During our third meeting, I realized that our original plan was too ambitious for the time available. I suggested dividing the design work between smaller groups, which made the process more manageable. This taught me that planning requires flexibility and that adapting a plan is not a sign of failure. Next time, I will consider the available time and resources more carefully when setting our goals.*

How Long Should a CAS Reflection?

There is **no need to write a very long reflection every time**. A meaningful reflection can be a short paragraph if it clearly demonstrates:

What happened + What I learned + How I developed + What I will do next.

Quality is more important than quantity. Avoid writing many repetitive entries that simply say: *It was fun. / I enjoyed it. It was interesting. I learned a lot.*

Instead, explain **why** it was meaningful and **what specifically you learned**.

The Golden Rule of CAS Reflection

DON'T JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU DID — TELL ME WHAT IT MEANT!

A strong CAS reflection should help answer:

What did I do?



What did I experience?



What challenged me?



What did I learn?



How did I change?



What will I do differently in the future?

Your CAS Portfolio should therefore show **a journey of learning and personal development**, not simply a record of activities.

Quick Student Checklist

Before submitting a reflection, ask yourself:

- ☐ Did I explain more than what I did?
- ☐ Did I describe something I learned?
- ☐ Did I explain a challenge or significant moment?
- ☐ Did I reflect on my feelings or perspective?

- ☐ Did I identify a skill or area of personal growth?
- ☐ Did I explain how the experience affected me?
- ☐ Did I connect my reflection to a relevant CAS learning outcome?
- ☐ Did I consider what I could do differently next time?
- ☐ Did I include relevant evidence where appropriate?
- ☐ Does my reflection sound personal and authentic?

Remember: A CAS reflection is about your learning journey, not about proving that you were busy.

The strongest CAS portfolios demonstrate **reflection, growth, commitment, learning and meaningful engagement** throughout the two-year CAS experience.