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Learn smarter, not harder

Understanding my learning style



My name is Sophie Walters, and I am currently studying business at Trinity Saint David in Carmarthen under the business management programme. Being a mature learner has its advantages and disadvantages, but through this research and understanding, I now know I have the tools to thrive.

My key study objectives explain how they support my academic and professional development. After completing the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire and the VARK test, I identified my predominant learning style as a Reflector-Theorist, with multimodal preferences encompassing visual, aural, and read/write learning modalities. According to the questionnaire, I learn most effectively through observation, listening, and deep contemplation of information before applying it. I favour structured learning environments that provide clear explanations and allow time for reflection before taking action. I also benefit from structured explanations and opportunities to revisit content rather than being expected to respond immediately. Overall, these results were unsurprising, as I have always found that I learn more effectively when I can learn at my own pace and fully understand the reasoning behind the concept, rather than merely memorising someone else's understanding of it.

I believe that setting clear study objectives is an essential component of effective learning at university, as it enables students to take ownership of their academic development and work more intentionally and systematically. Rather than approaching learning reactively, clear objectives help to focus effort, monitor progress and support long-term growth. Research suggests that students who set specific learning goals are more likely to remain self-motivated, self-directed and engaged with their studies (Zimmerman, 2022). As a mature student returning to education, I recognise the importance of setting meaningful objectives that align with both my academic development and my professional aspirations within the beauty and training industry. Research supports these findings. Honey and Mumford (1992) describe reflectors as learners who prefer to observe and reflect before acting, while theorists value logical reasoning and structured models. In addition, Flemming (2001) suggests learners with multimodal preferences benefit from combining different learning methods to reinforce understanding.

From insight to action, my personal learning plan

My first objective is to develop stronger reflective and independent learning skills throughout my time at university. Independent learning is paramount within the higher education sector. Requiring students to manage their time effectively, engage critically using academic material, and evaluate their own progress. Research indicates that reflective learning enhances understanding and promotes continuous improvement (Moon, 2024).

Research indicates that individuals identified as Reflector–Theorists benefit from structured lessons, opportunities for reflection, and the ability to analyse concepts in detail (Flemming, 2001). In light of this, I intend to utilise visual aids, summarise my notes using the GoodNotes application after class, colour-code notes for review, and employ reflective notes articulated in my own words to facilitate the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Understanding my learning style has clarified the need for both time and structure to achieve optimal results, as reflective practice is widely recognised as a core skill in education, training, and leadership roles (Schön, 1983). Developing this skill will allow me to apply academic learning directly to my salon and training business, supporting evidence-based decision-making and ongoing professional growth.

Honey & Mumford's Learning Styles



Image from Bitesize Learning

Having identified my predominant learning style as a Reflector–Theorist and recognising my Visual, Aural, and Read/Write preferences as indicated by my VARK results, I have begun to consider how this understanding can enhance my independent learning. Understanding my optimal learning methods enables me to establish robust habits that align with my strengths rather than oppose them. As a Reflector, I learn most effectively through observation, review, and deep contemplation before action. Consequently, I intend to maintain a weekly learning journal for each class, wherein I can review and emphasise my notes, articulate my understanding of each module in my own words, and reflect on the material. Engaging in reflective writing facilitates my ability to process ideas and forge clearer connections between theory and practice. Research suggests that reflective writing can significantly enhance deeper learning and self-awareness (Moon, 2024). Additionally, I have found that allocating quiet time after class for this process is beneficial.

My Theorist learning style suggests that I will benefit from structured, logical learning approaches. I plan to organise my independent study using clear frameworks, such as the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1998) or Kolb's Learning Cycle (1984), to assess and evaluate my progress. I will also use visual tools, such as mind maps, tables, and flowcharts, to clarify relationships among key concepts. To further support my learning, I will utilise university resources, such as tutor feedback, study skills workshops, and library research sessions. Engaging in discussions with peers will also enhance my understanding, as hearing diverse perspectives supports my Aural learning preferences. Ultimately, my objective is to integrate reflection and structure to manage my learning more effectively. By consistently applying these strategies, I aspire to become a more confident, independent, and reflective learner.

In summary, by using these objectives not only to support my academic success, but also for long-term professional development by strengthening my reflective and independent learning skills and developing my confidence further in collaboration and communication. I aim to become more effective and self-aware within my learning. These objectives will not only enhance my university experience but also contribute to my professional growth, enabling me to apply theory thoroughly and engage more effectively.

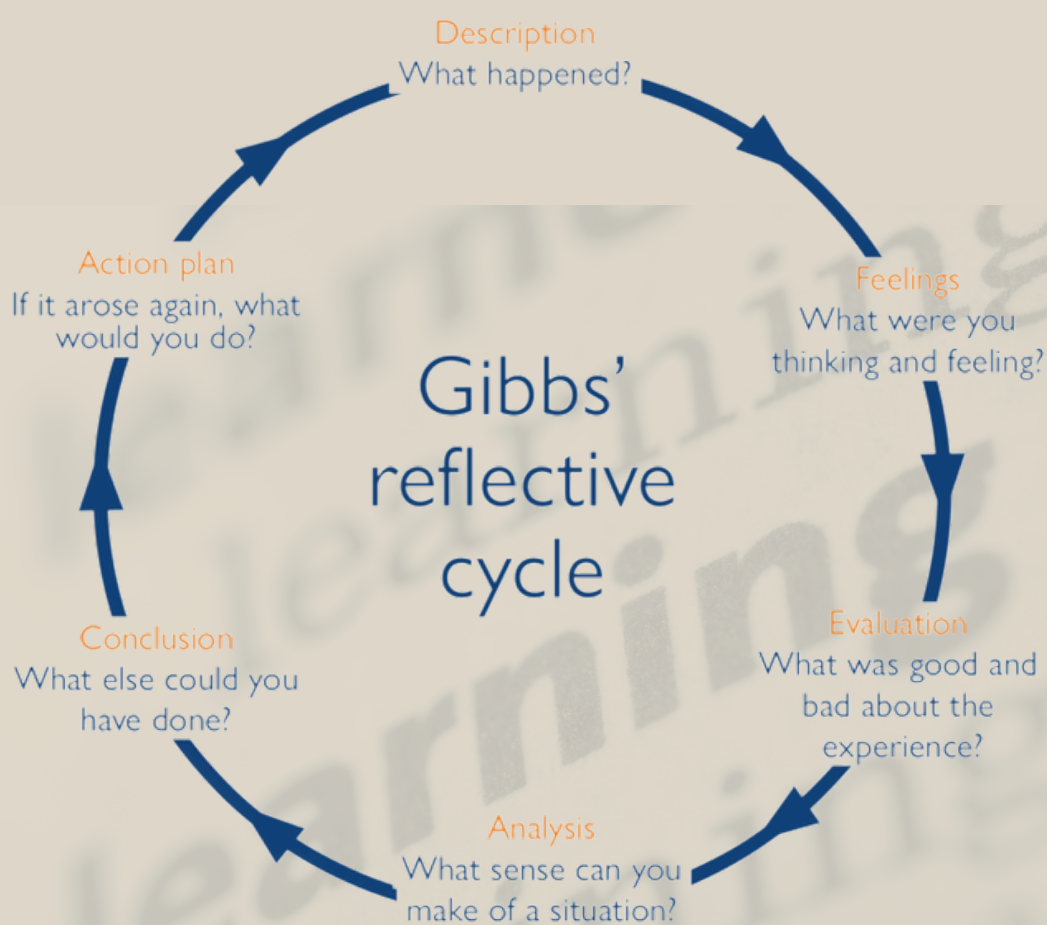


Image from <https://wp.coventry.domains/preciousnamani/reflection/>

My professional identity

With a background in the beauty and training industry, I have come to understand that professionalism extends beyond mere appearance; it encompasses continuous learning, relationship-building, and the development of confidence in both knowledge and skills. Through studying and completing my learning style assessments, I have recognised that my Reflector–Theorist personality significantly influences my professional development. I learn most effectively when afforded the opportunity to observe, research, and plan before taking action. This methodology has consistently informed my interactions with clients and learners, as well as my salon business.

Engaging with professional communities

As I advance in my studies, I aspire to cultivate a robust professional identity that embodies my values of growth, creativity, and high standards. To this end, I intend to leverage my Reflector tendencies to observe industry trends, participate in training workshops, and engage in peer discussions, thereby learning from others' experiences before integrating new ideas into my practice. Additionally, I plan to utilise my Theorist inclination to remain informed about the scientific principles underlying treatments, product development, and the broader business aspects of the beauty industry. A thorough understanding of theory enables me to make informed, evidence-based decisions, thereby enhancing my teaching and management practices within my company.

One of my objectives is to enhance my professional network. I intend to achieve this by utilising LinkedIn and joining groups focused on beauty and education, where professionals exchange insights on sustainability, leadership, and innovation. Engaging with these communities will enable me to draw inspiration and remain informed about industry developments. Additionally, I plan to participate in Sustainable Leadership programs and business networking events in Wales, facilitating collaboration with like-minded entrepreneurs and educators who share a commitment to ethical and sustainable beauty practices.



In summary, these objectives are designed to support both my academic success and long-term professional development by strengthening my reflective and independent learning skills and developing my confidence in collaboration and communication. I aim to become more effective and self-aware within my learning. These objectives will not only enhance my university experience but also contribute to my professional growth, enabling me to apply theory thoroughly and engage confidently.

Completing this assignment has encouraged me to reflect more deeply on how to approach learning at university; it has pushed me out of my comfort zone and given me a clearer vision of how I can shape my personal experiences and academic development. Gaining insight into my learning style has helped me approach learning with greater confidence and less uncertainty, thereby enabling me to intentionally structure my understanding of learning. This is likely going to help me avoid trial and error. I now have a clearer understanding of how reflection, organisation, and thoughtful preparation support my success as a learner.

As a mature student, I have found this process particularly valuable. Returning to education, especially after a traumatic education previously, made me realise that it was not just that I was struggling, but that I was not being shown my own map to my mind. If anything, this has underscored the importance of self-confidence, self-awareness, and adaptability, especially when balancing academic responsibilities with professional commitments and household responsibilities. Setting clear study objectives has helped me feel more in control of my learning and has provided direction during moments of self-doubt or when faced with a challenge.

Overall, this assignment represents the beginning of an ongoing learning journey to change habits and adapt to learning a new way which works for me. It has provided me with a strong foundation for learning and will support both my professional development and lifelong learning.

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