



**RTPI**

Royal Town Planning Institute

# Reflective Journal Advice Note

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## Supplementary Guidance

For Chartered L-APC and A-APC membership candidates

Published June 2019



**This supplementary guidance must be read alongside main guidance available at:**

**[www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources)**

**[www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources)**

**Your application will be rejected or deferred if you fail to comply with the main guidance.**

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# 1. General information

## 1.1 Who is this advice note for?

This advice note is applicable to Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) membership candidates applying for:

- Chartered membership via the Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC): [www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc).
- Chartered membership via the Associate Assessment of Professional Competence (A-APC): [www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc).

## 1.2 How to use this advice note

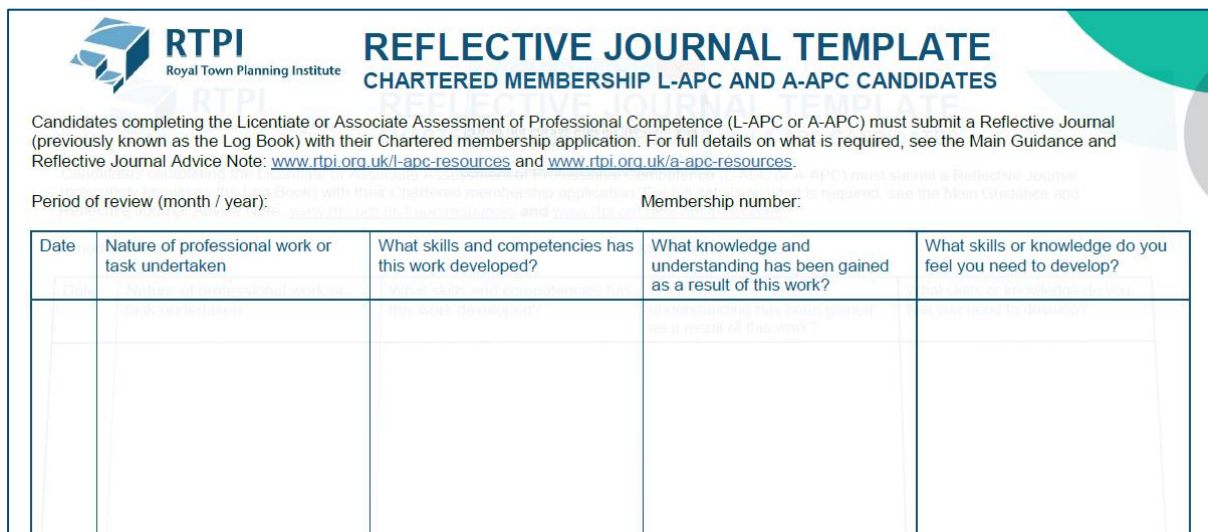
This advice note provides supplementary guidance on how to complete the Reflective Journal for Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) APC applications. It **must** be read in conjunction with the **main guidance available at:** [www.rtpi.org.uk/apc](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/apc).

# 2. Completing the Reflective Journal

## 2.1 Reflective Journal template

The RTPI provides a template for your Reflective Journal available on the RTPI website with APC resources: [www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources) and [www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources). It is recommended that you use this as it ensures you cover each of the required elements.

### REFLECTIVE JOURNAL TEMPLATE



**RTPI** Royal Town Planning Institute

**REFLECTIVE JOURNAL TEMPLATE**  
CHARTERED MEMBERSHIP L-APC AND A-APC CANDIDATES

Candidates completing the Licentiate or Associate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC or A-APC) must submit a Reflective Journal (previously known as the Log Book) with their Chartered membership application. For full details on what is required, see the Main Guidance and Reflective Journal Advice Note: [www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources) and [www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources).

Period of review (month / year): \_\_\_\_\_ Membership number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Nature of professional work or task undertaken	What skills and competencies has this work developed?	What knowledge and understanding has been gained as a result of this work?	What skills or knowledge do you feel you need to develop?

There are four key columns to the template.

#### COLUMN 1: NATURE OF WORK / TASK

This column should be a factual note of the planning or planning-related work undertaken. Do not make the entries too generic. Providing more detail will allow you to explore what you have learned. In many Reflective Journals, it is possible to see the improvement in reflection as candidates put more detail in the nature of the work. For example, you might consider expanding 'Site Visit' to include 'conducting an inspection, recording and identifying relevant data, considering local impacts and evaluating the importance of neighbour representations received'.

Expanding the description of the task also helps to avoid repetition and set out how a particular project added to your experience. You might be managing a number of development applications, and by providing more information about each one you can reflect more clearly on how each new application contributed to your knowledge and skills, how they differed and how you applied what you learned from one set of circumstances to the next situation.

Try to select interesting examples that have challenged you in skill or knowledge development, or have produced contentious issues to be resolved. This also demonstrates a good understanding of the issues surrounding each experience.

## COLUMN 2: SKILLS / COMPETENCIES DEVELOPED

In this column you should consider the type and level of skills utilised or obtained in order to undertake a particular task.

Skill refers to successfully applying learning concepts, principles and information in practice and getting expected results.

Describe skills at a suitably detailed level rather than at a broad generic level. For example, candidates often refer to improving their communication skills. Consider the context in which the skills are being developed. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Was the communication written or oral?
- Was it undertaken in an adversarial climate?
- Were you involved in further negotiation as a result?
- What worked and what didn't?

The more insightful the questions, the more effective the reflection will be.

One example of how you might explain good communication skills: 'I had to liaise with the case officer to obtain up-to-date information – using telephone and email effectively. I drafted an application response and learned the importance of clear, succinct writing. I also learned how to raise objections in a positive and helpful way, providing guidance on what needed to be done to advance the application'.

## COLUMN 3: KNOWLEDGE / UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPED

In this column you should reflect on the knowledge / understanding you acquired or developed as a result of the activity. Some experiences may lead you to readjust the knowledge you have.

Some examples of knowledge you might gain include: knowledge of relevant policies or legislation, knowledge of the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct, or knowledge of political issues.

## COLUMN 4: FUTURE SKILLS / KNOWLEDGE YOU NEED TO DEVELOP

In this column you are required to reflect on the work you have undertaken and identify potential training and development needs.

Reflective practice is “the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning”<sup>1</sup>.

You should be honest about your weaknesses and areas for development. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What aspects of the task did I find difficult or challenging?
- In the future, how could I alter my practice and / or methods to deliver a better outcome for this task?

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<sup>1</sup> Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. Basic Books, New York.

You should identify areas for development for each entry of your Reflective Journal. Your mentor may be able to help you identify these if you are having trouble.

Assessors will also expect to see how a record about a future development is referenced in future entries – how the skills were acquired and developed.

There should be **clear links** between the Reflective Journal and the third section of your written submission, the **Professional Development Plan (PDP)**, especially from your later Journal entries. For further details on the PDP see the main guidance.

### Use your Reflective Journal entries to identify competencies and case studies

Your Reflective Journal is a valuable tool, which can ensure your success in obtaining Chartered membership. Use it to track your progress throughout the Licentiate or Associate period – which competencies are you meeting (or not) and why? Use your Reflective Journal to identify your final case studies.

## 2.2 How often should you complete the Reflective Journal entries?

It is important that your Reflective Journal is kept up to date so that it provides an effective method of supporting your professional development. You should aim to update your Journal regularly, at a time which is most effective for you. Some candidates prefer to update the journal weekly or monthly, whereas others may add entries on the completion of smaller scale tasks and projects. Try to find the best time for you and your development.

## 2.3 Recording long term and short term projects

How you choose to structure your Reflective Journal will depend on the nature of your work.

### LONG TERM PROJECTS

If you are working on **continuous, long-term projects**, you will need to think about breaking these down into smaller, more self-contained activities that you have undertaken in order to enter this in the 'Nature of work' column. This could include client meetings; site visits; pieces of research; presentations; consultations etc. Having recorded the details of the work in the 'Nature of work' column, you can then consider what exactly you have learned from the work, how it might improve your ability to act in the future, and whether it has presented new avenues to continue your development. Once you have set the scene / detail in an initial entry, there is no need to repeat this unless the project scope changes.

## SHORT TERM PROJECTS

If you are working on **smaller scale tasks**, each one could form a separate entry. For example, within development management, particular applications could provide the examples for the 'Nature of work' column, drawing out the circumstances of the particular application, what made it interesting, useful, or challenging and how you tackled it. You will then be able to reflect on the skill and knowledge development, particular to that application, in the remaining columns.

### Maintaining confidentiality within the Reflective Journal

Your Reflective Journal is bound by the same standards of confidentiality as your written submission. When completing your Journal entries, you may want to use a code or referencing system for confidential projects, particularly for any that are longer term or that span several entries.

## 2.4 Avoiding repetitive entries

Entries in the Reflective Journal could become repetitive if they focus on the **processes** you undertake or **lack detail**. However, if you think less about the process you are following, and more about the particular examples you are dealing with, this should present useful material for the Reflective Journal.

For example, a planner working in a development management function will be following the same processes in dealing with different planning applications. Entering 'Processed planning applications' into the 'Nature of work' column of the Reflective Journal, will not provide sufficient information to draw out knowledge and skill related to a particular case. Such an entry would probably lead to knowledge and understanding in 'planning legislation', and skills and competence in 'researching applications', 'report writing' or, even more blandly, 'processing planning applications'.

Conversely, entering more specific details of a particular application (while observing any restrictions with regard to disclosure of confidential information) will allow you to think in more detail about what made the application interesting or challenging, and how you had to act to deal with the application. This provides a Reflective Journal entry, which helps you to draw out the knowledge and skills that were required or developed in order to deal with that specific application.

## 2.5 Planning skills versus generic skills

The Reflective Journal template is structured to encourage you towards including evidence of the planning and technical knowledge you have developed rather than just focusing on more generic and business skills.

Your Reflective Journal should be focused on planning work – it should be clear to anyone reading the Reflective Journal that you are engaged in planning activities.

There should be a strong interrelationship between knowledge, understanding, skills and competence. You should not be too concerned about whether you have entered a particular area of development into the 'right' column, as long as there is logic to the entries and your reflection on your development is recorded.



## 2.6 List of relevant professional skills

Your experience should help you develop skills and competencies relevant to planning. The following list provides some guidance of the type of skills that your experience could be directed towards developing.

<b>RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL SKILLS</b>	
<p><b>Professional ethics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Demonstrating the characteristics of a reflective practitioner, and an ability to learn from prior practice.</li> <li>➤ Upholding standards of ethical behaviour.</li> <li>➤ Commitment to lifelong learning and maintaining professional competence.</li> <li>➤ Demonstrating the ethics of good practice, including respect, tolerance, confidentiality and honesty.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Collaborative and multidisciplinary working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Partnership working – engaging with all professionals employed in the creation of sustainable communities and the built environment.</li> <li>➤ Creating an environment where information is shared.</li> <li>➤ Effective networking.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Defining objectives.</li> <li>➤ Delivering – making it happen given constraints.</li> <li>➤ Resource management, including financial and personnel management and use of information technology.</li> <li>➤ Process management and evaluation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Creative vision and design</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Producing creative and innovative strategies and solutions.</li> <li>➤ Making lateral connections.</li> <li>➤ Aesthetic and design awareness and critique.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Critical analysis and decision making</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Problem definition.</li> <li>➤ Weighing evidence and evaluation of alternative solutions.</li> <li>➤ Decision-making.</li> <li>➤ Mediating between the different requirements and expectations of other professionals, consultees and stakeholders, clients and regulators, communities and lobbying groups to deliver an equitable planning solution.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication and interpersonal skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Written, oral, graphic and multi-media communication.</li> <li>➤ Listening actively.</li> <li>➤ Using appropriate communication methods tailored to the audience.</li> <li>➤ Managing misinformation.</li> <li>➤ Internal communication and information sharing.</li> <li>➤ Community involvement and facilitation.</li> <li>➤ Understanding and accommodating the role of various types of media.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Data-collection, investigation and research.</li> <li>➤ Quantitative and qualitative analysis and appraisal.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Plan preparation and implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implementing planning in different contexts and at different development scales.</li> <li>➤ Using policy frameworks to inform decisions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Inspiring and motivating others at all levels.</li> <li>➤ Leading by example – displaying enthusiasm, tenacity, flexibility and self-motivation.</li> <li>➤ Embracing and leading through change.</li> <li>➤ People and organisational management.</li> <li>➤ Coaching and mentoring.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stakeholder management and conflict resolution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identifying stakeholders and customers, and awareness of how these groups can change.</li> <li>➤ Relationship building.</li> <li>➤ Negotiation, mediation and advocacy.</li> <li>➤ Understanding the dynamics of conflict and how to achieve mutual agreement.</li> </ul>

## 2.7 Style

There are no restrictions on the style you use for your Reflective Journal. Make the style something that you are comfortable with rather than using a format that you think an external reader may prefer. You may prefer bullet points or be happier with a more conversational style as in the example below.

One example of conversational style: 'I was reminded once again of the importance of the pre-application advice, this was an instance where the XXXX had given misleading and inconsistent advice, leading to an awkward path for the application and a difficult situation for me'.

Within your Reflective Journal, it is essential that you:

- use page numbering;
- include your membership number on each page; and
- date your entries.

Find out more on how to submit at: [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership-submit](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership-submit).

## 2.8 Should CPD activity be included in entries?

Licentiates and Associates are required to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) activity as part of their membership. In addition to your daily work, it can be useful to record some of this CPD in your Reflective Journal. You should ensure you draw out what you have learned from this experience in the same way as you do for your professional work. Examples of CPD activity could include formal courses; additional reading in your own time; online learning; volunteering (e.g. involvement in Young Planner networks), including RTPI activities.

CPD activity should be recorded **in addition** to your professional work. This means that the Reflective Journal should always be primarily a reflective record of your professional work, rather than a CPD log.

## 2.9 Reflective Journal in the workplace

You may already be keeping a work record or time log as a requirement of your employer, but this is unlikely to include the reflection expected in the Journal. The Reflective Journal is not simply a work record; it should include critical reflection on the work undertaken. You may wish to discuss with your employer or with your mentor how the two requirements can best complement one another.

You should use your Reflective Journal to assist you at appraisals and to help build your curriculum vitae. It is a valuable career development tool.

# 3. Examples

## 3.1 Reflective Journal – good examples

The following examples are detailed entries, which clearly outline the candidate’s role and the rationale behind the work including past problems. The candidate has been able to explain the new skills and knowledge developed within the context of each piece of work and has managed to draw out specific areas for improvement.

GOOD REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY: EXAMPLE 1			
Nature of work	Skills / competencies	Knowledge / understanding	Future development
<p>Planning Future Service Provision in (Location) seminar – I organised this event as part of my role to coordinate responses from internal service providers to borough Local Plan and now Local Development Framework (LDF) consultations. In the past it has been difficult to extract information from these providers and opportunities for X County Council services to benefit from development have been missed. At the start of the new era of spatial planning we explained the new system and how and why service providers should get involved right from the start. X County Council service providers and District Council Planning Policy Officers were invited. Themed group meetings will be set up to deal with the service provider’s more detailed aspirations for the County and individual districts for input to LDFs.</p>	<p>Creating an environment where information is shared between County Council and District Councils (two way process), effective networking, partnership working, improving internal communication, identifying customers.</p>	<p>Greater understanding of the views and issues other service providers have, greater knowledge of the way they can input into this new system and how planning can bring service providers together to create better services for the public.</p>	<p>Negotiation, mediation and advocacy, ongoing communication with these groups.</p>

**GOOD REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY: EXAMPLE 2**

Nature of work	Skills / competencies	Knowledge / understanding	Future development
<p><b>Reviews of a planning application.</b></p> <p>I was asked by a senior colleague to review a planning application. We were submitting the representation on behalf of our client who lived next door to where the application was proposed.</p> <p>The application involved the erection of a replacement dwelling considerably bigger than the existing. It was also located within an area of special landscape character as identified on the proposal's map.</p>	<p><b>Identification of Issues and Using Appropriate Research Methods</b> – It soon became apparent that the applicant's case centred upon the interpretation of paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and whether the creation of the new dwelling could be said to be 'truly innovative'.</p> <p>With the NPPF providing limited elaboration upon what this term means, I used a compass search to find appeal decisions that have been made post NPPF involving paragraph 55. This provided a key part of the evidence that I used to support my case.</p> <p><b>Time Management</b> – Time management was critical on the project as there was only a week left to run on the statutory consultation period.</p> <p><b>Aesthetic and Design Awareness</b> – Having identified the extent to which the proposals were seen to meet paragraph 55 of the NPPF as being crucial in the argument, my colleague suggested that as part of our argument we should draw upon the thoughts of a Landscape and Visual Impact consultant to bolster our</p>	<p>I am feeling more confident in talking to clients and responding to their questions on a daily basis. I also feel more confident in instructing and directing sub consultants.</p> <p>I have a much greater understanding of paragraph 55 of the NPPF and the tests that need to be established in determining whether a design can be said to be truly innovative.</p> <p>I know that it is important to manage client expectations when writing representations on behalf of clients.</p> <p>I realise the importance of drawing upon the expert knowledge of others in helping to build a case for a planning application. To use them is not a shortcoming of your own knowledge but helps in justifying your own case. This complies with clause X of the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct.</p>	<p><b>Resource Management</b> – I need to think more critically about what other resources, beyond that immediately available to me, I need in order to undertake tasks effectively.</p> <p>Having a landscape architect review the proposals gave our argument additional weight beyond that as planners we could comment on. I need to appreciate the wider network of specialists that can support planners in making their arguments.</p> <p><b>Time Management (Fees)</b> – I ended up spending more time on the project than the total fee that had been assigned for us to do the work. I need to ensure that I translate fee budgets into the amount of time that is available to resource a project to ensure I use clients' time appropriately.</p>

**GOOD REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY: EXAMPLE 2**

	<p>argument. Their knowledge and experience has allowed me to gain a greater understanding for design.</p> <p><b>Project Management –</b> The work produced by the Landscape and Visual consultant was key to our case, as such, it was important that they were set clear objectives and instructions to ensure that timescales were met.</p> <p><b>Written Communication Skills</b> – I wrote the letter of representation which helped me developed important skills for writing to persuade.</p>		
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**GOOD REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY: EXAMPLE 3**

<b>Nature of work</b>	<b>Skills / competencies</b>	<b>Knowledge / understanding</b>	<b>Future development</b>
<p>Planning history search and letter of advice to a client in relation to forthcoming proposals for an extended foodstore in city centre. The proposals have the potential to have a damaging effect on our client's permitted proposal for a retail development nearby.</p>	<p><i>Problem solving skills –</i> by identifying the relevant planning applications within the planning history and projecting what the forthcoming planning application may comprise, and researching the planning policy position.</p> <p><i>Communication skills –</i> by preparing the letter of advice and giving oral advice to the client.</p>	<p>An understanding of the planning history attached to the foodstore identified and knowledge gained on how any forthcoming proposals may have a detrimental impact on competing retail developments nearby.</p>	<p>Need to give both written and oral advice to clients to improve my competency and confidence.</p>

## 3.2 Reflective Journal – poor examples

The following examples illustrate many of the poor practices in putting together a Reflective Journal. It has been put together to include many areas of bad practice which should be avoided.

In these poor examples, the headings are too general, and do not give the candidate an opportunity to explore the different skills and knowledge that might be related to each case. Greater detail on the specifics of each

application / type of application might be more useful, as this would give greater opportunity to explore what they have learned.

Relevant knowledge development might cover applicable areas of planning law etc. but it is the **specifics** that will be most helpful.

You should avoid listing the competencies from the guidance but rather use these as a guide for what skills might have been developed. If key themes (e.g. communication, research) seem to occur repetitively, careful reflection on the exact nature of the skill involved will alleviate this. For example:

- Did the communication take place in writing or orally?
- How was written communication produced?
- Was there any antagonism when communicating orally? (This might then lead to another key theme of negotiation.)

POOR REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY: EXAMPLES			
Nature of work	Skills / competencies	Knowledge / understanding	Future development
Processing planning applications.	Research, delivering – making it happen, communication.	Planning law.	Further knowledge of planning law.
Regional CPD event – Development Control.	Effective networking.	Knowledge of development control policies.	To apply information from CPD event to my daily employment.
Contacted consultant with regard to listed building regulations	Research – finding a consultant; communication skills.	The limits of my own responsibility for specialist applications.	More knowledge of listed building regulations.
Site visits.	Data collection, investigation and research; quantitative and qualitative analysis and appraisal.	That it is useful to have first hand knowledge of a site involved in an application.	None – successfully achieved all elements.
Answering telephone calls from the public.	Negotiation, mediation and advocacy; relationship building; ethics of good practice.	Knowledge of the relevant areas of planning law.	Telephone skills.



**POOR REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY: EXAMPLES**

<p>Preparation and submission of representations objecting to a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) relating to developer contributions at the borough council.</p>	<p><i>Problem solving skills</i> – via the research and collection of data in relation to the draft SPD.</p> <p><i>Communication skills</i> – via the preparation of written representations in the form of a letter to the Local Authority.</p>	<p>Knowledge of the written form required for the submission of written representations.</p>	<p>Further practice of submitting representations to improve my competency and efficiency.</p>
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REFLECTIVE JOURNAL  
ADVICE NOTE  
RESOURCES



**Access all resources including  
main guidance at:  
[www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/l-apc-resources)  
[www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/a-apc-resources)**

**Contact the Membership Team:  
[membership@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:membership@rtpi.org.uk)  
**+44(0)20 7929 9462****

**Thank you for reading this  
supplementary guidance.**

**FIND OUT MORE:  
[www.rtpi.org.uk/apc](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/apc)**