

STAGE 1 · FOUNDATION JOURNEY

Understanding Myself through the Lens of Soil Mechanics

First Session Assignment

Objective

This task is designed to help you reflect deeply on your personal, academic and professional journey. The aim is to understand your strengths, weaknesses, interests, challenges and experiences, while using soil mechanics as a creative lens for self-discovery.

What to Include in Your Essay

Please reflect on the following:

1. **Your strengths and weaknesses.** What are you naturally good at? What habits, behaviours or limitations repeatedly make progress harder? Use examples.
2. **Your interests and passions.** What subjects, problems, activities or goals genuinely interest you? When do you feel most purposeful or engaged?
3. **Your current challenges.** What are you dealing with now, academically, professionally or personally? How are you responding?
4. **Past successes and failures.** Choose meaningful examples. What contributed to each outcome? What did you do well? What could you have done differently?
5. **Lessons and patterns.** What recurring patterns can you see in your decisions, behaviour, successes or setbacks? What have these experiences taught you about yourself?
6. **Next steps.** What do you now understand more clearly, and what do you intend to improve or do differently?

Using Soil Mechanics as Metaphor

Use soil mechanics concepts to help explain your experiences. The aim is not to fit technical words into the essay for their own sake. Each analogy should preserve the essential meaning or mechanism of the soil concept and should make your reflection clearer. Here are five examples to guide you:

- **Plasticity:** You may use plasticity to describe your ability to adapt to changing circumstances without losing your underlying direction.
- **Consolidation:** You may use consolidation to describe gradual change under sustained pressure, remembering that consolidation is a process that can produce settlement.
- **Shear Strength:** You may use shear strength to describe the capacity to resist pressures or setbacks without losing stability.
- **Permeability:** You may use permeability to describe openness or receptiveness to information, ideas or opportunities.
- **Sieve Analysis:** You may use sieve analysis to describe separating competing priorities and identifying what truly matters.

Requirements

- Length: approximately 1,000 words.

- Use at least 10 soil mechanics concepts meaningfully and technically correctly. You may use more where they genuinely improve the reflection.
- Quality is more important than quantity. Avoid forcing technical terms into sentences where the analogy does not fit.
- Write primarily in your own words and use specific examples from your own experience.
- At the end of the essay, include:
 - A glossary defining each soil mechanics term you used.
 - A list of references for the technical soil mechanics definitions, using any recognised citation style (APA, MLA, Harvard, etc.).

Key principle: The purpose of this reflection is not to impress your mentor or show how many soil mechanics terms you know. It is to understand yourself more clearly. *Soil mechanics is the lens, not the destination.*

Learning Outcomes

By completing this assignment, you should be able to:

1. Develop deeper self-awareness through structured reflection.
2. Identify strengths, weaknesses, behavioural patterns and current development needs.
3. Learn from past successes and failures by examining causes, not only outcomes.
4. Communicate technical soil mechanics concepts through meaningful real-world analogies.
5. Strengthen your understanding of soil mechanics by applying concepts accurately outside the textbook context.
6. Turn reflection into clear priorities and practical next steps for your development.

Before You Submit

Read through your essay once more and ask yourself:

- ☐ Have I explained what I learned about myself, not just what happened to me?
- ☐ Have I included both strengths and weaknesses?
- ☐ Have I identified at least one current challenge?
- ☐ Have I examined my own role in both successes and failures?
- ☐ Do my soil mechanics analogies remain technically defensible?
- ☐ Have I identified clear lessons and next steps?

Deadline: None, take the time you need. The value of this exercise comes from honest reflection, not speed. *When your essay is ready, upload it at damilolaakinniyi.com/mentorship/reflection-essay/. I'm really looking forward to reading your unique story.*