

Reflective Essay

Reflective Essay on the Development of Academic and Digital Skills



MODULE NAME: ACADEMIC SKILLS FOR THE DIGITAL ERA BMSW4013
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I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

This essay discusses importance of developing both academic and digital skills in today's world, particularly within the context of adapting to university study. Research suggests that these skills are essential for effective learning, communication and collaboration. Kubatova (2025) highlights the value of soft skills as being crucial in today's society and contains the art of harmonious living and working with others, while meta-analysis demonstrates the positive impact of information and communication technology (ICT) literacy on academic achievements (Lei, et al., 2021). In addition, studies show that individuals with stronger learning abilities and skills demonstrate improved problem-solving performance, such as in tasks like completing the Rubik's Cube (Meinz, 2023).

This essay reflects on my development of three key academic skills during my first term at university using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, a six-stage process that supports structured reflection and analysis. The skills discussed are time management, presentation skills, and critical thinking. Each of which has played a significant role in shaping my transition into higher education and developing my confidence as an independent learner.

The first experience I am reflecting on is the development of my time management skills. I began practising these strategies when I started a job in Wales in 2024, and they were further developed during the first week of university. In a workshop led by Ffion Cumberpath, we learned techniques for organising academic tasks and improving productivity. We completed an activity that involved categorising tasks according to urgency and importance. I found it difficult to decide which tasks could be postponed or removed, as prioritising effectively was a challenge for me.

The second experience relates to my presentation skills, which were developed during weeks six to eight in the Academic Skills and Digital Skills modules. I learned the structure of short verbal presentations and how to use digital tools for online delivery. My task was to present a mock presentation to my peers, focusing on both slide content and spoken delivery. I found it challenging to communicate concisely while maintaining clarity.

The final experience focuses on critical thinking. In week six, I attended a workshop analysing media headlines to determine whether information was reliable, false, or uncertain. I was required to assess the evidence objectively. This activity highlighted my tendency to make quick judgements, rather than carefully evaluating sources before forming conclusions.

At the beginning of the term, my greatest fear was feeling stressed and lacking confidence while developing new academic skills. Although I understood the purpose of each skill, I felt particularly insecure about my decision-making. Before the learning activities, I was disappointed in myself for not being more organised and for struggling to complete tasks on time, which left me overwhelmed. During presentations, I often felt embarrassed when making mistakes in front of others, further affecting my confidence.

As I progressed, I began to feel more empowered. I realised that I did not need to complete every task and that it was acceptable to prioritise university responsibilities over external demands. This reduced the pressure I placed on myself. I also felt proud of consistently trying and practising, even when relying on instincts without full clarity about homework in the Digital Skills module.

Despite moments of uncertainty, I generally felt energetic and hopeful that positive change was possible. I became motivated to explore new techniques, build confidence, and continue developing my abilities. By the end of the experience, I felt more comfortable and less pressured. Nevertheless, I still experience some stress and uncertainty when needing to remain objective, particularly when selecting appropriate academic sources for my assignments.

The online presentations and recommended educational videos helped me recognise the importance of the skills I was developing, as I learn most effectively through visual material and practical application. Implementing the techniques and tools introduced at university created a positive working environment both on campus and at home. I successfully completed two online presentations independently and delivered them to an audience, which increased my confidence. To develop my critical thinking, I explored a range of academic sources and alternative viewpoints related to my studies. In addition, I began using the Pomodoro Technique in my daily routine and improved

my task organisation by using a digital calendar and online planning boards. Research suggests that the Pomodoro Technique enhances focus, time management, and reduces cognitive overload (Ogut, 2025), which aligned with my personal experience. I also used the recommended reading lists from my course handbook and engaged more with digital library resources by accessing eBooks and borrowing printed materials from the campus library. When conducting research, I increasingly attempted to verify the credibility of sources before using them in my academic work, which supported the development of my digital literacy skills.

However, several challenges affected my learning. I sometimes struggled to maintain concentration during lectures and did not always absorb all the information presented. In the early stages of my research, I did not consistently use keywords or advanced search techniques, which limited the relevance and quality of my sources. I also found it difficult to remember academic terminology, and my presentation skills—particularly the technical aspects of creating online presentations—felt underdeveloped. Distractions during both lectures and independent study at home occasionally prevented me from focusing effectively.

These experiences showed me that productivity is more complex than I initially believed and involves both effective organisation and sustained concentration. They also helped me recognise the importance of practising objectivity when evaluating information. As Cottrell (2023) states, “our brains like to assume that they are right,” which reflects my tendency to favour my own viewpoints and resist alternative perspectives. This awareness has encouraged me to approach information more critically. Furthermore, although I initially felt anxious about audience judgement and making mistakes while presenting, the structured guidance provided during lectures gradually improved my confidence and performance.

I began university with the primary goal of improving my confidence, particularly regarding the academic and digital skills I identified as areas for development. Reflecting on these experiences highlights how personal characteristics, such as determination and high expectations, both supported and hindered my progress.

In terms of time management, adopting new productivity techniques was generally successful due to my motivation and commitment to self-improvement. However,

maintaining consistent focus was challenging because of poor self-prioritisation and distractions. I often underestimated how demanding my workload was and overcommitted, setting expectations that were not always achievable. Recognising these habits as ineffective was an important turning point, as awareness represents the first step toward meaningful behavioural change. I am now creating more realistic daily schedules and evaluating project feasibility by considering deadlines and timelines more carefully.

My experience with presentation skills was shaped by the importance of storytelling. Confidence in sharing personal experiences helped me communicate effectively; however, uncertainty increased when presenting academic content, driven by perfectionism and fear of peer judgement. Despite this, I demonstrated resilience by presenting publicly and engaging in group discussions, which I consider a personal achievement. Moving forward, I aim to develop audience-awareness skills to tailor my content and visual materials more effectively.

During lectures, I realised that critical thinking skills are essential not only for academic success but also for everyday decision-making. While I tend to rely on factual information, supporting objective thinking, I struggled with unfamiliar terminology and applying analytical frameworks independently. This may stem from previous reliance on structured guidance, which limited opportunities to develop independent reasoning. Engaging in critical evaluation tasks has helped me become more reflective and objective, forming conclusions based on evidence rather than opinion. I aim to continue strengthening these analytical skills to integrate factual understanding with well-reasoned, confident viewpoints.

Through this reflective process, I have learned that academic and digital skills can be developed through consistent practice, although progress varies. I recognise that I could have begun practising earlier and applied new techniques immediately after each lecture. Moving forward, I will focus more on the learning process than solely on outcomes, supported by the SMART action plan below.

While I have made progress, further development is needed, particularly in critical thinking and using academic information effectively. Over the past three months, I have maintained an open-minded approach and welcomed new knowledge, which I intend to continue.

Academic and digital skills are essential for my future studies, professional development, and everyday activities such as communication, organisation, and decision-making. In an increasingly digital world, continued development of these skills will enhance both my productivity and the quality of my learning experiences.

Below is my SMART action plan for achieving my goals over the next 12 to 36 months.

Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time Bound
Improve presentation confidence speaking in front of others.	Create one blog post and one short video per week.	Use digital presentation tools and speaking techniques.	Builds public speaking confidence.	Weekly until end of semester three.
Improve my time management to submit assignments on time.	Dedicate two daily study hours to coursework and assignments.	Use the Pomodoro Technique and time-blocking tools.	Enhances productivity and reduces stress.	Daily throughout semester two.
Strengthen my digital skills to make online presentations more engaging.	Design one original graphic per presentation or lecture summary.	Apply PowerPoint and digital design skills taught in university workshops.	Enhances creativity and audience engagement during digital presentations.	Weekly in semester two.

Develop critical thinking skills to make informed decisions in academic writing.	Apply self-questioning and source evaluation before submitting assignments.	Conduct research, reflect independently.	Supports objective analysis and evidence-based academic writing.	For all assignments until end of academic year.
Strengthen objective evaluation of viewpoints to reduce bias in academic reports.	Participate in one discussion per week exploring alternative perspectives.	Use core critical-thinking principles and deliberately engage with diverse viewpoints.	Improves balanced judgement and supports unbiased academic reporting.	Weekly until end of degree.

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