Most reflective writing tasks at university encourage you to draw links between your studies and your experiences. Reflective writing should include analysis as well as description. The purpose of reflective writing is to:

- stimulate self-awareness;
- develop a deeper understanding of your experiences and knowledge;
- examine new perspectives, and
- inform future practice.

The content and format of reflective writing tasks vary, so check your subject outline and course materials for specific requirements.

What is reflection?

Reflection is the process of actively thinking about a topic or issue, your personal beliefs, practices, experiences, emotions, actions, issues, motivations, processes and outcomes.

This reflective process can determine the advantages and disadvantages of a particular approach, identify personal and professional learning, and inform future action and behaviour. Reflection should be explicit, deliberate, focused, and relate to personal and professional growth and development.

Many frameworks can be used to guide the process of critical reflection. Three well-known models are given below. Choose or adapt a model that best suits you and your specific task.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle is a widely used framework for reflecting on and learning from experiences. It comprises six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Description

Feelings

Evaluation

Analysis

Conclusion

Action Plan

(Gibbs, 1988)
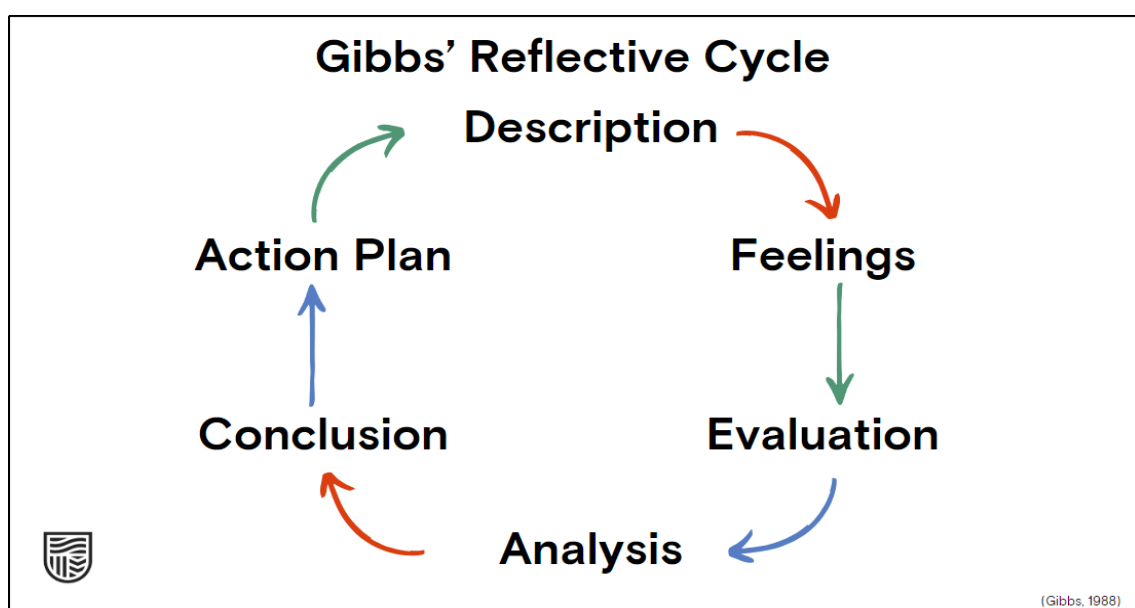
Example

Here's an example of how you could use Gibbs' Reflective Cycle to reflect on a recent experience:

Description

Last week, a colleague was critical of my idea during a team meeting. We were discussing a project, and my colleague disagreed with my approach. I felt frustrated because I thought my idea was relevant and impactful and would reduce the project time.

Feelings

At the time, I felt angry and defensive. I felt like my colleague was attacking my work and frustrating my approach. In addition, I felt angry about the comments as I had put a lot of effort into presenting my idea.

Evaluation

Looking back on the situation, I realise I may have been too defensive. I did not listen to my colleague's ideas or try to understand their perspective. When I look back on the meeting, I find that some input was designed to help improve my idea, and some input pointed out noticeable flaws. However, instead of listening calmly, I immediately assumed that my idea was being attacked, and when it was challenged, I became upset.

Analysis

Reflecting on this experience, I could have handled the situation better. Instead of getting defensive, as Grant et al. (2018) mention, I could have asked my colleague to explain their reasoning and listened to their ideas. I should have remained calm. Then, I could have tried to find common ground or compromise on a solution (pp. 704–708).
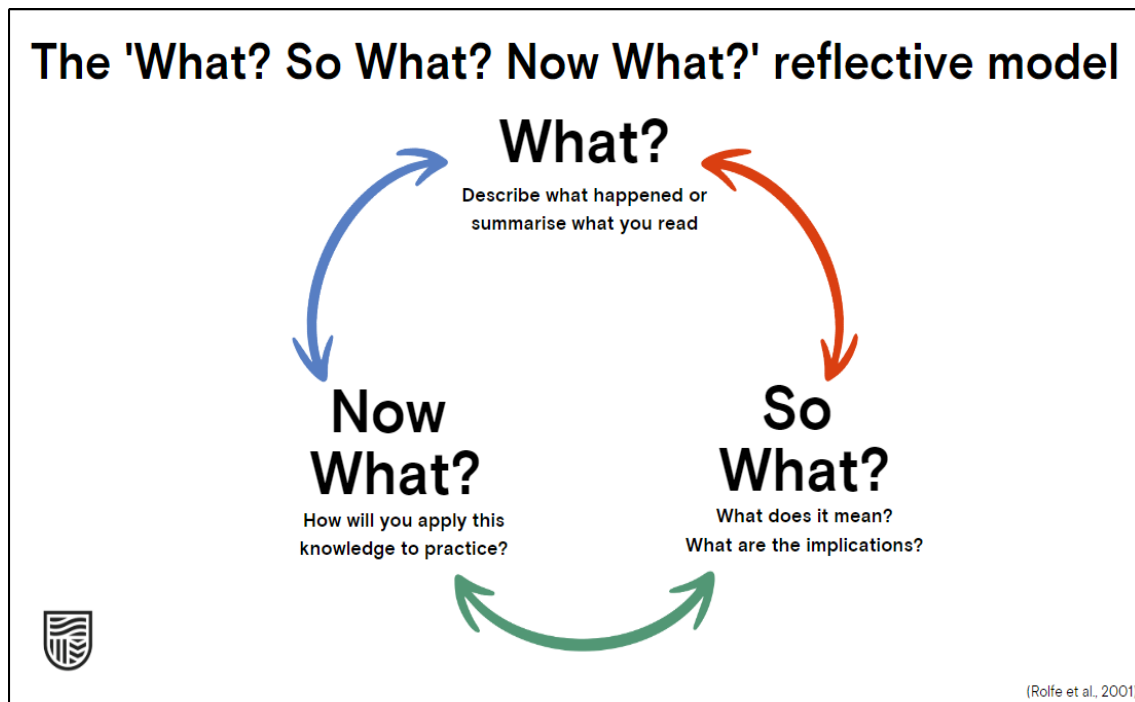
Conclusion

Overall, I learned that listening to other people's ideas and perspectives is essential, even if they differ from mine. A team only works when members are willing to listen and communicate, whereas becoming emotional and taking a subjective approach can make a situation worse (Harris & Sherblom, 2018).

Action Plan

In the future, I plan to be more mindful of my defensive tendencies regarding my ideas and try to stay open to other people's critiques. I will also try to ask questions and understand other people's perspectives before assuming my idea is the best one.

What? So what? Now what??

The 'What? So What? Now What?' reflective model

What?
Describe what happened or summarise what you read

So What?
What does it mean?
What are the implications?

Now What?
How will you apply this knowledge to practice?

(Rolfe et al., 2001)

What happened? (Descriptive)

- Describe the context
- Record observations
- Explain feelings and thoughts

So what? (Reflective)

- Evaluate observations, thoughts, and feelings
- Identify themes
- Interpet events in relation to theories, concepts, and readings
- Include analysis, insights, and changes of perspective

Now what? (Implementation)

- Demonstrate application of learning
- Explain how the reflection process will inform future practice

Example

*Topic: The Impact of Mindfulness Meditation.*

What:

Mindfulness meditation (MM) is a practice that involves paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental and accepting way. It has gained popularity in recent years due to its numerous benefits for mental and physical health (Wielgosz et al., 2019). I have been practising MM in the lead-up to exams to see how it impacts my academic performance.

So What:

Numerous studies have shown that regular mindfulness meditation can help reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain. Green and Kinchen (2021) state MM can improve sleep quality, cognitive function, and emotional regulation. Mindfulness meditation has even produced changes in brain structure and function, such as increased grey matter density in brain regions associated with learning, memory, and emotional regulation (Feruglio et al., 2021). Wielgosz et al. (2019) claim that MM is important in regulating health and psychological performance in academic tasks, such as studying for exams. On the other hand, there are those, such as Gal et al. (2021), whose research has found that MM has differing levels of impact on people, with some showing no benefit.

Now What:

During my research and practice, I have formed an interest in continuing to practise MM as I feel it benefits me. There are several ways for me to continue. One option is to try a guided meditation app, such as Headspace or Calm. These apps offer a variety of guided meditations for different purposes, such as reducing stress, improving sleep, or increasing focus. Another option is to attend a mindfulness meditation class or workshop in person or online. Finally, I will aim in both my professional life and academic studies to set aside a few minutes each day to sit in a quiet place and focus on my breath. With practice, I hope to find that MM becomes an integral part of a daily routine, providing numerous mental and physical health benefits.

The DIEP model

The D-I-E-P model

Describe ⟶ Interpret ⟶ Evaluate ⟶ Plan

(Boud et al., 1985)
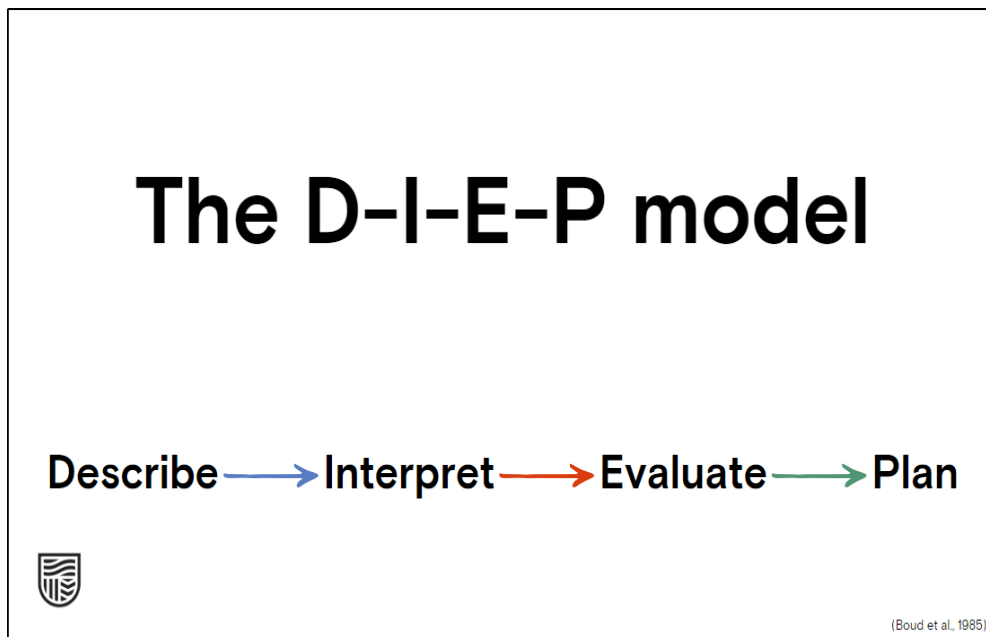
The DIEP strategy

The four steps in this approach are describe, interpret, evaluate, and plan.

Watch our video on the DIEP method of reflection

Describe objectively what happened

Answer the question: "What did I

- do,
- read,
- see,
- hear, etc?

Interpret the events

Consider why events happened in the way they did.

Explain:

- what you saw and heard,
- your new insights,
- your connections with other learning,
- your feelings, and
- your hypotheses and/or conclusions.

Answer the question: "What might this mean?"

Evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the experience

Make judgements that are clearly connected to observations you have made.

Answer the questions:

- What is my opinion about this experience?
- What is the value of this experience?
- Why do I think this?

P *Plan how this information will be useful to you*

Consider in what ways this learning experience might serve you in your:

- course,
- program,
- future career, and
- life generally.

Answer the question: "How will I transfer or apply my new knowledge and insights in the future?"

DIEP strategy for writing a reflection

Use the DIEP model to assist you to:

- gain insight into your own learning and performance,
- interpret and evaluate key aspects of your experience or learning,
- connect your experiences and ideas to theories, concepts and readings,
- identify and analyse themes or focus areas, and
- inform future practice.

Example

Clearly communicating evidence-based teaching practice develops the trust and support of students' parents. During my primary school teaching placement, a parent demanded that his child's guided reading level be increased.

My supervising teacher clearly explained her reasons for denying this request by describing her reading program, its processes, and the evidence supporting it.My supervising teacher uses *PM Benchmarks Reading Assessment Resources* (Smith et al., 2008) to access each student's current instructional reading level. All students should receive reading instruction using texts at their instructional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012) in addition to other components of a reading program (e.g., modelled reading, silent reading etc.). "We know that a "just-right" text for instructional purposes is one where the reader can read 90—95% of the words easily [and this] is considered the child's instructional level" (Clay, 1991 as cited in Rog & Burton, 2002, p. 348). Additionally, children need to demonstrate comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 270; Smith et al., 2008). These levels are re-assessed regularly because reading assessment is "dynamic-temporary, not static" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 275). When my supervising teacher explained this to the parent, he expressed an understanding of and gratitude for my supervising teacher's clear explanation.

My observation of this parent/teacher interview demonstrated, not only the importance of evidence-based practices but also the professional credibility that is gained when evidence-based teaching practices are clearly communicated. This was apparent when the initially abrasive approach of the child's parent softened as the teacher explained her reading program and the evidence underpinning her practice. Reflecting on this experience encouraged me to think about how I will ensure my own teaching practices are evidence-based and explicit. I decided to try using learning intentions (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, n.d.) to assist me to develop clear learning goals (Fisher et al., 2017, Figure 1.1). I also realised I need to improve the way I communicate in a professional context, so I will join the Primary English Teaching Association Australia and attend meetings to explore and discuss effective literacy practices.

Can you identify the stages of **Describe, Interpret, Evaluate** *and* **Plan** *in this reflection? Check out our interactive solution on the Academic Skills I2 site.*

Why do we reflect?

Reflection brings together theory and practice. It enables professionals to systematically find effective, practical ways of applying theoretical knowledge in the contexts in which they work.

✓ Top tip: reflection can and should inform future action and is essential to both personal and professional development.

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