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EXTENDED PROJECT

Teacher's Guide

GUIDE 4: EVALUATION AND CRITICAL THINKING

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Documenting the learning journey: Reflective Journals

Much importance is put on the process and experiences that students go through during the extended project, and it is vital that there is evidence of the planning, problem solving, decision making and critical reflection which goes into the management of the project.

The introduction of genuine reflective writing as part of the Extended Project will not only produce evidence of autonomous learning for assessment, but also build essential skills for higher education.

Why is it Important?

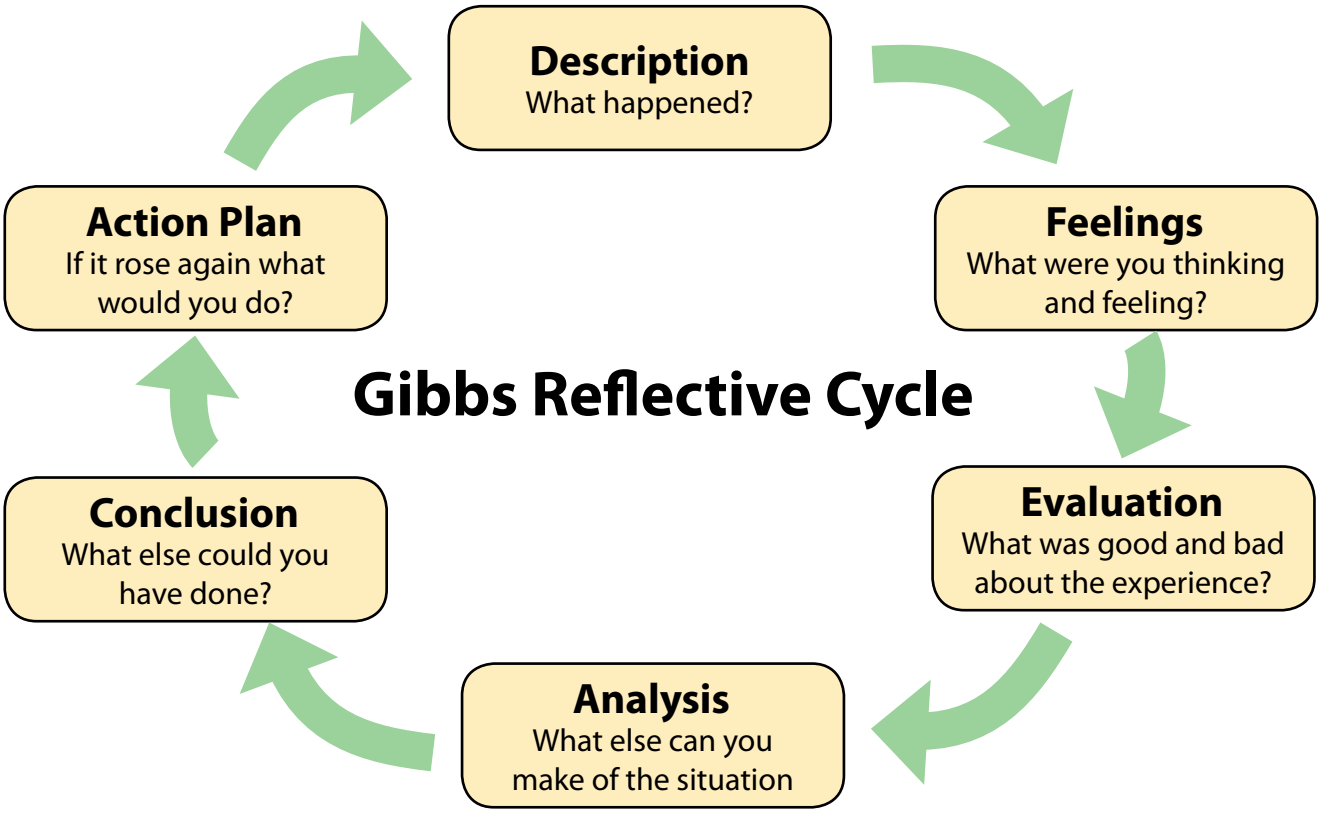
- Reflective writing allows the student to stand back and assess work in a more detached light.
- Examining both positive and negative experiences can help the learner understand why they tend to approach things in certain ways and avoid others.
- Solving problems can become easier if students regularly reflect upon their own work.
- Reflective writing allows tutors to see how students have developed their practice and ideas.
- Reflection is an essential skill for future working life.

Subjects for reflection:

Evaluation can and should be done at all stages of the project: from initial research and ideas generation to the presentation of your final product.

For example:

- How the topic/title was decided
- The process of research: including evaluating the validity of each source
- How new skills were developed
- Experiences of working in a group
- What was learned from working on the final product.
- Strengths and areas for improvement of work in progress.
- Strengths and weaknesses of final product.



What format should it take?

Students should choose the format of their reflective journal. It could be a diary, sketchbook, notebook, online sound recordings or blog.

The first priority is that it is easy for students to reflect. The reflective journal should be thought of like a journey; progress is not often made in a straight line, and the learning experiences are the most important thing to capture.

Useful questions:

- What happened? This is a description of events, experiences or the working process.
- What went well, or was good about this experience?
- What did the student learn from this? (new techniques, skills, abilities)
- What did not go well? It is vital that students learn to criticize their own work rigorously.
- What action could be taken to change the situation and why? Approach, technique, source help, etc.
- Is there a general principle here that the student could learn from in future?
- If not, what could they try next and why?

When evaluating the final product:

- If the student has been reflecting regularly, they should be able to:
- **Look** – through the entries in their journal
- **Select** – the comments relevant to their final piece
- **Deepen** – their initial thoughts, reflecting on the experiences that they have had and how their approaches and skills have developed during the course of the project.

Common problems with reflective writing:

- Writing is too descriptive and doesn't analyse what has been learned and what could be done differently in future.
- Written at the last minute and has not been used as an on-going journal.
- Too self-congratulatory, no discussion of what has not gone well
- When things have gone wrong, student does not take ownership of the problem, and sees others as being responsible.

Introducing the Reflective Journal:

Giving students examples of past students' reflective writing to critique is always helpful, as is encouraging students to consider the language and vocabulary and questions that they might use to write reflectively.

At the end of the project:

An in-depth final evaluation must be produced, which should draw on the on-going evaluation/reflection in the journal. This should cover all aspects of the project, from project management to research and realisation. This will form the core of the final presentation.

Summary of Guide Four

- Start a reflective journal immediately
- Format is flexible: blog, book, video diary
- Look at past examples of student reflective writing
- Produce on-going evaluations during the project
- Write an in-depth final evaluation of the project, covering all aspects
- Most important questions to answer in an evaluation:
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- What could have been improved?
- What could be learned for future work?

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