

ACS report

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Introduction:

If you'd asked me a month ago, I would have said reflection was just thinking hard about something that already happened. I was wrong. This module introduced me to the idea that reflection is actually a disciplined method for making sense of our experiences, a concept perfectly captured by Gibbs' (1988) cycle of description, evaluation, and analysis. It's the engine that turns simple experience into genuine learning. For a student like me, navigating the shift from being told what to know to figuring it out for myself, this skill has become indispensable. This report is the story of that awakening, specifically through my challenges with two skills I thought I understood: paraphrasing and the very act of reflective writing. I'll share my early missteps, honestly assess what

did and didn't work, and dig into the reasons why, all to build a clearer plan for how I will improve.

Description of Experiences:

I'll admit it: I thought I already knew how to paraphrase and reflect. How hard could it be? This module swiftly and humbly corrected that assumption. I discovered that real paraphrasing, which Bailey (2018, p. 35) defines as "restating the meaning of a text in your own words," is a test of genuine comprehension, not just a thesaurus game. Reflective writing, too, was revealed to be something far richer than I thought. It's not diary-keeping; it's a disciplined practice, one that Moon (2004) suggests creates deeper cognitive engagement by forcing you to confront the 'why' behind your experiences.

My confidence first cracked during Task 1. I remember the specific, sinking feeling of reading the feedback on my paraphrasing attempt. I had tackled a thorny text on climate policy, and I'd been so sure my version was clever. To be told it was "patchwriting"—that I'd just created a cleverly disguised replica—was genuinely embarrassing. It was a label I didn't want. That feeling was compounded later in a class on reflection. I'd written about a past failure, thinking the sheer emotion of the memory counted as depth. My tutor's comment, "This is a good account of what happened, but now dig into why it happened and what you learned," didn't feel like a revelation at first; it felt like I was being told I'd done it wrong again. It took a moment for the penny to drop: this wasn't about being wrong, it was about going deeper. I wasn't the only one finding this difficult; it was a common hurdle. That shift from feeling individually inadequate to understanding a shared academic challenge was everything.

Personal Reflection:

If I'm honest, my early work feels a bit like a stranger's now. I can see the person who wrote those first attempts was skimming the surface, afraid to dive deeper. My paraphrasing was a mechanical process; I was so anxious about plagiarizing that I just became a word-shuffler. I have a specific memory of laboring over the phrase "a significant contributor to global warming," finally landing on "a major factor in climate change," and feeling a surge of relief. I'd changed it. But the feedback revealed the truth: I hadn't understood it, I'd just disguised it. That hurt.

The same shallow approach plagued my reflection. I documented the what of a group project—“we disagreed and then compromised”—like I was writing a neutral minutes-taker, completely detached from the emotional and intellectual reality of the conflict. I avoided the why because it felt messy and self-critical. The feedback, while constructive, initially stung. It felt like a spotlight on my inability to grasp something everyone else seemed to get. However, reluctantly, I began to see that feedback not as a judgment on me, but as a lifeline. Each comment was a small, specific act of guidance, a sign that someone was carefully reading my work and believing I could do better. That shift in perspective—from seeing feedback as a personal failure to a tool for growth—was the first real sign of progress.

Analysis:

When I really dig into why I struggled, it boils down to something quite personal: a deep-seated anxiety about getting it wrong. Paraphrasing felt less like an academic exercise and more like walking a tightrope without a net. I was so terrified of misrepresenting the source or sounding foolish that I clung to the author’s original phrasing like a security blanket. Reading Pecorari (2003) was a moment of validation; she suggests students ‘patchwrite’ not from laziness, but from a lack of confidence in their own academic voice. That was me entirely. I didn’t believe my own words were sophisticated enough to carry the weight of the ideas.

The breakthrough was embarrassingly simple. A tutor saw me struggling and offered a piece of advice that changed everything: “Close the book and explain it to me like I’m a smart friend.” That single act of explaining the concept of climate policy aloud, in my own casual language, stripped away the pressure to sound ‘academic.’ It forced me to first understand the idea in my mind, and only then to find the words for it. The writing that followed was finally, authentically, in my own voice.

My issue with reflective writing was similar but rooted in a different misconception. I thought depth meant detail. I was writing a play-by-play of events, a diary entry, believing that more description equated to more insight. Moon’s (2004) distinction between description and deep reflection was the theory that named my problem. The real turning point was applying that theory after I got feedback on my group project piece. The tutor’s comment was a catalyst that made me stop and ask the messy,

complicated questions I'd been avoiding: Was that disagreement really about the task, or was it a personality clash? How did my own communication style fuel the fire? Suddenly, a theory like 'forming-storming-norming' wasn't just a term to define, but a lens I could use to diagnose what actually happened in my group.

My key strength is that I'm coachable; I can take feedback and run with it. But my biggest area for growth is to start running before the whistle blows. I need to learn to be my own critic, to interrogate my own work with those same tough questions before I hand it in. Moving forward, I plan to use models like Gibbs' (1988) cycle not as a theory to cite, but as a personal checklist for my writing: "Have I explained the why? Have I connected this to a theory? What will I do differently next time?" This is how I'll build that critical mindset from the inside out.

Conclusion:

So, what's the takeaway? For me, this module cut through the confusion. It transformed paraphrasing from a word game into a test of real understanding, and reflective writing from a diary task into a disciplined process for finding meaning. This has completely reshaped my approach to academic work, turning it from passive reception into active, critical thinking. I've still got a ways to go, but now I have the map and the compass to keep improving on my own. The biggest insight? The real growth didn't happen when I got it right; it happened in the messy, uncomfortable, but ultimately priceless process of figuring out why I got it wrong.

References

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