

**Professional Readiness Reflection Essay**

Nicole De Leonardis

Sacred Heart University

OT-609-E: Personal Transformation IV

Professor Nicole Smith

November 30, 2025

As I prepare to enter my Level II fieldwork, I reflect on my personal and professional growth throughout the program at SHU. Over the past year and a half, I have gained knowledge in a field that has strengthened my clinical reasoning, provided me with client-centered approaches to care, and taught me what it means to be an occupational therapist in the real world. To reflect on the progress I have made, this reflection demonstrates the professional behaviors I have developed, how I used critical thinking in case scenarios, and how my strengths and weaknesses shaped my TUOS.

Throughout the program, I applied the knowledge and skills learned from my classes in three different Level I fieldwork opportunities. These opportunities allowed me to prepare myself for the clinical settings I will be working in starting in January. In Level I fieldwork, I demonstrated the ability to perform assessments in different settings, observe multiple cases and scenarios, and apply my learned knowledge in conducting treatment plans. For example, in my pediatric level I fieldwork, I observed an assessment for a 4<sup>th</sup> grader presenting with poor visual perceptual skills. After observing, the OT educator allowed me to come up with an appropriate treatment plan that matched his goals, used strategies from my literature, and applied the “just right” challenge. This one experience alone allowed me to showcase my skills and growing competence in a pediatric setting. It also gave me the confidence to know that I could do it; thus, my next treatment plan was even better! Additionally, my portfolio is a great example of my readiness to grow into an entry-level occupational therapist. It displays my professional development and vision plans, fieldwork summaries and evaluations, and professional works I created for the program through courses and service learning. I believe the foundation I have built thus far sets me up for success as a future occupational therapist.

Professional behavior is defined as the ability to present oneself respectfully while demonstrating effective communicative skills, adhering to ethical considerations, and being accountable for one's own thoughts, decisions, and actions. Following the AOTA Code of Ethics, my approach to clients, peers, and educators is based on principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, and fidelity (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). I aim to provide respect and empathy to those I work with and strive to effectively communicate and collaborate with them professionally. One of my strengths is my empathetic use of self. I believe in building rapport with clients and getting to know them as people and not just "patients". Through active listening and constant consideration of how the client may be feeling about their condition, their goals, and their plan of care, I will always be the one to ask, "How are you feeling today?". I think providing an intention and meaning to the quality of care is the best way to let your client know that you care about them wholeheartedly.

Critical thinking is an important aspect of making decisions, building interventions, and coming up with client-centered approaches in occupational therapy. In many of my courses, I was taught to interpret evaluations and assessments, differentiate between limitations and motivation, and guide intervention planning through clinical reasoning. With this practiced knowledge, I used problem-solving skills to plan activities utilizing the "just right" challenge. For my Level I fieldwork in mental health, my peer and I came up with an activity to do that would increase our clients' ability to live independently. We conducted a vision board plan that included materials such as magazines, newspapers, and stickers, which allowed our clients to envision the future they wanted. We had to adjust the level of challenge as we worked with them by spreading out the magazines to allow decision-making to occur and have the clients ponder what they wished to place on their board. This activity brought up many emotions and gave the

activity meaning and purpose. It was amazing to see firsthand how an activity can go from just papers and pens to a masterpiece filled with hard work and a level of care from our clients that wasn't there before we started. Throughout the activity, I used my effective communication skills to build therapeutic relationships with these clients, who all came from diverse cultural, socioeconomic backgrounds. Adapting my communication style to meet everyone's needs helped me connect with each one of them, and we all gained respect for one another. This made the activity run smoothly, and it became impactful for all of us. Sometimes I question whether I "know what I am doing" in moments before these activities. These doubts come from always wanting to be successful and perform well, not just for myself but for the people I have the pleasure of working with. I need to recognize that this feeling does not come from my lack of ability and knowledge, but rather just from not wanting to fail. However, I know failure is inevitable and a learning experience, and through more hands-on experience like this, I believe I will become more confident in my abilities.

I have gained experience in interprofessional teamwork through case scenarios, group projects, and service-learning trips. I believe it is important to recognize each role in your plan of care. Each role is a percentage of care the client didn't have before. For example, I went on a service-learning trip to Guatemala with three different healthcare professions: occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology. We all worked together to treat clients using our roles appropriately, seeking out feedback, and listening and observing when the other was working with the patient. It was a great opportunity to see firsthand how important understanding different roles can be in impacting a client's quality of care. It is also important because it allowed me to use an OT lens when it came to advocating for OT treatment in

different scenarios. In addition, I was more confident in my abilities as an OT when I believed in something I thought was important and thus spoke up when it was necessary.

My peers would describe me as initially quiet until I feel comfortable and confident enough to speak up. Once I am comfortable, I am open and ready to engage in discussions between peers or with educators. They shared that I was well-spoken and considered me a strong contributor to group projects or PBL groups. In addition, they believe me to be someone who provides feedback that is supportive, while also being kind and respectful. However, they noted that I lack confidence in areas where I could be applying my skills, especially in a fieldwork setting where it is my opportunity to showcase what I can do. Based on their feedback, their view aligns with what I believe to be true. The feedback showed me that my challenges have nothing to do with my ability but rather my confidence in my abilities. I want to work to practice speaking up earlier in discussions, remind myself that I do hold the knowledge, ask for help more often, and seek as many hands-on opportunities as possible. Over time, I know using this feedback to my advantage will help me grow into a confident, assertive occupational therapist.

By reflecting on my readiness to step into the real world as an OT, I have recognized the growth of my professionalism, empathy, clinical reasoning, and interprofessional skills. As I continue to work towards building my confidence and trusting my abilities, I understand that it is all about the journey. There is no rush! My strengths have built a foundation for my entry into Level II fieldwork, and I am prepared to use them and my challenges to take the next steps toward becoming a licensed occupational therapist.

## References

AOTA 2020 Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics. (2020). *The American journal of occupational therapy : official publication of the American Occupational Therapy Association*, 74(Supplement\_3), 7413410005p1–7413410005p13.  
<https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S3006>

Schlegel, S. (n.d.). *Chapter 5: Being client-centered: Understanding interpersonal characteristics and mode preferences*. [PowerPoint slides]. Master of Occupational Therapy, Sacred Heart University. Retrieved from Sacred Heart University Blackboard.

Schlegel, S. (n.d.). *Chapter 9: Establishing intentional relationships*. [PowerPoint slides]. Master of Occupational Therapy, Sacred Heart University. Retrieved from Sacred Heart University Blackboard.