



Employability Skills
Academic Skills for Digital Era
BMSW4013
Ffion Cumberpatch
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Gibb's Reflective Cycle Essay

Starting on my first term at university, I quickly realized that the transition to higher education required a significant shift in both academic and digital skill sets. Academic Skills for Digital Era, module that was introduced to me by Ffion, provided me with an introduction to multiple frameworks and concepts, such as Kolb's Cycle, the Pomodoro Technique, Eisenhower Matrix, VARK and Critical Thinking, models that have shaped my approach to learning. Additionally, the case of Dr Harts Disappearance offered a real-world scenario through which I could apply and use these concepts in a practical way. This reflective essay uses Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) to explore my experiences, feelings, evaluations, analyses and conclusions regarding my academic journey. The final section presents a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) action plan for further improvement in the next term.

At the beginning of the term, I felt overwhelmed by the volume of information and various assignments I needed to complete. Early on, the transition from a gap in studying to the independent learning required in higher education was challenging. I remember struggling particularly with time management and referencing correctly, which led to a few missed deadlines. To better handle my learning curve and my workload, I tried to implement practically different digital tools and study techniques.

I first came across Kolb's Learning Cycle, which helped me understand that learning is a continuous process that involves experience, reflection, practice and experimentation (Kolb, 1984). This model helped me with my reflective practice for my assignments. At the same time, I started applying the Pomodoro Technique, a time management tool developed by Francesco Cirillo (2006), to break study sessions into smaller ones. Eisenhower's Matrix helped me in prioritizing tasks, ensuring that urgent and important assignments received immediate attention (Mackenzie, 1997).

Moreover, discovering about different learning styles through the VARK model allowed me to understand my best way for absorbing information, whether visual, listening, reading/writing, or kinesthetic (Fleming and Mills, 1992). The case on Dr Harts Disappearance was very interesting and it motivated me to research and learn more. The unfolding of events within the case not only motivated me but also provided a practical scenario where I improved my critical thinking skills. Through this exercise, I learned to

analyze information in more detail, detect biases and appreciate the complexities of digital skills and academic writing.

Throughout the module, my emotional responses changed significantly. Initially the stress of managing deadlines and pressure to maintain academic standards made me doubt my knowledge and abilities. Missing a few assignments deadlines made me feel worried and questioned myself that I may not be able to meet the high demands of university. However, as weeks passed, and I became familiar with the academic tools and techniques, my feelings changed towards enthusiasm and confidence. The structured guidance provided by frameworks like Gibbs Cycle and practical benefits of models like the Pomodoro technique showed me that improvement is possible, moment that my confidence increases significantly. I began to experience a sense of accomplishment each time I applied these methods to overcome challenges. This transformation in my feelings was important, because I developed a more proactive and positive approach to my academic responsibilities (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985).

Reflecting on my experience, I can understand several aspects well, alongside notable challenges that I must take into consideration moving forward. The consistent application of those concepts allowed me to focus on tasks more efficiently and reduced procrastination, an issue that I'm still struggling with. The Eisenhower Matrix was very effective in helping me prioritize tasks, ensuring that I could make a difference between urgent assignments and those that could be done later. The Kolb's Cycle helped me to view my learning process as ongoing, which was important in understanding that mistakes were part of the process rather than failures. Engaging with Dr Hart Disappearance case was one of my favorite activities throughout the module, it offered me a compelling context that integrated theoretical learning with practical application, reinforcing my critical thinking and digital skills (Moon, 2004).

Despite these successes, I also faced challenges. My initial struggles with referencing and meeting deadlines underline a gap in my academic skills. I found the learning structure difficult, especially self-directed learning, because of the large amount of information that I had to deal with, at least in the beginning. Even though I made progress with digital tools, there were times when the technological aspect became sometimes a distraction rather than helping me out. The fact that I had to use a mix of tools and adapt

at the same time to new digital platforms, felt overwhelmed and occasionally decreased my productivity.

These challenges became even harder because I rushed or struggled to learn all the concepts quickly. For example, while I understand the insights from the VARK model, I sometimes struggle to identify and utilize my preferred learning style effectively in different contexts. This experience underlines the importance of adapting study methods to fit the demands of specific assignments and digital environments (Dunn, Griggs and Price, 1995).

Analyzing my experience from academic theories perspective has provided me with valuable insights about my personal and professional development. One major takeaway is the importance of reflective practice in learning. By utilizing Gibbs Reflective Cycle, I could break down my experiences into clear stages that allowed for a structured analysis of what worked and what did not. The process showed that my struggles were not only because of poor planning but also because of lack of understanding of academic tools. The learning curve and understanding of those techniques not only improved my time management but also boosted my confidence in managing digital tools for academic purposes.

The case of Dr Hart Disappearance demonstrated the real-world application of digital literacy and critical thinking. It became clear that the integration of digital tools in learning is not just about efficiency but also about the depth of understanding. The case required me to research and analyze information from various sources, assess the credibility of digital content and make connections between theory and practice. This experience helped me better understand how biases can influence digital information, reflecting the concerns discussed in critical thinking literature (Ennis, 2011).

Furthermore, reflecting on my experience has allowed me to see links and connections between academic and digital skills. The ability to manage time effectively, reference correctly and digital tools is not only crucial for academic success but also a solid foundation for future career development. As my plan is to enter a field where digital skills are necessary the lessons learned this term will guide my future development. The reflection process has underlined that learning is both a personal and evolving process,

where setbacks are opportunities for growth rather than definitive failures (Argyris and Schon, 1978).

In conclusion, my first term has been a period of substantial growth in both academic and digital skills. I have been able to systematically evaluate my experience, from the initial struggle with information overload and missed deadlines to the gradual improvement in time management, digital skills and critical thinking. The adoption of those concepts and methods has been critical in shaping learning journeys. The case study on Dr Hart Disappearance helped me understand how important practical context is therefore enriched my knowledge of digital research and academic writing.

This reflection has reinforced the idea that continuous improvement is essential not only in academic settings but also on a personal level. By recognizing the challenges I faced and the progress I made, I have developed a clearer and structured perspective on how to approach future academic development. The lessons learned during this term will serve me as a foundation for personal and professional development in academic environments.

SMART Action Plan for Next Term

To build on the progress made this term, I have created a SMART action plan for the upcoming term:

Specific: I will focus on improving my digital skills and academic referencing. This includes citation's structure and digital training on specific platforms.

Measurable: I will track my progress by using a digital planner where I log activities and record weekly reflections on topic. I will also set goals for specific software tools, aiming to complete at least two tutorials per month.

Achievable: Advancing my digital and referencing skills is directly related to my academic and career aspirations. Improving in these areas will help me progress in future assignments and in my field of interest.

Time-bound: I will implement and review this action plan over the next term, with monthly check-ins to assess my progress. The main goal is to achieve a demonstrable improvement in digital and referencing skills by the end of the term.

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