

**REFLECTIVE REPORT ON HOW THE
ACADEMIC SKILLS MODULE HAS HELPED ME
TO DEVELOP MY ACADEMIC SKILLS.**

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INTRODUCTION.

Reflection is a critical thinking skill that aids us in better understanding a situation (**Cottrell, 2024, pp 271**). It is natural to all of us and contributes to independent judgment as we revisit situations to get a better analysis. Reflections helps us better understand the things that affect our performance and progress (**Cottrell, 2024, pp 269**). It is also vital in our acquisition of valuable insight to help us make better decisions (**Cottrell, 2024, pp 269**). In this report, I have chosen to reflect on 1) Referencing 2) Paragraph Writing and 3) Reflective Skills. To do this, I will be employing Kolb's reflective cycle (**Kolb, 1984**).

SKILL 1 :_REFERENCING

Concrete Experience

In Week 3, we covered referencing, which simply means acknowledging the intellectual work of others in your writing (**Neville, 2007, pp 1**). Books, chapters in books, journal articles, conference proceedings and even letters can all be referenced (**Bedford and Wilson, 2019, pp.96**). Referencing is therefore important to support an argument and avoid plagiarism. We covered the fact that at our university are recognised four styles , but we'd have to adopt **Harvard** referencing for purposes of the module. Popular with the Harvard style are in-text citations and reference lists (**Bedford and Wilson, 2019**). The former being a short citation with the author's name and date applied before, within or after a sentence, while the latter a full reference applied in the reference list acknowledging the author, date, title, publishers, volume, journal etc.

Reflective Observation

I felt a little frustrated because a many detail went into curating the perfect reference. We have done activities in the group, and we have referenced book style, journal style, and online websites. We have used the Havard style.

I think that other students were just as frustrated at the start because they shared the same struggles during group activities. However, by the end of Week 3, I was more confident in my

abilities because I had grasped how the Harvard Referencing worked in practice.

Abstract Conceptualization

I observed that referencing came off as difficult and frustrating due to my unfamiliarity with the skill and little to no attention to detail. I desperately needed to improve, because a consequence of neglecting to show where a particular idea was borrowed from amounts to plagiarism, for which many students are failed (**Bedford and Wilson, 2019, pp.96**). I realized that constant practice, research, re-reading the lecture notes, using the 'Cite' tool and practice helped me better the skill.

Active Experimentation.

I learnt that lack of attention to detail can affect the accuracy of your references, and that poor referencing amounts to plagiarism. Now, I proof read sources to ensure accuracy and also practice in order to perfect the skill and avoid plagiarism.

SKILL 2: PARAGRAPHS

Concrete experience

In Week 5 we focused on an essential part of academic writing, paragraphs. A paragraph is a couple of sentences which deal with a singular topic (**Bailey, 2011, pp72**). Every idea and analysis in a paragraph is organized around a central theme (**Bailey, 2011, pp 301**). We learned that well written paragraphs had to have an introductory topic sentence, the main idea and a conclusion (**Purdue OWL, no date**). Furthermore, it was important to use adverbs like "finally" or "Secondly," to maintain continuity in the next paragraph (**Bailey, 2011, pp72**). The topic was perhaps the fastest for me to understand once I engaged with the activities provided. By the end of the week I could see significant improvement in my writing.

Reflective Observation

Prior to this, my approach to paragraphs was relaxed, as I was more focused on putting across my ideas than the structure. This is why I was surprised when I learnt that all paragraphs had to

have clear conclusions, a concept I had previously overlooked. Another revelation was that unless it was to make a contrast, different ideas were not to be bottled together in the same paragraph. For the most part, I was eager to learn and enjoyed the classes, and as we progressed I became more confident in my ability to draft concrete and coherent paragraphs that can support my arguments.

Abstract Conceptualization

I enjoyed the classes because the topic was straight forward and we were given a number of prompt topics to practice with. I was able to identify various weaknesses with my writing style. It exposed a tendency to mix several arguments and ideas under the same paragraph, which must have contributed to my average grades in the past. By learning that unity and coherence were pillars of an effective paragraph (**Purdue OWL, no date**), I was able to structure my essays better.

Active Experimentation

I now approach paragraph writing with a more structured mindset, which has positively affected the flow of my arguments. Going forward, I will continue to practice my paragraph writing to ensure that I get more familiar with the basic principles.

SKILL 3: REFLECTION

Concrete experience

In Week 6 we covered reflective writing. Reflection is a critical thinking skill that aids us in giving perspective and clarity to a situation (**Cottrell, 2024**). I learned that it was integral to my development as an independent thinker with the ability to evaluate a situation, draw conclusions and improve. Throughout the week, emphasis was placed on learning **Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988)**, **Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)** and **Driscoll's Model of Reflection**. Gibb's model consisted of 6 stages; description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions and action plans whilst Kolb's involved 4; a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (**Cottrell, 2024**). We partook in engaging reflective activities, to better

understand the topic. One of these involved using Gibb's reflective model to reflect on referencing styles, and it was quite lengthy and difficult to internalize.

Reflective Observation

I found Gibb's model complex, which overwhelmed me. Despite the fact that we were given guiding questions at each stage, it was difficult to articulate what was required of me in the reflective reports. However, by Week 7, through hard work, there had been some improvement and I started to appreciate the value of reflection.

Abstract Conceptualization

My main struggle stemmed from overthinking and lack of prior knowledge on the models especially Gibb's, which was so technical and lengthy. I found that I spent so much time over analysing the structure of the multiple stages and the guiding questions, than I actually did reflecting on what I wanted to report on. Once I understood what affected my performance and progress, I made an effort to explore supplementary resources, reach out to my classmates and watch tutorials. There is now improvement in my reflective skills.

Active experimentation

(Cottrell, 2024) advises that a starting point for reflective writing can always be to go with the flow and that we don't always have to control the structure. Moving forward, I will focus on describing the experiences, my perception of them and how I can improve, in my own words, before I can structure them to fit the specific models.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this module has been quite beneficial in helping me polish up academic skills such as paragraph writing and referencing. It has also taught me those that I was completely unfamiliar with, like Reflective writing. I am now able to transfer these skills to all other modules in my academic journey. I will maintain the culture of practice moving forward, until I'm a pro/master at all of them.

REFERENCE LIST

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