

Academic Skills Reflective Report

MODULE NAME: Academic Skills

MODULE CODE: LCLM 4001_LON

STUDENT NAME: Rummyana Petrova

STUDENT ID: 2415920

GROUP: 7



Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

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1. Introduction

This report discusses how I developed my academic skills during my studies, focusing on paraphrasing, referencing, and reflective practice. To reflect on my learning process, I used Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, a structured approach that breaks experiences into six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan (Gibbs, 1988). This framework has helped me better understand the strengths and weaknesses in my academic practices, allowing me to identify areas for improvement and strategies for growth.

Academic success relies on a strong foundation in key skills, and I chose to focus on paraphrasing, referencing, and reflection because of their importance in academic writing and learning. These three skills are interconnected, and each plays a critical role in ensuring academic integrity, clarity, and growth. By analysing my experiences with these skills and applying Gibbs' Cycle, I've gained insight into the progress I've made and developed strategies for ongoing improvement.

2. Reflection Topics

2.1 Paraphrasing Skills

Paraphrasing is the process of restating information in one's own words while maintaining the original meaning (Kissner, 2006). Early in my studies, I found this skill particularly challenging. I often relied too heavily on the original text, and in doing so, I risked unintentional plagiarism. This made it difficult to confidently present ideas in my own words, especially when dealing with complex academic material.

At first, I felt discouraged by my inability to paraphrase effectively. I worried about accidentally changing the meaning of the text or not capturing the author's intent accurately. These fears led to a lack of confidence and hesitancy whenever I attempted to rephrase information. However, as I practiced paraphrasing regularly, my confidence grew. Exercises that required summarizing academic articles into concise, reworded statements proved especially useful. They encouraged me to break down sentences into smaller parts and focus on the key ideas.

Over time, I began to understand the importance of fully grasping the meaning of a text before attempting to paraphrase it. Kissner (2006) stresses that effective paraphrasing isn't just about substituting words but about engaging deeply with the material. By focusing on the main ideas and rethinking how they could be expressed, I moved away from mechanical word substitution and toward creating original, meaningful restatements of the content.

One significant turning point in my learning process was the feedback I received from Mr. Hopkins, who pointed out specific areas where I could improve. His constructive criticism highlighted my tendency to stay too close to the original structure of the text. This feedback motivated me to refine my technique further. I also started distinguishing between paraphrasing and summarizing, which helped clarify my writing and improved my ability to meet academic standards.

Although I have made significant progress in paraphrasing, I recognize there is still room for improvement. Condensing complex arguments without losing their original meaning remains a challenge. To address this, I plan to engage in more critical reading exercises, which will improve my

ability to identify the core message of texts. I also intend to seek feedback from peers and instructors regularly to ensure my progress continues.

Moving forward, I will include paraphrasing exercises in my daily study routine and cross-check my work against the original texts to ensure accuracy. I also plan to explore resources like academic writing workshops and online tutorials for more advanced strategies. By committing to regular practice, I believe I can fully master this skill.

2.2 Referencing Skills

Referencing is essential in academic writing as it demonstrates academic integrity, acknowledges the work of others, and prevents plagiarism. When I first started university, I found referencing to be one of the most difficult skills to master. The many citation styles, such as APA, MLA, Chicago, and Harvard, each with their specific formatting rules, made the process overwhelming.

In the beginning, I felt anxious and confused about how to apply the correct referencing style. Even minor errors in formatting would result in lost marks, which added to my frustration. Despite this, I recognized the importance of accurate referencing and was determined to improve.

The workshops and training sessions offered during my course played a key role in helping me overcome this challenge. These sessions broke down the rules of referencing into simple steps and provided practical examples. They also introduced me to tools like Zotero, which simplified the process of managing references. According to McMillan and Weyers (2021), consistent practice and familiarity with style guides are essential for mastering referencing. This proved true in my case, as regular practice made the process feel less intimidating over time.

One thing that stood out to me during the workshops was the purpose of referencing. It's not just about following rules but about giving credit to authors, showing the depth of your research, and helping readers trace your sources. Understanding this purpose made referencing feel more meaningful and motivated me to pay closer attention to detail.

While tools like Zotero made the process faster, I also learned the importance of manually checking my references for accuracy. This helped me avoid mistakes caused by relying too heavily on software. I now understand that referencing is a skill that combines precision, attention to detail, and an understanding of academic values.

Although I've come a long way, I know there's more to learn. Citation guidelines can change over time, so staying up to date is important. To continue improving, I plan to practice referencing a variety of sources, including books, journal articles, and online materials. I also aim to review updated style guides regularly to ensure my skills remain sharp.

2.3 Reflection Skills

Reflective practice involves analysing past experiences to learn from them and improve (Smile & Fowlie, 2009). When I first encountered reflective writing, I struggled with it. My initial reflections were vague and focused only on surface-level details. I lacked a clear framework to guide my thoughts, which made the process feel abstract and unstructured.

At first, I felt uncertain about how to reflect meaningfully. However, using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle provided me with a clear structure. The six stages of the cycle—description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan—made it easier to break down my experiences and think critically about them.

As I practiced using Gibbs' Cycle, my reflections became deeper and more focused. Smile and Fowlie (2009) emphasize that reflection should involve both critical thinking and planning for future improvements. Applying this approach helped me move beyond simple observations and identify specific strengths and weaknesses in my learning process.



Figure 1: Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Source: <https://ding.global/graham-gibbs-and-the-value-of-learning-by-doing/>

Over time, I became more self-aware and began setting realistic goals for improvement. For example, reflecting on my paraphrasing skills helped me identify the need for more critical reading practice. Similarly, reflecting on my referencing skills highlighted the importance of double-checking citations for accuracy. McMillan and Weyers (2021) suggest that reflective practice is key to personal development, and my experience supports this view.

Although I've made progress in reflective writing, I recognize the need to deepen my reflections further. Sometimes, I focus too much on identifying problems without fully exploring solutions. To address this, I plan to practice writing more detailed action plans and seek feedback on my reflections.

3. Conclusion

Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle to review my academic skills development has been very helpful. The structured method gave me clarity and helped me understand my strengths and areas for growth.

Paraphrasing, referencing, and reflection are interconnected skills that are essential for academic success. While I've made good progress in these areas, I know that continuous practice is key to further improvement. By setting clear plans and regularly revisiting these skills, I'm confident I can continue to grow academically. Gibbs' Cycle will remain an important tool for me, encouraging a reflective mind-set that supports lifelong learning.

4. References

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