

Reflective Writing

E - G U I D E



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Introduction

This easy-to-read guide has been created to help you to understand the basic concepts behind Reflective Practice and Reflective Writing.

This guide should *not* be referenced in your assignments. However, you can find a selection of handy academic resources on Reflective Practice and Reflective Writing in the Bibliography at the end of this guide.

Reflective Practice

In simple terms, Reflective Practice is the act of using *intentional* self-awareness to learn about yourself and the way you work through your professional experiences. This includes analysing the new information you gain from reflection to change, adapt and improve your skills, behaviours and decisions.

It's a cyclical process, meaning it never really finishes. Once you've analysed your experience and decided on what you're going to change, you will create a *new* action and experience, which means you now have something new to reflect on.

Reflective Writing: What it is

- Being intentionally self-aware about your behaviour, decisions and skills i.e. your internal and external processes.
- Questioning your experiences, feelings, thoughts and actions in your professional practice.
- Critically analysing and responding to those experiences in the written form.

Reflective Writing: What it isn't

- Only describing experiences or summarising what happened without any deeper analysis (see: **Reflective Models: Examples, pg.10-16** for models you can use in your reflective practice).
- Making an absolute, final judgment on something being completely bad or completely good – experiences have both good and bad in them and can change. Reflective practice is about self-awareness, honesty, and openness to possibilities.

Reflective Writing: Examples

Journal

Similar to a diary, a journal requires regular entries about events with the addition of your reactions, thoughts and feelings about what happened. The main difference a journal has from a diary is its *purpose*. It is specifically used as a link between your personal and professional development, challenging you to question your reactions, thoughts and feelings on a deeper level such as, ‘I reacted in xyz way, but why? What have I been through that influenced me to react in that way?’, and to use your answers to identify and understand **why** things you’re doing in your professional practice need to change, and to plan how to change them.

Reflective Writing: Examples, Cont.

Logbook

A logbook is a record of things you do in your professional practice. Entries in logbooks should be honest, accurate and as detailed as possible. They should also be written as soon as possible after the event to preserve an accurate record of the event and your actions/behaviours/feelings at the time. This can help you to improve your professional practice by enabling you to reflect on your past actions and decide on ways to change your behaviours, biases and actions in future situations.

Reflective Writing: Examples, Cont.

Reflective Essay

Reflective essays are often used in academic environments following the completion of practical assignments where learners practice a technique/method specific to their industry. The reflective essay is an opportunity for students to practice reflective writing by referring to specific theories and reflective models so that they may gain understanding behind the whys of their professional practices, as well as affording learners the value of feedback and guidance on their reflective processes from educators so they may improve their understanding and reflective practice for working in their respective industries e.g. in Education or Healthcare.

Reflective Models: Examples

Kolb (1984)

- **A 4-step reflective model**
- **1. Concrete Experience** – The act of having a new, active experience.
- **2. Reflective Observation** – Think about the experience, review its strengths and weaknesses. Reflect on what went well and what requires change, what helped the experience and what didn't.
- **3. Abstract Conceptualisation** – Find the links between what you did in the experience, what you knew then, what you know now, and what you don't know that you need to learn.

Reflective Models: Examples, Cont.

Kolb (1984), cont.

- **3. Abstract Conceptualisation, cont. -**
Get feedback and advice from colleagues as well as using academic resources such as research books and journal articles to learn about your understanding of the experience, your behaviour and your feelings. Using this research and your observations of the total situation, amend or redesign how you will deal with similar situations in the future and recognise how your feelings and ideas are changed by the knowledge you have acquired since the initial experience.
- **4. Active Experimentation –** Plan and try out what you have learned in similar situations to the original experience and experiment with how these changes shift the similar experience into a brand-new experience.
- **Repeat.**

Reflective Models: Examples, Cont.

Boud et al. (1985)

- **A 3-step reflective cycle, often presented as a triangle.**
- **1. Experience/s** – What happened, describe the events/ideas/feelings you experienced.
- **2. Reflection** – How you feel about what happened. Unpick the events/ideas/feelings you experienced and review.
- **3. Learning/Outcomes** – What you learned from what happened. What the impact was. Changes to behaviour.
- **Repeat.**

Gibbs (1988)

- **A 6-step reflective cycle.**
- **1. Description** – Describe the experience.
- **2. Feelings** – Explain your feelings and thoughts about what you experience.

Reflective Models: Examples, Cont.

Gibbs (1988), cont.

- **3. Evaluation** – Evaluate the good and the bad of the experience.
- **4. Analysis** – Analyse why the good happened and what made it good, analyse why the bad happened and what made it bad
- **5. Conclusion** – Reflect on what you have learned through the experience following your evaluation and analysis of the good and bad, explain what you could have done differently and how this could have changed or impacted the outcome/s
- **6. Action Plan** – Create an action plan for changes you can make if you know that you will have to repeat the experience OR explain how you would tackle similar issues and experiences if you came across them in the future.
- **Repeat.**

Reflective Models: Examples, Cont.

Atkins and Murphy (1993)

- **A 5-step reflective cycle.**
- **1. Awareness** – Being aware of the exact situations that impacted your emotions and why. Explain what you were feeling in the moment when it was happening. Explain what your feelings were immediately after it happened. Explain what your feelings are right now whilst you look back on what happened.
- **2. Describe** – Describe what happened in detail with context for the situation. Include the 4 Ws: What, When, Where and Why, i.e. What happened, When and Where did it happen, and Why did it happen. Move on to explain what you did in the situation and both the positive and negative impact of your actions in the moment.

Reflective Models: Examples, Cont.

Atkins and Murphy (1993), cont.

- **2. Describe, cont.** - Detail any other factors that may have influenced the situation, e.g. other people, environmental factors, sub-situations changing the context for others in the experience.
- **3. Analyse** – Analyse your assumptions before the situation happened. Explain what the reality of the situation was. Was there a difference between what happened and what you'd assumed about the situation beforehand? Compare the two and how they either support one another or how they contrast with one another.
- **4. Evaluate** – Evaluate the event and your feelings, you now know what happened and why it happened; you know how you felt, but why did you feel that way?

Reflective Models: Examples, Cont.

Atkins and Murphy (1993), cont.

- **4. Evaluate, cont.** - What have you learned because of all of this? Now that you know these things about the event in its context and about yourself in how and why you acted in the way you did, evaluate how you can use this knowledge in similar experiences.
- **5. Identify** – Combine everything you’ve learned from the previous 4 stages of reflection. Identify what you have learned from these reflections, and how you are going to use these reflections in similar situations in the future, e.g. behaving the same way, changing how you act, being open to change without assumptions etc.
- **Repeat.**

Reflective Questions to Ask Yourself

- What happened in this experience? Why did it happen that way?
- What impact did the experience have on me, personally? On my professional practice? On others who also experienced the same event?
- How did I react to the experience? Why?
- What has influenced my reaction/s and feelings to the experience? Is this influencing other areas of my personal and/or professional practice?
- How did I perceive others' behaviours/actions in this experience? Why did I perceive them that way?
- What went well/what didn't go well? Why could this be?
- Did my actions/behaviours/feelings influence how the experience impacted others?
- Do I need to undertake additional CPD training to address a specific issue?
- If I got to have this experience again, what would I change and why?
- What specific actions can I plan to make this experience a better one in future for: a) me, b) the stakeholders i.e. customers, patients, investors etc.?

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