

Structuring Reflective Practice

Many schools will recommend you use a reflective cycle such Gibbs (1988) (Appendix I) or Kolb (1974) (Appendix II).

These are ways of organising your thoughts, so you can critically analyse the event and your feelings into a coherent piece of writing. They can help you produce writing that is more analytical and that goes beyond descriptively recording what happened.

Whichever cycle is used there are often three main elements.

These main elements often comprise of smaller stages to put your feelings and actions into context and think about what you would learn from the experience:

1. What? (description)

- What was the event?
- When?
- Where?
- Who was involved?

2. So what? (interpretation)

- What is most important aspect of the event/idea/situation?
- Why did this occur?
- How can the event and your feelings be explained?
- Could anything have gone differently?
- How do the stages of the event relate to each other?
- Is this event/feeling similar to/different from others that you or other people have experienced?

3. Now what? (outcome)

- What have I learned?
- What are the implications for my future practice (would anything be done differently)?

Appendix I

The Reflective Cycle (Gibbs 1988) is a popular model for reflection. The model includes 6 stages of reflection and is presented below as cited in Dye (2011, page 230)

Description:

In this section, you need to explain what you are reflecting on. Perhaps include background information, such as what it is you're reflecting on and who was involved.

Feelings: Discuss your feelings and thoughts about the experience. Consider questions such as: How did you feel at the time? What did you think at the time? What did you think about the incident afterwards? You can discuss your emotions honestly.

Evaluation:

For your evaluation, discuss how well you think things went. Perhaps think about: How did you react to the situation, and how did other people react? What was good and what was bad about the experience? If you are writing about a difficult incident, did you feel that the situation was resolved afterwards? Why/why not? This section is a good place to include the theory and the work of other authors – remember it is important to include references in reflective writing.

Analysis:

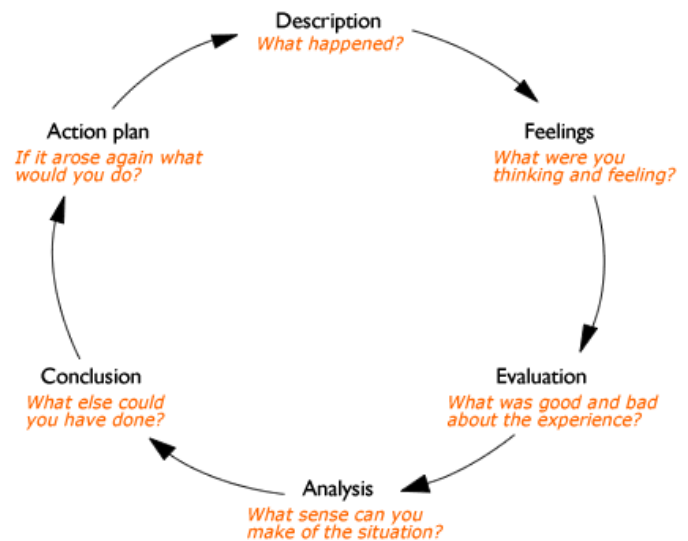
In your analysis, consider what might have helped or hindered the event. You also have the opportunity here to compare your experience with the literature you have read. This section is very important, particularly for higher level writing. Many students receive poor marks for reflective assignments for not bringing the theory and experience together.

Conclusion:

In your conclusion, it is important to acknowledge: whether you could have done anything else; what you have learned from the experience; consider whether you could have responded in a different way. If you are talking about a positive experience...discuss whether you would do the same again to ensure a positive outcome. Also consider if there is anything you could change to improve things even further. If the incident was negative...tell your reader how you could have avoided it happening and also how you could make sure it doesn't happen again.

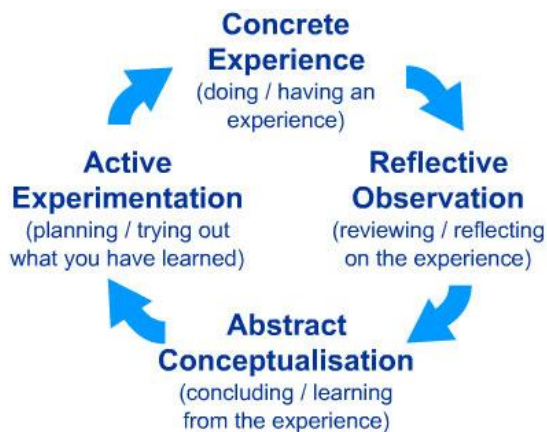
Action plan:

Action plans sum up anything you need to know and do to improve for next time. Perhaps you feel that you need to learn about something or attend some training. Could you ask your tutor or placement supervisor for some advice? What can you do which means you will be better equipped to cope with a similar event?



Appendix II

The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb 1974)



Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner 'touches all the bases':

1. Concrete Experience - (a new experience or situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience).

2. Reflective Observation of the new experience. (of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding).

3. Abstract Conceptualization (reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept).

4. Active Experimentation (the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results)

Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages: of (1) having a concrete experience followed by (2) observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to (3) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then (4) used to test hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

Kolb (1974) views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical sequence.

However, effective learning only occurs when a learner can execute all four stages of the model. Therefore, no one stage of the cycle is effective as a learning procedure on its own.

