

Reflective Practice for Careers Development



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Reflective practice: what is it?

Reflecting on our experiences is natural – any time you have wondered why something happened, or why someone reacted in a certain way you will have been reflecting.

'Reflective practice' is a structured way of using reflection. It involves thinking about your experiences in a critical and reflective way in order to learn from things that happen and develop knowledge, attitudes or behaviour which provide more effective ways of working in the future.

There are four main stages in reflective practice:

- 1) You have an experience, this may be a difficult or uncomfortable experience or a very positive one.
- 2) You reflect on the experience by thinking about what happened, how you felt, how you behaved, and the outcomes.
- 3) You understand the experience differently and come up with some ideas for how you might do things differently in the future.
- 4) The next time you are in a similar situation you experiment with acting or reacting differently.

(adapted from Kolb and Fry, 1975)

Exercise

Can you identify a time when you have reflected on your experiences and have used your reflections to adapt your behaviour?

Hint: sometimes it is easiest to spot the impact of reflection on practical activities or when you have been learning a new skill. An example might be if you have baked a cake but you have burnt it, reflecting on this experience you might decide that next time it might be a good idea to check oven temperatures and timings before putting the cake in the oven.



Reflective practice in the workplace

Reflecting on workplace experiences can be very important in professional development. By thinking about what went well or didn't go so well, we can identify our strengths and weaknesses and areas of development.

For this reason reflective practice is often considered to be an essential component of successful work experience. It is also very important for people who are learning new professional roles – such as new managers or new teachers. In some careers reflective practice is an on-going requirement of professional development (for example counselling).

Reflective practice in career development

Reflecting on our experiences (both in the workplace, and elsewhere) can also help us to develop our career ideas. This is because reflection will help us to understand what our strengths, weaknesses, values and interests are, and through this we may be able to decide what kinds of roles might suit us best in the future.

Reflective practice will also help us to critically evaluate the working environments we find ourselves in, helping us to understand the realities of different workplaces and roles. This can help us to understand how we might 'fit' within different workplaces, and the opportunities that there may be within different careers.

Reflective practice: how do you do it?

You may reflect by:

- 1) Quietly thinking over things on your own.
- 2) Discussing your experiences with another person.
- 3) Writing about your experiences.

Writing about your experiences can be a very effective method as it enables you to keep your reflections and to track your progress. Keeping a diary of your experience is highly recommended for students on work placement and for trainee teachers, managers, social workers etc. In order to keep a reflective diary you need to employ the skill of 'reflective writing'.

Reflection in the workplace - an example:

"I had to give a presentation to my team. I was nervous so I wrote myself a script. However it was awkward reading off my script because I spent the whole time looking at the paper rather than at my team. Next time I will try using prompt cards rather than writing a whole script"



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Reflective Writing

Reflective writing is a little different to normal academic writing. The main difference is that it is very focused on yourself, your experiences, your behaviour and your feelings, and is written in the first person (i.e. using lots of 'I's – I saw, I did, I felt) rather than the third person. Reflective writing also tends to work best if you focus your reflections on a particular experience (e.g. doing a particular presentation, rather than 'doing presentations' in general).

Commonly reflective writing on a particular experience will follow a number of stages:

- 1) Description: what happened?
- 2) Feelings: what were you thinking and feeling?
- 3) Evaluation: what was good and bad about the experience?
- 4) Analysis: what sense can you make of the experience?
- 5) Conclusion: what else could you have done?
- 6) Action Plan: if a similar situation arose again what would you do?

(Adapted from Gibbs, 1988)

Exercise

Think of a recent experience where you feel like you either did very well or where you feel you didn't do as well as you could have done.

Using the stages of reflective writing given above write about your experience - there is a template given on the worksheet at the end of this advice sheet for you to use.

Further Help and Resources

Information on this and other careers and employability topics can be found on the UHI Careers and Employability Centre website: www.uhi.ac.uk/careers. You can also follow the centre on Facebook: www.facebook.com/UHICareers, and on Twitter: twitter.com/UHICareers

Free confidential advice is available to all students on an HNC course or above via telephone, videoconference or email. Contact our advisers by clicking on 'speak to an adviser' on our website. This service is also available to graduates within two years of graduating from an HNC course or higher.



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Worksheet: Reflective Writing

Before completing this worksheet you may wish to look at the completed example on the next page.

1. **Description:** what happened?
2. **Feelings:** what you were thinking and feeling?
3. **Evaluation:** what was good and bad about the experience?
4. **Analysis:** what sense can you make of the experience?
5. **Conclusion:** what else could you have done?
6. **Action Plan:** if a similar situation arose again what would you do?



Worksheet: Reflective Writing (Example)

1. Description: what happened?

We had been given an exercise by our tutor to create a presentation in a group. My group included someone who immediately took charge and started to allocate everyone a role. I was given the role of researching and collecting pictures for our presentation.

2. Feelings: what you were thinking and feeling?

I was really annoyed because I felt like I'd been given a really boring job and I didn't have much opportunity to contribute to the actual content of the presentation. I thought that with my existing knowledge in the subject I would have been better suited to helping with the research or the writing of the presentation rather than just collecting pictures.

3. Evaluation: what was good and bad about the experience?

What was bad about the experience was that I felt that I was given a task that I didn't particularly want, and that may not have been the best use of my skills. However, in retrospect it was probably good to split up the tasks between the group, and to give everyone individual tasks – otherwise we might have all tried to do the same things and duplicated our efforts.

4. Analysis: what sense can you make of the experience?

Although it was good to split the tasks between the group, I think my main frustration was that I didn't feel like I had any control over how the tasks were divided up because we didn't really discuss how tasks were allocated. This reminds me of what we have been learning about in my course in terms of the importance of communication in teams. If I had been more able to communicate my ideas then I would have felt happier with the outcome (even if the outcome had been the same).

5. Conclusion: what else could you have done?

When my classmate took control, I could have spoken up and been more assertive. I could have said that I thought it was a good idea to divide the group into roles, but that we could maybe start by working out what roles we needed and then discussed between us who would be best suited to what role.

6. Action Plan: if a similar situation arose again what would you do?

If this kind of situation happens again I will speak up. I may not be able to change what happens, but I think I would find it less frustrating if I were at least able to offer my ideas.