

Academic and Employability Skills

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Introduction

In this report I will reflect on my learning in the Academic and Employability skills module and in order to realise my reflection I will make use of theory and reflection models. I will use Kolb's learning cycle who is a representative author for this concept and I will apply it to each experience described in the reflection.

This report will include topics such as: Academic writing, Paraphrasing and Referencing. These topics are interrelated and I have selected them because I had basic knowledge or no knowledge on them. Before doing this undergraduate course, I never had to write reports academically, being able to make use of specific literature, ideas and concepts, using paraphrasing and knowing the correct system to the referencing.

I will reflect on the way this new information impacted and improved my written skills. Although I am a confident speaker and I am able to express my views and communicate efficiently, I reckon I struggled in the past regarding my writing skills.

Main report: The Reflection

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's learning cycle which is also known as Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is a model of reflection used for the process of learning through experience. It involves four stages that are essential to the analysis because the model assumes that the process of learning follows a specific pattern. Following this 4 stages of the experiential learning cycle will ensure an effective learning through the experiences (Kolb, 1984).

The model shows that for an effective learning to occur, you must pass through four stages. The model uses the word "experiential" to highlight the fact that we learn through our experiences. Kolb (1984) organised the learning cycle in four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. First stage refers to having an experience, the next stage refers to the reviewing of the experience and the reflection of it; the third stage

conceptualises it and as conclusions are formulated and the learning realised from the experience is assessed; and the last stage involves planning and using and applying what was learned. First two stages involve a more objective approach, whilst the last two stages involve a more subjective approach as it refers to reflectors own thinking and judgement.

During our module Academic and Employability Skills we learned about a variety of topics that were meant to improve our skills, to learn new skills and help with our personal development and employability skills.

Academic writing

The topic of Academic writing was scheduled at the beginning of the course and during the class were discussed different terms such as: sentence structure, paragraph structure, aspects related to vocabulary and usage of linking words. The lecturer provided videos and practical exercises about academic writing.

The *reflective observation* of the learning process through this experience made me think about the information provided, but also intrigued me to read more on the subject as academic writing is not something that can be learned in one session of learning. I considered that I needed to make my own research on the topic and allocate more time for individual learning. The resources available on Moodle were really informative such as the “Short Guide to Academic Writing Style” by Thompson Writing Program. The study gave great general indications related to style techniques for learners studying in their first year as myself. Avoiding the colloquial language and using a formal language clarified me how an assignment should be written as it gave examples which facilitate my understanding. Part of the formal writing was to omit contractions which means to fully spell the words out, aspects which I did not know about before. It highlighted the cases when the first person can be used in formulating ideas (Day, 2018).

I reckon that for some issues related to grammar I still need to study more as English is not my first language, but I learned that keeping a simple expression is best to be used at the beginning to make sure the content is well understood and easy to read. I realised also how important is to allocate time for proofreading.

In conclusion this experience gave me the knowledge to be able to formulate my assignments in academic writing and this was the base that I needed for my studies. This learning experience made me able to adjust to the academic writing expected during my course.

The key style techniques and strategies improved my writing considerably as now I am able to write my first write report for my reflection. I will make use of the knowledge to future experiences at the

University or even at the workplace and real life experiences being able to produce efficient written reports.

Paraphrasing

The topic on Paraphrasing is another term that I was familiar with, but I did not know or practiced specific techniques to avoid plagiarism when discussing someone else's work and reasoning. The Paraphrasing topic was learned in week 4 when we were presented methods of paraphrasing by the lecturer using power point presentation and taught how to present someone else's ideas using different techniques.

As simple as it sounds to use your own words to present others work to support your view, it needs careful consideration as it has to maintain the same meaning. After paraphrasing it has to be provided the author's surname and year to acknowledge the source. In paraphrasing there are several techniques that can be used such as usage of synonyms, changing word class or order. Understanding the text is essential in order to develop correct writing (Bailey, 2011).

With this experience I consider that the effectiveness of the session was given by the practical exercises during the in-class activities. It conjured my focus in attempting to paraphrase and I realised that in order to be successful I need more individual study which I did and I reckon that with time it will become more easier for me.

I learned from the experience what is paraphrasing, how to approach paraphrasing, why used it and how it will enrich my work during the course. The paraphrasing can be realized using synonyms of the words for example "it highlights" with "it enhances". Other technique for paraphrasing can be realized though changing the word class for example the verb : "to analyse" to noun "the analysis". Another technique is changing the order of words but maintaining the same meaning. Paraphrasing is not something that I knew or put it in practice before starting my undergraduate studies as my work or previous studies did not required it. I consider paraphrasing is a tool that provides quality to the reports, as it enables the learner to sustain its own views and ideas whilst referring to existing theories. I consider that paraphrasing gives more validation to my work and it highlights my understanding in correlation or in contradiction with others work which is critical thinking.

I plan to use paraphrasing in my future assignments at the University as many times I am required to analyse published literature on different concepts.

Referencing

Referencing is another topic that intertwines with the previous topics academic writing and paraphrasing as it involves the ability to organise sources, but also to give in text referencing.

This topic was taught in week 5. The experience involved power point presentation and discussions on referencing, and in-class activities which asked the students to practice referencing.

I learned how to realise in text referencing and how to create a list of references as I did not know or learned previously in my studies or required in my work. I understood well the system and I am confident to apply it when I will need it.

Referencing is an important skill to have as a student to be able to provide qualitative assignments. The Harvard Referencing Style which is the most used system by universities and it is required from me as a student use refers to reference list and in-text referencing. The reference list is realised at the end of the assignment on a separate page on which are organised all the sources used in alphabetical order of the surname of the authors, excluding articles or documents that do not have an author. If there are more books or studies of the same author, it is organised after date of publication. It includes name of the author, year of publication, title of the work, location of publication and publisher. When citing from an online source the referencing is realised by writing the name of the author if known, year, article title, specifying that is an online source and making available the URL or DOI and when it was accessed. The in-text referencing is used when there are used quotations from a work or when is paraphrased a work. There can be situated at the beginning of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. The in-text referencing is shorter than the list of reference and it only provides surname of the author or editors name and year of publication. If there are more authors than three it can be written only the first author surname and ad “et al” for the rest of the authors followed by the year. In the case where there is no author it is written in italics the title, followed by the year of publication (Lloyd, Moryto, 2018).

Learning this methods of referencing combined with previous learning on academic writing and paraphrasing helped me to develop my writing skills. There are skills that build my confidence in writing assignments as I was concerned on how I will manage to accomplish the tasks. It was something that I needed to improve, that I wanted to improve and that I will continue to improve.

I will use the in-text referencing and referencing list in my future assignments. Having good references are part of my marking for which I aim to do my best. I will use the Harvard Referencing system as required by my university making sure I follow the correct order and providing the related information to the referencing.

Conclusion

The module of Academic and employability skills had a great impact on me as a student as I gained new skills and I improved my existing ones. The new skills obtained through learning experiences were related to academic writing, paraphrasing and referencing where I had major lacks. I did not know how to paraphrase or reference and although it requires more practice, I am now confident to write my academic reports such as this reflection where I used published sources on the selected topics, paraphrasing and I was able to reference them.

Although in my reflection I referred strictly to the three main topics because there have provided me new skills, I consider that the other topics learned during the module were as important. For the other topics I had previous knowledge, but it improved and developed my skills, my thinking and my own development. I find Kolb's model of reflection a complex and efficient model which contributed greatly to my process of learning through experiences.

Before this reflection I never formulated a reflective writing and I will continue to practice it as it raises my self awareness, it gives me multiple perspectives to analyse experiences, it makes me allocate time for a more in depth thinking using critical analysis, using other's work to support my ideas and provides multiple angles. Ultimately, it made me think of planning about how to use the learning and how to practice it, which many times we tend to put the information in a "drawer" and lock it there.

References

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