



Prifysgol Cymru
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University of Wales
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LCLM4001

Academic Skills

Reflection

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Discussion

Discuss and answer these questions with a partner.

- How do you think the last 8 weeks of Academic Skills class have been for you? Why do you feel that way?
- What was the most interesting thing you learnt?
- What was the most challenging thing you did in class? How about in Independent Study?
- Is there anything you wish you had done differently in the Academic Skills module?

Write

Think about the discussion you just had and write down your thoughts. You should do this by hand.

You have 10 minutes, so don't worry about grammar or spelling, just write as many ideas as you can.

You do not have to write in paragraphs! For this part, it's more important to get more ideas down, than getting them down perfectly

1. How do you think the last 8 weeks of Academic Skills class have been for you? Why do you feel that way?
2. What was the most interesting thing you learnt?
3. What was the most challenging thing(s) you did in class? How about in Independent Study? Why were these things challenging for you?
4. Is there anything you wish you had done differently in the Academic Skills module?

Discussion

Discuss and answer these questions with a partner.

- What does 'reflection' mean to you?
- Have you ever kept a diary or a journal before? If so, what kind of things did you write in it? How old were you? Do you still keep one now? Why or why not?
- Have you ever reflected on something before? If so, what was it? What did you learn?

What is reflection?

Reflection or **Critical reflection** is defined as:

Reflecting means thinking carefully about past experiences, thoughts, and actions. The aim is to learn from them, understand them better, and use that insight to guide what we do now and in the future. It can help us question our usual ways of thinking and doing things, and may shape our choices, beliefs, and understanding of ourselves (University of Edinburgh, 2024)

What is reflective thinking?

In an academic context, reflective thinking usually involves:

1. **Looking back at something** (often an event/idea, something that happened).
2. **Analysing the event or idea** (thinking in depth and from different perspectives, and trying to explain, often with reference to a model or theory from your subject).
3. **Thinking carefully about what the event or idea means for you** and your ongoing progress as a learner and/or practising professional.

Why is Reflection Important...

- 1) ...for university students?
- 2) ...for business people?

Discuss with a partner.

Reflection for University Students...

Can:

1. **Help students remember learning more effectively** – by linking ideas to actions or decisions, rather than just hearing them once.
2. **Help students identify strengths and areas to improve** – for example, recognising issues with time management or planning.
3. **Develop confidence in responding to challenges** – students learn to adjust their approach instead of repeating the same mistakes.
4. **Prepare students for workplace decision-making** – by practising how to evaluate what worked, what didn't, and what to change next time.

Can you think of a **specific** example where a student might benefit from reflection? Discuss with a partner.

Reflection in the Business World....

If someone in business isn't reflecting, they're basically guessing and hoping a success happens again OR that they just get lucky and avoid problems in the future.

Reflection is what turns experience into better business decisions.
It can:

- Improve decision-making by learning from past outcomes
- Prevent repeated mistakes by identifying what went wrong
- Enhance performance through small, continuous improvements
- Build self-awareness in communication and working style
- Support adaptability in changing business environments.

Can you think of a **specific** example where a business professional might benefit from reflecting? Discuss with a partner

Why Reflect?

1. People often reflect when experiences are **negative** – do you think reflecting on positive experiences can also be worthwhile? Why or why not?

Why Reflect?

“It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience, it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated.”

(Gibbs, 1988, p.9)

Common Frameworks (models) of Reflection

- Gibb's 'Reflective Cycle' (1988)
- Kolb's 'Experiential Learning Cycle' (1984)
- Driscoll's Model of Reflection (1994)

.....there are more reflective frameworks! Task 3 is based on **Gibb's Reflective Cycle**, and **you will have questions to guide you.**

You do NOT need to remember the cycle off the top of your head!

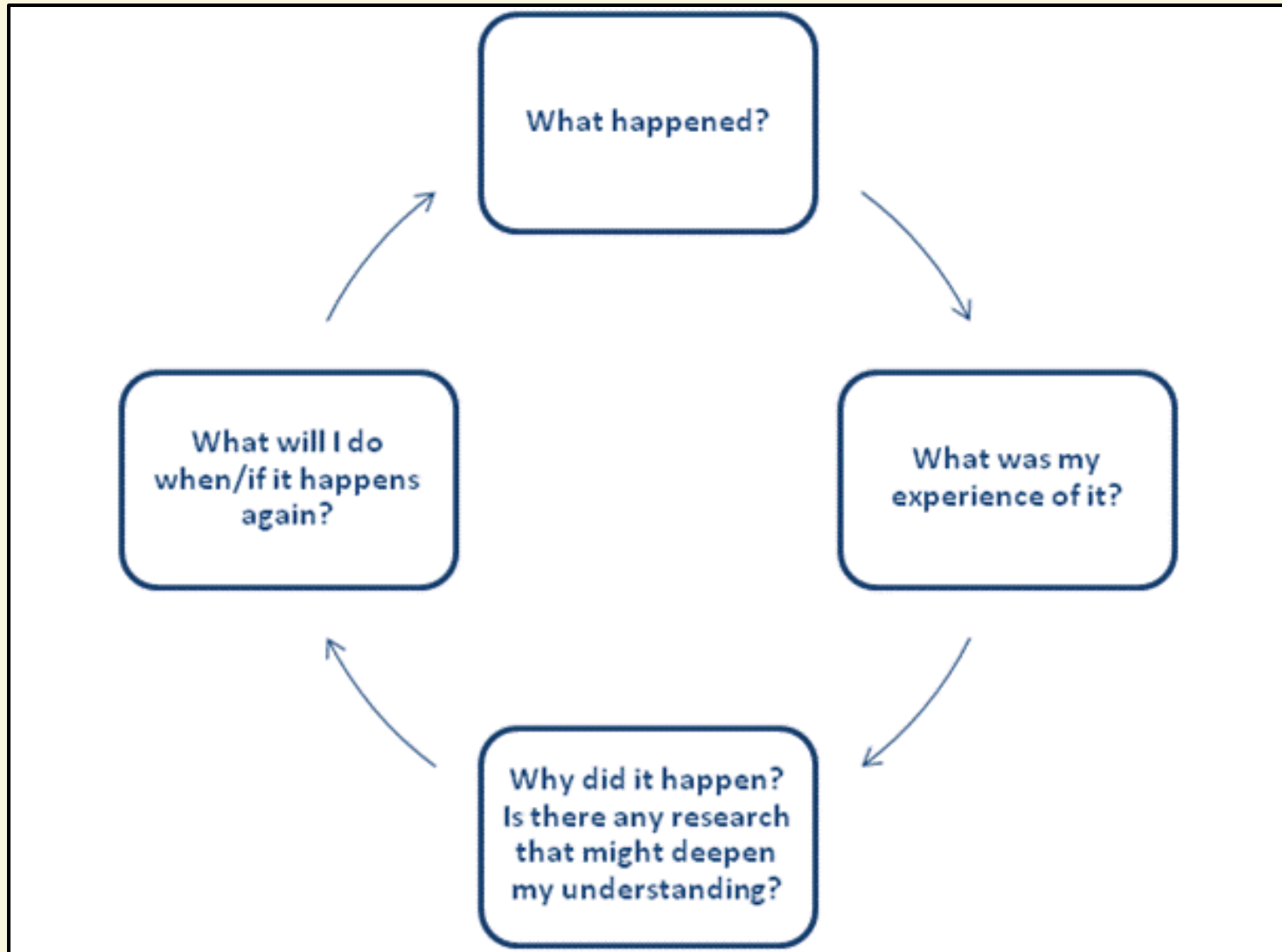
BUT

You should be quite familiar with the cycle before Task 3 and understand what each stage requires.

Reflecting in an Academic Context

- The key is to make sure you properly address **each stage** of whatever model you use (you can't skip stages!)
- It is important that you don't just describe everything

Most Reflective Models follow this basic cycle...

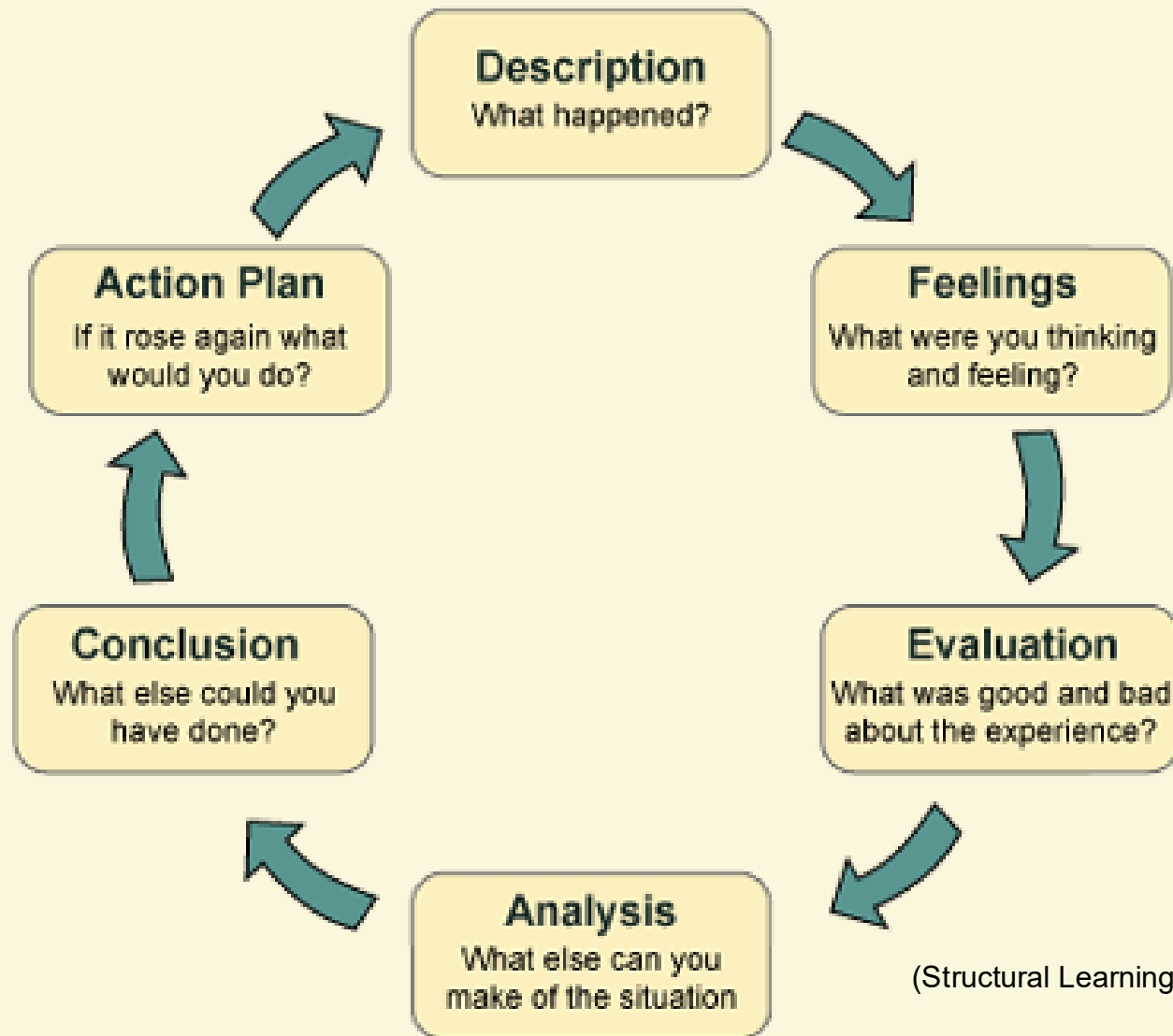


Essentially...

- 1) What (*happened?*)
- 2) How (*did I feel? did it go?*)
- 3) Why (*did I feel this way? did the experience go that way?*)
- 4) What (*did I learn? will I do differently or the same next time?*)

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988)

Gibbs Reflective Cycle



(Structural Learning, 2023)

The Description Stage

(What happened?)

1. What was the experience or situation?
 2. When and where did it happen?
 3. Who was involved?
 4. What did you do?
 5. What was the outcome?
- **Stick to facts.** No explanation or judgement yet.
 - This does not mean 'be general', it's **important to be specific.**
 - Don't just say "we did some activities" or "I worked in a group", tell the reader *which* activities you did, and what they were like. Tell the reader what exactly you did in groups, etc.

Feelings Stage

(What were you thinking or feeling?)

1. What were your thoughts at the time?
 2. How did you feel before, during, and after?
 3. Did your feelings change over time?
 4. What influenced those feelings?
- Be **honest**, but keep it relevant to the situation
 - Be specific (again!) and relevant: go beyond “I felt good/bad” and explain *what kind* of feeling (e.g. anxious, confident, uncertain) and *what caused it* in the situation.
 - Show change over time if it applies: explain how your feelings evolved (e.g. initial anxiety became confidence after practice or feedback), and briefly link those feelings to your behaviour or decisions.

Evaluation Stage

(What was GOOD, what was BAD?)

1. What went well?
 2. What did not go well?
 3. What were the weaknesses? What were the strengths?
 4. What was positive or negative about the experience overall?
- This is the stage in which you try to understand a situation better.
 - Balance strengths and weaknesses: don't only say what went well; also identify what didn't go well and why, with roughly equal attention.
 - You might find that you are reflecting on something which has positive AND negative parts.

Analysis Stage

(Why did it happen?)

1. Why did things go well or badly?
 2. What factors influenced the outcome?
 3. What skills, behaviours, or decisions made a difference?
 4. How does this relate to what you've learned?
 5. What patterns or causes can you identify?
- Explain the **reasons** behind outcomes: go beyond describing what happened by identifying the factors that caused success or difficulty (e.g. skills, preparation, pressure, environment, support).
 - Link your explanation to evidence: support your reasoning by referring to evidence to explain why something may have challenged you or why something may have gone very well.

Conclusion Stage

(What conclusions can you draw/what did you learn?)

1. What have you learned from this experience?
 2. What could you have done differently?
 3. What did this experience teach you about yourself?
 4. What would you avoid or repeat next time?
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- **Summarise what has been learned overall:** clearly state the key takeaways from the reflection (e.g. what has improved, what challenges remain, and what has been discovered about personal performance).
 - **Keep it forward-looking but not too detailed:** briefly indicate what could be done differently next time, without going into step-by-step planning (save detailed actions for the action plan stage).

Action Plan Stage

(What will you do next?)

1. What will you do differently in future situations?
2. How will you apply what you've learned?
3. What specific steps will you take to improve?
4. How will you prepare next time?
5. How will you know you've improved?

- This stage is particularly important as your teacher needs to be able to see that you understand how to improve.

- Set specific, practical steps for improvement: clearly state what will be done next time (e.g. practise a skill more, prepare differently, or use a different approach) rather than making vague statements.

- Make it realistic and focused on future situations: explain how the plan will be applied in similar tasks or contexts, showing how it will lead to improved performance next time.

Group Activity

What Makes a 'Good' vs. 'Bad' Reflection?

Now that you understand what a reflection is and what it includes, **work with your group to brainstorm two lists:**

- 1. Effective Reflection:** What actions, behaviours, or elements do you think contribute to a strong, thoughtful reflection? What details would be necessary to include if you're demonstrating your ability to reflect to others?
- 2. Ineffective Reflection:** What common mistakes or missing elements result in a weak or unhelpful reflection?

Write down your ideas for each list and be prepared to discuss them with the class.

Some Possible Answers

Effective Reflection (Good Reflection)

- **Specific & Detailed** – Clearly explains thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- **Connects to Learning** – Relates personal experiences to key concepts or lessons learned.
- **Self-Aware & Honest** – Shows genuine self-assessment and willingness to improve.
- **Includes Growth & Next Steps** – Identifies areas for improvement and how to apply lessons in the future.
- **Balanced Perspective** – Acknowledges both successes and challenges rather than just focusing on one.

Ineffective Reflection (Bad Reflection)

- **Vague & Generalised** – Lacks specific details, making it unclear or unhelpful.
- **Doesn't Connect to Learning** – Just summarises events without linking them to lessons or personal growth.
- **Avoids Challenges** – Only focuses on positives or avoids acknowledging areas for improvement.
- **Too Short or Superficial** – Lacks depth or critical thinking.
- **Blames External Factors** – Doesn't take personal responsibility or reflect on one's own role in the experience
- **Doesn't specify ways to improve** or next actions to take

Evidence in Reflective Reports

- Even though you are writing about your own experience, evidence can still be used in most stages of a reflection (for Task 3, you **do need to include it!**)
- Using evidence in reflection strengthens your ideas by showing that your conclusions are based on real examples, feedback, or research rather than opinion, which makes your analysis more convincing and helps you clearly explain why things happened and how you can improve in the future.
- For now, it might be easiest to use it in the **Analysis** and **Action Plan** stages

Evidence in Reflective Reports

- It is not *usually* used in the Feelings stage
- **Description:** can include definitions or basic facts
- **Evaluation:** can support what went well / didn't go well (a bit trickier)
- **Analysis:** helps explain *why* things happened (possibly the easiest place for evidence for students new to reflective writing!!!)
- **Conclusion:** can support key learning points
- **Action Plan:** can justify what actions to take next (possibly the second easiest place to include it!)

Worksheet

- **Go to the worksheet and complete Activity 1 with a partner**

Worksheet

- **Go to the worksheet and complete Activity 2A-B on your own**
- **Then complete 2C with a partner**

References (and further resources!)

- Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods*. [London]: FEU.
- Leeds Beckett University (2015) *Content Preview: Models for structuring reflection*. Available at: <https://skillsforlearning.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/preview/content/models/02.shtml> (Accessed: 8th July 2019).
- Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs; London: Prentice-Hall.
- Nursing Answers (2024) *Driscoll's Model of Reflection*. Available at: <https://nursinganswers.net/reflective-guides/driscoll-model-of-reflection.php> (Accessed: 18th December 2024)
- Structural Learning (2023) *Gibbs' Reflective Cycle*. Available at: <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/gibbs-reflective-cycle> (Accessed: 8th January 2025)
- University of Edinburgh (2024) *Reflection Toolkit*. Available at: <https://reflection.ed.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10th January 2025)

Further Resources:

- Open University. (n.d.). *Reflective Learning*. Available at: <https://help.open.ac.uk/strategic-study-techniques/reflective-learning> (Accessed 3 Feb. 2025)
- University of Cambridge. (n.d.). *Reflective Writing - Reflective Practice Toolkit*. Available at: <https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/reflectivepracticetoolkit/reflectivewriting> (Accessed 20th Feb. 2025)
- University of Edinburgh (2024) *Reflection Toolkit*. Available at: <https://reflection.ed.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10th January 2025)

The Description Stage: Mini Example

Over the 10-week skydiving course, I attended weekly sessions that included both classroom learning and practical training. In the early weeks, we focused on safety rules, equipment checks, and basic body position in the air. We also practised in a wind tunnel to get used to controlling our movement.

As the course continued, I completed jumps with an instructor behind me, and later moved on to solo jumps with my instructor very close to me in the air. Before each jump, we had to run through a checklist and check all equipment. During and after the jumps, instructors gave feedback on things like body position, timing of the parachute, and landing. By the end of the course, I was more confident and able to complete jumps on my own with very little support from the instructor.

The Feelings Stage: Mini Example

When I started, I was very nervous about skydiving because it was a new experience and I was unsure what to expect. Also, many of the other people taking the course seemed like they knew more about skydiving than I did when we started, and that made me even less confident. I am not very coordinated, so I was anxious about controlling my body in the air. I'm also slightly afraid of heights, so I felt fear when in the plane on the first few trips up.

During the early sessions, I felt more comfortable after practising in the wind tunnel, although I was still slightly anxious before the first real jump. As the course went on and I received feedback from instructors, my confidence started to improve. By the later weeks, I felt more relaxed before jumps and more confident in my ability to follow instructions and complete the landing safely. Overall, my feelings changed from nervousness to excitement and confidence as I gained more experience.

The Evaluation Stage: Mini Example

The ground training activities went well because I felt confident understanding the key procedures of skydiving and was able to follow the instructions correctly in a controlled environment. I was able to complete the exercises without much difficulty and felt prepared for the practical jumps.

However, the practical part in the air was not as effective, as I struggled to release the parachute at the correct time. I became flustered when trying to untangle the strings, which meant I was unable to act as planned, and my instructor had to intervene. In addition, my timing during the jump was inconsistent compared to the ground practice, which showed a gap between my understanding and my ability to perform under pressure.

The Analysis Stage: Mini Example

The difficulties I experienced during the parachute release were likely caused by the difference between practising on the ground and performing in the air. On the ground, I was in a calm and controlled environment, which made it easier to understand and follow the steps. However, in the air I felt more pressure and had to think and act more quickly, which affected my performance.

This suggests that stress and lack of real experience made it harder to apply what I had learned. Studies on learning suggest that people often perform less well when they are under pressure compared to when they are practising in a safe environment (Daredeveel, 2023). Acrobate (2022) also explains that understanding a process in skydiving is not always enough, and that repeated practice in realistic conditions is important to improve performance.

In addition, my difficulty with untangling the strings suggests that I had not yet developed enough familiarity with the equipment to carry out the task automatically. This may have increased the time it took me to react, which contributed to missing the correct timing. With more practice in similar conditions, this type of task would likely become quicker and more natural to perform.

The Conclusion Stage: Mini Example

Overall, this experience showed that I have developed a good understanding of the basic procedures involved in skydiving through both classroom learning and practical training. Over the 10 weeks, I became more familiar with the equipment and the steps involved, which helped to increase my confidence when preparing for jumps. I also improved in my ability to follow instructions and carry out tasks more consistently as the course progressed.

However, I also learned that understanding the process on the ground is different from applying it in a real situation. In the air, I found it harder to stay calm and act as quickly as needed, which affected my performance at times. This showed me that practical skills are not only about knowing what to do, but also about being able to do it under pressure.

Overall, this experience helped me see how my confidence and skills have improved over time, while also showing the areas where I still need more practice to perform more effectively in real situations.

The Action Plan Stage: Mini Example

In future skydiving activities, I will focus on improving my ability to stay calm under pressure by practising a simple breathing technique before and during high-pressure moments. For example, I will use slow breathing (in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, out for 4 seconds) to help control nerves and maintain focus before making key decisions during a jump. I will also mentally run through the main steps of the parachute release process before each jump so that I feel more prepared and confident.

In addition, I will try to practise similar skills in training sessions, especially focusing on timing and responding quickly to instructions, so that these actions become more automatic over time. To track my improvement, I will keep a short log after each session where I note how confident I felt, whether I stayed calm using the breathing technique, and how successfully I completed each step of the jump. I will also compare my performance over time by looking for fewer mistakes, quicker reactions, and increased confidence in completing tasks independently.