



# Reflective Writing: Gibbs Model of Reflection

Study Development Factsheet

We are often asked to think ‘reflectively’ on our experiences, and to demonstrate our reflections in a reflective essay. Several models are used to help structure our reflections, but we also need to remember why we are being asked to reflect on our actions to begin with.

## Why reflect?

Reflective writing is about contextualising and questioning your experiences. A reflective essay isn’t just about the final assignment; the process of writing helps you to achieve a better understanding of your decisions and feelings, so you improve your practice in the future.

Reflective thinking also helps you build connections between theory and practice. You will often be asked to engage with theory, research and professional guidance to help you bridge the gap between your individual experiences and the situations in which those experiences took place. Critical thinking is at the heart of reflection – in the same way you question academic sources, question your own experiences.

## Gibbs model

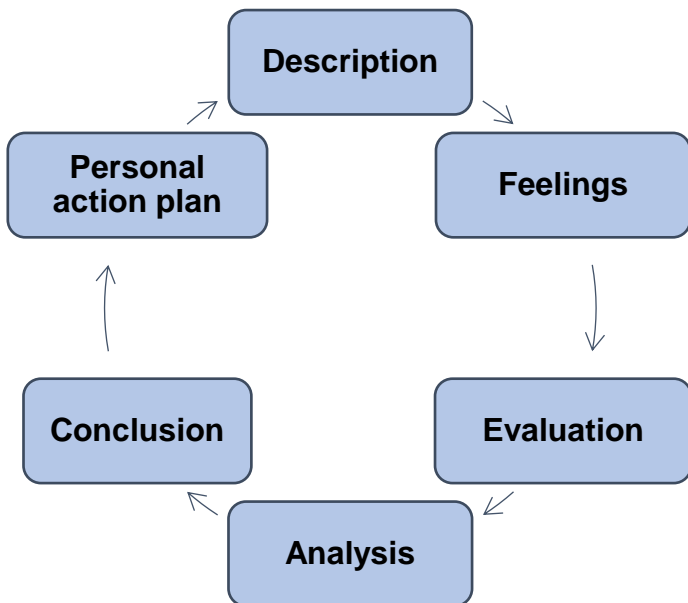
One framework that can help to structure your reflections is Graham Gibbs (1988) Model of Reflection. Gibbs believed that the best way people learn is by doing and developed a reflective cycle to give structure to learning from analysing experiences. Gibbs developed this cyclical model from Kolb (1984), who showed the importance of reflective components in his Experiential Learning model, which is based on learning from experience. Whereas Gibbs model provides a reflective structure to learn by doing, which is based on learning through repetition, although it can be used to reflect upon an individual experience or situation.



## Gibbs Reflective Cycle

Gibbs Model of Reflection has six stages:

1. Description. 2. Feelings. 3. Evaluation. 4. Analysis. 5. Conclusion. 6. Action plan.



Source: Graham Gibbs (1988), *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Further Education Unit.

### 4. Analysis

Gibbs now wants you to make sense of what happened by drawing on theories and experiences outside of this scenario. Why was something a strength or weakness? This part of the reflection is important as it requires you to bring in different contexts, such as academic literature, key theories and other people's experience of the scenario.

### 5. Conclusion

Summarise your own learning, what could you have done differently? What can be learned from this experience or a way of working? Are there any key theories or academic literature that you need to look for or revisit?

### 6. Personal Action Plan

What will you plan to do differently in the same or similar situation? Gibbs asks, "What steps are you going to take on the basis of what you have learnt? (Gibbs, 1988, p46).

### 1. Description

Here is where you explain **what happened**. Describe only relevant information, such as what occurred. Who was involved? What did you do? What did others do? Gibbs asks, "Don't make judgments yet or try to draw conclusions, simply describe" (Gibbs, 1988, p46).

### 2. Feelings

What were your **reactions**, thoughts and **feelings**, honestly? Don't analyse anything yet, only describe what you felt and what you thought about during the scenario.

### 3. Evaluation

This is where you evaluate your experience, and when doing so, try to remain objective but truthful, Gibbs asks you to "Make value judgements" (Gibbs, 1988, p46). What was good and bad? What went well? What didn't go so well and why?

**Schön theory (1983) suggests you can reflect in action or on action.**

- **Reflection in Action** is when the **scenario is happening**.
- **Reflection on Action** takes place **after the experience or scenario**.

#### Some tips to support reflective writing

- **Use Study Development's Gibbs framework template on page 3 of this factsheet.**
- **Free writing** is a technique where you quickly write down your thoughts about an experience. This can be helpful, especially with Gibbs description and feelings stages, as he doesn't want you to analyse or draw conclusions yet.
- During Gibbs evaluation, analysis, and conclusion stages, **apply criticality as these sections are the most useful and important** of the reflection.



## Apply Gibbs Reflective Framework

The table below mirrors Gibbs **reflective cycle (1988)**. Use the question prompts to guide your reflective note-taking.

<b>Description:</b> Simply describe what happened - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the scenario, and what happened? Describe anything relevant that had occurred.</li> </ul>	
<b>Feelings:</b> Describe your feelings and reactions – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were your thoughts, feelings and reactions at the time? Did these change at all?</li> <li>What affected how you felt during the scenario? Was it something you or a member of staff, pupil, or patient did?</li> <li>Did you think something went well? Did they do something that was useful, or wasn't the best way?</li> </ul>	
<b>Evaluation:</b> Evaluate the experience – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was good or bad about the experience? What worked well? What didn't work?</li> <li>Why did you respond in the way you did?</li> <li>Did you learn anything new? What was the main learning overall? How does this link to your skills and knowledge?</li> </ul>	
<b>Analysis:</b> Make sense of what happened by drawing on theories and experiences outside of this scenario – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What primary and secondary sources explore theories applied or needed, as well as address any key issues raised during the scenario?</li> <li>What subject knowledge can you show?</li> <li>What are other people's experiences (experts, experienced staff, peers etc) of this scenario? Are there any similarities or differences to your approach or experience?</li> </ul>	
<b>Conclusion:</b> Summarise your own learning – What have you learned from this experience? What could you have done differently?	
<b>Personal Action Plan:</b> What steps will you take to approach the same or similar situation differently?	

### Sources/further reading:

Gibbs, Graham.(1988). *Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods*. London: Further Education Unit.  
 Schon, Donald A.(1983). *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

**Support:** Study Development offers workshops, short courses, 1 to 1 and small group tutorials.

- Join a tutorial or workshop on the [Study Development tutorial and workshop webpage](#) or search 'YSJ study development tutorials.'