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Academic Skills

Reflective Report

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1. Introduction

This report focuses on my experience in developing academic skills throughout my studies. I have used Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as the framework to reflect on my learning process. Gibbs' model is well-known for its systematic approach to reflection, leading learners through six steps: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan (Gibbs, 1988). By dividing the experience into these stages, it helps in better understanding what was effective, what wasn't, and how to make improvements going forward.

For this report, I have chosen to focus on three key academic skills that are crucial for academic success: paraphrasing skills, referencing skills, and reflection skills. Each of these skills plays a significant role in effective learning and academic performance. The report will explore how I developed these skills through practice and feedback, applying Gibbs' Reflective Cycle to identify challenges and outline actionable strategies for continuous improvement.

2. Reflection topics

2.1 Paraphrasing Skills

Paraphrasing involves rephrasing information in one's own words while retaining the original meaning (Kissner, 2006). Initially, I encountered difficulties accurately paraphrasing complex texts without altering the intended message. The challenge stemmed from an over-reliance on closely mirroring the original wording, which sometimes led to unintentional plagiarism. During the course, I engaged in activities designed to improve paraphrasing, such as exercises that required summarizing academic articles into concise statements using different wording.

In the beginning, I felt discouraged by my inability to convey ideas without overly imitating the source material. The fear of misrepresenting the original meaning often led to hesitancy and self-doubt. Over time, as I practiced more, I noticed slight improvements, which gradually boosted my confidence. The feedback from Mr Hopkins was especially encouraging as it helped identify specific areas for improvement.

While I initially struggled with paraphrasing, I found that consistent practice and the application of structured techniques significantly improved my ability. Kissner (2006) emphasizes that effective paraphrasing is a learned skill requiring active engagement with the text. Activities such as breaking down sentences and identifying key points were particularly helpful. Although I am still refining my skills, the progress has been encouraging.

The process highlighted the importance of understanding the original text's meaning before attempting to paraphrase. Kissner (2006) advises against focusing solely on substituting words and instead recommends a deep engagement with the content. By practicing this method, I began to move beyond simple rewording and towards producing

unique renditions of the material. My improved comprehension also made it easier to distinguish between paraphrasing and summarizing, ensuring clarity and precision in my academic writing.

Through continuous practice and applying strategies from Kissner (2006), I have developed a stronger grasp of paraphrasing. However, there are still opportunities for improvement, particularly in accurately condensing more complex arguments without losing meaning. Going forward, I plan to engage more in critical reading exercises and continue to seek feedback to further refine this skill.

To maintain progress, I will incorporate more paraphrasing exercises into my study routine and regularly check my work against original texts to ensure accuracy. Additionally, I intend to explore resources like academic writing centres to receive further guidance. Continued practice will be key to mastering this skill.

2.2 Referencing Skills

Proper referencing is crucial for demonstrating academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism. Initially, I found referencing confusing due to the variety of citation styles and the precise formatting required. The transition to university-level expectations made it even more challenging as I had to adjust to stricter guidelines.

At first, I felt overwhelmed by the extensive rules and variations between citation styles, such as APA, MLA, and Harvard. This confusion often led to errors, resulting in lost marks. Despite feeling anxious about mastering this skill, I was determined to improve as I recognized its importance in academic work.

The training sessions and workshops provided during the course offered practical examples and breakdowns of the citation process. As I practiced more, I gradually became more confident in my referencing skills. McMillan and Weyers (2021) highlight that consistent practice and familiarization with style guides are key strategies. The introduction of reference management tools like Zotero also simplified the process.

Through structured learning, I realized that accurate referencing is not solely about memorizing rules but understanding the logic behind them. The workshops emphasized the purpose of referencing: to give credit to authors, demonstrate research, and allow others to trace sources. Applying this understanding made it easier to adhere to the rules, leading to fewer mistakes. Additionally, using citation tools reduced the pressure of manual formatting and allowed me to focus on content.

My referencing skills have improved significantly through consistent practice, the use of management tools, and better understanding of citation principles. However, I still need to be cautious about consistently checking for updates in style guidelines, as these can change. Continued learning and practice will be essential to maintaining accuracy.

I plan to engage in more exercises that involve citing different types of sources, such as books, journal articles, and online resources, to ensure versatility. I also intend to

continue using citation tools while cross-checking them manually for accuracy. Regularly reviewing updated style guides will help keep my skills sharp.

2.3 Reflection Skills

Reflective practice involves critically analysing one's experiences to promote learning and personal growth (Smile & Fowlie, 2009). At the beginning of the course, I was unfamiliar with structured reflective frameworks like Gibbs' Cycle. My initial reflections lacked depth and tended to focus only on surface-level observations.

Initially, I felt uncertain about how to approach reflection effectively. The process seemed abstract and subjective, making it difficult to structure my thoughts coherently. As I started using Gibbs' Cycle, I found the framework helpful in breaking down my experiences into manageable parts, which made reflection more accessible.

The use of Gibbs' Cycle (1988) improved my reflective practice by providing clear stages to follow. Smile and Fowlie (2009) emphasize that reflection should be systematic and involve both critical analysis and action planning. By applying this approach, I gained a deeper understanding of my learning process and became more self-aware.

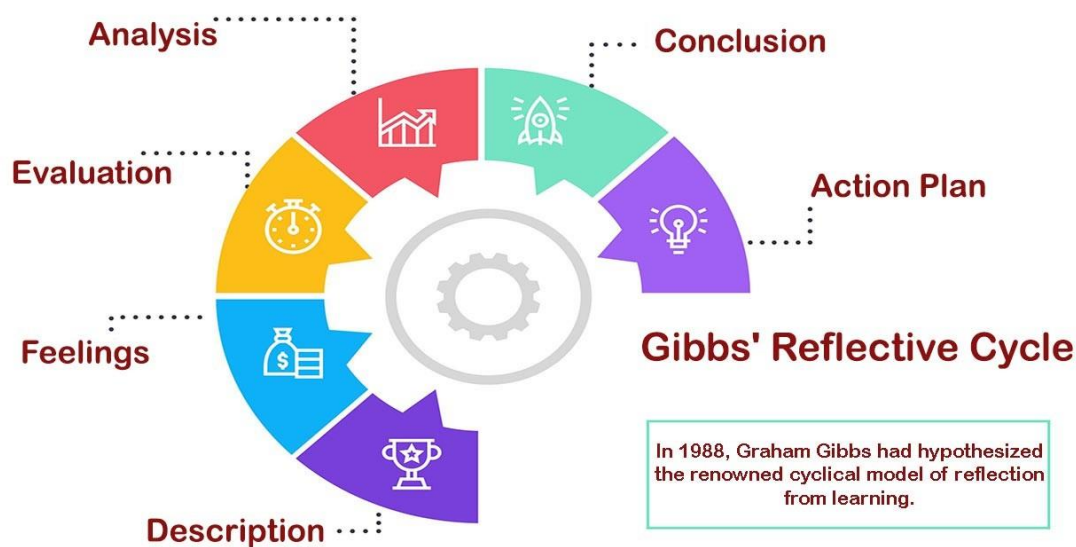


Figure 1. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle
Source: <https://www.assignmentclassmates.com/>

The structured approach allowed me to identify specific strengths and areas for improvement, rather than vague generalizations. McMillan and Weyers (2021) highlight that reflective practice is essential for personal development, as it encourages individuals to engage critically with their experiences. As I became more familiar with the cycle, I found that my reflections became more insightful and targeted, helping me set realistic goals for improvement.

My reflection skills have evolved significantly through the structured application of Gibbs' Cycle. The process has helped me better understand my academic progress and make informed decisions about future learning strategies. However, I need to continue practicing to enhance the depth of my reflections and apply insights more effectively.

3. Conclusion

Reflecting on my academic skills development through Gibbs' Reflective Cycle has been a valuable experience. The structured approach provided clarity and direction in analysing my strengths and areas for growth. Paraphrasing, referencing, and reflection are all interconnected skills that contribute to overall academic success. Although I have made significant progress in these areas, continuous practice and learning are essential to further improvement. By setting clear action plans and regularly revisiting these skills, I am confident that I will continue to enhance my academic performance. Gibbs' Cycle will remain a critical tool in this journey, helping me maintain a reflective mind-set that drives lifelong learning.

4. References:

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