

Reflective Writing

“It is not sufficient to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting on this experience, it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost.”

Gibbs, 1988, p.9



Reflection in Academia

We reflect quite naturally in our day to day lives, thinking about things that have happened, why they happened, whether we handled them well.

In academia, you may be asked to formalise your reflections to show that learning is taking place.

This may involve:

- Reflecting on your own professional or academic practice
- Scrutinising an experience and the way you dealt with it
- Evaluating a project or experiment and considering how to do it better next time
- Reflecting on things you have read and linking theory with practice/reality

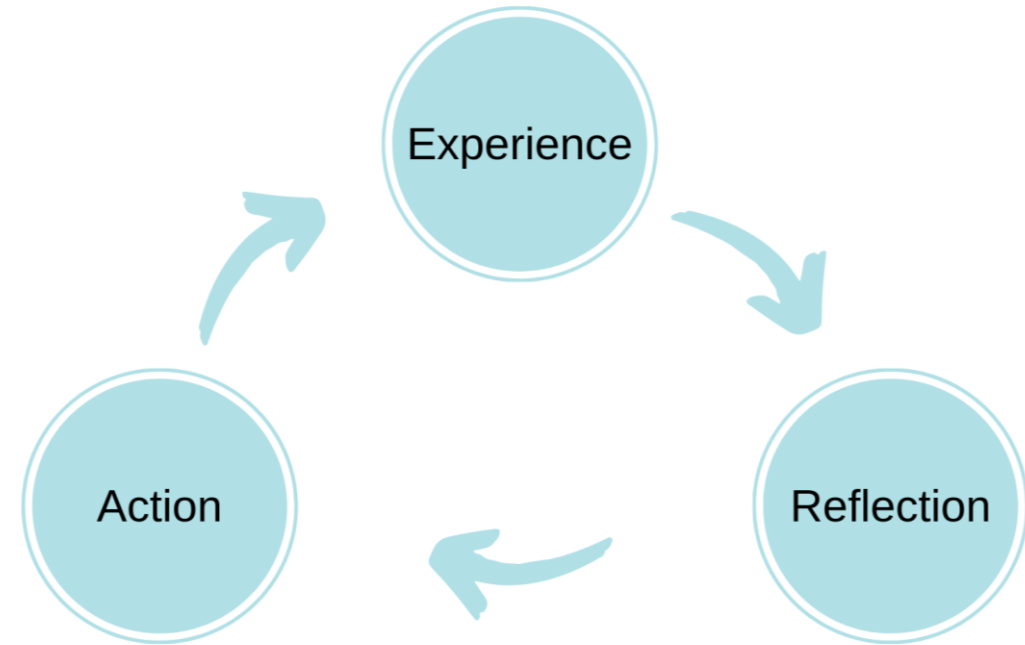
Reflective Models

- ERA Cycle
- Gibbs Reflective Cycle
- Kolb's Experiential learning cycle
- Schön

ERA Cycle

The ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013) is one of the simplest models of reflection and contains only three stages:

- Experience
- Reflection
- Action

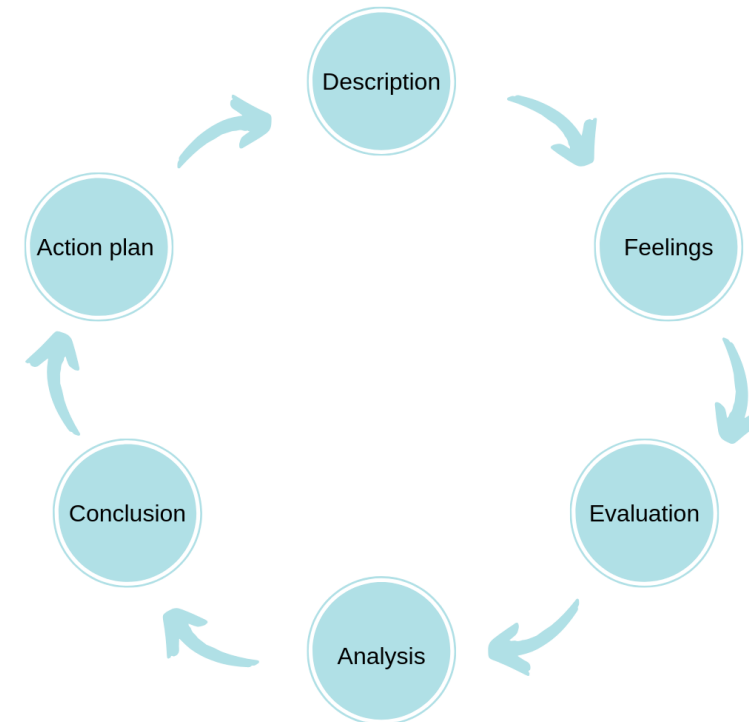


Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

■ This model builds on the other three and adds more stages. It is one of the more complex models of reflection, but it may be that you find having multiple stages of the process to guide you reassuring.

■ Gibb's cycle contains 6 stages:

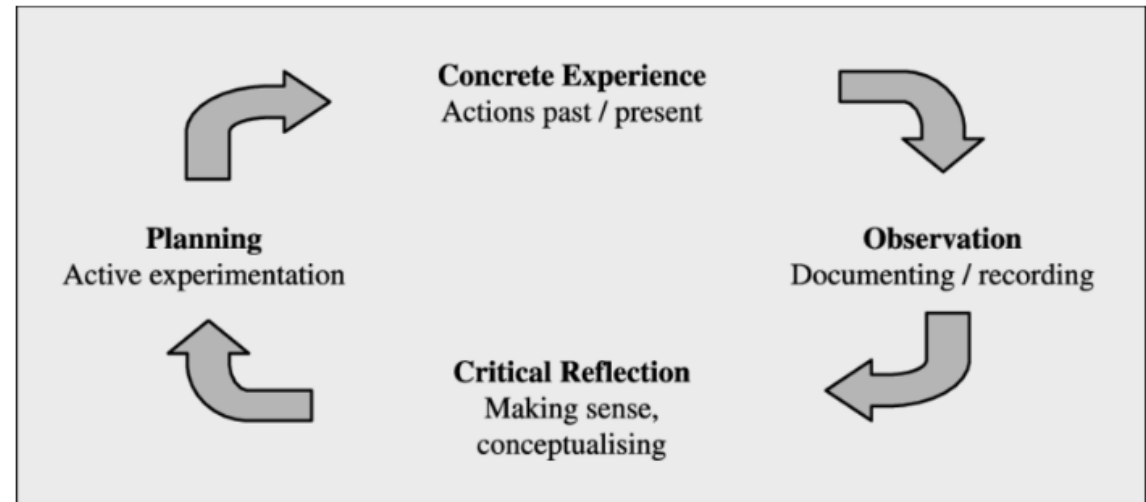
- Description
- Feelings
- Evaluation
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Action plan



Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's model (1984) takes things a step further. Based on theories about how people learn, this model centres on the concept of developing understanding through actual experiences and contains 4 key stages:

- Concrete experience
- Reflective observation
- Critical reflection
- Active experimentation



Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Source: Adapted from Kolb (1984)

Schön

‘Reflection in action’ Reflection in action – This is reflecting as you go (immediately), where you reflect on your actions during an event This isn't going well, what can I do now to improve things? Or this is going well; how can I maintain the momentum? Making informed decisions based on spontaneous, split-second reflections.

Reflection on action – You recall incidents after the event has passed, thinking in depth on how you can improve your practice. You may think over something spontaneously while travelling or resting or you may put specific time aside and formally structure your reflections.

REFLECTION *IN* ACTION

Reflecting as something happens

- Consider the situation
- Decide how to act
- Act immediately

REFLECTION *ON* ACTION

Reflecting after something happens

- Reconsider the situation
- Think about what needs changing for the future