# Examples of reflective writing using the Gibbs Cycle

This document provides examples of good and bad reflective writing statements to support you to understand the technique further.

Compare examples of reflective writing a) and b) using the Gibbs Cycle below. Both are discussing the same experience. Identify the differences in style and approach that make account b) more effective as a piece of reflective learning than account a).

## Description

This should only be a brief outline of the context of the experience. The more specific the incident the easier it will be to demonstrate learning. Reflective writing concentrates on the implications of an experience rather than the details of the event itself. The correctness, or otherwise, of your actions is not being judged by anyone else but yourself.

a) The project brief asked us to research the differences between Johnson’s (2004) theories and the later work by Daniels (2012). This is an area of some controversy in my academic discipline and there is a lot of work to compare and contrast these approaches. The latest commentary on the division is Hopkins and Rhodes (2017) which still fails to demonstrate a clear preference for either Johnson’s or Daniels work. As there is so much to look at here Peter Scott, Jane Campbell, Chen Niu and myself met using Zoom to divide up the research topics. I don’t like Zoom and wanted to use Microsoft Teams but was overruled. During the meeting we all had poor internet connections and so didn’t hear everything that was said very clearly. I said that I would research developments in the debate after 2015 but Jane clearly misheard this as the work being allocated to her. We ended up both researching the same area and only found this out two days before the submission deadline leaving a quarter of the work undone. We had another meeting at which Jane apologised for her mistake and we agreed to use a bit of both our work, which kept us both happy, and then split the missing work across the four of us to do.

b) My project involved working with three other students to research and report on a specific element of a major debate in our academic discipline. We agreed to divide up the research into more manageable chunks of work that we could tackle on an individual basis. Due to a misunderstanding at our initial online meeting, I and one other student researched the same chunk; something we only discovered two days before the submission deadline. As a group we decided to use the best from both of the duplicated pieces of work and all picked up an element of the missing work to do before the deadline. We succeeded as a team and received a good mark for our work.

## Feelings

Being reflective requires you to question why you reacted to the experience the way you did. Try to analyse your emotional response to an experience; what does it tell you about yourself in terms of your own motivations and sources of satisfaction?

a) I was angry when the mistake was made but much happier when we put it right.

b) Team working of this type is relatively new to me so I was initially really pleased that we had managed to divide up a difficult job between four people with everyone happy to collaborate together. When we realised the problem I had a moment when I was angry at another team member as I was convinced that it was their mistake. However, I then recalled the details of the first meeting and realised my frustration was at a group failing. Resolving the problem in time for the deadline was a great feeling that allowed the team to share in a joint achievement, regardless of the grade we received for the work.

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## Evaluation

Look at the situation honestly and consider what went well, what could have been improved and how you contributed to this process. As with the description phase, you are not being assessed on the correctness of your response but on your ability to evaluate it clearly.

a) What could have gone better? A member of my team made a mistake that could have cost us a lot of marks. What went well? We sorted it out. I performed well in the situation that could have been serious for us.

b) As an early experience of teamwork I was able to see the value of allocating a larger piece of work across a group so that it became more manageable. Resolving the problem as a team was also the most effective way to respond and one that gave me a sense of satisfaction. The group did make an avoidable error in the division of the work and didn’t find this out until very late in the project. I managed to respond constructively to this situation; taking on emergency work and supporting the group to do the same by concentrating on solutions rather than debating whose fault it was.

## Analysis

See if you can make sense of what happened and your reactions to it. Consider both the positive and negative elements of the situation.

a) When my team member made her mistake we were able to work together to come up with a solution. Solving problems is something I’ve always been told that I am good at.

b) When we initially met as a team we did not take any notes or write up the work allocation into any kind of shared record. Although we were all enthusiastic we were relatively unorganised and should have taken the opportunity to set team rules - like always having a minute taker. Nor did we set up review meetings to check and support each other’s progress meaning that the mistake only came to light at the last minute. When under pressure to correct the mistake we divided up work effectively and clarified that we all knew what we had to achieve, allowing us to finish the work in time and to the required quality.

## Conclusions

What do you take from the experience? Is the learning in the form of a skill, an insight into your preferred ways of working or a strength? Does this learning logically flow from your evaluation and analysis of the experience? Sometimes this learning is an anticipated and clearly stated outcome of the module but very often it can be entirely personal to you.

1. I found I was more in favour of Daniel’s theories than Johnson’s. Really enjoyed the project even if it wasn’t always easy to work with others.
2. Working in a team environment had great advantages in terms of allowing a lot of focused research to be completed in a limited time and I derived a lot of satisfaction from playing a full role in this. However, to be properly effective the team needed to organise itself and set deadlines, milestones and keep records. In effect we needed to be aware of the basics of project management. I feel this experience has given me a practical insight into why these conventions exist.

## Action Plan

If a similar situation arose in the future in further study or in the workplace what would you do differently? What are the generalised learning points you have taken from this specific experience that will inform your thinking and actions in the future in further study or in the workplace and why might this be important?

1. I will be much more cautious about working with others in the future as you cannot rely on people. I don’t think I will be using either Johnson or Daniels in the future as this was the only module that includes them.
2. When joining a new team I would look to ensure there was some way to record allocated actions and to agree checkpoints when we could review progress together; well in advance of any deadlines. If these plans did not already exist I would take it upon myself to suggest them to the team and take a role in their implementation. I intend to look at types of productivity software, such as Asana and Trello, by the end of my course so that I have a knowledge of which tools I might use for team projects in the future. I am very interested in joining a major technology company in the future and I am aware of the importance of being able to work effectively in remote project teams in this environment so I feel confident that this experience will be helpful.

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## Using your reflection to tell a story

As well as using this in the assessment of your academic studies, your overall reflection of an experience should help you to tell a story that can be applied succinctly to an application for a new course or job using the CAR technique. CAR is a technique expected by a number of employers in application forms and interview answers, it stands for Context, Action, Result. This is not a case of regurgitating everything in your record but to help answer situational questions e.g. tell me about a time when you have had to influence an outcome? What happened? What would you do differently next time?