



Learning outcomes

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- ✓ understand what is meant by 'reflection'
- ✓ understand the importance of reflection to evaluating and improving personal performance
- ✓ identify different kinds of reflection for a variety of purposes
- ✓ develop methods for improving your reflective skills
- ✓ consider Kolb and Schon's models of reflection – and devise your own model
- ✓ consider how to communicate the results of your reflection to other people.

The value of reflection

If you had a fleck of bright green paint between your eyes, or egg on your chin, you wouldn't be able to see them. When you are too close, without a mirror or a comment from other people, you could pretend there was nothing to see. This won't, of course, prevent others from seeing what you cannot.

Similarly, we are usually too close to ourselves to be aware of the things we most need to know. We can easily fail to recognise what is evident to other people. Fortunately, we can stand back occasionally and reflect. Well-developed skills in reflection can help us to:

- ★ gain an in-depth, honest picture of ourselves, including our hidden motivations, fears and doubts, and how these help or hinder us
- ★ understand what affects our own performance and progress
- ★ acquire insights and make better decisions
- ★ increase control over our own thoughts, emotions, responses and behaviours, so that we are in a better position to achieve what we want to achieve.

Reflection in everyday life

Reflection is a natural activity. To a greater or lesser extent, we all spend time rethinking events, rehearsing diverse ways of approaching a situation, or wishing we had said or done things differently. With hindsight, we have the benefit of seeing how even an apparently minor comment, look or action was more significant than we realised at the time.

This is reflected in everyday expressions:

- ★ *'If only I knew then what I know now ...'*
- ★ *'With hindsight, I realise ...'*
- ★ *'I could never have imagined that doing X would result in Y ...'*
- ★ *'If I had the chance, I would do it all over again.'*
- ★ *'It was worth it/It wasn't worth it'*
- ★ *I wish I had ...'*

In other words, we review what was said or done, weighing up the consequences and considering what the alternatives might have been. We evaluate whether we would do things differently if given the chance again or whether we were right first time.

Why engage in reflection?

Developing independent judgement

At university level, you need to take responsibility for your own progress. Students are expected to develop into independent thinkers, capable of evaluating their own performance, drawing conclusions about what they did well and how to improve. Your success will depend, to a large extent, on yourself.

You need to be confident in your own judgements of your work. The feedback you receive from tutors and other students gives you a rare opportunity to compare your own evaluations with those of other people.

Your evaluations should be based upon sound criteria rather than a general feeling that you are right and others wrong. Consider the differences between your own evaluations and the feedback you receive from others: these may hold important clues about how to achieve better grades and to improve your performance generally.

Reflection and personal development planning

All British universities are required to provide personal development planning (PDP) for students as a 'structured process of reflection'. By the time you leave university, you are expected to know how to use structured reflection to understand:

- ★ yourself, your motivations, choices and behaviours
- ★ what you want to achieve
- ★ how to plan, follow through, review and evaluate a course of action
- ★ how your responses and performance affect other people
- ★ how to take action to improve your work or learning to the benefit of yourself and/or others.

The 'reflective practitioner'

Many occupations take a 'reflective practitioner' approach and build this into the work cycle, such as through staff reviews or appraisal. Typically, it involves taking personal responsibility for:

- ★ your continuing professional development (CPD)
- ★ evaluating your personal experience, strengths, qualities and skills
- ★ identifying ways of using your strengths well, within your professional area
- ★ identifying personal limitations and areas that could be improved through training, practice or informal learning
- ★ recognising the effects of your own responses and behaviour and taking responsibility for these
- ★ making useful contributions to team discussions
- ★ improving individual and team performance
- ★ identifying your own contribution to the results of a task, project or outcome.

Your course might include reflective activity. If not, the self-evaluation questionnaire on page 273 can help you to decide your next step.



What is 'reflection'?

Reflection is a thinking skill. It is associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding. It includes such factors as the following.

1 *Making sense of experience*

It is important to note the difference between 'experience' and 'learning'. Experience can be the basis for learning and development. However, just because we have been through an experience does not mean we have understood all there is to learn about it – or even that we have learnt anything at all. Reflection is an essential part of learning. It is where we analyse experience, actively attempting to 'make sense' or find the meaning in it.

2 *'Standing back'*

By 'standing back', we gain a better view or perspective of an experience, issue or action. It is not easy to reflect deeply when caught up in the midst of activity.

3 *Repetition*

Reflection involves 'going over' a situation, perhaps even several times, in order to look at it critically from several points of view and to check nothing has been missed.

4 *Deeper honesty*

Reflection is associated with a striving after the truth. Honest and open reflection helps us to acknowledge things we find difficult to admit in the normal course of events.

5 *'Weighing up'*

Reflection involves a sense of even-handed judgement and critical evaluation – it usually involves 'weighing things in the balance', taking all things into account rather than just the most obvious.

6 *Clarity*

Reflection can bring greater clarity, as though seeing things reflected back in a mirror. This can be useful at any stage in the process of devising, carrying out or reviewing activities.

7 *Understanding*

Reflection is associated with opening up to learning and understanding at a deeper level, including gaining insight into theories, concepts and experiences that are difficult to access by other means.

8 *Making judgements*

Reflection involves an element of making judgements and drawing conclusions.

Reflection as challenge

The reflective process is challenging. We do not always like to discover the truth about ourselves: it can be embarrassing to find we have been talking to others with a dab of egg yolk on our chin. We would rather believe it wasn't there or that nobody could see it.

The same is true of the reflective process. When it works well, we discover things that make us feel uncomfortable. Our natural reaction is to pretend they do not really matter, or to look for an excuse, or to blame someone else. The things we most need to know can be the hardest to hear.

It takes time and practice for people to develop good reflective skills. Don't be discouraged if you think reflection does not come naturally to you. This book structures reflection on a wide range of issues. If you have undertaken some of the reflections and activities, then you will already be developing a good sense of what is involved.

Activity



The relevance of reflection to me

Circle as many of the following as are relevant and of benefit to you. Use the empty circles to add in any others of importance to you.

To consider how I could get better marks

To think about how what I am learning all fits together

To see how I could do things differently at work

To manage my emotions better

To put time aside to consider my life plans

To check I am on track with what I need to do to get a job

To check I am on track with what I need to do to gain promotion

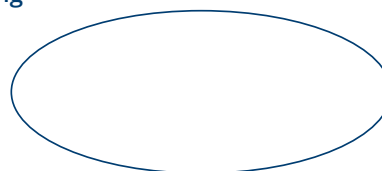
To check that I am taking things in on my course

To apply theories to my work

To make sense of what I am learning

To be more efficient

To be more mindful of how I do things



To make me slow down and think

To become more self-aware

To think about how my actions affect others

To see how I change over time

To be more professional in my approach

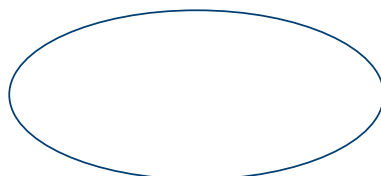
To gain a broader perspective

To take on board feedback from other people

I need to do it for my course

I need to do it in my job

For staff appraisal



For better self-understanding

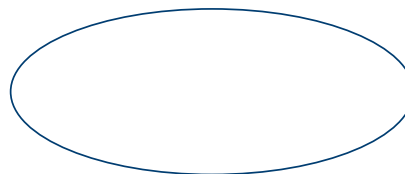
To consider what training I need

To avoid getting into a rut

To find out where I could introduce more variety to the way I do things

For space to think about what matters to me

To take on board new ideas



Highlight the one that is the most significant for you.



Reflective practice

For each of the following statements, rate your responses as outlined below. Note that the rating for 'strongly disagree' carries no score.

Rating: 4 = *strongly agree* 3 = *agree* 2 = *sort of agree* 1 = *disagree* 0 = *strongly disagree*

'I am very confident that I ...'	Rating				
1 know how to use reflective journals, logs or blogs	4	3	2	1	0
2 understand myself very well	4	3	2	1	0
3 challenge my own thinking sufficiently	4	3	2	1	0
4 spend sufficient time looking for relevant links between experiences and theory	4	3	2	1	0
5 spend sufficient time 'making sense' of what I learn and experience	4	3	2	1	0
6 spend sufficient time thinking about the significance of what I learn	4	3	2	1	0
7 spend sufficient time thinking about how to improve my academic performance	4	3	2	1	0
8 spend enough time thinking about the effects of my actions and behaviour	4	3	2	1	0
9 make an accurate evaluation of my own strengths	4	3	2	1	0
10 know how to apply my experience and skills to novel situations	4	3	2	1	0
11 am aware of my personal limitations	4	3	2	1	0
12 am aware of my own personal development needs	4	3	2	1	0
13 always consider all options before arriving at a decision	4	3	2	1	0
14 am always aware of all the motivations underlying my behaviour	4	3	2	1	0
15 always take full responsibility for my own part in events	4	3	2	1	0
16 think in depth about how to improve my skills in dealing with other people	4	3	2	1	0
17 spend enough time thinking about how to contribute better to groups/teams	4	3	2	1	0
18 spend sufficient time thinking about the significance of other people's actions	4	3	2	1	0
19 spend sufficient time thinking about the significance of what other people say	4	3	2	1	0
20 can reflect accurately about my emotional responses to events	4	3	2	1	0
21 could draw upon my reflections well for assessment purposes	4	3	2	1	0
22 spend sufficient time thinking about how to use the feedback I receive from others	4	3	2	1	0
23 know how to use reflection effectively when applying for jobs	4	3	2	1	0
24 am clear about the different kinds of reflection that are open to me	4	3	2	1	0
25 use reflection well to plan for my future.	4	3	2	1	0
Add up your score	Total				

Interpreting your score

You have a score out of 100. This is a rough guide to your strengths as a 'reflective practitioner'. If the score is less than 100, then there is more work that you could do to develop your reflective skills.

- ★ Using your ratings, what are your priorities for improving your reflective thinking skills?
- ★ Which one thing could you do this week in order to develop your reflective abilities?

Nine steps for improving self-reflection

The following steps help to produce useful, focused self-reflection.

- 1 Small regular bites** Keep a regular journal, log, blog or vlog. Little and often is better at first, so that you develop the habit. Seven minutes every weekday evening is all that is needed. Alternatively, you might prefer to put aside a longer regular slot once or twice a week.
- 2 Be specific** Choose one particular situation, habit, skill or feature of your day/week as a focus for each entry. This allows for deeper thought rather than a superficial record.
- 3 Aim at improvement** Choose something you found difficult, confusing or disappointing. Think through what gave rise to this, and how you might approach things differently in similar contexts. Do note anything that went unexpectedly well, and consider why that might have been the case.
- 4 Focus on yourself** Don't use reflection as a way to blame or take out anger on others, even if you feel they deserve it. Focus on your own role, and how you can make a similar situation more manageable next time.
- 5 Use prompts** Select an activity from the book and use this to structure your reflection. See pages 290–1, on the 'Core Model for Reflection', for ideas for prompt questions.
- 6 Be critical** and evaluative rather than descriptive. Weigh up strengths and weaknesses, costs and benefits, decisions and outcomes. These are thinking skills required for most academic work. Avoid simply reciting what happened, or who said what, unless there are particular reasons for doing this, such as for clinical notes. For critical, analytical thinking, see Cottrell (2017).
- 7 Have a purpose** Reflection should be directed to a purpose. It is better to write a short, meaningful entry than pages of description. Find a topic that is useful to your life, work, studies or interests. What do you most need to improve? What would it be helpful to think through?
- 8 Ask useful questions** Consider the right questions for structuring your reflection. It is easier, when you start out, to answer questions that give shape to your thinking. See page 275.
- 9 Review** After a few weeks, read back over your entries. Look for the main themes in what you have written and consider the significance of these for you. Decide what action to take next.

Example

Brief critical entry aimed at improving performance

How good were my people skills today?

Today was useful as I realised I am still interrupting people when they are talking. I cut right across Mary today during the seminar break. I realise this was not very skilful or considerate. Mary looked annoyed. I just ignored this at the time because I was embarrassed. It would have been better to have apologised as soon as I realised. I will next session. I have to take more care not to burst in when other people are talking. Maybe I could ask Joe and Ali to point it out to me for a while so I notice it more.

Descriptive entry

The following is an example of poor reflection. It simply describes what happens and focuses on other people. The writer doesn't take personal responsibility for actions or plan to improve performance.

In the seminar break today, Mary was talking and I wanted to say something. She had been talking for a few minutes already and I hadn't said anything. I was interested in what she was saying but then just interrupted. It was a simple mistake. I didn't mean to upset her. Mary carried on talking for a moment and then decided to stop. She looked angry. Everybody just looked at me as if I was in the wrong. I didn't even talk for very long. Peter said I had an interesting point. Then we went back in the seminar and Mary avoided looking at me all the way through.

Question-based reflection

There are many ways of approaching reflection:

- ★ question-based
- ★ open
- ★ synthetic
- ★ developmental
- ★ evaluative

Each can be useful for a different task or for specific stages of one – and there are overlaps and connections between these. As you develop your reflective ability, you will move more easily between these approaches to suit the task or issue. Your tutors can guide you on approaches most suitable for your course.

Benefits

Question-based reflection provides clarity, focus, structure and direction. You might have noticed that it is used throughout this book. It has a number of advantages:

- ★ it prompts and guides you through the reflective process
- ★ it helps ensure you don't miss out any essential elements
- ★ it can give shape and direction to the subject of reflection, reducing vague discussion and 'waffle'
- ★ it enables everyone in a group to reflect on the same set of issues in a particular way in order to make direct comparisons on specific issues
- ★ questions increase motivation to produce a response and can sharpen thinking.

Who does it suit?

Question-based reflection is associated with analytical, serial thinking. It tends to suit people who like or need to work in a logical, ordered or controlled way, and who appreciate some external direction. It is useful for people who find it difficult to structure their thinking.

But why did I ... ?

Could I have ... ?

At what point did ... ?

What was the best ... ?

Did I ... ?

Which ... ?

Example

Question-based reflection

Question

How did I make use of feedback for my course-work?

Response

I read through it, I accepted most of it, I identified themes that need to be addressed.

Question

Did I make the best use of feedback I got for my report?

Response

At the time I thought I used feedback well. I read it and set priorities for action. Now, looking back, I don't think I took it seriously enough. I wondered if the tutor had been too harsh on me, so for my essay for the next tutor, I didn't really follow through on the advice I had been given. I then got some of the same feedback again. I realise I ignored my own priorities.

Question

How can I make more effective use of feedback?

Response

I need to set myself a realistic target. I tried to take on too many changes at once last time and then got discouraged. I need to speak to my tutor to work out one or two changes that would make the most impact. Basically, I need to be more focused and accept that I can't change everything at once.

Activity

Setting questions



- 1 Jot down a list of at least ten questions to structure your reflection about one aspect of your work that you find difficult or want to improve.
- 2 Answer your questions.
- 3 Note at least three things you clarified about your performance.

Open reflection: generating ideas

Open reflection methods encourage you to 'let go' of some concentration, and 'go with the flow' rather than trying to control the process too tightly. Open reflection can seem 'unstructured'. However, there is usually a structure of some kind to the method, such as working from prompts, working through several stages in a process or following semi-formal rules.

Benefits

The benefits of open reflection are:

- ★ it makes it easier to get started on a task as it helps you to generate thoughts and ideas
- ★ it allows the imagination free rein so that a relatively uncensored set of associations can be formed
- ★ unexpected ideas might emerge, which can be energising and exciting
- ★ it can be more personally relevant than working through questions set by somebody else.

Open reflection is good for generating ideas, but not always for structuring and making sense of them. It is useful to combine open reflection with other approaches that help to structure your emerging thoughts effectively, so that you derive more meaning from your experience.

Who does it suit?

Open reflection suits people who like to work in organic ways, where ideas evolve in new or original ways. It can be conducted in an orchestrated way (a tutor guides the process) or can be personally controlled. Some methods of open reflection are discussed below.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a very simple and quick technique – you might already be familiar with it. You can brainstorm on small screens, although it often works best when using a flip chart, a large sheet of drawing paper, a whiteboard or other large surface.

Jot down the problem or question at the top or centre of the page (or wherever suits you). Give yourself a few minutes to write down quickly every idea or related solution that comes to mind. Don't censor 'bad' ideas or judge what emerges at this stage – just let the ideas flow.

This is one of the most widely used techniques for generating ideas quickly. You can use it to start the process of reflection, and for generating ideas for problem-solving or writing course assignments.



Open reflection: multiple routes

Activity

Brainstorming



- Select a topic, problem or issue that you need to think about this week – or brainstorm ideas about an ideal birthday gift for someone you know.
- Write down the topic in one colour.
- Using a different colour, take a maximum of five minutes to jot down as many ideas as you can. Draw on the creative thinking approaches outlined on pages 235–46.
- Avoid judging your ideas as you go along; just write down whatever comes into your mind.
- Once you have finished the brainstorm, consider each suggestion in turn. Cross out the least useful. If other ideas emerge as you do this, jot them down for consideration too.

Discussion

Discussion can be a valuable form of reflection. It has the advantage of offering multiple perspectives. Paired or group discussions can raise challenging questions that you, as an individual, might wish to avoid. Such questions are often the ones we most need to address – so discussion-based reflection can keep you on your toes.

Discussion, unless strongly steered, can tend to drift in many directions. For a more open-ended, creative discussion, use a limited number of prompt questions or statements – possibly just one. This allows the discussion to wander broadly over the topic and enter into unexpected areas.

For a more controlled discussion, set a higher number of questions and time limits for responses. If there isn't a great deal of time, three open questions is usually adequate. The higher the number of questions, the more time you need or the less open these need to be – otherwise it will be hard to cover them in any detail.

If the discussion veers away from the agenda, don't dismiss the tangents straight away. The tangents could be giving you important clues about the target subject, or about how well the group is working together, or how you might approach a particular problem. Do check, though, how the tangent is helping the group and, if it isn't, whether it is better to re-focus.

Day-dreaming

Without forcing the issue, let your mind drift over the target subject. Day-dreaming about the target subject is more likely to occur if we give the subject serious and detailed consideration, and then do something different for a while. It is not something that can be forced, but it can be encouraged and nurtured. Use your phone, laptop or ideas notebook to capture ideas as they occur. Reflections that arise in this way are easy to forget. Sometimes, there is a natural movement from this more relaxed reflection towards more analytical questioning, as you become aware of what you are discovering.



Drawing and doodling

Drawing and doodling can be used to distract you from controlling your thought processes too closely, allowing your mind to take you where it wishes. You might find that the drawing and the reflection have little in common. On the other hand, you could analyse your drawings for clues about how your mind is working.

Caricatures, cartoons, paintings, networks (page 241), or other graphics might be your preferred methods for reflection. Have a go, as below.

Activity

Doodle



- Select a new topic for reflection.
- Take a piece of paper and scribble in the middle.
- Either doodle as you think about the subject or draw a picture, diagram or network of it. The image does not have to be of good quality: it is simply a tool to distract you from concentrating too hard on the topic.
- If ideas emerge that you want to jot down or develop, then let yourself do so.
- After you have finished, consider whether this helps your thinking process.

Open reflection: free-writing

Free-writing

Writing as a reflective tool is different from writing intended for an audience or tutors. Its aim is to stimulate thinking, not to communicate a message to others. This means that the writing might look, sound and flow differently from other writing that you do.

Your method will be quite different from any other person's. You might just open your keyboard and type. Or open a notebook and let words flow. You might write in short phrases or long paragraphs. You might scribble and draw as you write, or use verse. In other words, you assess the value of this writing and your approach for yourself, in terms of whether it helps you to reflect and achieve your own aims.

Example

Reflective free-writing

A good day. Enjoyed the session. I made more contributions than usual – starting to feel more relaxed with group, more confident. Really liked it when we saw and discussed the video. I got very involved in the debate, which surprised me. I hadn't thought I felt so strongly. Maybe a bit dismissive of other people's ideas (???) I really didn't like the design of the bridge. Ugly. Not sure why I got argumentative about it at one point, though. Was it because I don't get on that well with Aiden anyway? Or because something reminded me of history lessons at school – rather than doing engineering which I usually love. I hadn't really thought about not liking Aiden much. Was I rude to him? What's that really about? It would be better for our project if we got on better. What can I do about that? We have very different likes and dislikes when it comes to design.

The above example may not make much sense to you, but it did to the person who wrote it. They knew the issue they were trying to explore in this first draft. Try for yourself the free-writing activity below.

Reflective free-writing, like other free-writing, can benefit from more than one draft, especially if the theme or issue is important to you:

- ★ an initial rough draft to generate ideas
- ★ a draft that explores some issues in more detail, going off at tangents and with more details
- ★ a later draft with more structure, as you begin to draw out key themes, observations and conclusions. This final stage is important if you are required to write up your reflections for others to read, such as for a reflective essay or for assessment for professional practice.

Activity



Free-writing

Choose a focus for your reflections this week. This can, if you wish, be one you are using for other activities in this chapter.

- ➔ Give yourself ten minutes to write down, as fast as you can, any thoughts that come into your mind on this subject.
- ➔ Unlike brainstorming, where you just jot down any phrase, for free-writing aim to link the thoughts to some extent. Consider how one idea connects to others. Monitor, lightly, where your thoughts are going. This can help to stimulate your thinking further.
- ➔ As in the example below, you don't need to be too concerned about matters such as style, grammar or flow, as long as you can make sense of what you wrote when you come back to it.
- ➔ When you have finished, read through what you have written. Look for one key theme, idea or insight that emerges for you. Highlight or underline this, or jot down a summary of it if needed.
- ➔ Give yourself a few minutes to write down your thoughts just about that.
- ➔ Then highlight a second theme (if there is one) and write about that.
- ➔ Use the writing process to allow your ideas to develop. If you get stuck, either use the question approach (page 275) or take a break to let your brain work on the theme without pressure.

Generative thinking

The strategies suggested above are associated with generative thinking styles. The approaches developed in Chapter 10 support this way of working.

Synthetic reflection

Synthetic reflection involves a 'bringing together' or a 'synthesising' of different aspects and perspectives. It is useful for giving shape to a series of reflections or making sense of earlier stages of reflection. It helps you find the meaning behind your reflections, thoughts and actions. It also stimulates creative thinking. It is an important stage to add to other forms of reflection, in order to give your reflection purpose and significance.

Benefits

Synthetic reflection is useful for:

- ★ seeing links and connections
- ★ gaining a sense of the 'bigger picture'
- ★ gaining a concrete overview from where to begin more detailed analysis
- ★ giving shape or structure to the reflective process
- ★ drawing the most useful reflections together into a meaningful, coherent whole.

Who does it suit?

Synthetic reflection is associated with gestalt or holistic thinking. It suits people who like to spot clues, solve puzzles or put things together into new forms. Artistic endeavour and synthetic processes are closely associated.

Linking can be made in both logical and creative ways, so synthetic reflection can suit those who like order and those who like to work organically. The importance of developing these modes of thinking is highlighted in Chapter 10, *Thinking creatively and productively*.

As synthetic reflection helps to draw things together, it can be used to follow up reflection based on free writing or discussion.

Look for links and themes

Synthetic reflection is an active type of reflection. You are looking for links, connections and leads in material you have already produced. Use it to search out hidden themes that are there on the page but which you may not yet have noticed.

Going over the material, re-writing it, colouring it, highlighting it, organising it, illustrating it, narrating your thoughts about it, discussing it, anything that makes you engage with it, will help you to focus on each theme.

Activity

Synthesis



- ➔ Select one theme that you began to explore in a previous activity.
- ➔ Identify themes and links in this.
- ➔ Check for links with thoughts or ideas you have had in any earlier reflections you have undertaken, or that have emerged for you in discussions.
- ➔ Organise your thoughts so that the main themes and links stand out clearly.
- ➔ Draw out what you have gained by making such links. What is their significance for you or the task you are undertaking, or your professional practice, etc.? What have you learnt about yourself? Or about situations that you find yourself in? How can this help you?

When using self-evaluation questionnaires

Self-evaluation questionnaires and checklists (such as those in this book) are useful:

- ★ to help you pinpoint where specific issues lie for you
- ★ to identify priorities
- ★ for using 'before' and 'after' you take action, to make comparisons over time
- ★ as easy-to-use starting points to stimulate thought.

They are best combined with other reflective methods that then take you deeper into considering the significance of your self-evaluations.

Developmental reflection

Whilst any method of reflection can assist the process of personal development, the following methods focus specifically on understanding and improving your performance and achievement.

Activity

Developmental reflection



If you have not done so already, complete the activities on page 273 to identify your developmental priorities.



Jot down your thoughts about one of your priorities. For example, you might find it useful to consider some of the following questions.

- 1 What made you select this as a priority? What is really the key issue for you?
- 2 What is the goal? What do you hope to gain by developing this area?
- 3 How does this contribute to achieving your long-term or short-term goals?
- 4 What are the problems you are encountering?
- 5 What have you tried already? How successful was this?
- 6 What (else) could you change or do differently? What will you do first?
- 7 What would be a realistic time-scale to address this successfully?
- 8 Who else would benefit if you addressed this priority?
- 9 What might get in the way of your making a change? How can you prevent this from happening – or work around it?
- 10 How might you sabotage your success in achieving this? (See page 244.)
- 11 What are your feelings about this priority? What emotions, if any, does it bring up for you?
- 12 Who else needs to know about your developmental plans, to support you, encourage you, provide training or to be aware of your career ambitions?

Monitoring performance

You might be asked to keep a log, blog or journal as part of your course and to use reflections in this to evaluate for yourself how well you are making progress on your developmental priorities.

Even if this is not a requirement, it is a useful practice. Many employers require logs to be kept of actions taken, along with the rationale and outcomes. You might be asked to contribute extracts or ideas from these as part of staff reviews or to demonstrate that you are active in maintaining your professional development.

Example

Monitoring performance

Project Group: reflection

20th February

I chaired the project group meeting again today. This went better than last time. I was able to keep the group to the agenda. Unlike last time, this time I did not let people just bring up new topics as they felt like it. I was quite tough, for me. I summarised points well and got good feedback.

Unfortunately, the meeting still ran over time. I did find it difficult to break in to interrupt the flow when Carla and Ian started arguing. I am not sure whether I should speak to them before the next meeting, or whether I should just cut across them, which might seem rude. I am worried because they speak loudly and it would look bad if nobody could hear me if I try to interrupt.

Because I didn't keep these two in check, we ran over time. Time-keeping looks like my big challenge, but really the issue is about knowing how to interrupt people. There might also be an issue for me about being afraid not to be liked – something for me to think about further. Time-keeping is my next priority. I have arranged to speak about this to my tutor for a few tips.

Reflecting on transferable skills

Transferable skills

Chapter 3 demonstrated that expertise can be used in diverse contexts. However, skills do not translate automatically from one context to the next. They are likely to be 'transferable' only if we:

- 1 identify the range of skills involved in an activity, noting the wide range of sub-skills we integrate even into everyday experience
- 2 make specific attempts to draw parallels between one activity and another, searching out the comparisons
- 3 are able to see how one situation is similar to the other. If we cannot see those parallels, then we tend to believe ourselves incapable of dealing with situations that are well within our actual competence (Butterworth, 1992).

It is worth giving time and thought to what we have achieved in any one situation and considering its applicability to other situations, as in the examples that follow. The self-knowledge gained may help us later in new situations.

Example

Transferring skills 1: academic skills

I was very anxious about writing an essay as I hadn't written one before. My programme mainly uses report writing. Reports are very structured whereas I couldn't see how essays fitted together.

I spoke to a third-year student who talked me through the process. He pointed out that the discussion part of my reports is quite like an essay. If I take out the different sections of the report, such as the method and results sections, and remove all headings and tables, I have the core of an essay already.

I find it easier to write the main part of an essay as if I was writing a report. I use headings and write a paragraph under each of these. This helps me see the structure of my writing. I have noticed I need to check my paragraphs are linked because sections of essays flow into each other more than sections of reports. I then remove the headings when I am ready to hand in the essay.

Example

Transferring skills 2: communication

I have been working with children in a local school, helping them with their mathematics. The main developmental points for me were in taking responsibility for others and in using 'plain English'. However, I am also much better now at organising information so other people can use it.

The teacher pointed out that when I first started at the school, I launched straight in and tried to finish as much of the worksheet as I could. Now, I focus more on ensuring the children know what they are supposed to be doing and learning. This is partly about explaining things more clearly. However, I am also developing skills in structuring information; I am better at breaking down instructions into small chunks that the children can take in at once. They don't like it if I have to repeat instructions.

I have found that this is useful when talking to adults too. In my part-time job, I now do this when giving guidance on technical problems. I find I don't have to go over information so many times. This way of thinking seems to be helping me to plan and structure my written assignments, too. My tutor says my writing is clearer and more structured.

Reflection

Spotting your skills



Jot down your thoughts about any one new activity that you have undertaken recently. Consider things such as:

- ★ What skills did you already have that you used for the new activity?
- ★ How did you adapt your usual ways of thinking or doing to help you with the new task?
- ★ What did you discover about yourself by doing something new?

Reflecting on academic development

Take time to stand back and look at the big picture regarding your academic development. Consider:

- 1 Are you sufficiently motivated to achieve well academically? How could you increase your motivation?
- 2 Are you bringing the right amount of drive and impetus to keep going and improving? Or are you coasting along, without pushing yourself sufficiently? Or burning yourself out?
- 3 Are you making good academic choices? Are these giving you a strong enough specialist base? Will your choices make you stand out as distinctive with interests and capabilities beyond your subject specialism?
- 4 How coherent are the choices you are making for options, electives or other units of study? How will these choices help you achieve your longer-term ambitions?
- 5 What are the most stimulating aspects of your current learning?
- 6 What is blocking your progress in any area? Are your study strategies still relevant or do they need to be reviewed and changed?
- 7 How have you developed academically and intellectually since starting your course? What has changed?

Example

Academic choices

I wanted to study nothing but chemistry as that interested me most but I am concerned that this will look boring when I go for jobs. I am also interested in travelling abroad. I couldn't see how the two could fit together as I imagined myself in a large factory near where I grew up.

The Careers Service showed me some case studies of career paths that people from my programme had taken, and I was struck by the opportunities that are available through some big companies for working in international branches. I am not sure yet whether to study a language, which I could start from scratch. This would make it easier to get picked for a placement abroad in the future. However, a specialist IT option might be more useful.

I also need to look at whether I would have better or worse opportunities if I took a subsidiary in a subject such as health science or nutrition. I have put time aside next Thursday to look through materials in the Careers Service library, and on its website.

You could reflect on differences in your performance from one topic or option to another. For example, you might experience a sudden drop or increase in your marks, or find you are more successful in some areas than others. You can begin to investigate this by techniques such as:

- ★ listing how you approached subjects or topics differently
- ★ free-writing about your attitudes or approaches to each subject
- ★ brainstorming differences between the topics and how you will manage these.

Example

Reflection on assignments

I spent a long time on my last assignment and was disappointed with the marks. This time I spent less time and yet my mark was better. It seems to me the main difference is that I really thought a lot about what the question meant this time. All of my work was very focused on addressing the title. It felt like I really knew what I was doing – so it took less time. I spent more time, though, just working out my initial plans. I think I have made a breakthrough in the way I go about my assignments.

What I need now is to know how to work out what is needed for my land-surveying option. I can't really see how to work out the problems in the same way. I suppose I haven't actually tried applying my 'breakthrough' method to surveying yet, so I don't know if it will work or not.

Reflecting on professional development

Take time occasionally to consider your short- and long-term professional development.

- 1 What skills are you developing? Are there obvious gaps in your profile of skills and experience? Will these matter when you apply for jobs and/or promotion?
- 2 Are your course choices, whether undergraduate or post-graduate, right for the type of career, or career progression, that you have in mind?
- 3 Are you focusing too much on study at the expense of other experience which would help your career?
- 4 Are you making the best use of all that college or university has to offer to develop your skills, experience and CV?
- 5 Are you making the best use of all the training, supervision and networking opportunities available through your workplace?
- 6 Are there particular kinds of work experience, new roles or work shadowing that you could undertake to further develop your people skills in work contexts?
- 7 Are you making good (and early) use of your institution's Careers Service and its resources?
- 8 Would it be useful to have a mentor from the area you are considering for your future career?

Example

Professional development: skill awareness

I have noticed that many job adverts require good team-building skills. There is not much opportunity for teamwork on my course nor in my current job. I am worried that this will be a weak point when I come to apply for jobs. I have heard that there are volunteer activities that involve teamwork so I will follow this up this week.

Another alternative for me might be to study an elective that includes teamwork in its skills profile. Unfortunately, I haven't found one that interests me. I could choose one that is not especially interesting, but I would rather be in a team involved in real-life activities rather than study, such as through volunteer work as I think employers would prefer that ...

Reflecting on your personal development

Reflection isn't useful only for academic or work-related contexts. You can use it to look hard at any area of your personal development. For example:

- ★ Are your life ambitions changing in any way?
- ★ Are your values and beliefs undergoing any changes? What is influencing such change?
- ★ Are you giving sufficient time to friends and family?
- ★ How are you taking care of your health?
- ★ What are you doing to manage stress and to promote your well-being?
- ★ What are you doing to ensure a good 'work/life balance'? Do you get time to enjoy yourself without undermining your work and study?

Example

Personal development: managing well-being

I have been working long hours at college and at work recently. I added this up to 65 hours last week. I was supposed to go to my brother's birthday party but in the end had to work an extra shift as it was double pay. This was good for the money, but my family was disappointed. I know I am not getting the right balance.

I need clear breaks with no work or study. I have to start planning out my time so I get time to rest and enjoy myself occasionally. Just stop. I have noticed that I am not sleeping well. Studying late just keeps me awake at night, rattling it all round in my head. And just processing stuff, I suppose, as there is no space to do so in the day. It would be better for me to start studying earlier and then finish off earlier in the evening.

I know it is good to relax for at least an hour before bed. At present, I can't imagine how I will find that time, but I have to own up that this is essential for me now. I'm going to look at how I can reschedule my day and week – and consider where I could save time.

I am also neglecting my interest in music. I would really like to spend more time listening to recent releases. I could do this in that hour before sleep.

Evaluative reflection: critical events

Critical events

One good way of finding out more about yourself is through an in-depth analysis of a single event. Select an occasion of some importance to you such as:

- ★ the first time you ...
- ★ the last time you ...
- ★ a difficult situation
- ★ a test of your values, abilities, determination
- ★ a turning point in your life
- ★ when you realised something unexpected about yourself or others.

Reflection



Critical event/incident

Select one event, as indicated above. Jot down your thoughts on some or all of the following, depending on what is relevant to the event you describe and what you could learn from it.

- 1 The context** What was the background?
- 2 What happened?** What occurred during the incident/event? Provide a brief summary.
- 3 Your role** What did you do/say? What was the impact of this?
- 4 Immediate response** How did you react at key moments during the incident? How did you interpret what was going on during it, and immediately afterwards?
- 5 Outcomes** What were the outcomes or consequences of your actions (positive or not)?
- 6 Feelings** How did you feel before, during and after?
- 7 Longer-term impact** (if known) How did this incident or event make a difference to you, to others and/or to how other events played out longer term? Has it had any impact on your values, beliefs, habits, attitudes, motivation or behaviours?
- 8 Inputs** What useful comments or feedback have you received? How will you make use of these?
- 9 Alternatives** What alternative actions could you have taken?
- 10 Gains and losses** What did you lose through the incident (e.g. Trust? Support? Other things?) What did you gain from the experience?
- 11 Lessons** What have you learnt from this incident/event that will be of use to you in future?
- 12 Change** What is the one main area where you need to focus to improve and/or change, highlighted by this event or incident? What will you do in order to take this forward?
- 13 Difference** How might you prepare and/or act differently when dealing with a similar situation in future? What difference do you think that would make?
- 14 Application** How have I applied learning from this event (if at all)?

Write down your answers to each of the above questions so that you have a record to which you can refer on future occasions.

NB If anyone else will see these reflections, check first that you have not included names or other information that identify people, departments or organisations without their express permission.

A template is available on the companion site for you to write up critical events.



Drawing out themes

Undertake a similar analysis of other events over a period of a few weeks or months. This can provide you with a rich database of material to support your developmental reflection. When you have accumulated several such reflections, consider:

- ★ What themes emerge?
- ★ What noticeable areas of improvement are there in your performance over time?
- ★ What areas did you highlight for further action that you did not then attend to? What do you think is preventing you from doing so?

Example

Critical event

The context I undertook a student project that contributed to a larger project at Company X, spending one afternoon a week with their research and development team. The project was important as the company had gone through a period of financial loss. I was responsible for designing a social media strategy to help attract new client bases.

What happened There was a huge argument between two of the sub-teams. It blew up fast and was very loud and heated. Other teams joined in, either arguing to support one of the teams, or shouting for everyone to keep quiet.

My role I listened for a while. I tried to tell people to calm down. No one was listening so I found I was shouting louder. At one point, when a team-leader turned on one of my friends, I heard myself say: 'Leave him alone! It's not his fault!' The team-leader turned and shouted at me to shut up or get out. Other people then shouted at him telling him not to take it out on me.

My immediate response/feelings I felt upset by the scale and loudness of the argument. I also got involved because two of my friends from college were on the sub-team and I was shocked that they were being shouted at like that. When we were shouted at (to shut up), I felt angry, upset and powerless. I felt as students we shouldn't have to put up with this.

Outcomes My shouting just added to the general noise and fuelled the heated situation. It drew in more people and didn't help to end the argument.

Longer-term impact The incident shook me up at the time. I would want to avoid being in that kind of argument or fuelling it. However, the team-leader and several others apologised to each other and everyone else. We spent some time talking it through together and how we felt. We went out for a pizza and we have been fine since. It showed me that such events can be survived and people can still be good colleagues afterwards. That has added to my sense of resilience, and reduced my fear of workplace conflict. I can survive being told to shut up (even if it isn't polite!)

Inputs My friend from college told me that though he appreciated the sentiment of me supporting him, he didn't need me to fight his battles. He said he then began to worry about me, rather than being able just to focus on what his sub-team needed to hear.

Alternatives I would do what I could to diffuse such a situation, maybe by moving away and not adding to it. I would check afterwards whether anyone needs support getting over it. I want to manage my own emotions better when there is conflict, staying calm, and not fearing the worst.

Lessons learnt I surprised myself that I allowed myself to get drawn in and worked up. I imagined I would have acted more wisely. I think I will be more self-aware in this respect. I also hadn't really thought through that I can't assume what kind of support others would find helpful. I realised that it is important to ask rather than wading in. Just because I want to help doesn't mean that I won't make things worse. I can see that could apply to a lot of situations!

Using feedback

As a student, you will receive regular feedback on your work in ways you might never experience again. Such feedback, provided by experts who want you to succeed, is an extremely valuable resource. Be open to all feedback, irrespective of whether, in your opinion, it is fair and accurate or not. Keep bringing your thoughts back to what you can learn from it.



Latifa could always find constructive use for her tutor's feedback

Use it in reflection

You can use feedback as a basis for reflection on your development, personal, professional or academic.

- 1 Keep it!** If it is written down, store it where you will find it. If it was given verbally, note it down!
- 2 Read it!** Read it again a few days later: you might not be objective the first time you see or hear it.
- 3 Contextualise it** Consider why these particular comments were given in this context. If they were unexpected, work out why that was the case. What prevented you from seeing that you might receive such comments?
- 4 Evaluate it** Consider whether you agree with the comments. If not, what are the grounds for your disagreement? Be honest in your evaluation. You don't necessarily have to agree with them, but there should be good grounds for rejecting them outright.
- 5 Decide** Decide whether you want to see similar comments on future work. Use that to commit to action (if any).
- 6 Make a change** If the comments were good, how will you build on your success? Bear in

mind that just doing the same kinds of things might not draw the same positive feedback a second time. If you disliked the feedback, what steps can you take to improve that area of your performance?

- 7 Use support** Consider sources of support available to you (books, web pages, talks, tutors, support services) to address areas for improvement.

Put time aside at least two or three times a year to go over written feedback that you have received. Note any emergent themes that indicate where you could be losing or gaining marks on a consistent basis. Jot down guidance for yourself on how you will address those points so that you really gain from having received this feedback, whether it pleased you or not.

Varieties of feedback

Bear in mind that much of the feedback that you will receive both as a student and in life more generally is not written out as individual comments at the end of an essay. If there are comments that apply to most of a class, it can make more sense for the tutor to provide these to the whole class verbally, through a group handout, or on the course website. This is still important feedback for you to consider.

Look out for feedback that may be available to you in a wide range of formats depending on your course or at work, such as:

- ★ passing comments that provide verbal feedback on your performance during lab work, on the wards, in the studio, in class, etc.
- ★ comments provided on your ideas or on an early draft of an assignment, in seminars, in work meetings, during coffee breaks, etc.
- ★ opportunities created for you to receive feedback from other students, employers, clients, patients, or other stakeholders
- ★ comments during a taught session which provide insights into what is expected of you as a student or for that module of study
- ★ feedback from supervisors on work-placement
- ★ comments during work-based reviews or appraisals.

If feedback is not provided in written form, consider how you will capture this and record it in your own words so that you will be able to make use of it later.

Models of reflection 1

A model is just a simplified, abstract, proposed outline of how a process works. Models can also guide you through a process such as reflection.

The underlying concept

Reflective models, in summary, assume we can:

- 1 think about our experiences
- 2 understand them at a deeper level
- 3 learn from that thinking and understanding so as to effect change.

Staged models

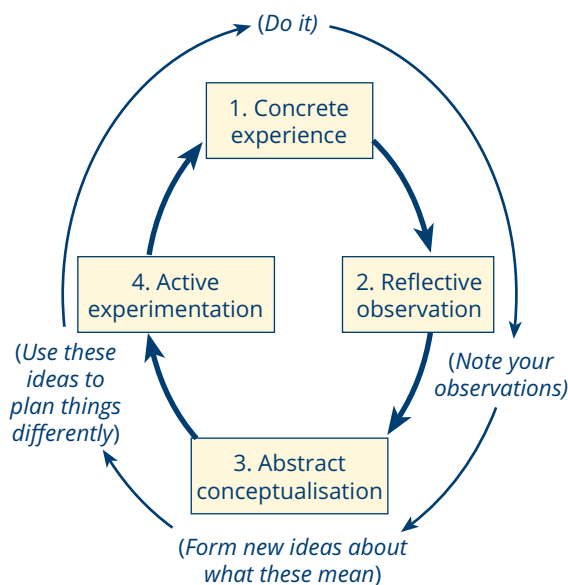
Some models of reflection break down the various reflective processes into steps or stages. Typically, these are represented as a cycle, the idea being that we can apply what we learn from active reflection, bringing greater understanding and better planning to future experiences next time round. The reflective process can be conceived in various ways. Depending on where attention is focused, this can give rise to a model with fewer or greater numbers of steps highlighted.

Kolb's four stage model

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) has been particularly influential on developments in thinking about experiential learning. It consists of four stages:

- 1 **Concrete experience** – the experience or action
- 2 **Reflective observation** – actively taking note of what you are observing about that experience
- 3 **Abstract conceptualisation** – forming ideas about what you have observed
- 4 **Active experimentation** – putting those new ideas into practice.

The third stage, *abstract conceptualisation*, gives significance to the act of drawing generalisations – an important cognitive step in identifying how one experience could relate to others.



Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Multi-stage models

Other reflective models use either more, fewer or alternatively conceived stages that focus on aspects such as

- ★ awareness of initial responses
- ★ feelings and emotions
- ★ consideration of issues and theories.

Cottrell's *Core Model* (2010) uses five stages. It emphasises making good decisions for the focus of reflection, accurate reconstruction of events, close analysis, extrapolation of learning, and preparation for practical application. It encourages the selection of relevant prompts to personalise the model to fit your own experience (see page 290). Atkins and Murphy (1994) use six stages, incorporating steps such as awareness of thoughts and feelings, describing these and the broader situation, analysing them, and challenging assumptions.

Reflection

Working with staged models

How useful do you think the concept of 'stages' would be for your own reflection?

Are you likely to work better with:

- ★ a model that has few stages, and you elaborate the details and prompts yourself?
- ★ a model with more stages, with prompts provided that you select from as needed?

Models of reflection 2

Schön's model (1983)

Schön draws distinctions between reflecting:

- ★ **in action** – reflecting on what you are doing whilst in the process of doing it, such as when experts call upon pre-existing knowledge as they work, and
- ★ **on action** – making sense of an action or event once it is over, so as to learn from it for the future.

Many models refer back to this distinction. There is also a case for reflection:

- ★ **before action** – drawing on knowledge, theory, experience and input from others.

It is generally easier to reflect:

- ★ **Before action** Put aside time for good forward planning. Find useful information and examples of good practice; refresh relevant skills; simulate difficult scenarios; practise what you are going to say or do; weigh up and mitigate risks; consider the most efficient routes; plan a course of action, etc.
- ★ **On action** Put time aside after the event in order to think significant events through in detail (such as page 285).

Reflection

'Before action' and 'in action'



Your response for the 'Critical event' reflection above (page 284) was an example of reflection on action – so if you managed that, you know what that kind of reflection feels like. What kind of reflection do you think you could also undertake:

- ★ **Before action?** How would you plan differently for that kind of scenario?
- ★ **In action** – whilst you are actually in the midst of the scenario? What would you be able to call to mind and do differently whilst 'in action'?

Alternative focal points

Depending on what is important to you and your context, other themes could be used as a focal point for reflection. Some models include an explicit stage on 'feeling' or 'thinking' whilst others assume these are integral components of all stages. If you decide to devise your own model (page 289), you could consider including stages in the process where you reflect on one or more of the following:

- ★ Behaviours
- ★ Feelings
- ★ Knowledge
- ★ Thoughts
- ★ Theories
- ★ Local practice
- ★ Systems
- ★ Structures
- ★ Policies
- ★ Procedures
- ★ Ideas
- ★ Ethics
- ★ Values
- ★ Feedback
- ★ Personal histories
- ★ Interactions with or between others
- ★ Broader issues (e.g. history, ideology, economics, politics, culture, media).

Activity

Focus points for reflection



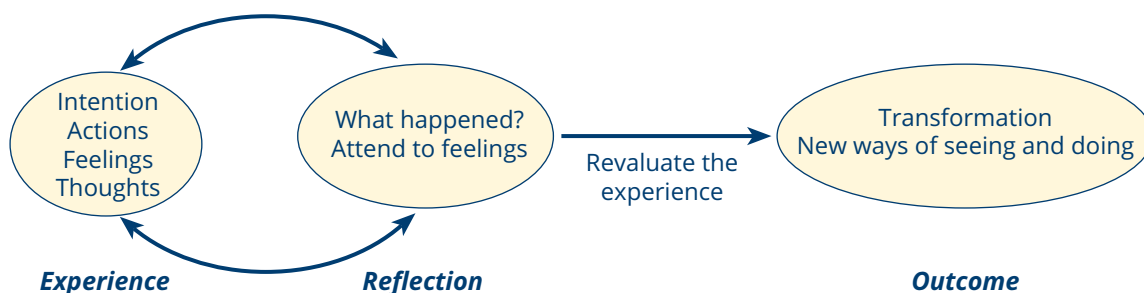
- Which of the items above are of most relevance and interest when considering your own experiences?

Example: focus on feelings

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) emphasise that experience, and reflections on experience, are both influenced by unconscious aspects such as emotions as well as conscious ones such as intent.

Boud et al. argue that emotions tend to override our rational thinking without us being fully conscious of this, making us less aware of how and why we are acting as we do. If we re-evaluate an event, focusing on feelings and their impact, this helps us to identify how to manage similar events differently in the future.

Models of reflection 3



Inspired by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985)

Developing your own model

Your current model?

Does your current model for action and reflection sound at all like the following?

I usually launch into action with a rough idea of what I think is needed. I work out my next steps as I go along, adapting to the evolving circumstances, using ideas that come into my head, or memories of doing something similar in the past. I might listen to suggestions, or think on my feet as I read the situation and calculate what is needed. Often, I don't know why I did exactly what I did but it all works out pretty well anyway. Sometimes, if someone compliments me, or maybe if I feel things didn't go well, I find myself mulling over who did or said what, or what I should have said or done. I might remember this next time I am in that situation – but then again, I might not.

If you recognise this scenario, then you are in good company. Much of the time, this approach works well enough. Depending on the task, we form unconscious expertise in a variety of ways, from training, practice, hearsay, reading, media or being around experts. However, this model doesn't include setting time aside specifically to focus in a structured, systematic way that helps us for the future.

Reflection



My current model

- ★ Jot down a brief outline of how you go about thinking or reflecting on your work or study at present.
- ★ Is this generally true of you in most areas of life?

Why develop a better model for yourself?

We saw above that reflecting on your learning and experience is regarded as a means of deepening your understanding of how and why things work out the way they do for you. This can help you to make better decisions and exercise more control over the outcome of events.

Unless you are required by your work or course to use a particular model of reflection, then there is value in devising a model that:

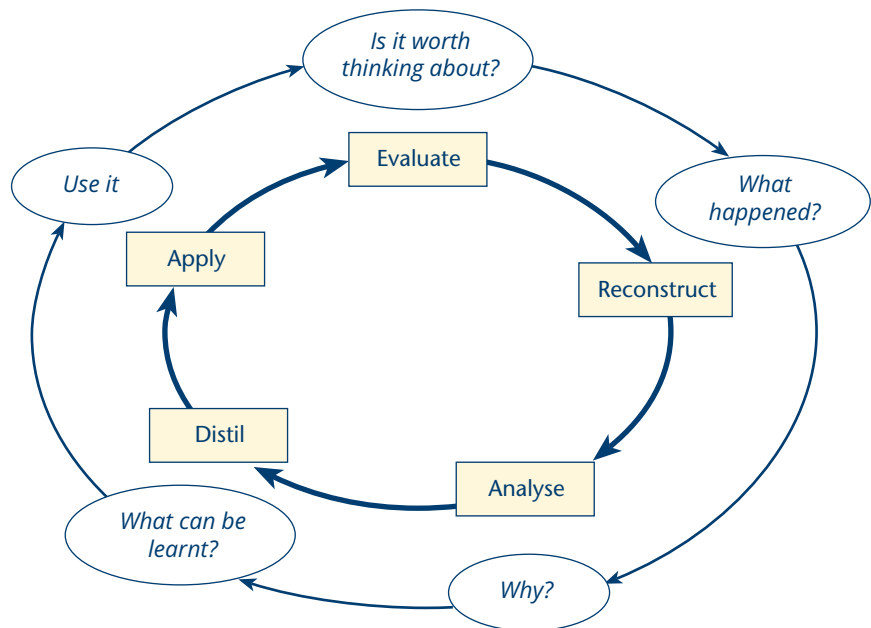
- ★ makes sense to you
- ★ with (or without) prompt questions
- ★ with as many stages as you find useful
- ★ adapting existing models, or starting from scratch if you prefer.

The 'Core Model for Reflection' below is designed to be easy for you to adapt, selecting those steps, or focal points, that are most pertinent to your experience (see page 288).

The Core Model for Reflection

The Core Model was devised to help people formulate their own reflective model, to suit their own way of thinking and working. It identifies five key practical components.

- 1 Evaluate significance** Is it worth reflection?
- 2 Reconstruct the experience** What happened?
- 3 Analyse** Why did it happen that way?
- 4 Distil learning** Draw out lessons for the future.
- 5 Apply** Prepare for future situations.



Core Model for Reflection (Cottrell, 2010)

A template for creating your personal model is available on the companion site: www.macmillanihe.com/cottrell-skills-for-success-4e



Select those components you find appropriate, either as stages in their own right, or combined into a stage. You can also choose from prompts for each component (see below).

1 Evaluate significance: Is it worth reflection?

Before launching into reflection, it is worth making an initial evaluation of the relative value of that experience as the focus of your reflective energies. Consider, for example, the following prompts:

- ★ Will I encounter this kind of experience again?
- ★ Could it provide lessons for the future?
- ★ Does feedback from others suggest this would be useful?
- ★ Were there things I did really well that I could apply in the future?
- ★ Would working this through help me understand concerns I have and how to deal with them?
- ★ Is this a key aspect of my job that merits reflection from time to time?

- ★ Would reflecting on this experience lead to positive outcomes for other people?
- ★ Is there an aspect of my life, work or study that I take for granted that merits refreshed thinking?
- ★ Does thinking about this experience arouse strong emotions suggesting it merits reflection?
- ★ Is this the issue that most merits deeper reflection now? Is it a priority?

2 Reconstruct the experience

This is the stage where you go through surface aspects of the experience, identifying where you consider it 'starts' and finishes'. Inevitably, this is an act of reconstruction, not an exact record. Draw out what you decide are the most salient points. These prompts can help.

- ★ **Events** Is it helpful to go through the storyline of the experience point by point, identifying who did what and when? Sometimes this uncovers details that prove significant; sometimes not.
- ★ **Intent** What was the purpose of your involvement? What were you aiming to achieve through your actions, words, silence or inaction?
- ★ **Feelings** How did you feel during the experience? Do the feelings evoked in reconstructing the event throw any further light onto your own behaviour?

- ★ **Your role** What role did you think you were playing at the time? In retrospect, what role did you play? What was the impact of your involvement? What might have been different if you had not been present, or if someone else had taken the part you played?
- ★ **Other people** What part did others play? What could you have done to change the flow of interactions for the better?
- ★ **Surface outcome** What was the outcome? Did it end well? Well enough? As a disaster?

3 Analyses: Why did it happen that way?

In the analytical stage, you dig deeper for greater understanding of what goes on below the surface. Consider such questions as:

- ★ What interpretations, explanations and theories help me to make sense of it?
- ★ What was really going on for me? For others? On that day? In that place?
- ★ Were the final outcomes as intended? If not, why not?
- ★ Which actions, words, or omissions were most significant in the way events unfolded – or on the final outcomes?
- ★ What made the situation better or worse?
- ★ Did the scenario have roots in something that predated that occasion?
- ★ Is it really 'finished' or are there loose ends and bad feelings that could be addressed?

4 Distil: What lessons can be learnt?

What can you learn from all this? For example:

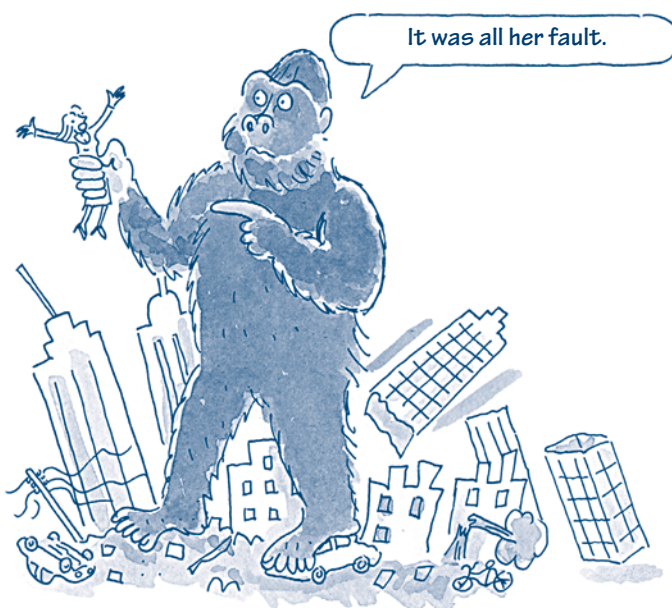
- ★ Any tips or advice to yourself for the future?
- ★ Trigger points that could be better managed?
- ★ Skills and qualities you demonstrated that you could apply to similar situations?
- ★ Specific actions that you, personally, could take or omit in similar situations so that things run more smoothly, harmoniously or with better consequences?
- ★ Ways of tracking and managing your emotions and responses differently?
- ★ Areas for training or practice?

- ★ Awareness of other people's needs or issues and how these could be addressed differently?
- ★ Would different preparation, planning, or timing produce better outcomes?
- ★ Could any theoretical models help?

5 Apply: Prepare for future situations

Give active consideration to how you will apply what you learnt from reflection so it has a positive impact. For example:

- ★ **Identify your wish list** What do you want to be different?
- ★ **Identify potential scenarios** In what kinds of situations will you apply what you have learnt?
- ★ **What will you do differently?** (Focus on what you personally can do – as this is under your control.)
- ★ **Identify consequences** What could be different as a result of changes you will make?
- ★ **Identify beneficiaries** Who will benefit from such changes? What will be different for them?
- ★ **Identify personal benefits** – that motivate you to act. What will you gain?
- ★ **Advance planning** What preparation do you need to do now so as to respond differently in such situations in future?
- ★ **Plan memory-joggers** Once such situations arise, what will trigger your memory about what you wish to do?



Take personal responsibility

Devise your own model for reflection

Decide which stages you want to include in your own model. In doing so, give thought to:

- ★ specific parts of the reflective process that you want to focus on – either because they suit the material, or your way of working, or because you want to be sure you don't omit them
- ★ whether you prefer a simpler model with fewer stages but where you have to remember the underlying detail, OR a more detailed model that takes you step by step through the process.

Drawing on the Core Model

Use the 'alternative focal points' on page 288 to help you decide whether to merge some stages so that you have a simpler model, OR whether you would prefer to divide some of the stages of the Core Model so that you have more steps. You might want to use one or more of the prompt questions as a stage in its own right within your model.

Once you have decided on your stages, and the best sequence for these, name the stages and their purpose in your model. This, in itself, may cause you to reconsider how many stages are really useful for you. Then decide on the prompt questions you want to use for each stage. Use the prompts in the Core Model as a starting place. If you wish, select from these, adapt them or add to them to suit your context and reflective material.

Activity

Test your model



Identify one event, situation or issue as a focus for your reflection, using Step 1 of the 'Core Model for Reflection'.

- ➔ Use your own model to reflect on this, working through your set of stages and prompts.

As you work through your model, and afterwards, consider how well it is working for you, and whether there are any aspects that you wish to adapt for the future.

Draw up a record of your stages and prompt questions, such as by using the layout suggested below or using the template on the companion site to add or delete rows to suit the number of stages you have decided upon.

- ★ Use the first column to number your stages.
- ★ Use the second column to name each stage.
- ★ Use the third column for 'prompt questions' to structure your reflection. Prompt questions are provided on the companion site for you to paste in or adapt for your own model.

Stage number	Name of this stage	Prompt questions

A template is available on the companion site for you to adapt for your own use.

Presenting your reflection to others

Raw reflection: phase 1 reflection

Most of us engage quite naturally in deep reflection when we do it in our own time and way. It is important to capture such reflections in a way that suits our personal styles. These are the reflections we make such as when we sort out our thoughts through writing in personal reflective journals or logs.

Such 'phase 1' reflections are in raw form – thoughts are not organised in a logical order. We might express our emotions in ways that are most useful for us, but are not for others to read. The free associations we bring can help stimulate our thinking but do not necessarily make our reflections accessible to others. First phase reflection is the 'raw material' with which we work in a more analytical and structured way when we need or wish to present our reflections to other people.

Worked reflection: phase 2 reflection

Second stage reflection is what you would use, typically, when you are ready to post your thoughts such as within a blog, vlog or podcast, or use in a seminar, reflective essay or similar assignment.

Phase 2 reflection is characterised by:

Time Leaving time between the initial reflection and the current stage of reflection.

Summary Second phase reflection seeks out and summarises key themes and salient points, noting down where more detailed evidence can be found in the portfolio.

Insight Identifying what has been learnt – especially the less obvious learning. This will refer to broad themes rather than specific subject knowledge. It will bring out issues of relevance and significance rather than focus on data. During second phase reflection you come to appreciate the deeper and subtler aspects of your learning. It is a good point to draw on relevant theory from your course.

Communication It is at this point that you are ready to consider presenting the results of your

reflection to others. The context will determine what it is appropriate to show to others. For most purposes, you will need to remove:

- ★ material about your personal life you wish to keep private
- ★ personal details about other people
- ★ repetitive or irrelevant material
- ★ unnecessary examples or excessive background detail
- ★ materials produced by other people, such as guideline materials, tutor notes, copies of background reading, lecture notes, etc.

Submitting reflections to tutors

You could be asked to submit your reflections to tutors either as part of an assessment, or for more informal monitoring. If so, you might be asked to submit either raw or worked reflections, or both. For example, you may be asked to submit a journal, log or extracts from a blog as part of a portfolio of materials.

Alternatively, you might be asked to draw on your reflections as the basis of work undertaken in class or to provide material within an assessment such as an essay, case study, position paper or observation, without there being a requirement to submit your journal.

Confidentiality

NB If anyone else will see your reflections, check first that you have not included names or other information that would enable others to identify people, departments or organisations without their express permission. The details you provide should not enable people, including tutors, to make a good guess at who is being referred to in your reflections or assignments.

If you have received permission to include other people's details or information, it is a good idea to have this in writing and attach it, otherwise it would be assumed that you were not clear about maintaining confidential boundaries.

Selective reflective portfolios

As reflection tends to be word-intensive, for assignments, you are likely to be asked to use it as:

- ★ selected extracts within an essay, case study or report
- ★ and/or to provide reflections as an appendix, and refer to them in passing within the assignment
- ★ and/or to provide your reflection as part of a portfolio. Depending on the assignment, you might be asked to include such material as:
 - ☆ a reflective piece of writing such as an essay
 - ☆ a reflective journal (either as phase 1 or phase 2 reflection)
 - ☆ an evidence base for your reflections, such as feedback on your artwork, clinical practice, work experience, or equivalent.

What do tutors look for?

If your tutors are going to assess reflective work as part of a portfolio, they would normally indicate in the marking criteria what, in particular, they are looking for. Always check these carefully and use them as the basis of your assignment. Typically, these are factors that are taken into consideration.

How well it meets required learning

outcomes These are usually specified for the unit of study and for the course. Check these before you start to put your portfolio together. They are usually provided in a handbook and/or on the course website. Your assignments are usually devised so that, in completing these well, you meet the objectives for the course as a whole.

How well you summarise your insights into your learning

Your grades are likely to be based primarily on how well you integrate reflection into a thoughtful, well-researched, coherent piece of reflective writing. Although there might also be grades awarded for raw reflections and supporting documents, typically these are a requirement that authenticates your work (so essential) rather than graded in their own right.

How well you select and edit relevant information for inclusion

It is how you use reflection that really matters on most courses. You don't usually gain better grades just because your portfolio is larger or longer. Bulky unedited portfolios that contain all the information you could possibly gather on a subject are unlikely to impress.

The tutor is likely to award marks specifically for skills in selecting relevant examples, good editing (cutting out unnecessary or repetitious material) and clear cross-referencing.

How well the evidence and examples you refer to in the portfolio really do support the point you are making

If you say the evidence demonstrates a particular skill or insight, it must be a clear example. Specify how skills or the application of theory were demonstrated in the examples you provide. Don't assume these are obvious to the tutor.

How well the portfolio is constructed

Make your portfolio easy for tutors to navigate. Provide a clear Contents page. Label all documents. In your writing, for every point you make for which you have evidence or reflective material, provide exact cross-references to the page(s) where these can be found in the portfolio. Use highlights and/or number the lines to indicate exactly where the tutor should look. If you are submitting work electronically, use editing and reviewing functions (such as those for inserting comments). Avoid making vague references to long free-ranging reflections, leaving the tutor to guess which parts of these you are referring to.

How well you select one or two good pieces of evidence for each main point you make

Keep extracts within your work short. For longer reflections, use a cross-reference to the appendix, and summarise the point briefly in your writing.

How well you draw on relevant theory as part of your reflections

For an academic assessment, it is generally assumed that you will demonstrate that you are aware of which reading material and theories are relevant and how these provide insights on the issues you address.

In other words, good guidance for portfolios is:

- ★ include a contents page and a strong summary document (e.g. position paper or essay)
- ★ label and signpost clearly
- ★ think through which points you really want to make and check these come across clearly
- ★ back up your points with good evidence
- ★ cross-reference your argument clearly to evidence in the portfolio or appendices
- ★ include only essential evidence
- ★ keep it as succinct as possible.

Reflective essays

Purpose

Some courses set reflective essays as marked assignments. The contents of these will vary depending on the focus of the course and the purpose of the essay. For example, some courses ask for a reflective piece of writing at the start of study, in order to encourage students to focus on their goals and learning needs. Others set an essay at the end of a module for students to draw together their learning and identify next steps.

Usually, you will be given specific guidance on what is required. If not, the guidance below outlines features typical of reflective essays. The overall structure is similar to that of other essays you might be asked to write but the content and style are distinct.

Structure

Like any other essay, a reflective essay will have:

- ★ **a specific title** – you must structure your essay to respond to the question contained within the title
- ★ **an introduction** that identifies your overall position and prepares the reader for what to expect from the essay
- ★ **a main body** divided into paragraphs – this does not usually contain any headings or bullet points
- ★ **a conclusion** that sums up the main points – this does not introduce any new material
- ★ **citations** of source materials within the text
- ★ **a reference list** of all materials used and cited in the essay.

Contents (for a PDP essay)

Typically, a reflective essay will contain a selection of the following elements. To provide a focus, the sections below are those typically expected for an essay on personal development planning.

Personal aims and goals

- ★ Why did you choose this course? What were your aims and objectives?
- ★ Have these changed since starting the course? If so, how and why?

Expectations

- ★ What were you expecting from the course?
- ★ What did you expect from yourself?
- ★ What led you to form these expectations?

Programme learning outcomes

- ★ What are the learning outcomes for modules/units you have taken so far?
- ★ What skills development is associated with these?
- ★ How do these outcomes and skills correspond to your own aims and goals?

Other activity

- ★ What else do you do outside of your course in order to achieve your personal/professional goals or to supplement your learning?

Learning goals and targets

- ★ What are your current areas of strength in relation to your course, career or life ambitions? What relevant experience, skills, training or qualities did you bring?
- ★ Which areas do you need to improve?
- ★ What are your priority areas for improvement as 'learning goals'?
- ★ What are your targets, milestones and time-scales for meeting these learning goals?

Use reflection

- ★ Which methods have you used for reflection?
- ★ How do you use reflection?
- ★ Which books or theories help you to make sense of your developmental needs?
- ★ Provide a detailed example of how you developed and evaluated your performance in one area, drawing on structured reflection.

Use of feedback

- ★ What kinds of feedback have you received from tutors, students, employers or other people?
- ★ How do you feel about this feedback?
- ★ How have you made use of this feedback?

Evaluation of personal choices

- ★ In practice, how far does your course meet personal goals and interests?
- ★ Would any other course or set of modules/units be more suitable for you?
- ★ What other subject choices, additional modules or supplementary qualifications would help you to meet your personal goals?

Evaluation of learning

- ★ How well are you achieving the learning outcomes of your course?
- ★ What else have you learnt through your course?
- ★ What are you gaining, additionally, from your course or from college/university that was not part of your original goals?

Evaluation of your course

- ★ How do the modules or particular aspects of your course contribute to your professional and personal development?

Evaluation of personal performance

- ★ How well are you achieving your personal goals?
- ★ How well have you engaged with your course? (Attendance? Punctuality? Level of interest? Contributions made in class? Efforts to make personal meaning of the course material? Additional reading or work undertaken?)
- ★ How far do you consider you have taken responsibility for improving your own learning?

Personal development

- ★ How have your opinions, attitudes, beliefs or values changed since starting at college/university?
- ★ In what ways have you changed as a person since starting at college/university?

Critical incident

- ★ Identify an incident that illustrates your approach to your learning.
- ★ What does this incident demonstrate about you?
- ★ How does this incident relate to any theories of learning you have covered on your course?
- ★ What did you learn from this incident?
- ★ See the Reflection on page 285.

Use of theory

A reflective essay is still an academic piece of work. You should draw on your background reading for the subject, relating your own experiences to the theoretical perspectives relevant to your course.

Consider:

- ★ Does your experience support or exemplify theories you have covered in class or through your background reading?
- ★ Or does your experience run counter to those theories? If so, why might that be the case? What is different about your experience that might account for this?

Style

Reflective essays are about your own experience. This means that it is more acceptable for these to be written in the first person ('I', 'We').

Personal statement

Personal statements are important tools for making real use of ongoing observation, reflection and evaluation. They are characterised by:

- ★ being written in a more formal manner than reflection for personal purposes
- ★ drawing together learning that has taken place
- ★ identifying themes (from a portfolio or journal) and summarising these
- ★ identifying the overall path that developmental work has taken over a period of time
- ★ identifying the lessons that have been learnt
- ★ evaluating current performance
- ★ making recommendations for future improvement
- ★ identifying action that needs to be taken.

The emphasis of a personal statement may differ depending on whether it is written:

- ★ at the beginning of your course
- ★ as developmental work within your course
- ★ for assessment or submission at the end of your course
- ★ for a specific purpose such as a job application.

Example

Personal statement

This semester, I took three modules in Business Studies. These covered project management, business communication and entrepreneurship. I was able to draw out several themes that ran across the three modules.

First of all, the communication skills were important in identifying ways of varying a message so that it comes across to different audiences: client groups, bank managers, the buying public, products aimed at different age groups and at people who purchase for those client groups. We also focused on communication within teams.

Communication skills

Communication skills were important to my entrepreneurship project as I was part of a team that took a product (light-weight collapsible bikes) through from idea to design to market. We drew up a business plan that we presented to a funding panel. There was an accountant on the panel who gave us feedback on our presentations. Although our group did not win the funding, we were given valuable advice on what a business plan should look like and how to communicate its strengths when asking for funding.

The entrepreneurship students were not all from a business background: some were from product design, fine art, engineering, marketing and multi-media. One important lesson was in discovering that students from each discipline use different ways of describing their work process and the product than we expect from a business perspective. Although we learnt that we have to find a common vocabulary, a shared way of communicating, we could have approached this in a more organised way and avoided some misunderstandings. Communication for team work across disciplines is an area that I would like to investigate further.

Teamwork

The product designers and engineers, in particular, approached their work in ways that the business students found challenging. This meant that we had to establish ground rules for working together as a team. This took several attempts because our starting points were so different. We had not anticipated this... In the beginning, each of us was unwilling to compromise on methods we had been trained in.

However, as the deadlines drew closer, we made a choice to develop a hybrid way of working that met the needs of the project rather than what we thought we should do as 'business students' or 'design students'. This felt like a risky strategy but we were encouraged by our tutors, who gave us some useful tips on how to negotiate a strategy...

Position papers

Purpose

A position paper is a 'snapshot' of where you are now, which draws together reflections on your personal development. You might be asked to write a position paper:

- ★ as part of a reflective portfolio for course assignments
- ★ as a way of demonstrating learning if you are applying for exemption from part of a course of study
- ★ as an early assignment on a new course, so that tutors gain a sense of what you want and need from the course
- ★ when undertaking a workplace project, either as part of arguing a case for training or to undertake a project, or to report back at an interim stage on a longer project
- ★ as part of a reflective annual work-based review or appraisal system.

Format

You are usually expected to:

- ★ look back over past experience and identify what you have learned from your experience
- ★ evaluate your current position
- ★ project forward to where you wish to be
- ★ decide a plan of action that takes you from where you are now to where you wish to be in the future, using your past experience
- ★ identify how you will be able to recognise when you have achieved your goals.

To write a position paper, you can draw upon such material as entries from your reflective journal, responses to activities in this book, self-evaluations and action plans. A possible structure is suggested below, organised through a series of questions. You can use these to guide you, selecting relevant questions. Where possible, include references to texts you have read in order to support your reasoning.

Orientation

Aspirations and motivation: where am I going?

- ★ What are your aims for your future? Where would you like to see yourself in five or ten years' time? (Be imaginative and bold.) See page 39.
- ★ In what ways do you think your course will help you to achieve those aims?
- ★ What skills and attributes do you want to develop whilst in higher education?

Review

What do I bring from my past?

- ★ What has led you to the present stage in your study or career? Focus on what is relevant to your vision or goals.
- ★ What has inspired you? (Give references where possible.)
- ★ How has your past learning and life experience equipped you for this course and for being a student now? Evaluate the knowledge, qualifications, skills, attitudes and experiences that you bring with you and which are relevant to your study and goals.

Appraisal

Where am I now?

- ★ What skills and abilities will be required of you as a student on this course to achieve your goals?
- ★ What are your main strengths and weaknesses as a student on this course to achieve your goals?
- ★ What will you need to improve in order to do well?

Planning

How will I achieve my aims?

- ★ How do you plan to achieve your ambitions and study aims? What are you going to do, when and how?
- ★ What targets have you set as milestones (to what time-scales)? See page 207.

- ★ What difficulties might you encounter?
- ★ In what ways might you sabotage your own success? What steps will you take to prevent yourself or others from sabotaging your success?
- ★ How will you keep yourself motivated?
- ★ What other preparation and planning do you need to undertake?

Evaluating progress

What have I achieved?

- ★ How will you be able to recognise that you have achieved your aims?
- ★ What changes do you expect to see in yourself, your work, and in the attitudes of others when you have achieved your aims?
- ★ How will you be able to demonstrate to others what you have achieved?

Extrapolation

What have I learned?

- ★ What have you learned about yourself or your learning that was unexpected in some way?
- ★ How might this learning help you more generally with your studies, life and work?

References

Which source materials have I used?

Include references to books, films, music or other sources that have inspired you on your journey to where you are today. Include references to all materials you have used in writing the position paper. Remember to use the correct referencing system, such as the Harvard or Vancouver system, as recommended by your tutors.

Example

Sample introduction to a position paper

In this position paper, I demonstrate how my past experiences and future objectives are influencing my current study on a degree in media technology. The paper is based on an in-depth consideration of my previous life and learning experiences, and shows the ways in which prior learning has provided me with skills, knowledge and personal qualities that are relevant to my present studies. In particular, I draw attention to the range of skills and insights I acquired through working as a volunteer on a children's educational project in the USA last summer and how these, unexpectedly, have provided me with starting points for design work on the degree.

My main aim is to use this qualification to advance my professional career as a designer. This position paper outlines both the areas I need to investigate in order to improve my career prospects and my reasons for the module choices I have made for next year. It also looks at skills I need to improve next year to improve my course marks. In addition, I demonstrate how the media technology course I am on and the decisions I am making will help me to achieve my goals.

Give it time!

Reflection is not something that comes easily to everyone. However, reflective abilities develop over time and with practice, and are then useful for life.

- ★ Put time aside on a regular basis to reflect upon your performance.
- ★ Use a structured approach. Make use of activities in the book if you are not sure where to begin.
- ★ Read back over your reflections on a regular basis. Look for themes.
- ★ Consider regularly how far you have achieved personal goals.
- ★ Find approaches that suit you and your programme.
- ★ Look for changes in yourself, your actions, goals or values.
- ★ Notice and celebrate your achievements.
- ★ Be positive about the process: over time, you will see the benefits.

Review: The art of reflection

1

Value and nurture your reflective abilities

They will serve you well in all walks of life. Be able to trust better in your own judgement and decision-making through being able to think deeply, creatively and analytically about any situation.

2

Learn more from every context and experience

It is skilled and timely reflection that enables us to draw the most benefit from our experience. Although it takes time to develop a reflective habit, once this is established, taking a reflective practitioner approach helps us to avoid repeating mistakes and to enhance our situational wisdom.

3

Flex your approach

Become adept at using diverse approaches to reflection. Learn to recognise which will suit you best for the situation, issue and/or time available. Be able to move flexibly between approaches and to combine them.

4

Reflect on your own development

Put a little time aside every now and then for deep, structured thought about your own development, academic, personal and professional. It will become easier the more you do this. You deserve that time.

5

Choose the right reflective model for you

Be aware that there are various models for reflection – not everyone agrees on one best way. Decide what you need and how to make the time you spend in reflection most productive for you and others. If you can, devise your own model and/or your own set of prompt questions, to help you focus most usefully.

6

Distinguish between first and second phases of reflection

Not every thought and reflection that is useful for you is right to share with others. Use raw reflective material to free up your thinking and emotions, so you can get to the heart of the matter. Use second phase reflection to extract what is then most useful for you and right for sharing with others.

7

Consider your audience

If presenting your reflection to others, don't just 'dump' it on them in raw form. Shape it to fit the audience, such as for a blog, podcast or assignment. Structure your reflections so they are meaningful for your audience and purpose.

8

Understand how to use reflection in assignments

Don't become so attached to your reflections that you miss the point of the assignment. Stay focused on what you have been asked to do. For longer assignments, take steps to help your tutors navigate the material quickly and easily, so that they can absorb the important points you wish to make.

9

Bring it back to the learning

It is easy to be fascinated by our own experiences and thoughts. They are great resources and can bring back interesting memories. However, for your reflection to be really useful, keep bringing your awareness back to what there is to learn from the situation. What changes will you make? How will these make a difference to you or to others?

10

Give it time

It can take time to become really effective at reflection. Our natural reaction can be to focus on the wrong things, drift into a description of events or to rush it. Give yourself the time, space and practice to really reap the benefits.