



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Student Name:	Bubu Marius Calin Mucioniu
Student Number:	2008111
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Lecturer:	Lloyd Beharry

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Reflective Writing

Introduction

The Academic and Employability Skills course exposed me to various experiences through theoretical learning and practical experience in several aspects of life. Through guided learning and practice, the knowledge acquired in over ten areas of study helped me gain skills necessary for both academic and employability success. Some areas of study covered during this module include time management or organizing study, academic writing, paraphrasing, summarizing, referencing, reflection, CV writing, cover letter writing, public speaking and giving presentations, analytical and critical thinking skills. These areas exposed me to new experiences and information during the module, although I had little knowledge in some areas like summarizing, time management, and referencing.

In the Socrates' trial of 399 BC, he made the famous dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Indeed, life calls for frequent reflection of the taken actions. Reflective writing is a moment of self-seeking, internal personal questioning, which examines all learned experiences, achievements, challenges and shortcomings faced during this process, and how all these experiences affect the present and the future.

Reflective thinking can be described as a method of learning, which involves doing something, followed by looking back at the entire process, to extract the exact things that can specifically help you improve. It involves reflecting on knowing exactly where you stand in the present moment, understanding your strengths and weakness on that topic and adjusting accordingly to your needs. In this matter, different methods have emerged, such as Gibbs reflective cycle, Kolb's learning cycle or Driscoll's model. For this report I will be reflecting on my learning in this module, focusing on Time management, Referencing, Cover letter writing and Paraphrasing, using Gibb's "Reflective Cycle" to look in depth on the experiences and practical applicability on these topics.

Understanding the Gibb's 'Reflective Cycle'

In 1988, professor Graham Gibbs, in his book "Learning by Doing", described the Reflective Cycle – a six stages model – which implies a method of learning from experience, leading to constant and significant improvement. By having a closed loop structure, it can be

considered a way of continuously improve one's knowledge, especially when it comes to repetitive actions and understanding on which areas to focus on for future progress. (Gibbs' Reflective Cycle: Helping People Learn from Experience, 2020)

In this report covering my learning experience in the Academic and Employability Skills Module, I will follow Gibb's cycle model for each topic I will be reflecting on. The first step, Description, as its name also suggests, involves describing the activity in detail. Feelings – the second phase – focuses on emotions, while the third step – Evaluation – looks on what went well or maybe not so well. The Analysis phase requires reflecting on what has the experience taught me, followed by drawing the Conclusion – the fifth step, which can be divided in General and Specific. The final step – Action plan, is based on the previous one and involves setting future goals for further improvement. (What is Gibbs Reflective Cycle? Explanation & blank template | toolshero, 2020)

For me, understanding the principles of reflective thinking helped me learn how to use reflection as a method to either learn something new or try to do better in something I previously experienced. During this class I was first exposed to this concept, and although at the beginning understanding how this works seemed to be a bit overwhelming, I managed to overcome this after reading more about this topic and applying the method of reflective writing in this paper. I find Gibb's Reflective Cycle to be very useful and think I will continue to apply this tool in the future, as it proves to be an effective and versatile practice-based learning tool.

Application

Time Management

If we could describe time management in just a few words, we would say it involves using the time you have in a productive and efficient way. In practice, managing to spend the hours in a day to successfully achieving your goals, can prove to be a hard thing to accomplish. Taking into consideration that time is a limited resource, poor management of it can lead to problems such as procrastination, a high level of stress, missing deadlines, poor decision making or having a deficient work life balance. Considering this, it is vital to control your time as effectively as

possible, by knowing how to prioritize your goals and set deadlines for yourself, avoid distractions and focusing on your tasks etc. (Wade, 2020)

During the Academic and Employability Skills module, we were introduced from the very beginning to the basics of study organizing methods. Here we discussed about time management, covering topics like what is time management and how to efficiently apply time management principles, identifying which activities are time consuming, setting SMART goals and others. We were engaged in activities such as reviewing how we use our time or creating a time log. Also, several time management philosophies we learned about are The Pareto 80-20 rule, The Eisenhower Method, making a SWOT analysis for our time management skills. I consider that the topics covered are very useful and easy to apply, also following the lecture was effortless and it kept us engaged.

Before this class, I was aware that I am lacking in several areas of time management, but I did not know what I can do to improve that. Now I have the knowledge and I do my best to try to spend my time on the things that are truly important, in an efficient way, to reduce time wastage as much as possible. Spending more time on practicing how to apply these tools would have been even better. I also figured out that time management is not easy and calls out for dedication and discipline.

Knowing how to allocate your time is a key component of being successful and meeting your goals. I found learning about this topic very inspiring and it helped me realize that things like planning beforehand how to properly use my time, the importance of making to do lists or keeping a tidy workspace can have a major positive impact on my life.

After analyzing my behavior regarding how I manage my time, I was able to identify some of my weaknesses, such as procrastination, being easily distracted, not following a timetable, not allocating enough time to complete my tasks. To overcome this, as a first step I will focus on learning how to eliminate distractions and keeping a diary to identify which activities take more time than expected and creating balanced workplans.

Referencing

Proper referencing is one of the most important things you must learn for your academic success and you should focus on doing it the correct way from the very beginning. There are a couple of different styles of referencing, for example The Harvard referencing system, which maybe is the most popular one. Referencing is more than just about giving credit to the original author for his work, but also plays a role in validating the arguments you present in your work, as well as enabling the reader to easily check the original work for further information and helps you avoid plagiarism, which is a serious academic offence. (Academic Referencing - How to Cite & Reference | SkillsYouNeed, 2020)

During this lecture about referencing methods, we learned how to prevent plagiarism and why this is extremely important; we also had the opportunity to put into practice through exercise what we learned theoretically. Although at the beginning I felt a bit overwhelmed, as it can be a difficult topic to grasp, after a bit of practice I now feel a lot more confident regarding this.

Before this course, I had heard about intellectual property rights and plagiarism. While I somewhat knew what these two terms stood for, I did not know that one can breach the law through academic writing. I liked the fact that the course was interactive, and I was able to learn through doing. In conclusion, learning how to properly cite someone's work should be mandatory, and unfortunately, due to different reasons, in my opinion a lot of people breach the academic referencing guideline. After this class I realized what errors related to referencing I committed in the past, and in the future I will make sure that I always follow the guidelines in this matter in my academical activity.

Cover Letter

The cover letter can be defined as a tool which can help you make a great first impression to your potential employer, helping your professional skills stand out and showcasing your personality, as well as showing to what degree you are interested in applying to that job and why you represent a good fit for the company. It completes the resume, both being fundamental to any job application. (How to Write a Cover Letter [10+ Example Cover Letters], 2020)

To ensure that you have a top-notch cover letter, rather than just relying to listing some of your skills, you should include all the relevant content for that position. Another important aspect of a great cover letter consists in showing that you have a genuine interest in that company, by taking time to do the necessary research and showing that your skills and passions align with its vision, mission, or future goals. (The 2 Most Important Elements of a Great Cover Letter, 2020)

Some of the topics included in this class covered things like what a cover letter is and what it should include. This tool should enable you to introduce yourself, sell yourself and emphasize what you can do for the company; it also contains a paragraph that calls to action. I particularly liked the fact that I had the opportunity to apply what I have learned through the individual task we had, which involved writing a cover letter.

Before participating in this module, I knew how to write a CV and I had some previous experience regarding the process of applying for a job, but I was not aware of the importance a cover letter has or even how to write one that stands out. This class has allowed me to gain the knowledge necessary to be able to successfully write one.

Having the ability to write a cover letter and practicing this skill can help ease the application process in the future; for me personally I consider that gaining the ability to write a cover letter that encases my personality and professional skills will have a positive impact on the development of my career path. Steps that I consider taking to continuously improve in this matter include practicing writing personalized cover letters upon applying for a new job, as well as reading different articles regarding this topic, for further improvement.

Paraphrasing

An effective way to avoid plagiarism is through paraphrasing, which involves combining several techniques, such as the usage of synonyms or changing parts of the speech of the structure of the sentence, by replacing the words of another source and reiterating it, using your own lexis, without copying the exact wording. (Avoiding Plagiarism - Paraphrasing | Academic Integrity at MIT, 2020)

The Academic and Employability module introduced me to paraphrasing as an essential tool in my academic work, helping me understand different paraphrasing techniques. At a first

glance, paraphrasing seems to be difficult, but I have overcome this by practicing through exercise. This skill requires you to focus on improving your vocabulary, but also helps you better internalize the information, therefore can be used as a learning technique as well. In this matter, I will try to use the paraphrasing method when I take notes or revise material, which in return will help me avoid plagiarism whenever I have a paper to write.

Conclusion

Learning never ends and every opportunity is a meaningful experience. This module was an eye-opener to many aspects of academic writing, personal skills like time management and self-presentation through cover letters and resumes.

Reflective writing is an opportunity to examine the experiences one gained through a given learning process. Acquiring this skill has helped me become a reflective thinker and I consider that this enables me to constantly improve myself by learning from both past and present experiences.

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