**REFLECTION STRATEGIES & EXAMPLES**

**Type:** Simple Reflection  
**Purpose:** Acknowledgement of Feelings  
**Tip:** Respond to resistance with nonresistance


A good general principle is to respond to resistance with nonresistance. A simple acknowledgment of the person’s disagreement, feeling, or perception can permit further exploration rather than continued defensiveness, thus avoiding the trap of taking sides. A reflective listening statement will often suffice for this purpose. Sometimes a small shift in emphasis can also be accomplished through reflection.

**Example 1:**  
*Student:* I’m trying. If my parents would just get off of my back, I could focus on my studying.  
*Advisor:* You’re working hard to on making the change you need to make.  
OR  
*Advisor:* It’s frustrating to have a parent constantly asking about your academics.

**Example #2:**  
*Student:* I don’t want to drop the course. I should be able to handle 5 classes in one semester on my own.  
*Advisor:* You don’t want to drop a course. It seems like a crutch.

**Type:** Amplified Reflection  
**Purpose:** Magnifying Resistance statement to the absurd  
**Tips:** Reflections must be made in a straightforward, supportive, matter-of-fact manner.  
Any vocal hint of sarcasm, irony, incredulity, or impatience can quickly recast your response as hostile and thus elicit student resistance.


A related and quite useful response is to reflect back what the person has said in an amplified or exaggerated form—to state it in an even more extreme fashion. If successful, this will encourage the person to back off a bit and will elicit the other side of ambivalence. This must be done empathically, because any sarcastic tone or too extreme an overstatement may itself elicit a hostile or otherwise resistant reaction.

**Example 1:**  
*Student:* I can take care of myself. I don’t need anyone checking in on me.  
*Advisor:* So you might be better off, really, without support or help from anyone.

**Example #2:**  
*Student:* The first exam test score doesn’t really mean anything anyway. I don’t need to study more for the next exam.  
*Advisor:* It seems to you that your exam test scores have nothing to do with your overall course grade. They won’t have any impact on it so there’s no need to study more.
**Type:** Double-Sided Reflection  
**Purpose:** Developing Discrepancy  
**Tips:** Use “And” instead of “but” in order to maintain balance of emphasis


*Capture both sides of ambivalence. If the student’s recent statement manifests only the resistant side of the argument, a double-sided reflection acknowledges what the student has said and adds to it the other side of his or her own ambivalence (not yours). This requires the use of material that the student has offered previously, perhaps not even in the same session.*

**Example 1:**  
*Student:* I know that what you’re trying to do is help me, but I’m just not going to do that.  
*Advisor:* One the one hand, you know there are some challenges I’m trying to help you work through, and on the other hand, what I suggested is not acceptable to you.

**Example #2:**  
*Student:* I don’t procrastinate any more than most of my friends. Nothing wrong with putting a few things off now and again.  
*Advisor:* I can see how this is confusing for you. You’ve told me how your procrastination concerns you and how it affects your academic performance, and also it seems like you’re not putting off assignments any more than your friends do. Hard to sort out.

**Type:** Shifting Focus  
**Purpose:** Detour


*One approach is to shift the student’s attention away from what seems to be a stumbling block in the way of progress. This amounts to going around barriers rather than trying to climb over them. Such detouring can be a good way to address or at least postpone dissonance when encountering a particularly difficult issue. The general structure of a shifting focus response is to first defuse the initial concern and then direct attention to a more readily workable issue.*

**Example 1:**  
*Student:* Ok, I have to be here because I’m on academic probation. Tell me what I have to do.  
*Advisor:* I don’t know enough about you yet for us to start talking about what it makes send for you to know. What we need to do right now is learn more about why you are here.

**Example #2:**  
*Student:* This is all my fault.  
*Advisor:* That’s not the issue at all, and I don’t want you to worry about it. It’s not going to help to place blame. I am worried though that there have been some rather unfortunately things happening to you that have lead you to where you are today. Tell me a little more about...
Type: Reframing

Purpose: Interpreting with new meaning


Another response to resistance behavior is to reframe what the student is offering. This approach acknowledges the validity of the student’s raw observations but offers a new meaning or interpretation for them. The student’s information is recast into a new form and viewed in a new light that is more likely to be helpful and to support change.

Example #1:
Student: I’ve tried so many times to do better in this course and failed.
Advisor: You’re very persistence, even in the face of discouragement. This change must be really important to you.

Example #2:
Student: My parents are always nagging me about doing well in school. They are always asking me about how much I study, how my classes are going, if I like my professors.
Advisor: It sounds like they really care about you and are concerned for you. I guess they express it in a way that upsets you, and maybe we have help them learn about how you’re doing in a different way.

Type: Agreeing with a Twist

Purpose: Reflection with Reframe


A related way of rolling with resistance is to offer initial agreement, but with a slight twist or change of direction. This retains a sense of consonance between you and the student, while allowing you to continue influencing the direction and momentum of change. Agreement with a twist is basically a reflection followed by a reframe.

Example #1:
Student: You aren’t a student here at UMass. You don’t know how it is.
Advisor: The truth is that it’s really up to you on how manage your experience and academics here at UMass. You’re in the best position to know which ideas are likely to work for you and which one’s area. I’m not going to tell you want to do. You will be a full partner in the process of determining your options for moving forward.

Example #2:
Student: Why is everyone always on me about picking a major? You and my parents are ganging up on me about making a decision. You’d be upset too if everyone you talked to wanted to know when you were going to pick your major and career.
Advisor: You’ve got a good point there, and that’s important. There is a bigger picture here, and maybe I haven’t been paying enough attention to that. Selecting a major isn’t simply and it does impact your career opportunities. Major selection involves may different things. I think you’re absolutely right.
Type: Emphasizing Personal Choice
Purpose: Reinforcing Autonomy


*Resistance sometimes arises from the phenomenon of psychological reactance. When people perceive that their freedom of choice is being threatened, they tend to react by asserting their liberty (e.g., “I’ll show you; nobody tells me what to do!”). It is a common and natural reaction to a threatening loss of choice. Probably the best antidote for this reaction is to assure the person of what is surely the truth: in the end, it is the student who determines what happens. An early assurance of this kind can diminish reactance.*

**Example #1:**
*Student:* Why are you giving me this worksheet and telling me which classes I have to take?
*Advisor:* It’s just information on requirements for the major. What do you with it is complete up to you.

**Example #2:**
*Student:* What if I tell you I’m not taking an 8am class. End of Story.
*Advisor:* You’re a free person, and it’s your choice. I can’t make any decision for you even if I wanted to.

Type: Coming Along Side
Purpose: Reverse psychology


*If taking up one side of the argument causes an ambivalent person to defend the other, then the process ought to work both ways. When a counselor advocates for change, the ambivalent person argues against it, but what happens if the counselor defends the other side, the counterchange side? In a way, it is a special case of amplified reflection. By the nature of ambivalence, when the counselor raises only one side the client is inclined to explore the other. Because of principles of self-perception theory, it is important for the counselor to be mindful of this process, because a person who is caused to defend one side of the dialogue.*

**Example #1:**
*Student:* I don’t think it’s for me.
*Advisor:* It’s certainly possible that after giving it a try, you might not be better off, so it might be better not to try at all. What’s your inclination?

**Example #2:**
*Student:* I don’t go to class sometimes, and I don’t like that I miss work, but I don’t think it’s that much of a concern really.
*Advisor:* It may just be worth it to you to keep on going/not going to class has you have been, even though it causes some problems. It’s worth the cost.