## Reflection

Reflection is the cognitive process of contemplating, analysing, and evaluating your thoughts, experiences, actions, and emotions. This could be related to your professional practices as a designer or on a more personal level.



Fig 1. Pexels (n.d.) Reflecting on design ideas

We naturally reflect on our experiences but reflection in a learning context should be structured and purposeful in order for it to be useful. It should involve introspection and it should encourage you to deliberately think about and examine past events or situations in order to gain insight and deepen your understanding of what took place. The aim is to identify a focused path forward from your experiences, considering how you can continue to learn and improve. In turn, this facilitates deeper learning and personal growth.

Reflection can take various forms, including written or verbal expression, artistic exploration, or contemplative practices. It has many benefits and plays a vital role in promoting your own self-awareness, critical thinking, and resilience.

## Lifelong Learning Through Reflection

Reflective practice is key in promoting lifelong learning. Lifelong learning, or the act of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development, is particularly important for designers due to the dynamic and evolving nature of the design industry. As a creative professional, you must constantly adapt to technological advancements, stay up to date with current design trends, solve problems, keep developing your skills, and network with others - all of which require an ongoing, voluntary pursuit of knowledge on your part.



Fig 2. Unsplash (n.d.) Reflecting on work

### Self-awareness and growth

Reflective practice encourages creative practitioners to regularly evaluate their work processes and outcomes. By reflecting on past projects, successes, and challenges, you can gain deeper self-awareness regarding the strengths and weaknesses of your approach or your designs, as well as help you to identify areas for improvement. This self-awareness fosters a growth mindset, which will be motivation for you to continuously seek out new knowledge, skills, and experiences to enhance your craft.

### Critical thinking and problem-solving

Effective reflection requires thinking critically about the past. Engaging in reflective practice therefore cultivates critical thinking skills. By analysing your design decisions, the problem-solving approaches you employed, and creative processes, you can develop a deeper understanding of design principles, aesthetics, and user needs. This critical reflection enables you to identify innovative solutions to design briefs, anticipate any challenges that might occur, and adapt your strategies to meet evolving client demands and design industry trends.

### Feedback and iteration

Reflective practice encourages you to seek and incorporate feedback from clients, peers, and mentors. By reflecting on feedback received, you gain valuable insights into how your designs are perceived by others, how you can improve them, and what strategies are most effective in doing so. This iterative process of reflection and refinement facilitates continuous learning and improvement, leading to the development of more polished and impactful design solutions over time.

### Adaptability and innovation

As a creative practitioner, you have to be adaptable and innovative. By reflecting on your work and your practices, you can develop curiosity, open-mindedness, and receptiveness to new ideas and technologies, therefore improving your creative outcomes. By reflecting on emerging trends, industry developments, and evolving client needs, you can also anticipate future demands and proactively update your skills and toolkits accordingly. This proactive approach to learning and adaptation enables you to stay relevant and ahead of the curve while remaining competitive in a rapidly changing design landscape.

### Professional development

Reflective practice is the cornerstone of professional development for designers. By documenting your experiences, achievements, and areas for growth, you can create a roadmap for your career progression. Reflective practice also encourages you to set goals, seek out learning opportunities, and track your progress over time. This intentional approach to lifelong learning empowers designers to take ownership of their professional development and continuously strive for excellence in their work.

## Building resilience

As well as encouraging lifelong learning, reflective practices also play a crucial role in building resilience within the creative industry by offering valuable tools and strategies for coping with challenges such as criticism, self-reflection, and rejection.



Fig 3. Pixabay (n.d.) Reflecting on work

### Handling criticism

As a designer, you will face a lot of criticism, whether it be towards your work or how you do business. Reflective practices can help you develop a more constructive approach to handling such criticism. By reflecting on the feedback that you receive from, for example, peers, mentors, or clients, you can assess the validity of the criticism, identify areas for improvement, and separate constructive criticism from personal attacks. This ability to critically evaluate feedback fosters resilience by enabling you to learn from criticism rather than let it undermine your confidence or sense of self-worth.

### Self-reflection

Engaging in reflective practices encourages self-awareness and introspection, which are essential components of resilience. By regularly reflecting on your work, creative processes, and personal development, you can gain a deeper understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, values, and aspirations. This self-awareness helps you navigate challenges more effectively, make informed decisions, and adapt to changing circumstances with confidence.

### Rejection resilience

Rejection is a common experience in all creative industries, whether it's facing rejection from a client, your target audiences, or a potential employer. Reflective practices can help you develop resilience in the face of such rejection by reframing setbacks as opportunities for growth and learning. By reflecting on past rejections, you can identify lessons learned, areas for improvement, and alternative pathways to success. This resilient mindset enables you to persevere in the face of adversity, maintain motivation, and continue pursuing your creative goals with determination.

### Adaptability and innovation

Reflective practices promote adaptability and innovation by encouraging individuals to learn from their experiences and experiment with new ideas and approaches. By reflecting on past projects, successes, and failures, you can identify patterns, trends, and emerging opportunities in the industries. This reflective insight enables you to adapt your strategies, refine your skills, and stay ahead of evolving trends, enhancing your resilience in an ever-changing creative landscape.

## Tips on how to reflect more effectively

Whether you are conducting a reflective written, verbal, or group sharing exercise, it will almost always involve:

1. Looking back at something (event or idea).
2. Analysing the event or idea ( in-depth exploration and different perspectives).
3. Evaluating the experience.



Fig 4. Unsplash (n.d.) Reflecting on work outcomes

#### Tips:

Here are some ways to get the most out of your reflective practices:

* It is advisable to write and complete one reflection at a time
* Do not present a reflection full of “stories”
* Write about the relevance and meaning of the experience
* Carefully analyse what you have learned as this is the key focus of the reflection
* Reflection is an exploration and an explanation of events - not just a description of them
* It involves revealing anxieties, errors, weaknesses as well as strengths and successes
* Select only the most significant parts of the event or idea on which you are reflecting
* It is useful to “reflect forward” to the future as well as “reflecting back” on the past

#### Suggested wording for reflections

You may find some of the following useful when writing or reflecting verbally:

* I became aware that ...
* I found out that ...
* I was impressed by ...
* I am more aware of ...
* I discovered that ...
* I feel ...
* I think my attitude to .... has changed because…
* I know I would like to ...
* I believe I made a difference by ...
* I was surprised by ...
* I was encouraged by ...
* Today was ... because ...
* One thing that helped me today was ...
* A client I found interesting was ... because …
* An event I found interesting was …because …
* The best thing that happened today was ...
* For me the most significant learning arose from ...
* For me the most relevant learning happened when ...
* If I could do one thing differently it would be ...
* At the time I did not question ...
* Having analysed this experience ... I now realise ...
* I am able to ...
* Most importantly I have learned that ...
* I have significantly developed my skills in ...
* A recommendation I would make for myself would be ...
* I believe I achieved my goals because ...