

Learning in the Digital Era

By Kirstin Jones

2214408

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Through the looking glass – From the past into the future

Reflection is defined in many ways, personally, I think of reflection as the ability to analyse and explore to understand, expand, and improve. It is a useful skill in all aspects of life. Analysing past experiences and knowledge to gain a better understanding as you head into the future.



(Donelly, 2018)

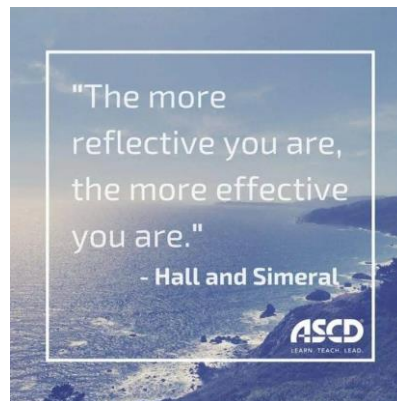
Critical reflection encourages you to think deeply, increasing knowledge instead of relying solely on your own judgments. By analysing, questioning, and considering all aspects you can create unbiased evidence-based opinions. During this time, you may reconsider your initial thoughts, potentially changing opinions as you expand your knowledge forming a completely different opinion or discovering what you initially believed to be true.

In life we reflect upon numerous situations in our day-to-day lives. As students using ability to reflect and apply it in different contexts. Using our knowledge and experiences to analyse in depth the concepts of what we believe, while considering contrasting perspectives, continuously challenging and questioning to create an improved outcome.

During times of self-reflection, we assess our strengths and weaknesses, creating a plan of self-improvement, allowing ourselves the opportunity to make positive changes to better ourselves and our abilities. By reflecting, we not only make necessary improvements to the outcome of our work, but it also builds confidence, improves organisation skills while challenging the way we currently think and make decisions.

Self-reflection gives you a greater understanding of yourself and what works for you. Critical reflection involves connecting your critical thinking skills in order to think deeper about the world around you, questioning and analysing information, policies, procedures, experiences in ways that challenge our thought process and creativity in a constructive way. As stated by (Deveci & Wyatt,

2022) critical reflection 'serves to 'increase our intellectual independence, increase our tolerance for different points of view, and free us from the snares of dogmatism'



(Ball,2017)

Years of research and time has gone into understanding the skill of reflection. John Dewey (1859-1952) developed his theory of reflective practice (1933) to improve the way we make decisions and problem-solve. He believed that reflection is a process in which we consider and question our knowledge to further our development. He created a 5-step model for successful reflection;

- 'Step 1: Identify and Define the Problem.
- Step 2: Analyze the Problem.
- Step 3: Generate Creative Solutions.
- Step 4: Select the Best Solution.
- Step 5: Take Action.'(Davidmwhitearchitect.com, 2022)

Philosopher Donald Schon (1930 – 1997) developed his theory of reflection in 1983 by creating two categories. Firstly, reflection in-action involves the process of reflection during an experience and making necessary changes or improvements to a present situation. The second is reflection on-action. This leads to the process of analysing past situations in order to learn from them. (Study Prism, 2023)

With many theories supporting reflection, it can be a challenge discovering the best one to support your needs. Your reasons for reflecting can help you make this decision, personally I enjoyed Gillian Bolton's 'looking through the mirror' approach, using reflection as a journey of exploration and confidence. Described as 'envisaging ways in which the familiar can be changed.' (Bates, 2019, p.330) This approach to reflection encourages you to embrace uncertainty, considering other factors greater than your own.

The International Institute of Time Management defines time management as 'the skill of organizing and aligning your tasks and objectives into a schedule' (International Institute of Time Management, 2021).

As students, the benefits of effective time management include increasing the ability to set goals, complete tasks and meet deadlines. With multiple ways to manage time effectively, understanding your individual circumstances is a necessity. When referring to time management, it can be better understood in two categories. Firstly, the psychological aspect, refers to the ways in which we think and feel. An example of this would include not starting an essay as you fear you do not have to knowledge and skills to complete your work to the standard you would like. The second aspect involves the physical changes we make to improve our time management. Creating calm, quiet spaces to study and removing distractions allows us to use our time more efficiently.

Poor time management can have a negative effect on our ability to achieve goals and complete tasks often due to our self-control, procrastination, lack of attention. Being unable to manage your time effectively not only impacts the outcome of your work but the impact on your life can be detrimental. The stress and worry can continue to build affecting your mental-health and well-being. Although it can feel as though time is unlimited, when broken down it can be difficult to ensure you have enough time to complete all your tasks. To overcome this, it is important to ensure that we manage our time effectively and learn the best ways to manage our time as individuals looking into strategies that work with our schedule and personality.

One of the biggest impacts of time management is procrastination. As stated in the Cambridge dictionary procrastination is described as 'the act of delaying something that must be done, often because it is unpleasant or boring.' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). A number of students have difficulty with procrastination. With common reasons being motivation, anxiety and confidence, it is important to understand a person's reasons for procrastinating and discover ways of coping. For some, this could be support from friends, family and staff. Some students may require support from professionals.

Procrastination can be influenced by the prefrontal cortex, a small area within the brain affecting our decision making. (Newsham, G. 2022) As the author, recently undertaking a short study

involving different effects the brain has on a person's personality, emotions, and decisions this specific area of our brain can hugely influence who we are as a person and the decisions we make.

To overcome the challenges of procrastination and implement good time management its essential to understand your expectations and limitations, prioritising the most important tasks. One way to implement this is creating a schedule. It can be helpful to include all the tasks you need to complete, ordering them from most to least important. Having a visual timetable is easier to follow and encourages you to stay organised. It can take time creating a schedule that works for you, asking yourself relevant questions to determine tasks, timing and productivity ensuring that you can study while feeling calm and alert with minimal distractions. When creating your schedule overestimating your time can be beneficial, in the instance that any unexpected challenges occur you will have ample time to complete deadlines. (Cherry, K. 2022)

Your workspace plays an important role in the physical aspect of time management. Creating an area where you can feel relaxed and free from distractions increases productivity. Removing your phone during this time can be beneficial as it is one of the biggest distractions. The temptation to answer a call or check social media can override the need to complete the task, by removing your devices you eliminate the distraction. It can be helpful to make friends and family aware that you are unavailable while studying.

Focusing on time management involves taking time to ensure your mental health and well-being is supported. One way included is allowing yourself an appropriate time to sleep. Losing sleep to complete assignments when you are behind schedule is a common way students attempt to catch-up, but it can be damaging on your mental health and effects the outcome of your work. Getting enough restful sleep influences your decision making, mood, attitude, concentration, and your ability to focus and retain information. Taking breaks while working is another important way to maintain focus. Using the time productively allows you to feel refreshed when you return. It can be useful during this time to take a walk or exercise.

When aiming to manage time efficiently, it can be helpful to have guidance to follow. The acronym 'SMART' stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. This framework can allow you to build your time management skills, breaking down a goal into smaller parts to achieve a better understanding and outcome. This technique allows you to break down your desired

outcome into smaller goals, making them easier to manage and control. The SMART approach can be especially useful in the beginning to help you gain a better understanding, as time moves on it may become a useful tool in helping you manage your time to achieve your goals. (Robby, 2022)

In conclusion, good time management involves planning and organising aspects of your life to ensure that your time is used wisely and appropriately with your schedule and workload, allowing deadlines to be met while including time for self-care, socialising, resting. Managing time can be difficult but using helpful tools and providing structure to your routine can ensure your time is used in the best, most efficient way to help you reach your full potential.

ARE YOU A CRITICAL THINKER?

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

"Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally, understanding the logical connection between ideas."
(SkillsYouNeed, 2011)

critical thinking is a useful skill allowing you think and learn responsibly and independently.



WHY DO YOU NEED TO THINK CRITICALLY?

Thinking critically can allow for a more beneficial way of learning, encouraging/promoting a successful outcome. As students, acquiring this skill improves the ability analyse information and make informed decisions. Critical thinking enhances creativity, encouraging curiosity to shine through. It promotes self-reflection and self-assertion while nurturing problem solving and decision-making skills during this time and for later in life.

HOW TO BECOME A CRITICAL THINKER

There are numerous skills involved when becoming a critical thinker. The ability to create reasonable, realistic conclusions based on the research and evidence discovered. This can be found from articles, books, videos, journals, verbal communication and many more. It's down to you to use your critical thinking skills to analyse this information, make necessary judgements and further your research to determine your findings/outcome.

'critical thinking includes practices of analyzing arguments, predicting potential consequences, developing genuine strategies, finding alternative and appropriate ways to deal with situations and making decisions' (Akcaoglu, Mor, Kulekci, 2023. p.2)

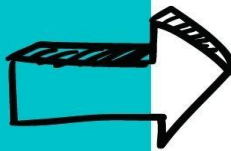
SKILLS EVERY CRITICAL THINKER SHOULD HAVE

The following are some of the most useful skills one can have to enhance critical thinking:



- Observation
- Analysis
- Inference
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Open mindedness
- Creativity

(Indeed, 2019)



These critical thinking skills will help you on your journey to success. Each aspect involves a different element to consider in order to achieve the desired outcome.

By using these skills, you will be able to make informed decisions based on factual evidence supporting your opinions and conclusions. You will be able to analyse information by asking yourself these relevant questions:



- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?
- How?

METACOGNITION



Our ability to become critical thinkers is based upon the skills we learn, the challenges we face and the ability to think deeply.

The input into our research, work and something else is mostly self-initiated and self-aware. Metacognition is our ability to process individual thoughts. It determines the way we plan, monitor and evaluate our thinking in the work we create and how we organise different aspects of our life in order to reach our goals successfully. (Cambridge Assessment, 2018)

It allows similarities to be made between old and new information and encourages reflection.

Skills for life

Developing these skills can make great attributes for the future. Skills such as problem-solving and communication are important qualities that are necessary during studying in order to achieve greatness, but these skills are useful in many aspects of life. They are useful when making decisions and life choices and are qualities that future employers look for.

created by Kirstin Jones

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