

Academic Skills

Reflective Report

MODULE NAME: ACADEMIC SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

This report discusses the development of my academic skills during the first semester of my studies. I will use Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as a framework to reflect on my learning experiences. Gibbs' model, which includes six stages—description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan—is an effective tool for structured reflection (Gibbs, 1988). This model helped me break down my experiences, identify what worked well, what didn't, and how I can improve in the future.

The report will focus on three key academic skills that are fundamental for success in university: paraphrasing, referencing, and reflection skills. Each of these skills is crucial for effective learning and academic performance. I will explore how I developed these skills through practice and feedback and apply Gibbs' Reflective Cycle to highlight challenges and outline strategies for continuous improvement.

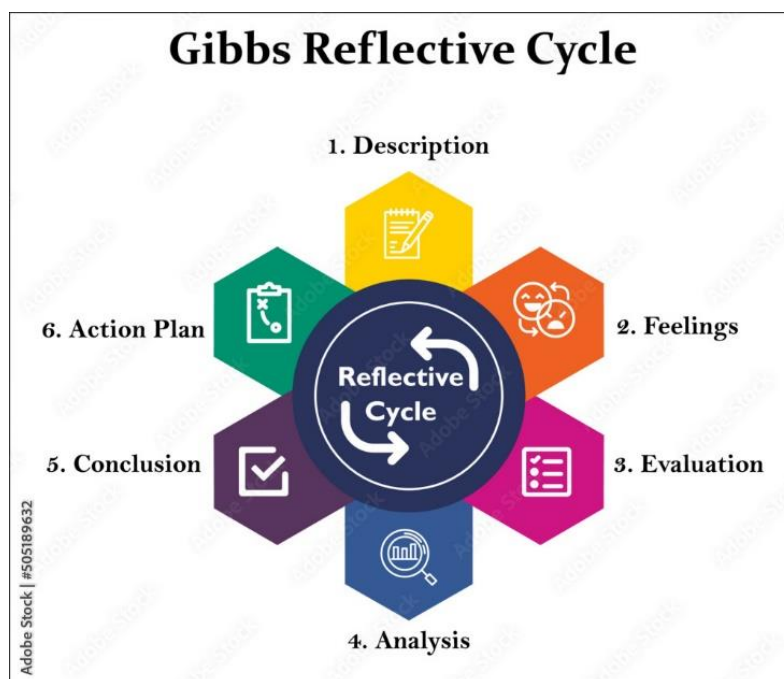


Figure 1. Gibbs Reflective Cycle

Source: <https://stock.adobe.com/>

Reflection on Paraphrasing Skills

Paraphrasing involves rephrasing information in one's own words while maintaining the original meaning (Kissner, 2006). Initially, I struggled with accurately paraphrasing complex texts without changing their intended meaning. I often found myself too closely following the original wording, which sometimes resulted in unintentional plagiarism. During the course, I participated in exercises that required summarizing academic articles using different wording, which helped me improve my skills.

At the beginning, I felt frustrated by my inability to convey ideas without copying the source material too closely. I was also anxious about misinterpreting the original meaning, which made me hesitant to attempt paraphrasing. However, as I practiced more, I began to see

gradual improvements, which boosted my confidence. Feedback from my instructor, Mr. Hopkins, was particularly helpful in identifying areas where I could improve.

Over time, consistent practice and the use of structured techniques significantly improved my ability to paraphrase. Kissner (2006) emphasizes that effective paraphrasing is a skill that requires active engagement with the text. Activities like breaking down sentences and identifying key points were especially beneficial. Although I am still working on refining my skills, the progress I've made is encouraging.

Understanding the original text's meaning before attempting to paraphrase is crucial. Kissner (2006) advises against simply substituting words and recommends engaging deeply with the content. Following this advice, I moved beyond simple rewording to producing more unique renditions of the material. Improved comprehension made it easier to distinguish between paraphrasing and summarizing, which enhanced the clarity and precision of my academic writing.

To maintain progress, I plan to incorporate more paraphrasing exercises into my study routine and regularly compare my work against original texts to ensure accuracy. Additionally, I will seek further guidance from resources like academic writing centres. Consistent practice and seeking feedback will be key to mastering this skill.

Reflection on Referencing Skills

Accurate referencing is essential for academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism. At first, I found referencing quite challenging due to the different citation styles and their specific formatting requirements. Transitioning to university expectations was even more difficult, as I had to adhere to stricter guidelines.

I initially felt overwhelmed by the variety of citation styles, such as APA, MLA, and Harvard, and the numerous rules associated with them. This often led to mistakes and lost marks, which made me anxious. However, I was determined to improve as I understood the importance of proper referencing in academic work.

The training sessions and workshops provided during the course were very helpful. They included practical examples and detailed explanations of the citation process. As I practiced more, I gained confidence in my referencing skills. McMillan and Weyers (2021) suggest that consistent practice and familiarity with style guides are effective strategies for mastering referencing. Using reference management tools like Zotero also made the process easier and less stressful.

Through structured learning, I realized that accurate referencing is not just about memorizing rules but understanding their purpose. The workshops highlighted that referencing is about giving credit to authors, demonstrating research, and enabling others to trace sources. Understanding this made it easier to follow the rules, resulting in fewer errors. Additionally, using citation tools reduced the pressure of manual formatting and allowed me to focus on the content of my work.

My referencing skills have improved significantly through consistent practice and a better understanding of citation principles. However, I still need to stay updated on changes to style guidelines. Continued learning and practice will be essential for maintaining accuracy.

Reflection on Reflection Skills

Reflective practice involves critically analysing one's experiences to foster learning and personal growth (Smile & Fowlie, 2009). At the start of the course, I was unfamiliar with structured reflective frameworks like Gibbs' Cycle. My initial reflections were superficial and focused mainly on basic observations.

I initially felt uncertain about how to approach reflection effectively. It seemed abstract and subjective, which made it difficult to organize my thoughts coherently. Using Gibbs' Cycle, however, I found a structured way to break down my experiences into manageable parts. This made the reflection process more accessible and meaningful.

Gibbs' Cycle (1988) improved my reflective practice by providing clear stages to follow. Smile and Fowlie (2009) emphasize that reflection should be systematic and include both critical analysis and action planning. Applying this approach helped me gain a deeper understanding of my learning process and become more self-aware.

As I became more familiar with the cycle, my reflections became more insightful and targeted, helping me set realistic goals for improvement. However, I need to continue practicing to enhance the depth of my reflections and apply insights more effectively.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my academic skills development using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle has been a valuable experience. The structured approach provided clarity in analysing my strengths and areas for growth. Paraphrasing, referencing, and reflection are interconnected skills that contribute to overall academic success. Although I have made significant progress in these areas, continuous practice and learning are essential for further improvement.

I plan to engage in more exercises that involve citing various types of sources, such as books, journal articles, and online resources, to ensure versatility. I will continue using citation tools while cross-checking them manually for accuracy. Regularly reviewing updated style guides will help keep my skills sharp. Gibbs' Cycle will remain a critical tool in this journey, helping me maintain a reflective mind-set that supports lifelong learning.

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