A Guide to Reflective Thinking and Writing for Learning Portfolios

In higher education and graduate employment high value is placed on the skill of being a reflective learner. Reflection is a key component of a learning portfolio. It is a way of processing your practice-based experience to produce learning. It is an exploration and an explanation of events – not just a description of them.

Reflective writing has two key features:

1) **It integrates theory and practice.** Identify important aspects of your reflections and write these using the appropriate theories and academic context to explain and interpret your reflections. Use your experiences to evaluate the theories - can the theories be adapted or modified to be more helpful for your situation?

2) **It identifies the learning outcomes of your experience.** So you might include a plan for next time identifying what you would do differently, your new understandings or values and unexpected things you have learnt about yourself.

There are a number of models that may guide you in your reflective thinking. Review the below and select an approach that makes sense to you personally:
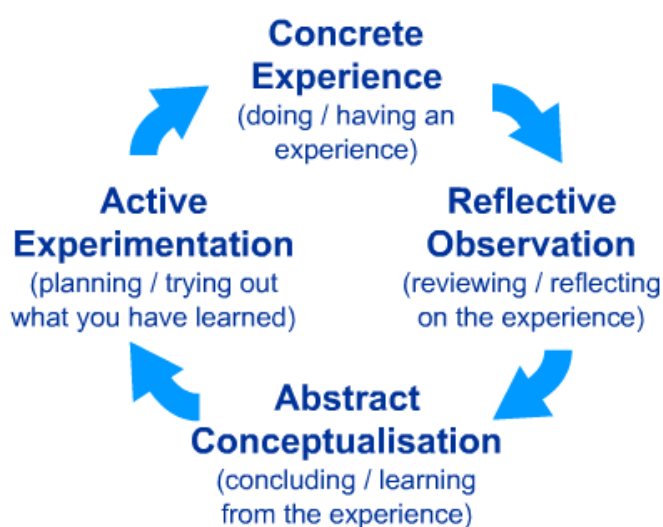
Kolb's Learning Cycle

http://www.ldu.leeds.ac.uk/ldu/sddu_multimedia/kolb/static_version.php
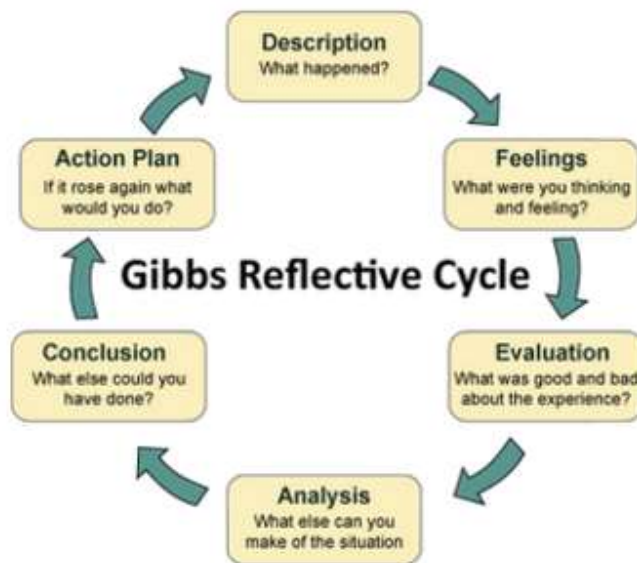
Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

*www.afpp.org.uk/filegrab/**Gibbsmodel**of**reflection**.pdf?ref=46*

The 4Rs Model of Reflective Thinking

Level	Stage	Questions to get you started
1	**Reporting** and Responding	Report what happened or what the issue or incident involved. Why is it relevant? Respond to the incident or issue by making observations, expressing your opinion, or asking questions.
2	**Relating**	Relate or make a connection between the incident or issue and your own skills, professional experience, or discipline knowledge. Have I seen this before? Were the conditions the same or different? Do I have the skills and knowledge to deal with this? Explain.
3	**Reasoning**	Highlight in detail significant factors underlying the incident or issue. Explain and show why they are important to an understanding of the incident or issue. Refer to relevant theory and literature to support your reasoning. Consider different perspectives. How would a knowledgeable person perceive/handle this? What are the ethics involved?
4	**Reconstructing**	Reframe or reconstruct future practice or professional understanding. How would I deal with this next time? What might work and why? Are there different options? What might happen if...? Are my ideas supported by theory? Can I make changes to benefit others?

The 4Rs Model of Reflective Thinking

http://www.citewrite.qut.edu.au/write/4Rs-for-students-page1-v1.5.pdf

STARL: **Your 5 steps for reflection**

1. **Situation** – describe the context in which the experience occurred.

2. **Task** – describe what was actually required of you in the situation.

3. **Action** – describe the steps that you personally took in response to the task. When reflecting on your actions, ask yourself why you chose to respond in that particular way.

4. **Result** – describe the outcome of your actions. How did your actions contribute to the completion of the task? How did your actions affect the final outcome of the situation?

5. **Learnt** – describe the things you have learned from the experience. Highlight any skills or abilities that you have developed or improved as a result of the experience. Think about how you might apply what you've learnt to other situations.

   Finally, try to keep it brief and precise.

STARL

http://eportfolio.usp.ac.fj/view/view.php?id=33932

Good reflections should be an integral part of every student learning portfolio. Whichever model you choose, reflective writing is**:**

- your response to experiences, opinions, events or new information
- your response to thoughts and feelings
- a way of thinking to explore your learning
- an opportunity to gain self-knowledge
- a way to achieve clarity and better understanding of what you are learning
- a chance to develop and reinforce writing skills
- a way of making meaning out of what you study

Use the resources and models on this page to help you to write good reflections for your learning portfolio.

Useful Resources:

Video	Text	Games
Short video on reflective thinking and writing - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1eEPp5VSIY	Link to examples of reflective writing - https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/0B-3hGydiKzzGd2huQUVoN0RXSnM	Review the 6 metaphors for good reflection and try online reflective thinking games - https://sites.google.com/site/eplearningworkshop/key-components/reflection
An excellent online course on reflective practice, developed by the University of Hull - http://www2.hull.ac.uk/lli/skillshub/ReflectiveWriting/index.html	A useful guide to writing reflectively including examples - https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/skills/asc/documents/public/Short-Guide-Reflective-Writing.pdf	
	An overview of reflective writing techniques including language and examples - http://www.qmu.ac.uk/els/docs/Reflection.PDF	
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