

Reflective Essay: Challenges Faced as a New University Student Using Gibbs' Reflective Model

Introduction to Gibbs' Reflective Model

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, developed by Graham Gibbs in 1988, is a structured model designed to help individuals reflect on experiences. It is particularly useful in guiding self-reflection and understanding personal development. The model consists of six key stages: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. This framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of experiences, fostering deeper insights into what worked well, what didn't, and how to improve in the future. In this reflective essay, I will use Gibbs' model to reflect on my personal challenges as a new university student, exploring issues such as balancing time commitments, academic writing, and digital skills, and how these experiences have shaped my academic journey.

Description -

When I first enrolled at university, I encountered various challenges, many of which I had not fully anticipated. One of the most pressing difficulties was managing the sudden shift in academic expectations. For instance, in high school, assignments and coursework were usually more structured with deadlines and guidance provided by teachers. However, at university, I was expected to be more self-directed and proactive in managing my study schedule.

Balancing academic commitments with personal life was another challenge. I had to juggle multiple assignments, lectures, and independent study, all while adjusting to the independence that university life offered. Digital literacy became another hurdle, as I had to navigate new software, online learning platforms, and digital research tools.

The most significant challenge, however, was academic writing. Unlike the essay writing I had done in high school, university-level academic writing demanded a higher level of critical thinking, argumentation, and proper referencing. This shift was initially overwhelming, as I struggled to meet the standards expected in academic writing.

Feelings –

At the start of my university journey, I felt a mix of excitement and anxiety. The prospect of higher education was exhilarating, but I also felt unsure about my ability to handle the academic pressure. I questioned whether I could meet the rigorous standards set by my lecturers and if I would be able to keep up with the pace of university life.

I also felt overwhelmed by the amount of reading and research required. I was used to receiving guidance and having a clear roadmap in my academic work, but in university, I had to take more responsibility for organizing my time and finding my own resources. This made me feel uncertain about whether I was truly prepared for this level of independence.

In terms of academic writing, I felt frustrated and at times discouraged. The technical aspects of academic writing, such as citation styles and structuring essays, seemed like

barriers I had to overcome. I doubted my ability to communicate my ideas clearly and to meet the expectations of my lectures

Evaluation – What Was Good and Bad About Your Experience?

There were positive and negative aspects to my experience. On the positive side, I began to appreciate the freedom and responsibility that university life offered. I gradually adapted to self-directed learning and found that I enjoyed the depth of academic inquiry and the intellectual challenges that came with university-level education. Over time, I also developed a better understanding of time management, realizing that creating a study schedule and breaking down tasks into manageable segments helped me stay organized.

However, my experience was not without challenges. One of the most difficult aspects was balancing time between academic work and personal commitments. The pressure to complete assignments while maintaining a social life and managing personal responsibilities sometimes felt overwhelming. This imbalance led to feelings of burnout and exhaustion at times.

My struggle with academic writing was also a significant challenge. Initially, I found it hard to transition from informal writing to a more structured, formal style. I struggled with organizing my thoughts cohesively and ensuring that my arguments were clearly presented and supported by evidence. Additionally, digital skills were an issue. Navigating various online resources, university portals, and databases was initially frustrating and time-consuming, making me feel technologically inadequate at times.

Analysis –

Reflecting on these experiences, I realize that the challenges I faced were part of the natural transition to higher education. University life requires a level of decision making that I had not fully experienced before, and with this autonomy comes the need to develop self-discipline and effective time management. According to Tuckman (1999), students in the early stages of university often experience what is referred to as “storming,” where they struggle to adjust to new academic demands. This period is characterized by feelings of overwhelm and uncertainty, which I can now recognize as a normal part of the academic transition process.

Additionally, academic writing, which initially felt like a barrier, is something I have come to view as a skill that requires practice and ongoing development. Research by Bean (2011) highlights the importance of writing as a tool for critical thinking and intellectual engagement. Initially, I found it challenging to craft well-supported arguments, but over time, I began to recognize that academic writing is not just about meeting assignments’ formal requirements but is an essential skill for academic and professional success.

The struggles I faced with digital tools were, in hindsight, a result of insufficient initial digital literacy. As noted by Martin et al. (2017), digital literacy is a crucial skill for university students, particularly with the increasing reliance on online resources for research and communication. Although I initially felt overwhelmed, my increasing comfort with digital tools over time allowed me to be more effective in my studies.

Conclusion –

Looking back, there are a few things I could have done differently to improve my experience. First, I could have sought help earlier with academic writing. I was hesitant to approach my lecturers or attend workshops, assuming that I should already have the skills needed. Looking back I should have been , taking advantage of these resources sooner would have helped me refine my writing techniques and boost my confidence.

Second, I could have been more proactive in seeking advice on managing my time effectively. I initially underestimated the amount of time university assignments would take and failed to account for the time required for independent study. Creating a more detailed weekly study schedule from the outset might have helped me balance my academic and personal responsibilities better.

Lastly, I could have been more patient with myself regarding digital skills. Given the rapid pace at which technology evolves, it would have been helpful to allow myself more time to familiarize myself with the tools and platforms used at the university. Digital literacy is a skill that improves over time, and I would have benefited from embracing this learning curve earlier.

Action Plan

If I were to face similar challenges again, I would approach them with a more proactive mindset. In terms of academic writing, I would attend writing workshops and seek feedback from my lecturers to improve my skills. Additionally, I would allocate more time for reading and drafting my essays to ensure that I have sufficient time to refine my work.

For time management, I would use tools such as a time-tracking app to monitor how I spend my time and adjust my schedule accordingly. I would also make use of university resources, such as peer support groups, to get advice on balancing work and personal commitments effectively.

In regard to digital skills, I would invest more time early on in familiarizing myself with the technological tools required for academic success. This could include taking digital literacy courses or seeking help from IT support to ensure I am comfortable with the platforms used in my courses.

Reference List

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