Guide for Writing a Reflective Journal   2015

In the reflective journal, you are asked to identify critical learning events that have happened on your placement, in terms of your professional development. You then analyse the most significant of these events using a standard analysis template. Below you will find some guidelines to help you through the process. The examples given are real.

Firstly, review the previous month and think of all the things that you have done. Decide which of those things have helped you understand better, helped you do a better job as an engineer. Write them up in the table. Aim for 4 – 6 items. For each Critical Learning Event you list, write a description. Then choose one of the learning incidents for a more detailed analysis.

Analysis of learning incidents

You need to work through the incident in four stages on the template.

1. **Situation:** What actually happened?

2. **Affect:** What was its impact on <u>you</u> personally?

3. **Interpretation:** What did you learn from the experience?

4. **Decision:** What did you decide to do so as to become a better engineer?

1. **Situation**

Choose one Critical Learning Event that seemed the most significant. It doesn't have to be something that went well; often we learn more from things that don't go right or as planned. At this stage write what actually happened – no feelings, thoughts, reflections, or assumptions – just facts. Be concise, but write as much as you feel you need to. Incidents will vary in complexity and depth.

Examples:

Student A – [I] was supervising a group of 30 operators with one other supervisor. I had a number of groups moving cars from one area to another. I got into a situation where two groups were moving the same cars back and forward for just over an hour until they realised and made myself aware. After investigating I found that the other supervisor organised his group to move cars from the area my group were parking them as he thought they were a part of his area. This was because I did not communicate to him what I was doing.

Student B – I received a task handover for a departing colleague, but didn't look at it. This was because, as per normal, I felt rushed and like I didn't have time. When I finally got around to looking at the task handover plan, I had several questions for the departed colleague. However, I couldn't talk to him as he was on holiday. Hence, the required tasks were much more difficult and time consuming.

Student C – On Wednesday, the supervisor for one of the areas in Body Build was absent. I was asked to fill in the position for the day. Due to my current workload I could not take on the

task. I explained this to the manager and told him 'No'. He was able to find someone else and spread the load.

Student D – Part of my job is to calculate the CO_2 emissions of various buildings. This is done via spreadsheets and computer models. As my experience grows, I'm tempted to add complexity to continually improve accuracy and keep things interesting. I've been gradually increasing modelling complexity until last week. I realised such complexity is really not necessary and is really time-consuming. Instead of adding complexity, I quickly completed the model and spent some additional time on communicating the information to the client via a better report.

2. Affect

Think about the event and how it affected you personally. This could be positive or negative. You may have felt frustrated, confused, angry, elated, relieved ….. Why did you feel as you did? 'I felt confused because I thought I had understood what I was meant to do.' 'I felt relieved because I knew it was luck that everything turned out ok'. 'I felt angry because I knew I was right.' 'I was happy because I knew I had done a good job.'

Examples:

Student A – I felt frustrated that for over an hour two groups accomplished no valuable work due to a lack of communication. I was disappointed as I did not pick up on the mistake earlier.

Student B – I felt frustrated because I knew that a few simple answers would clear up my questions. I realised that I should have looked at the task list at the time, and so I was annoyed with myself.

Student C – By saying 'no' I felt like I had let the team down. I was relieved when the manager accepted my comment and agreed.

Student D – I felt this was a small victory against my natural tendency to greatly over-complexity things. This felt good, because previously I have – against my better judgement – continuing to obsess over the detail. It was somewhat empowering to put into action something previously planned via the PDLs.

3. Interpretation

Think about, and then explain in what ways the new learning either confirms or contradicts your prior knowledge, theories, or understanding, in particular the knowledge you might have gained at university.

Examples:

Student A – I learnt that communication between management and supervision is vital to successfully and efficiently complete a job. I have witnessed through experience the affects of poor communication at work and university. Lessons taught through studies at university have been designed to teach techniques of good communication. I will need to use these techniques and develop them throughout my career.

***Student B** – I learnt that even if things are hectic, it is necessary to determine if it would be more efficient to have a quick look at certain tasks/documents in order to save time later.*

***Student C** – I often find it hard to say 'no' to work takes by have learnt it is sometimes necessarily to do so. Saying 'no' is a form of prioritising work, as learnt from uni. Good communications skills help make the decision easy.*

***Student D** – I learnt that I can overcome habits and temptations to become more productive. In this situation, this conformed my thinking that often the fine detail is meaningless. Rather, I saw that the communication aspect was equally important. With regards to university, this is usually not the case. That is, at university the detail is – rightly – important. I learnt that this balance, between content and presentation, sways in the direction of presentation in private industry.*

4. Decision

There is no point learning something if you don't store it away for future use. So what decision did you make to help you in future? What will you do better in future? For example, you might take more time over planning something, ask more questions, ask the right questions, ask the right person or do it exactly the same if it went well.

Example:

***Student A** – I will be supervising similar jobs throughout next week. I will ensure I communicate with other supervisors and management using techniques I have learnt, for example, regular coordination meetings, phone calls when changes are made, or email if the required people cannot be contacted. I will review the techniques I use at the end of the week and continue to refine and develop my communication skills.*

***Student B** – It's not practical to look at everything as soon as you receive it. However, I resolved to scan my email every morning, even during busy times. When I see something that is important, I will make a conscious decision to either leave it, or have a quick look and follow it up.*

***Student C** – Being asked to do additional takes is common in the workplace. I need to continuously prioritise my tasks even if that means saying 'no'. However, saying no has to be done appropriately and with good explanation. I will continue to review and reflect on the decisions I make when dealing with tasks. Particularly how to say 'no'.*

***Student D** – This was a positive experience. I should, very simply, try to repeat it. Previously I'm mentioned various task lists, planning methods, etc which have enabled me to determine whether I should delve into the detail of a particular task. In this case, to continue this learning event, I'll continue to use these methods and follow their advice. This is somewhat hard to enforce because it's really just my choice at the time. However, one good way is to remember the positive outcome of this event, and to focus on the outcomes, not process.*