

HELP WITH WRITING MORE REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY!

The following excerpts are from an article on reflection and reflective writing. It is written by Phil Race from University of Leeds

Why Reflect?

Reflection deepens learning. The act of reflecting is one which causes us to make sense of what we've learned, why we learned it, and how that particular increment of learning took place. Moreover, reflection is about linking one increment of learning to the wider perspective of learning – heading towards seeing the bigger picture. Reflection is equally useful when our learning has been unsuccessful – in such cases indeed reflection can often give us insight into what may have gone wrong with our learning, and how on a future occasion we might avoid now-known pitfalls. Most of all, however, it is increasingly recognized that reflection is an important transferable skill, and is much valued by all around us, in employment, as well as life in general. The ability to reflect is one of the most advanced manifestations of owning – and being in control of – a human brain. Have you reflected today? Almost certainly yes! But have you evidenced your reflection today? almost certainly 'sorry, too busy at the moment'. And the danger remains that even the best of reflection is volatile – it evaporates away unless we stop in our tracks to make one or other kind of crystallization of it – some evidence. In our busy professional lives, we rarely make the time available to evidence our ongoing reflection. But we're already into an era where our higher education systems are beginning to not only encourage, but also require our students to evidence their reflection. So what can we do to address the reflection culture gap – how can we approach accommodating our lack of experience in evidencing our reflection, and helping our students to gain their skills at evidencing their reflection?

Although many attempts to cause people to evidence their reflection tend to be backward looking, the reflection which can be generated by past, present and future-tense questions can be much deeper.

For example, the trio of questions:

1. What worked really well for you?
2. Why do you think this worked well for you?
3. What are you going to do as a result of this having worked well for you?

Is a much richer agenda for reflection than just any one of these questions on its own.

Questions to help deeper reflection

1. What did I actually achieve with this piece of work? Which were the most difficult parts, and why were they difficult for me? Which were the most straightforward parts and why did I find these easy?
2. How well do I think I achieved the intended learning outcomes for this task? Where could I have improved my achievements? Why didn't I improve them at the time?

3. What have I got out of doing this assignment? How have I developed my knowledge and skills? How do I see the payoff from doing this assignment helping me in the longer term?
4. What else have I got out of doing this assignment? Have I developed any other skills and knowledge, which may be useful another time? If so, what are my own emergent learning outcomes for doing this assignment?
5. What was the best thing I did? Why was it the best thing I did? How do I know that it was the best thing I did?
6. What worked least well for me? Why did this not work well for me? What have I learned about the topic concerned from this not having worked well for me? What have I learned about myself from this having not worked well for me? What do I plan to do differently in future as a result of my answers to the above questions?
7. With hindsight, how would I go about this assignment differently if doing it again from scratch? To what extent will this assignment influence the way I tackle anything similar in the future?
8. What did I find the greatest challenge in doing this work? Why was this a challenge to me? To what extent do I feel I have met this challenge? What can I do to improve my performance when next meeting this particular sort of challenge?
9. What was the most boring or tedious part of doing the assignment for me? Can I see the point of doing these things? If not, how could the assignment be redesigned to be more stimulating or interesting for me?
10. Has it been worth the effort I put in? Do the marks represent a just reward? Should this assignment be worth more or less marks in the overall scheme of things?
11. Do I feel that my time on this assignment was well spent? If not, how could I have used my time more sensibly? Or should the assignment been designed differently? Which parts of the assignment represent the time best spent? Which parts could be thought of as time wasted?
12. How useful do I expect the feedback to be, that I receive on my efforts for this assignment? What sort of feedback do I really want at this point in time? What are my expectations of getting useful feedback now, based on the feedback (or lack of it) that I've already received on past work?
13. Overall, how has this assignment helped or hindered my motivation to learn more about this part of my syllabus? Has it encouraged me or disillusioned me?
14. To what extent has this assignment helped me to clarify what I need to learn about this topic? Have I a clearer picture after this assignment? Who can help me gain a clearer picture?
15. To what extent has this assignment helped me to understand what is expected from me in future assessments?
16. What advice would I give a friend about to start the same assignment?
17. What are the 3 most important things that I think I need to address to improve my work at this moment in time? Which is the most urgent? What is a sensible deadline?