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ACADEMIC SKILLS

REFLECTIVE REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reflection is an essential skill in higher education, supporting students to critically evaluate their experiences and identify areas for improvement and personal growth. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) describe reflection as a way of revisiting experiences to gain insight and improve outcomes. It encourages independent learning and builds academic resilience (Ryan, 2013).

In this report I will use Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) to examine my development in academic writing, time management, and group work during the Academic Skills module. These experiences have been extremely important in shaping my confidence and progress as a learner and have helped me better understand how to approach academic challenges successfully.

2. DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCES

A formal, based on reality communication style that is important to success in higher education is academic writing. According to Bailey (2018), it involves clarity, structure, and objective tone. In class, I explored how academic writing differs from informal styles by comparing different texts from different sources. A key activity was rewriting an informal paragraph to make it more formal, which taught me how to avoid personal, usual language and slang. I also analysed paragraph structure- identifying topic sentences, supporting points, and conclusions- which helped me understand how to build arguments. I gained the courage to take on upcoming assignments and tasks with greater planning after writing my personal topic and closing phrases.

Note-taking supports memory, understanding, and revision by helping students organize and process information (Farrand, Hussain and Hennessy, 2002). During the module, I practised in class several techniques, including linear notes, mind maps, and the Cornell method. I found out that using colour-coded headings and bullet points made reviewing much easier, especially when preparing for tasks, class discussions or the quiz. In class, I applied these techniques to an audio exercise, I really enjoyed it and really highlighted the importance of active listening and structure. This experience changed how I approach both reading and lectures, making my study time more effective and focused.

3. PERSONAL REFLECTION

3.1. EVALUATION

Throughout the Academic Skills module, I was highly engaged and actively participated in all class activities. All of the class activities were quite enjoyable to me, like rewriting texts, analysing paragraphs, taking notes, etc. These exercises helped build my confidence and gave me a solid foundation in academic writing. However, some aspects of the module did not work good for me. Even though I was inspired to work with others and talk about tasks, most of my peers were very quiet and hesitant to engage. This limited opportunities for debate and peer learning, which are essential in my opinion, made me become quieter by the end of the module. Additionally, I felt that feedback from the tutor was limited, which made it difficult to know whether I was on the right track or how to improve further.

Another challenge was paraphrasing and vocabulary, as English is not my first language. I often relied on a thesaurus to find synonyms, which made some tasks time-consuming. As an example, during the 75 minutes Quiz when I had not access to a thesaurus and I was incredibly stressed about the outcome. Despite these challenges, I found this module valuable, and I enjoyed every session. It highlighted the gaps in my academic skillset but also showed me that I have the motivation and dedication to improve.

3.2. ANALYSIS

The aspects of the module that went well were mainly due to my personal motivation and willingness to engage with each activity. According to Biggs and Tang (2011), active participation enhances deep learning by encouraging students to make meaning from their experiences. I found that breaking down paragraphs and rewriting texts in a formal style helped me better understand academic tone and structure. These exercises brought abstract ideas closer to reality. My ability to stay focused and contribute to class, even if the others were less active, proved to be one of my key strengths. It helped me to take full advantage of each session and develop independence in my learning- a crucial skill at university level (Cotrell, 2019).

However, some challenges limited the overall impact of my learning. For me, sharing knowledge was minimal due to the absence of peer interaction. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development suggests that learning is often most effective when it involves social interaction. Without regular group discussions or feedback from classmates, I sometimes find hard to test my understanding or build on others' perspectives. Additionally, limited and standard feedback from the tutor left me unsure whether I was applying academic skills correctly. Feedback is essential in guiding process and improving performance (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and its absence made self-evaluation more difficult for me.

Another area of difficulty was paraphrasing and vocabulary. As English is not my first language, I frequently relied on online tools and thesauruses to complete tasks during the classes and my individual study time. While this helped in the short term, it also slowed me down and revealed a gap in my academic vocabulary. However, this experience also highlighted an area for growth. To address this, I have started building something similar with a personal vocabulary bank and I am actively practising paraphrasing with short but difficult texts.

Overall, these experiences deepened my understanding of the module content by showing me how different academic skills are interconnected. Writing, taking notes, and even participating in class all help students become more comfortable with themselves. I want to get more feedback in the future, come up with ways to increase my vocabulary, and look for options to collaborate with more involved peers—possibly in study groups.

This reflection has shown me both my strengths – such as focus, determination and engagement- and areas where I still have space to grow.

4. CONCLUSION

This module has significantly enhanced my academic skills, particularly in writing, note taking, referencing, critical thinking and time management. The time management lecture and study, it has served like an affirmation for me that I am doing things correctly.

Throughout the module, by exploring and applying reflective models like Gibbs 'cycle, I believe that I have gained a more profound understanding of my way of learning and areas where I need to develop to achieve my goals. Reflecting on my personal experiences during this module, my confidence in writing has increased, my vocabulary has evolved, now I feel ready and totally prepared for any of my future assignments in the educational sector and not only.

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