

Reflection on My Academic and Employability Skills.

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1. Introduction

To be successful in the world of employment and academics a set of skills must be mastered. This academic report reflects on study/research strategies aimed to improve effective skills to gain success. In class we studied the following skills: Academic writing, Paraphrasing, Summarising, CV and cover letter, Public speaking and giving presentations, Analytical and critical thinking skills, and online learning experience. However, the three topics this report will be discussing is:

- Time Management
- Referencing
- Reflection

2. Reflective Model

The module of reflection being used to analyse these three topics is the Gibbs Reflective Cycle created by Gibbs Graham. This model is useful in reflecting on academic work and research and helps to increase one's awareness of an experience. I picked the Gibbs method of reflection because the stages it goes through, which is shown in Figure 1. These stages help me process events better and gives a great structure for reflection.

- In 1988 Graham outlined a cycle and named each step one must take to reflect effectively. (Gibbs, 1998, p. 50)



Figure 1.

3. Academic and Employability skills

3.1 Time Management

Description: "Time management presupposes conscious control over the amount of time which is spent on particular types of works, increasing thus efficiency and quality of a product of activity" this is a definition given by a study of time management in education. (Krillov et al, 2015, p.193). I tend to agree with Krillov's definition. Managing time requires commitment and dedication. I had a very basic understanding of time management organising and planning my time between home and work; however, I did not have a formidable structure to achieve maximum efficiency of my time until I studied the Eisenhower method and got the opportunity to watch a YouTube video titled 'The

Eisenhower Matrix' by vlogbrothers (Green, 2018) about how the matrix can fix your procrastination issues.

Feelings: Prior to being aware of my Time management I always felt rushed. Sometimes ironically not having time to manage my time. For instance, when I started out this university year and experience, I had not set specific times on specific days I had to achieve certain goals. I had not prioritized events like homework tasks, and I felt under pressure to deliver. In addition, I had not considered my career time and time at home. Without being able to eliminate either one I realise now that managing my time is of utmost importance.

Being aware of the basic principles of the Eisenhower matrix I am now able to categorise my time in the same way Dwight. D Eisenhower did where he stated that "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important". The Eisenhower matrix is to categorise tasks in four fragments. "Important/urgent, Important/Not Urgent, Unimportant/ Urgent and Unimportant/ Not urgent". (Savaneli, Krivokapic and Pikhart, 2014, p.45). To illustrate, I have categorised my University work as Important/Urgent to get it done with time to go back and review it. On the other hand, I have classified activities such as non-essential shopping as Unimportant/ not urgent, to complete urgent tasks before I participate in such activity. This method has proven to be helpful and effective to stop any kind of procrastination that may have threatened the quality of my university work. Working smarter and not necessarily working harder is proven to be successful. (Bast, 2016, p.73).

Evaluation: At times what is urgent is not important because when it needed to be done it was not done. Being able to determine what is important/ not urgent when important/urgent work is done would avoid important or unimportant work to become urgent when it could have been avoided.

What has worked is that I have been able to prioritize university work, however constantly working towards important/ urgent matters has taken away certain liberties I had before such as going for a walk and watch my favourite shows.

Analysis: What has been challenging is being able to recognise what is important/urgent. For example, when I first started using this method what was important/urgent to me seemed to only be my university work and my job. However, putting those activities first all the time takes away from other events such as a time to relax and watch a favourite TV programme. As the saying goes "all work and no play make jack a dull boy". In effect what I consider important/urgent is now being reconsidered and put into question. Is my time for relaxation just as important/urgent as my university work?

Text: My time management now has improved; my research has helped me participate more in class as well as home. I have been able to allocate more time in conversation with my children. I am also able to use my time at work wisely so there are never stagnant moments.

Conclusion: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Time for everything, Ecclesiastes 3:1). That means for every hour of the day there is something for one to do. How we use this time should be wise. By using the Eisenhower matrix, I have planned to achieve the best out of my work, university, and my home.

3.2 Referencing

Description: To reference your work is to acknowledge the original source of your academic information. To fail to reference work correctly can lead to plagiarism. This occurs when you take a "direct quote, paraphrase, or elaborate on someone's else's opinions". It also includes taking pictures, graphs, and data.

The method of referencing that we have been taught to use is the “Harvard Referencing system also known as the author date system”. Citations appears in two ways:

1. In Text citations – (Brief information)
2. In bottom reference list (Full citation) (Damarell,2005, p.5)

Feelings: At the beginning of studying about referencing I was unfamiliar with the Harvard referencing system and how to reference appropriately. I had limited understanding of acknowledging people’s work and why that was important. Now I understand the relevance of using academic journals/ articles, newspapers, and media to “highlight better research, supporting evidence” and appreciate the work of other intellectuals.

Evaluation: A good character of a research academic is “attention to detail” in every piece of work. Attention to detail nurtures great habits, for example, regular reading and correct spelling. Furthermore, the details needed to reference encourages focus and scrutiny to achieve better academic work. Details such as correct spellings of authors names and page numbers and precision of information which the reference holds, all encourage academic integrity. (Santini,2018, p.3)

What I have found difficult was how to look for appropriate references. For example, now I have learnt that instead of using Google, I use Google Scholar as that brings a greater range of academic research. I also found structuring my references difficult. For instance, writing the correct authors name and remembering the surname comes first, putting the right dots in the right places and doing my references as I go along with my work.

Analysis: Although I have now understood the importance of referencing, I could not help but point out that referencing could stifle creativity. The need to reference to show credibility for a valid argument can be counterproductive. This is because the person who I referenced must do the same and so the cycle continues till it reaches the first work. However, will this not mean that we all used the first person’s opinion to base what is now our valid argument. It claims that a person’s opinion or idea or theory cannot be valid unless it is backed up.

Text: The lecture gave a good explanation of the topic followed by classwork that went into depth on how to reference correctly with a homework practise work. In addition, it encouraged me to do further research on my own to practise with the printed version of the Harvard Referencing handbook. (Referencing Handbook, 2020).

Conclusion: In conclusion “Standard Academic practise” of referencing shows “authority, reliability, politeness, reach and scope, evidence, traceability and credibility.” These are essential to show that you respect the work that other academics have done, you have taken the correct steps to research, the information you have obtained comes from a credible source and you are not plagiarising. (An introduction to the Harvard referencing style, 2019).

3.3 Reflection

Description: Understanding the very beginnings and origins of reflecting may better explain its importance in the academic world. Beginning from the famous Greek Philosopher Aristotle and his ‘Phronesis φρόνησις’ which means wisdom in Greek. Aristotle believed in reflecting on emotions and gaining knowledge of it. Reflecting makes a person self-aware of their environment and this is the first step to be taken to improve yourself. From Aristotle’s development then to modern day we can see how philosophers, academics and intellects have developed the ideals of self-reflection where today I am using the Gibbs reflecting method. From the philosopher Dewey (Dewey,1933. p.9) to Schön “who said thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing in action

may have contributed to an unexpected outcome... (Stop and Think)" Shows the development and understanding of Self- reflecting. (Schön 1987, p.26).

Feelings: I have always agreed that good reflection brings about good results. In class we were given the opportunity to learn about different reflective methods such as the Kolb's Reflective Method, Driscoll, Schön and Gibbs reflective module. However, I have learnt more on how to give a proper and well-structured reflection using the Gibbs reflective method because of its straightforward categories which bring about an uncomplicated reflection.

Evaluation: What was great about reflecting was being able to come to terms with certain weaknesses that I had and being able to improve upon them. For example, I know that my computer skills are lacking and needed improvement and to combat this I practiced with the use of YouTube videos and the library books. I have also joined various groups such as reading clubs that were available at my local post office, which I really enjoyed. Despite this, due to Covid-19 we had to take a break. However, continuing this in future when measurements are eased will help me fine tune my grammar and reading skills.

However, in reflection before coming to terms with your shortcomings you must see them for yourself and concede that they exist. Bad habits stick and when they become the norm it is hard to recognise that those bad habits are not normal habits to be engaging with. Difficulties with pointing out the bad habits that I had with myself was a hurdle I had to overcome with self-reflecting.

However, with this in mind the Schön method of reflection to "stop and think" may have worked better in combating my bad habits as it gives a pre-emptive element before going into any activity which may have stopped those habits happening beforehand instead of the Gibbs method which would only reflect on them afterwards the activity has taken place.

Analysis: I found that upon reflection certain activities that I wanted to improve upon would take time and the goals I set for myself to achieve them become unrealistic. This was challenging because, I had to rethink on what goals were easily attainable first and work through my goals in such a way. For example, reflecting on my computer skills I realised I knew less than I thought. Therefore, I had to change the timeline I made for myself on what I wanted to achieve.

Text: Lectures come in line with how I have been reflecting on learning. It encouraged me to constantly do so and to know that was the only way to succeed and better myself on areas I lacked.

Conclusion: To conclude, although there are other reflective modules such as the Kolb's, and so on. To continue my reflection in the future, I will continue to use the Gibbs reflective cycle, while also trying out new reflection methods such as Schön in addition to Gibbs. I have also come to acquire a reflective diary in which I would assess my work and reflect in there using these structured models to see improvement on areas I lack.

Conclusion

Career readiness requires a set of academic and employability skills which are essential depending on your chosen career. To succeed, one should always ensure they sharpen these skills. With opportunities I have had from my world of work, prospects, and lectures I have improved my employability skills. This report made use of the Gibbs reflective model to reflect upon the various skills which I learnt from this module considering what I already knew from the topics and the learning which I have obtained on these skills outside the classroom and what I will improve on what I lack.

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