

Reflective Report

Student Name: Mohd. Abdus Salam

Student Number: 2331141

Module Code: LCLM4001_LON

Module Title: Academic Skills

Lecturer Name: Sylvia Hoffmann

Assignment Title: "Task 3: Reflective Report on Note Taking Skills, Academic Writing Skills and Reflection Skills"

Word count : 1241 (excluding references and contents page).

Table of contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Section 1: Note Taking Skills**
- 3. Section 2: Academic Writing Skills**
- 4. Section 3 : Summarising Skills**
- 5. Conclusion**

1. Introduction

Returning to education after a good forty years was a big step for myself. I trained in a career which required little to no academic skills. In this report, I will explore how my learning of core academic skills such as note-taking, academic writing, and summarising from the academic skills module helped me apply to other areas of my study, life and made a significant positive impact. While courage is one aspect of embarking on a task, but the impact of physical and mental abilities and its decline with age is undeniable. However, these skills have sharpened my critical thinking and ability to process, retain and present information with precision improved.

This report is my reflection of using Gibbs' Reflective cycle (1988) to analyse and apply the stages of the model into note taking, academic writing skills and summarising skills.



Source : Library and Learning Services Study Development.

1. Description : This is the lived experience stage without passing any judgements and simply explaining stage.
2. Feelings : At this stage we access my own reaction (physical/mental) to the lived experience and again not a stage where we pass any judgement or analysis.
3. Evaluation : Now we establish if the lived experience was positive or negative and different aspects of it.
4. Analysis : Now we analyse this to make sense of the experience from different perspectives. Compare with others where possible to see if there was a consensus or difference of opinions.
5. Conclusion : The learnings from any analysis. Key takeaways.

6. Action Plan : How I will use all the learnings and anything I would do differently in future.

2. [Note Taking Skills](#)

Description

At the start of my course, I started to just listen and thought I could remember everything the lecturer presented. I assumed there would also be lecture slides. With English being my second language, I focused on listening. After the first few sessions, I started to write things down in my notepad, often trying as fast as I could to write as much as I could. The module described effective note taking involves identifying key points, organising them meaningfully, engage critically with the learning materials. (McPherson, 2018).

Feelings

I had the feeling of extreme nervousness, trying to think if I am understanding properly. If the meaning is what the lecturer actually intended. When different theories such as Herzberg's Two Factor Theory was explained, I felt this concepts are alien to me. I tried to write more quickly often feeling lost and felt like I would probably never understand this. But as I saw new learning materials on mind maps understood visual methods I started to feel hope.

Evaluation

After each week, I took the time to think what am I doing well during lectures, what do I need to improve? I had to be honest with myself to improve my note taking skills. I compared different methods of note taking and objectively asked myself which one would be more suited to my own learning style.

Analysis

I tried to understand why one system of note taking suits me better than the other. I found diagrams and mind maps are better suited. In comparison to the messy and wordy pages after pages of disorganised notes. This seems to support Cottrell (2019) which explains the importance of structured notes enhance comprehension and recall. Then reviewing lecture slides with my mind maps alongside allowed better understanding.

In conclusion the lectures on note taking helped me a great deal to learn how just writing pages after pages would not provide the best outcome. Applying the different skills would yield much better result.

What I would do differently in future

Practice taking notes more briefly in a more organised fashion

Review my notes while they are fresh in my mind and expand where necessary.

Section 2: Academic Writing Skills

Description

Coming from a blue collar profession, academic writing was an unfamiliar concept to me. Academic writing seemed very complex to me. Before I took classes on this, I found my paragraph writing lacked a coherent structure and I relied heavily on copying lecture slide notes. I learnt about the key principles such as writing with a clear message in short sentences, using evidence from reliable sources, present the pros and cons of the argument logically and provide a clear and short conclusion.

Feeling

At First I felt, I will never be good enough to write logical, eloquent sentences let alone paragraphs. It did not help that English was not my first language. I kept feeling overwhelmed with the amount of things to consider in order to write a good paragraph on a given topic. Use of grammar was inaccurate, I was not using credible information and not properly presenting a balanced argument.

Evaluation

I asked myself what are the things I need to master and noted, I needed to learn to use grammar properly, consider the topic and understand what I want to explain and finally learn how to paraphrase. Quoting "Brown (2004) understanding learning styles is essential" "Brown (2004)". I evaluated my own learning style and noted how I can apply those to learning those key areas of weakness for me.

Analysis

I analysed the appropriate learning materials to learn on those topics.

Conclusion

By analysing my weaknesses, I realised where I need to improve. I read more on referencing, paraphrasing and finally on grammar skills. Skills which contributed to writing better paragraphs.

Action Plans

I will continue to read more academic texts.

Obtain learning support to review my own writings to learn from my mistakes.

Section 3 : Summarising Skills

In simpler terms summarising means to give the reader the core message in a few short lines. It condenses the core information, findings from research/balanced argument and will omit any large volume of information. Reading the summary the reader will be able to understand what the report is about and key findings and conclusions. However, this was a difficult task for me for a few reasons.

Based on my research, the key summarisation techniques are, "Narrative summary, Executive summary, Information Summary, Thematic Summary, Critical Summary." (Readpartner, 2023).

For example: I would take a lot of notes but often struggled to put all the information in a summary form to explain the key message.

This made me feel rather disappointed in myself. I felt due to my language skills and poor working memory I was struggling. While I understood the task but I felt overwhelmed to put this into practice.

At times I found summarising very frustrating. However, with time I began to appreciate the importance of this.

To evaluate the issue I tried to identify where my weaknesses are. For example I felt I was not understanding the technical concepts/theories properly first. Without understanding this I would not be able to explain this in fewer words.

Using this analysis, I applied my note taking skills to make diagrams of the theory. So I can use this to create my summary.

Then I practised on different topics to summarise them.

This module has significantly improved my summarising skills, how to explain the key concepts in a condensed manner, explaining the key areas without taking up too much of the readers time.

This module has been a transformative journey for me. It gave me the confidence I needed to improve my skills that is essential to progress in my academic journey in this course and beyond.

References

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