

How to succeed@reflective thinking and writing

This leaflet is a summary of the online tutorial 'how to succeed@reflective thinking and writing'. It explains what is reflective thinking, how to think reflectively and how to write reflectively.

Remember that you can get lots of study tips and resources from succeed@solent on myCourse.

What is reflective thinking?

Reflection - reflective thinking and writing - is an important part of university life and work. The ability to reflect on your experience and knowledge, and use that to make improvements, is a key part of university-level thinking and work.

To think and write reflectively you have to:

- Experience something
- Think about what happened
- Learn from the experience

You think reflectively all the time, you probably just don't realise you're doing it. Have you ever missed the bus and then thought 'next time I'll leave the house 5 minutes earlier'? It's an example of you being reflective, you thought about an experience and decided to learn from it and do something different the next time.

As a student, and in the workplace, you will be asked to be reflective. Thinking or reflecting on the world around you, your experiences and actions will help you to develop and improve your skills.

Reflection is:

- Experiences and your view of the world
- Self improvement: learning from experiences and wanting to improve some area of your life
- Empowerment: putting you in control of making changes and behaving in a different way

How to think reflectively

There are several models of reflective practice which you can use to help you structure your reflective thinking and reflective writing.

Kolb's Learning Cycle (1984) has four elements of a loop which you can start at any point, though normally you start with an experience:

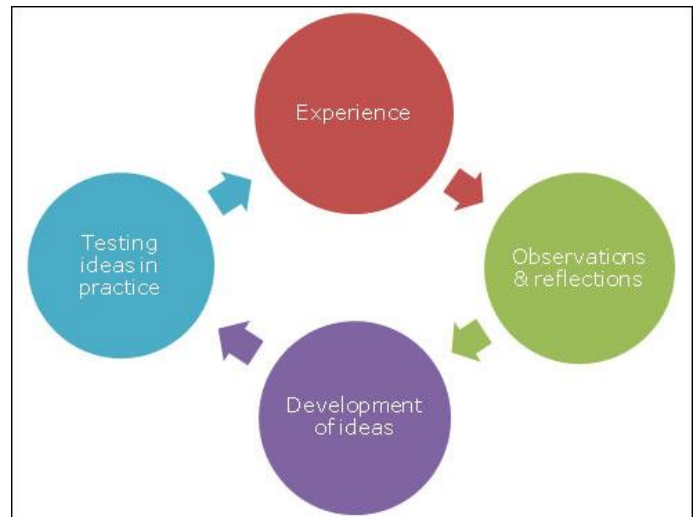


Figure 1: Kolb's Learning Cycle

The four elements of Kolb's Learning Cycle:

- Experience: doing it
- Observations and reflections: reviewing and reflecting on the experience
- Development of ideas: learning from the experience
- Testing ideas in practice: planning, trying out what you have learned

Schön (1983) presented the concept of 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action':

Reflection in action

- Experiencing
- Thinking on your feet
- Thinking about what to do next
- Acting straight away

Reflection on action

- Thinking about something that has happened
- Thinking what you would do differently next time
- Taking your time

Schön's theory is that there are two types of reflection, one during and one after an activity or event.

You can put these models into practice through your reflective writing.

How to write reflectively

Creating a piece of reflective writing is different to other academic writing as it is more personal and you are writing about your experiences.

The table below lists the differences between reflective and academic writing.

| Reflective writing | Academic writing |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Personal account | Impersonal account |
| Consider your personal views | Considers the views of others |
| First person | Third person |
| Contemplates | Argues and justifies |
| Finds solutions to problems | Compares and contrasts |

However, do check how your lecturer wants you to structure your reflective writing, as they may want you to write it in a particular way.

Structure for reflective writing

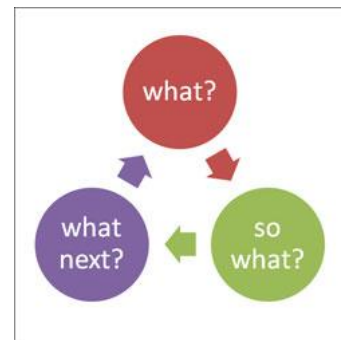


Figure 2: Reflective writing structure - three Ws

When you write reflectively, use the three Ws:

- What? (description)
 - What happened? Who was involved?
- So what? (interpretation)
 - What is most important, interesting, relevant or useful aspect of the event, idea or situation? How is it similar to or different from others?
- What next? (outcome)
 - What have I learned? How can it be applied in the future?

What to include in reflective writing

- Don't just describe - explore and explain what happened.
- Be honest - it's ok to admit to making mistakes as well as success. But you should also show how you understand why things happen and what you are going to do to improve.
- Be selective - you don't have to write about everything that happened, just key events or ideas.
- Look to the future - reflect on what happened in the past and how it will have an impact on future ideas or activities.

Further help

In succeed@reflection you'll find downloadable templates to help you structure your reflective writing and useful reflective vocabulary.

In succeed@solent you will find the following to help you write reflectively:

- [How to succeed@writing well](mailto:succeed@writingwell)
- [How to succeed@the writing process](mailto:succeed@the writing process)