

ASSIGNMENT 2: REFLECTIVE ESSAY



MODULE NAME:	ACADEMIC SKILLS FOR THE DIGITAL ERA (BMSW4013_SWAN)
STUDENT NAME:	KATERYNA KORIUCHKINA (2426099)
LECTURER NAME:	FFION CUMBERPATCH

In this essay I will reflect on my experience during my study the Module Academic Skills for the Digital Era using the Gibb's Reflective Cycle (1988). It is a framework for structured reflection that helps to analyse experiences by putting them into six stages: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. My task was to reflect on my academical and digital skills development with the example of module's activities and to set up the Action Plan with S.M.A.R.T. Goals (Doran, 1981) to improve my weaknesses.

Description

Among the academic skills that I've learned I will focus on the two the most challenging for me during this Module. They are Reflective writing itself and Presentation skills. I will also analyse the impact of studying on a foreign language for developing the above-mentioned skills.

Reflective writing is challenging for students, that have difficulties in balancing personal insights with academic analysis and integrating theoretical frameworks, especially when writing in a second language (Sari, 2023). These challenges can prevent the development of critical thinking and reflective skills essential for academic and professional growth. These struggles are particularly manifests when students try to link personal experience with academic theory, which is crucial for effective reflective writing. One of the most challenging aspects of the course for me was writing a reflective essay.

Feelings

I felt uncertain about how to express my thoughts in a structured and meaningful way. Since English is not my first language, I often found it difficult to articulate my emotions and experience in a formal academic style. It made me feel disappointed. I only have practice with private reflecting writing, so additionally, I was not sure about the level of personal insight that was expected in my writing, which made me hesitate and less confident.

Evaluation

To overcome this challenge, I reviewed samples of reflective essays. Exploring well-structured examples helped me to understand the difference between description and analysis. Through compering my writing with examples, I began to see the importance of linking my reflections to theoretical frameworks. I also realized that reflection is not just about recounting experience but also critically engaging with them

to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth. The feedback from my tutor on the draft was also very helpful. I read all the comments and made the necessary revisions. However, despite this progress, I still found it difficult to integrate academic sources effectively. While I understood that referencing theories and models—such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988) was crucial for demonstrating critical engagement, I often struggled with incorporating them naturally into my writing. Instead of seamlessly weaving theory into my reflections, I tended to add citations in a way that felt forced or disconnected from my personal experiences.

Additionally writing in non-native language added another difficulty. I often felt that my ability to express deep reflection was limited by my vocabulary. This made my writing simpler comparing to examples I studied.

Another challenge was understanding the appropriate balance between personal insight and academic analysis. I was unsure how much personal experience I should include and how much I should rely on external sources. I hesitate to express my emotions too openly, because of fear that it won't be enough academic.

Analysis

Reflecting on my difficulties with academic reflective writing, I realized that several factors influence my struggle. Firstly, my initial approach was too descriptive rather than analytical. As Moon (2019) explains, reflective writing should go beyond recounting experiences; it should critically assess learning moments, link them to theory, and identify areas for improvement. My writing lacked this depth at first, as I was unsure how to integrate personal experience with academic models effectively.

Additionally, my challenge in balancing personal insight and academic analysis reflects. My hesitation to include emotions in my reflections stemmed from the misconception that academic writing must always remain impersonal. However, Schön (1991) highlights that reflective practice involves exploring emotions to deepen learning, as they provide insight into one's thought process and areas for development.

Language barriers also played a significant role in my struggles. According to Sari (2025), writing in a second language can limit a student's ability to express nuanced reflections, as they may prioritize grammatical accuracy over depth of analysis. This resonates with my experience—I often felt that my vocabulary restricted my ability to critically evaluate my learning. However, according to Ahmed (2024) reflective practice for English foreign language (EFL) students can promote not just developing the academic writing skills but also stronger language abilities. Now I

understand that for me, as for EFL student reflective writing practice is both a tool and a goal.

Conclusion

Through this experience, I have developed a better understanding of what constitutes effective reflective writing. I now recognize that reflection is not just about describing past experiences but about analysing them critically and linking them to theoretical frameworks. Although I initially struggled with structuring my reflections, using models such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) helped me organize my thoughts in a more analytical way. Furthermore, I have gained more confidence in incorporating academic sources to support my reflections.

However, I still need to work on refining my academic writing skills, particularly in integrating theory seamlessly and expanding my vocabulary for deeper analysis. Moving forward, I plan to read more academic articles on reflective practice, seek feedback from tutors on my writing, and practice paraphrasing complex ideas to enhance my ability to express critical insights effectively.

Description

During the preparation for my presentation, I initially focused on gathering as much information as possible. I wanted to ensure my presentation was informative and well-supported by evidence. However, after my mock presentations, I realized that my slides contained too much text, which distracted the audience. Research suggests that excessive text on slides can overwhelm listeners and reduce engagement, as they focus on reading rather than listening (Reynolds, 2020). When I tried to maintain eye contact with my peers, I noticed they were reading the slides instead of listening to me. Additionally, I struggled with structuring my speech effectively, often over-explaining points or repeating information.

Feelings

At the beginning of my presentation, I felt nervous, which led me to rush through my slides too quickly. McCarthy and Hatcher (2002) argue that nervousness often causes speakers to speed up their delivery, making it harder for the audience to follow. I also felt frustrated when I noticed that my audience was more focused on reading my

slides rather than engaging with my speech. However, according to receiving feedback from my peers and tutor gave me a sense of direction. I realized that simplifying my slides and improving my delivery would make my presentation more effective.

Evaluation

The mock presentations were extremely beneficial, as they allowed me to identify my weaknesses and make adjustments before the final presentation. My main challenges included:

- Overloading slides with text, which reduced audience engagement. Research shows that slides should serve as a visual aid rather than a script (Atkinson, 2004).
- Rushing through the slides, making it difficult for my audience to follow key points. According to Kumarasamy (2020) pacing is critical in maintaining audience attention.
- Over-explaining certain ideas, which led to unnecessary repetition.

Despite these issues, there were also positive aspects of my performance. My peers noted that I spoke loudly and clearly, maintained good body language, and presented useful evidence. Additionally, I made an effort to establish eye contact, which helped improve audience engagement.

After receiving feedback, I revised my slides by:

- Reducing the amount of text and using bullet points for clarity. This aligns with Kawasaki's (2016) 10-20-30 rule, which suggests using no more than 10 slides, keeping presentations within 20 minutes, and ensuring text is at least 30-point font.
- Adding more visual elements to enhance engagement. Studies show that images and graphics improve information retention (Daibao et al. 2020).
- Structuring my speech more effectively to ensure a clear and direct delivery.

These adjustments improved my confidence and allowed me to present more effectively during the final presentation.

Analysis

Reflecting on this experience, I recognize the importance of effective visual communication in academic presentations. Reynolds (2020, p. 91) emphasizes that

slides should complement the speaker's words rather than serve as a substitute. Overloading slides with text can overwhelm the audience, reducing their ability to absorb key information.

Moreover, research (Jasuli, 2024) suggests that audience engagement is significantly influenced by body language, eye contact, and vocal clarity. My experience aligns with these findings, as my attempt to maintain eye contact and speak clearly was positively received. However, I also learned that pacing is crucial. McCarthy and Hatcher (2002) highlight that speakers should use pauses strategically to allow the audience time to process key points.

Conclusion

From this experience, I learned that effective presentation skills involve more than just delivering information—they require clear communication, structured content, and audience engagement. While I improved my slides and speech organization, I still need to work on pacing and balancing detail with conciseness. I also realized the importance of understanding and using the feedback now.

Action Plan

Target to be achieved	Action step to complete to achieve target	Potential difficulties	Resources	Deadline	Comments
Improve reflective writing skills	Read more academic articles on reflective writing. Practice integrating personal experiences with theoretical frameworks.	Difficulty in balancing personal reflection and academic analysis.	Academic journals, university library	1.06.2025	Focus on increasing vocabulary and fluency in written reflection.
Enhance integration of academic sources in writing	Practice paraphrasing and summarizing academic sources. Include more references naturally in my reflections.	Difficulty in incorporating sources without disrupting the flow of reflection.	Online writing guides, tutor feedback, writing workshops	1.06.2025	Seek feedback from tutors to ensure correct referencing and smooth integration of sources.
Refine presentation skills	Apply the 10-20-30 rule (Kawasaki, 2020) for slide design. Practice speaking with pauses for better pacing.	Nervousness may affect pacing and delivery.	Presentation guidelines, online tutorials, peer feedback	24.03.2025	Focus on improving pacing and reducing text on slides to enhance audience engagement.
Improve audience engagement in presentations	Incorporate more visual aids, use simpler language, and rehearse the presentation multiple times.	Creating effective visuals that are clear and relevant.	PowerPoint tools, design websites, presentation workshops	24.03.2025	Aim to make slides more visually appealing and ensure better alignment with the spoken presentation.
Improve confidence in public speaking	Practice presentations in front of a mirror or record videos to self-evaluate body language and clarity.	Nerves may lead to rushed delivery or unclear speech.	Video recording tools, feedback from peers, presentation guides	Ongoing	Focus on building confidence through practice and reflection on past presentations.
Improve visual support during presentation	Simplify slides by reducing text and incorporating more visual elements. Rehearse delivering the content without overloading the slides.	Creating visually appealing yet simple slides.	PowerPoint, Canva, design resources	24.03.2025	Keep slides minimal and use them as tools to guide the audience rather than as a script.
Improve writing skills in English	Regularly write reflections in English and seek peer feedback on grammar and style. Use language learning apps to practice.	Grammar and vocabulary limitations may hinder expression.	Grammar checkers, language apps, peer feedback	Ongoing	Focus on building academic English proficiency through writing exercises.

Reference List

- Ahmed, M.A., 2024. Writing to Learn: Reflective Writing as an Educational Method for Saudi EFL Students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 14(6), pp. 1811-1817.
- Atkinson C., Mayer R., 2006. Five ways to reduce PowerPoint overload. Available at: https://nuwrite.northwestern.edu/communities/design/docs/design-presentation-and-poster-advice/atkinson_mayer_powerpoint_4_23_04.pdf (Accessed: 20 March 2025)
- Daibao, G., Mctigue, E.M., Matthews, S.D. and Zimmer, W., 2020. The Impact of Visual Displays on Learning Across the Disciplines: A Systematic Review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(3), pp. 627-656.
- Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives. *Management Review*, Vol. 70, Issue 11, pp. 35-36.
- Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Oxford Further Education Unit.
- Kawasaki, G. (2016) The 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint. Available at: https://guykawasaki.com/the_102030_rule/ (Accessed: 20 March 2025).
- Kumarasamy B. (2020) How to Control Pace in a Speech. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=032Hum9KNjw> (Accessed:20 March 2025)
- McCarthy, P. and Hatcher, C. (2002) *Presentation skills: The essential guide for students*. London. Sage Publications.
- Moon, J.A. (2019) *Reflection in learning and professional development: Theory and practice*. London. Routledge.
- Reynolds, G. (2020) *Presentation zen: Simple ideas on presentation design and delivery*. 2nd edn. Berkeley. New Riders.
- Jasuli, J., Hartatik, S. F. и Astuti, E. S. (2024) 'The Impact of Nonverbal Communication on Effective Public Speaking in English', *Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 7(2). DOI: 10.33503/journey.v7i2.834.
- Sari, F.M. and Wahyudin, A.Y. (2023) 'Reflective writing in EFL learning: Challenges and strategies', *Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 6(1), pp. 12-22. Available at: <https://ejurnal.uibu.ac.id/index.php/journey/article/view/834> (Accessed: 21 March 2025).
- Schön, D.A. (2016) *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. Abingdon, England; Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237473>.