



Student SkillPack

**SUE
DREW
and
ROSIE
BINGHAM**

*Teaching and Learning Institute
Sheffield Hallam University*

Gower

Reflecting On Your Experience

STARTER LEVEL



REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE Starter Level

by Sue Drew and Rosie Bingham

CONTENTS

- 1 What is reflection?
- 2 Why do courses ask you to reflect, evaluate, review, self-assess?
- 3 What is required?
- 4 What do you currently do?
- 5 Getting started. Identify what to reflect on
- 6 Strategies to help reflection: thinking things through
- 7 Strategies to help reflection: feedback
- 8 Strategies to help reflection: a process
- 9 Action planning to improve your reflection
- 10 References and bibliography

Being able to reflect is essential to learning. It is not just common sense, it is more than that, it is a skill you can improve.

Reflection improves your learning and your performance on your course, by helping you identify what you do well (and how to make the most of it) and what to improve.

Some people find it easy to think about what they have done, said, or thought, while others find this uncomfortable or difficult. This SkillPack should help both. It aims to:

- explain why reflection is so important, and why courses ask you to do it
- help you get better grades or marks for assessed work requiring reflection
- help you develop ways of reflecting on your experiences.

We suggest you use this SkillPack:

- when a tutor asks you to reflect on something, evaluate your actions as part of course work, or self-assess
- to reflect on something personally important to you on the course or in a course related activity (eg a *work placement*).

If you like to reflect in different ways, you could use the margins to note what would work better for you. The SkillPack focuses on reflection on the course, but you could also use it, if you wish, to think about personal matters.



NOTES

When you have completed it, you should be able to:

Agree targets

- identify main features and purposes of reflection
- identify your current practice in reflecting
- identify and select possible strategies to reflect.

Use your plan

- use your reflection strategies, monitoring and revising them as needed
- seek and use feedback and support, as part of reflecting on an experience
- use feedback and support to improve reflection skills
- identify appropriate evidence for claims about your performance.

Review progress and achievements

- when required, produce a summary of the results of your reflection, with appropriate evidence
- review your reflection process, and identify any factors influencing performance
- identify ways of improving in the future.

(Based on QCA Key Skill specifications, QCA 2000)

1 What is reflection?

'Reflection', here, means looking back on an experience and making sense of it to identify what to do in the future. It helps you repeat what worked and learn from mistakes. Most of us think about experiences afterwards. We may re-live something enjoyable or be concerned about something ('Our team played well today because...'; 'I wish I hadn't said...'). We may reflect soon afterwards or later, when something triggers a memory.

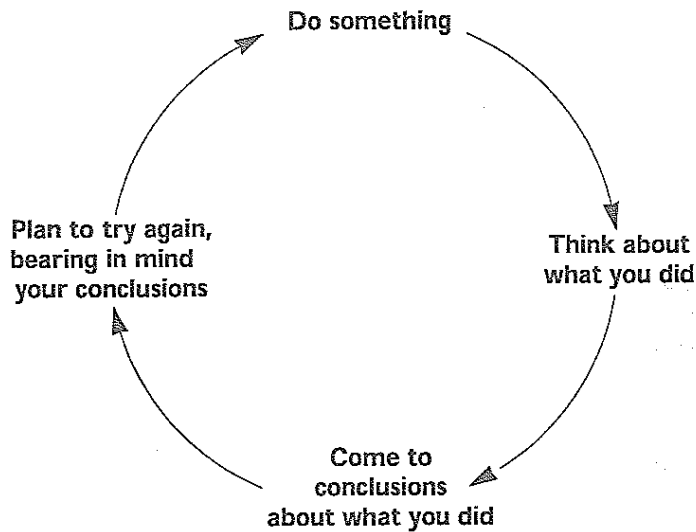
Reflection is a skill needed at work. Professionals need to know they are doing a good job. It is encouraged via appraisal schemes, and by professional bodies' Continuing Professional Development schemes.

Taking action as a result of reflection assumes you are responsible for your learning, and that you can do things differently, that 'old dogs' can learn 'new tricks'.

2 Why do courses ask you to reflect, evaluate, review, self-assess?

Reflection helps you:

- reinforce your learning
- learn concepts and principles
- identify, while in a situation, the best action to take.



(derived from Kolb 1984)

Some learning theory (Gagne 1985, Kelly as described in Bannister and Fransella 1971, Kolb 1984) suggests that we sort information, feelings and sensations into categories. When we meet new situations which seem to fit the same categories we recall our original thoughts and feelings, eg *one recall method is to associate one thought with another, such as remembering somebody's name by remembering where you met.*

Reflecting helps to make sense of an experience and 'categorise' it so that learning from it can be used again. Without it we may do things the same old way, not thinking what works, what doesn't and what to do differently (*'Why do I keep doing that!?'*).

Reflecting helps you understand concepts and principles ('deep learning') as well as knowing facts ('surface learning' - Gibbs 1992) (eg *reflecting on the practical experience of project work or a placement can help in understanding theory*).

Being effective is not just repeating what you did in another situation - each situation must be weighed up to see what is appropriate. Schon (1987) suggests that if you make sense of something afterwards ('reflection on action'), you are more likely to be able to work out what to do whilst in a situation, to think on your feet ('reflection in action').

3 What is required?

3.1 What sort of reflective work will you meet on your course?

You may be asked to reflect on, review, evaluate or assess what you have done. The following are strategies used by courses to help you reflect. If they are assessed, check what will get a good grade - but also use them to help you learn and improve.

NOTES



5 Getting started. Identify what to reflect on

For Sections 6, 7 and 8 below it will help to have in mind an experience to reflect on, and to complete the boxes in relation to it.

It may help to use a simple experience to reflect on (eg *a small project, a group meeting, an essay/report/lab session, a work activity*). You can then work through the sections again reflecting on something more complex (eg *a large project, a term/semester*).

To identify an experience to reflect on for the rest of this section, consider:

- are you pleased interested, curious, excited about something which has happened?
- do you feel uncomfortable or bad about something?
- do others seem to do things differently in a situation?
- what does your lecturer/tutor think is important for you to reflect on? If in doubt, ask.
- if your reflection is assessed, what will they be looking for? If in doubt ask.
- who will see your reflection, what is appropriate for them/what is private to you?
- does a 'critical incident' stand out (eg *something that changed things/had a big impact on you*)?



What are you going to reflect on while using this SkillPack?
<p style="text-align: center; color: lightgrey; opacity: 0.5;"> This area is intentionally left blank for students to write their reflections. </p>

6 Strategies to help reflection: thinking things through

The following suggest ways to think about the issue you want to reflect on. This chapter is for all students in all subject areas – keep an open mind on the ideas, even if they seem strange (or obvious) to you on your course. Which could you try?

Talk to somebody...

- explaining it gets it clearer in your own mind
- hearing yourself speak puts things into perspective
- the person might have useful questions, similar experiences, new ways of looking at it, be reassuring
- ask others involved in the same situation what they felt/thought.

NOTES



REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE - Starter Level

Write, draw...

- write about it; re-reading it later helps you see it as somebody else might
- write a letter (you don't have to send it), a play, a newspaper report, a poem
- make a drawing, picture, diagram
- make lists of pros/cons, likes/dislikes
- if you can't sleep, get up and write it down to get it off your mind
- writing/drawing makes you feel you've done something and can reduce anxiety or anger.

Think about it on your own...

- give yourself time and space... on the bus, walking, in the bath....

Look at it in new ways

- replay it as it happened (or repeat it as you read, heard or saw it)
- to give new insights – read books/poems/newspapers, look at pictures/films/TV
- think about what might have been....what you wish had happened
- think of what else you could have done, however unusual or uncharacteristic of you
- think about it in the opposite way from how you normally would (eg *'I liked...'* instead of *'I didn't like...'*)
- describe it as somebody else might
- identify your feelings about it (what was your gut reaction?)
- ask yourself questions (eg *why do I feel angry/upset?*)
- identify the main or crucial aspects of the situation.



NOTES

What other ways do you use (or do your friends use – you could compare notes)?

Which of the suggestions could you try to use for the issue you identified in 5 above?



7 Strategies to help reflection: feedback

7.1 Seeking feedback from others

Verbal or written feedback from others is very helpful and gives useful evidence of your skills.

Who could you get feedback from? You could jot in the right-hand column names and notes on what they could give you feedback about.



Suggestions	Your notes
<p>For course activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tutors other students technicians other specialists (eg <i>library/learning centre, computing support staff</i>) others (who?) 	
<p>If you are in employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> your boss/supervisor colleagues at your level colleagues above/below your level clients/customers others (who?) 	
<p>Other areas of your life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> family members friends people in eg <i>sporting or social clubs</i> others (who?) 	

NOTES

How can you get helpful feedback and encourage people to give it to you again?

- Explain why feedback is important and what will help you
- Ask for feedback as soon after the event as possible
- Ask specific questions (eg not 'what did you think of it' but 'could you understand what I wrote?') – this gives more specific information to act on
- Listen without interrupting or defending
- Check you have understood
- Make it easy for them – don't take up too much time
- Thank them and accept it without arguing or disputing.

7.2 Recording feedback

Are you aware of and do you take notice of feedback:

- from tutors? Do you understand it (if not, ask them to explain it)?
- from other students (eg about how they do things differently from you)?
- others such as library/learning centre or computing support staff or technicians?

Do you make a note of feedback to help you in the future? You could:

- keep a diary
- keep tutor feedback sheets together in a folder – to help you note any changes
- use an action plan to help you improve (see Section 9)
- use the following format – practise using it for some feedback you recently had.

NOTES

Feedback received	Key points to consider	Actions to take



NOTES

Feedback points I disagree with	Evidence

7.4 Giving feedback

If you are asked for feedback from somebody else:

- give it as soon after the event as possible
- be specific (not *'You are OK in meetings'* but *'When you chaired you kept to the agenda but you overran a bit on time'*). This tells them what to do about it.
- give feedback on things they can do something about (eg *they may not be able to alter how they speak*)
- avoid judgement words (eg *'rubbish'*)
- if you point out something negative make sure you also include positives
- avoid generalised personal comments (eg *'You are a pain.'* What can they do with this? They don't know why and it will just upset them)
- calmly keep to the point if the other person is defensive (see the 'broken record technique' in the Starter Level SkillPack 'Negotiating and Assertiveness')
- check they have understood and that you have been specific enough for them.

8 Strategies to help reflection: a process

In this section it will help to have in mind something you want to reflect on (see 5 above) and to complete the boxes in relation to it.

This section questions: what happened; how you felt; how others reacted; what was good/did you achieve; what needed improvement/did you not achieve; what choices you made and what effect they had; what will you do in the future.

If any of the questions don't apply to your issue change them, pass over them, or add others which do apply (eg *for a technical issue you may need technical questions*).

Complete the boxes in an order that makes sense to you (not necessarily in the order given). If the process seems too structured, what would work better for you? Each box gives an example of a student on a group project. This is not intended to limit your thinking, the situation you are thinking of could be completely different.



REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE - Starter Level

8.1 What happened

Who did/said what, what did you do/read/see/hear? In what order did things happen? What was the scale of it (eg: *how much work, time taken; costs*)? What were the circumstances (eg: *at home; in class; at work; lots of people around*)? What were you responsible for? What evidence (proof) do you have for what happened?



Your record
Example. *Group project. Used the library to get information for my part. Library very busy. Found some information, couldn't find rest immediately (computers all being used). Got information in end but after deadline.*

[Handwritten student response for section 8.1]

8.2 How did you feel?

What was your initial gut reaction, what does this tell you? Did your feelings change, how, why, what does this tell you? What evidence (proof) do you have for how you felt?



Your record
Example. *Panicked at first. Worried about what others in group would say about me missing the deadline. Once completed it felt better. Pleased. Want to pull my weight.*

[Handwritten student response for section 8.2]

NOTES



NOTES

8.3 How did others react?

Is what other people thought or how they reacted important/relevant? Did they react like you or differently: how? Who had which reactions, and what does this tell you? How did their reactions affect you? What evidence (proof) do you have for how others reacted?



Your record

Example. One group member wasn't bothered (missed deadline too). Another (normally gets very high marks) was fed up. Others probably fed up too. Once I'd done it they were relieved and pleased with my work. I felt bad and want to avoid that in future.

8.4 Identifying the positives

What pleased, interested or was important to you? What went well, how, why? What/who was helpful? What skills/qualities/abilities did you use? What evidence (proof) do you have for the positives?



Your record

Example. Found most of the articles in the end. Used computerised data bases. Took good notes. Tidied up notes at home and filed them. Produced a summary for the group project report, and my bit got a good mark.

8.5 Identifying negatives, or things which could have gone better

What made you unhappy? What didn't go well, didn't you achieve/do? What difficulties were there, who/what was unhelpful? Why? What needs improvement? What evidence (proof) do you have for the negatives?



Your record

Example. Books out on loan. Wasted time in library chatting. Had to break off to go to bank. Didn't start work early enough or allow for others using the information or getting on computers.

8.6 What choices did you make and what effect did they have?

What choices did you make in this situation? What effect did they have? What evidence (proof) do you have for your choices and their effects?



Your record

Example. Chose to start work too late – created problems for me and the group. Chose to use computerised databases – found lots of information.

NOTES

NOTES

8.7 What have you learnt for the future?

What you have learnt from the experience, what are the main points? What similarities or differences are there between this and other experiences? What in the future might be the same/different? What you would do next time?

Note. The other SkillPacks in this series in this book can help put your actions into practice.



Your record

Example. Carry on with current system for organising notes. Start work earlier next time. Allow longer to do things/build in leeway. Plan at start of each week so can do jobs like going to bank at best time. Sit in library away from people I know.

9 Action planning to improve your reflection

This section is about your skills in reflecting.

What do you need to do to improve your reflection, both to get good grades for reflective work and to improve your learning? It will help to look back over the SkillPack.



What reflection strategies have you tried?	How well did they work? What influenced or affected this?
	<p><i>Handwritten notes in the right column:</i></p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p>



REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE - Starter Level



NOTES

What do you need to improve in your reflection?	What action can you take to improve this (include help from others)	By (deadline)
<p>1. I need to improve my writing skills, especially my grammar and punctuation. I often make mistakes when I write, and my sentences are often awkward and hard to read.</p> <p>2. I need to improve my research skills. I often struggle to find relevant information for my assignments, and I don't know how to evaluate the sources I find.</p> <p>3. I need to improve my time management skills. I often procrastinate and don't start my assignments until the last minute, which makes me very stressed.</p>	<p>1. I will take a writing course to improve my grammar and punctuation. I will also ask my teacher for feedback on my writing.</p> <p>2. I will use online research tools like Google Scholar and JSTOR to find relevant information. I will also ask my teacher for help in evaluating sources.</p> <p>3. I will create a study schedule and stick to it. I will also ask my teacher for help in managing my time.</p>	<p>1. By the end of the semester.</p> <p>2. By the end of the semester.</p> <p>3. By the end of the semester.</p>

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Jo Mackett, Combined Studies student at Sheffield Hallam University, who evaluated an earlier draft (upon which this chapter is based) as part of a final year independent study unit (1996-7).

NOTES

10 References and bibliography

- Bannister, D. and Fransella, F. (1971), *Inquiring Man*, Penguin
- Bingham, R. and Drew, S. (1999), *Key Work Skills*, Gower
- Gibbs, G. (1992), *Improving the Quality of Student Learning*, Technical and Educational Services Limited
- Kolb, D.A. (1984), *Experiential Learning*, Prentice-Hall
- Moon, J.A. (1999), *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice*, Kogan Page
- Pettigrew, M. and Elliott, D. (1997), *Student IT Skills*, Gower
- Schon, D. A. (1987), *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey Bass

10.1 Student skills product list

Having worked through this SkillPack you might like to know that similar structured, straightforward guidance is also available on the following topics:

- Identifying Strengths and Improving Skills
- Organising Yourself and Your Time
- Note Taking
- Gathering and Using Information
- Critical Analysis
- Essay Writing
- Report Writing
- Oral Presentation
- Visual Communication
- Solving Problems
- Group Work
- Seminars, Group Tutorials and Meetings
- Negotiating and Assertiveness
- Coping with Pressure
- Revising and Examination Techniques
- Improving Your Learning
- Action Planning

The Student Skills Guide Second Edition

All of the SkillPacks listed above are gathered together and are available as a paperback workbook (0 566 08430 9).

Published by Gower Publishing Limited,

