

TIMS3311 | Assessment 2 – Personal Development Reflective Statement

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Introduction

When I began TIMS3311, I chose to develop Vayla, a travel-tech startup aimed to make destination discovery visual, intuitive, and personalised for 20–35-year-old travellers. My goal is to bridge the gap between social-media inspiration and practical trip planning whilst exploring whether young travellers wanted curated discovery experiences. This reflection explores my personal and professional growth through this journey, concentrating on how I applied Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation. Drawing on sixteen interviews and iterative MVP development, I evaluate my key learning moments, the feedback that reformed my approach, and how this WIL experience altered both my confidence and career outlook.

1. The Overall WIL Experience

Personal Lessons

This semester was both confronting and transformative. My strength in research and development phase proved invaluable, even whilst overseas, I remained engaged through thinking, research coordination, and structured planning. However, I learned that over-preparation could hinder experimentation. Early on, I invested excessive time refining pitch decks and theoretical frameworks instead of engaging directly with research on competitors. This cautiousness stemmed from a fear of making mistakes, a mindset incompatible with entrepreneurship.

In my first assessment, I received feedback that Vayla needed a tangible MVP and at least two Build–Measure–Learn cycles rather than relying on interviews alone. Being warned about the Cold Start problem, typical of two-sided marketplaces, and encouraged me to identify whether I would focus on supply (agents) or demand (travellers). That thought became a turning point. I decided to design how Vayla will look.

The highlights of the semester came from interview questions which describe the app as “clean,” “easy to navigate,” and “something I’d actually use to save ideas.” Each positive response reignited my motivation. Conversely, the difficult moments involved feedback I didn’t want to hear. One traveller said, “This isn’t an app that they would use due to wanting to be more free flowing with their travelling.” Upon reflection, I realised that these moments represented the essence of Lean Startup learning, failure as feedback.

Maintaining momentum was also challenging. Working mostly independently required self-management and internal accountability. Weekly goals and reflective journaling became essential to sustain direction. In hindsight, I would have started customer discovery earlier, expanded the travel agent's perspective, and prioritised forming the outlook of the apps design. The WIL experience ultimately taught me that progress develops from imperfect action, not prolonged preparation.

Networks Established

Networking was a vital enabler of growth. Throughout the semester, informal conversations helped me refine my research approach and gain new perspectives on MVP testing. For example, one peer shared her method for structuring the design of the website. Beyond class, I developed networks that extended Vayla's reach. I interviewed 11 travellers, 4 travel agents, 1 travel blogger and 1 hotel owner cultivating a small but diverse ecosystem around my idea.

The value of these networks extended beyond information gathering. Travellers provided empathy-based insights that clarified Vayla's central problem: users are overwhelmed by choice and crave curation. Agents introduced the commercial realities of the travel industry, helping me think beyond B2C to potential B2B applications such as lead generation and other business who have tried similar concepts. Two boutique agents expressed enthusiasm about collaborating once an MVP existed, while two franchise agents offered constructive criticism, warning that most discovery apps struggle to drive conversions. I also spoke with a boutique hotel owner who highlighted that many small accommodations struggle to reach digitally savvy travellers, reinforcing the potential for Vayla to act as a discovery channel that connects independent operators with younger audiences seeking authentic stays. Meanwhile, the travel influencer highlighted that "authentic, user-generated content" drives the strongest engagement on social media, sparking ideas for a future "trip board" feature.

These interactions reflected Design Thinking's empathy stage, enabling me to view the idea through multiple lenses. They also demonstrated Effectuation's "crazy quilt" principle, where entrepreneurs co-create with available stakeholders. Networking pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me realise that entrepreneurship is not a solitary pursuit. My confidence in initiating conversations with professionals improved dramatically, a transferable skill for any career.

2. New Knowledge, Insights and Skills

The Past

Coming to TIMS3311 at the end of my Entrepreneurship major, I already had a solid theoretical grounding in innovation and venture creation. I understood frameworks such as the Business Model Canvas, Design Thinking, and Lean Startup, and had applied them conceptually across previous courses. However, most of this learning had occurred in structured, simulated settings. I had rarely tested an idea empirically or managed a project with full autonomy from concept to prototype. Before this course, I equated success with precision, producing polished plans and detailed analyses, rather than with experimentation and iteration. TIMS3311 challenged that mindset, pushing me to apply theory in a self-directed, uncertain environment where learning was measured by progress, not perfection.

Key Learnings – Applying Design Thinking, Lean Startup and Effectuation

Throughout the semester, I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews, eleven travellers, four travel agents, one hotel owner and one influencer. These interactions formed a holistic understanding of both user pain points and industry constraints.

Design Thinking, as described by Brown (2008), emphasises empathy and iterative problem-solving, and this framework shaped how I approached these interviews. Using empathy mapping and thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I recognised emotional pain points such as decision fatigue, distrust of generic reviews, and lack of inspiration. Many travellers said, “I open ten tabs and end up not booking anything.” These insights reframed the problem: travellers do not lack options, they lack clarity. This empathy-driven discovery phase grounded every decision that followed.

Guided by Ries (2011), I approached Vayla through a series of conceptual Build–Measure–Learn loops. Instead of developing a full website, I created concept and visual mock-ups that illustrated how users would swipe through curated destinations and save favourites. I shared these concepts with interview participants to gauge interest and usability. The feedback revealed that travellers were drawn to the discovery element. To structure my learning, I built a validation board capturing key hypotheses, assumptions, and feedback themes. While the process remained conceptual rather than technical, it translated Lean Startup principles into

practice by turning uncertainty into testable ideas. Negative feedback no longer felt personal, it became evidence to iterate the concept further.

Effectuation. Following Sarasvathy (2001), I leveraged my existing means rather than waiting for perfect resources. Using the affordable-loss principle, I tested the MVP at zero cost and relied on my travel-agent contacts for insights. The crazy quilt principle emerged naturally through collaboration with peers and mentors. This pragmatic mindset kept the project low-risk yet high-learning.

Combined Learning. Combined, these frameworks showed me that innovation is iterative and relational. Design Thinking created empathy, Lean Startup validated assumptions, and Effectuation maintained resource realism. Their integration changed my perception of entrepreneurship from risk-taking to structured discovery.

The Future

This WIL experience reformed how I define success. I now view entrepreneurship not as building a perfect business however as constructing the capacity to learn fast. My next step for Vayla is to continue refining the MVP by focusing on one geographic niche, such as boutique retreats in Southeast Asia. This targeted approach aligns with my tutor's suggestion to overcome the Cold Start problem by starting small and building one side of the market first.

Professionally, this course equipped me with transferable skills, problem framing, customer empathy, data-driven decision-making, and resilience. These will directly enhance my future in strategy, innovation, or consulting roles, where arranged experimentation is highly valued. More importantly, the experience cultivated an entrepreneurial mindset grounded in curiosity, iteration, and reflection. I now approach ambiguity with a sense of opportunity rather than anxiety.

What I Valued Most and Suggestions for Improvement

What I valued most was the autonomy and authenticity of TIMS3311. Unlike conventional courses, it imitated the ambiguity of real innovation work, rewarding initiative and reflection over memorisation. I learned to self-manage, pivot, and communicate efficiently without trusting on external direction, experiences that mirror professional entrepreneurship.

However, a few refinements could elevate the experience further:

1. Integrate guest panels from founders who have navigated early-stage challenges like MVP testing or customer discovery.
2. Develop a shared resource bank of interview scripts, pitch decks, and validation templates to accelerate early-stage progress.
3. Provide case studies of previous WIL projects that demonstrate how students successfully implemented Lean Startup or Design Thinking principles.

This would connect the course more deeply to the real startup environment, adding value for students ready to scale their ideas.

Conclusion

Throughout TIMS3311, I advanced from a theoretical learner into a reflective practitioner capable of turning ideas into validated prototypes. *Vayla* progressed through empathy, experimentation, and iteration, exemplifying the essence of Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation. Acting on my Assessment 1 feedback pushed me beyond research into real MVP development, expanding my practical understanding and confidence. I discovered that meaningful innovation needs humility, persistence, and responsiveness to feedback. I now view reflection as a strategic advantage, the mechanism that transforms mistakes into insights. Reflecting on my journey aligns with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, where active experimentation and reflection transform experience into deeper understanding. I now view reflection as a strategic advantage, the mechanism that transforms mistakes into insights. The discipline, creativity, and self-awareness developed during this WIL will continue to guide how I lead projects, solve problems, and approach future opportunities in both entrepreneurship and beyond.

References

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Reflective Diary Entries

Entry 1: Early Exploration

At the beginning of the semester, I decided to pursue my own startup, Vayla. The idea came from a personal frustration with how fragmented travel planning feels, hundreds of tabs, conflicting recommendations, and uninspired booking sites. I wanted to design a platform that made discovering new destinations feel intuitive and fun, almost like the way people swipe through Pinterest or TikTok for inspiration.

Initially, I felt lost. Different to other courses, there were no step-by-step instructions. The independence was daunting but exciting. To ground myself, I used the Business Model Canvas to map out assumptions about who my customers were, what problem I was solving, and how value would be created. This exercise exposed that my concept was too broad. I was trying to appeal to “everyone who travels,” which meant I appealed to no one in particular.

After reflecting on this, I refined my target audience to 20–35-year-old travellers who value visual discovery and curated experiences over traditional booking systems. I also began exploring Design Thinking, predominantly the empathy stage, to remind myself that the solution needed to start with understanding real user pain points, not my assumptions.

This week taught me that uncertainty is not a flaw in entrepreneurship, it’s the starting point. Once I accepted that I wouldn’t have all the answers immediately, I began to view ambiguity as creative freedom rather than failure. That mindset shift became foundational for how I approached the rest of the semester.

Entry 2: First Interviews

I have begun conducting my first user interviews, five travellers aged between 22 and 33. Initially, I was nervous about asking friends for their opinions, but once the conversations started, I realised people enjoy talking about travel. Every interview uncovered frustrations that resonated with the problem I wanted to solve. Most participants described feeling “overwhelmed by too many choices” and “spending hours scrolling before committing.”

Interestingly, two participants challenged the concept directly, saying Vayla sounded too like Pinterest or TikTok. I remember feeling deflated, but after reflecting using the Lean Startup framework, I recognised that criticism was data, not rejection. These comments helped me identify that my idea wasn’t differentiated enough and needed clearer value. Instead of trying to be another social platform, I needed to focus on personalisation, helping users discover destinations that fit their style rather than giving them endless options.

After transcribing the interviews, I used thematic coding to identify recurring themes like authenticity, simplicity, and visual engagement. This analysis provided structure to qualitative data that had initially felt overwhelming. The process of hearing directly from potential users made me more empathetic and reminded me of the Design Thinking principle of “building with, not for” users.

The week ended with a sense of development, not because my idea was validated, but because I was finally learning from real feedback. This experience helped me transition from thinking like a student trying to meet assessment criteria to an entrepreneur genuinely exploring a problem.

Entry 3: Responding to Feedback

After receiving feedback on my first assessment, I realised I was still operating in research mode, comfortable collecting information but avoiding execution. My feedback stated that I needed to “build and test an actual MVP” really stuck with me. It forced me to acknowledge that I was delaying action out of fear of imperfection.

This week, I focused on changing my ideas into a more tangible concept using Lean Startup’s Build–Measure–Learn cycle as a guide. Rather than building a full prototype, I created a detailed set of visual mock-ups and user flow diagrams that illustrated how Vayla could work. These low-fidelity designs showed how users would swipe through curated destinations, save favourites, and share ideas. I then used these visuals during informal concept interviews with five participants to “measure” reactions to functionality, aesthetics, and overall value.

The feedback was honest and illuminating. Most feedback stated the simplicity and visual focus was appreciated, whilst two questioned whether it offered enough differentiation from TikTok. Instead of taking this as criticism, I viewed it as actionable data, using it to refine the concept’s purpose and emphasise personalisation over replication.

Reflecting on this process, I began to internalise. Testing an idea conceptually was still valid experimentation. This week marked a psychological turning point. I finally accepted that progress in entrepreneurship is measured by learning, not by perfection. Taking small, imperfect actions gave me a sense of momentum that theoretical planning never could.

Entry 4: Iterating and Pivoting

By Week 9, I had finished twelve interviews and refined several sets of visual concept boards for Vayla. Clear patterns emerged: travellers loved the swipe-based discovery concept and visual curation but were uninterested in any booking functionality, whilst travel agents were divided on their commercial value. Two boutique agents viewed Vayla as a promising lead-generation idea, yet two franchise agents argued that discovery platforms rarely convert to bookings.

At first, the clashing feedback was disheartening. However, using Design Thinking's ideation stage, I stepped back and reframed the problem I was trying to solve. Vayla didn't need to be a "booking tool"; it needed to be an inspiration platform that simplified discovery for overwhelmed travellers. This realisation marked a turning point. Rather than trying to build a comprehensive end-to-end solution, I began exploring concepts that focused purely on visual discovery.

Applying Lean Startup's iteration principle, I refined my storyboards to emphasise simplicity and emotional engagement. I shared these updated visuals with a small group of users to gauge reactions to layout, flow, and clarity. Their responses confirmed that the simplified approach was more appealing. I also engaged my network of agents, peers, and travellers, an embodiment of Effectuation's "crazy quilt" principle, to co-create ideas for future integration opportunities.

Emotionally, this week was challenging but liberating. Pivoting initially felt like an admission that my first idea was flawed, but I came to see it as evidence of growth. Vayla finally had a distinct identity: a curated discovery concept that helped travellers find destinations effortlessly. That clarity only emerged once I learned to embrace feedback as progress rather than criticism.

Entry 5: Looking Ahead

I reflected on how Vayla had evolved through seventeen interviews and countless concept refinements. I spoke with eleven travellers, four travel agents, one hotel owner and one travel influencer each shaping the project from a different angle. The influencer suggested a “trip-board” feature where creators could share visual itineraries, which opened possibilities for community-driven discovery and user-generated content.

By this point, my thinking had become more strategic. Drawing on my tutor’s earlier advice, I began addressing the Cold Start problem that affects two-sided marketplaces. I concluded that Vayla’s first stage should focus narrowly on one niche, boutique getaways in Southeast Asia and use manually curated content before introducing agent participation. This plan reflected Effectuation’s “bird-in-hand” principle, using existing resources and networks to create traction rather than waiting for perfect scale.

Looking back, my greatest transformation has been in mindset. I entered TIMS3311 seeking structured answers but finished understanding that entrepreneurship is about learning through uncertainty. I now see the Build–Measure–Learn cycle not only as a Lean Startup process but as a way of thinking, experiment, analyse, iterate, and repeat. I also developed deeper self-awareness: my strengths lie in organisation, communication, and persistence, whilst my growth areas involve acting faster and embracing feedback earlier.

Ultimately, this course showed me that innovation is not spontaneous or lucky, it’s the product of disciplined curiosity and reflective practice. Whether I continue developing Vayla or apply these principles in consulting or property, I now approach every project as an experiment: a chance to test, learn, and adapt.

Appendix – Interview Summary

Group	Count	Key Insights	Influence on Vayla
Travellers	11	Overwhelmed by excessive options; crave visual inspiration and curated recommendations; four sceptical about differentiation from existing platforms.	Confirmed the need for a simplified discovery process and led to the pivot from booking integration to a discovery-only concept.
Travel Agents	4	Two supportive (saw lead-generation potential for boutique agencies); two critical (highlighted integration and conversion limitations).	Highlighted opportunities for B2B collaboration and clarified challenges in scaling a two-sided marketplace.
Hotel Owner	1	Boutique hotel owner noted that small, independent accommodations struggle to reach younger, tech-savvy travellers and welcomed platforms that bridge discovery with local authenticity.	Reinforced <i>Vayla's</i> potential role as a visibility channel for boutique operators and strengthened alignment with the “authentic stays” segment.
Travel Influencer	1	Suggested introducing user-generated “trip boards” and creator-curated itineraries to drive social engagement and authenticity.	Inspired plans for community and influencer-led content integration in future iterations.