

REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO

Guide to reflective writing



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OUTLINE

- What is reflection?
- What is critical reflection? Moving from reflection to critical reflection.
 - Importance of context
- Becoming self aware
 - Values
 - Emotions
 - Assumptions
 - Strengths & Weaknesses
- Writing reflectively
- Introducing the reflective portfolio



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WHAT IS REFLECTION?

- Term used a lot in academic contexts and a key skill of postgraduate study
- Encompasses 'reflective thinking' 'reflective learning' and 'reflective practice'
- Plays an important role in your learning and self development
 - Often assumed that you acquire it automatically but as with other areas of competence you need to be aware of, **practice and develop it as a skill**
- Certain life experiences often make us pause and think, but how often do you do this actively and as part of your professional development as an officer?

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KEY FEATURES OF REFLECTION



Reflection results in learning: It can change your ideas and understanding of the situation.



Reflection is an active and dynamic process: It can involve reflecting 'on' action (past experience), reflecting 'in' action (on an incident as it happens), or reflecting 'for' action (actions that you may wish to take in the future).



Reflection is not a linear process, but cyclic: It leads to the development of new ideas which can be used to plan the next stages of learning.



Reflection encourages looking at issues from different perspectives: It helps you to understand the issue and scrutinise your own values, assumptions and perspectives.

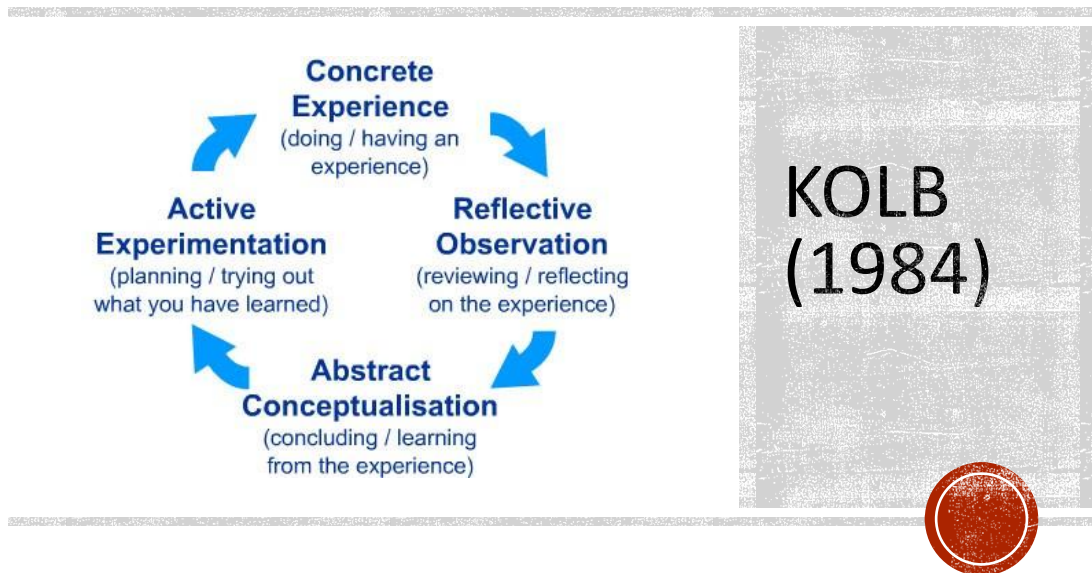


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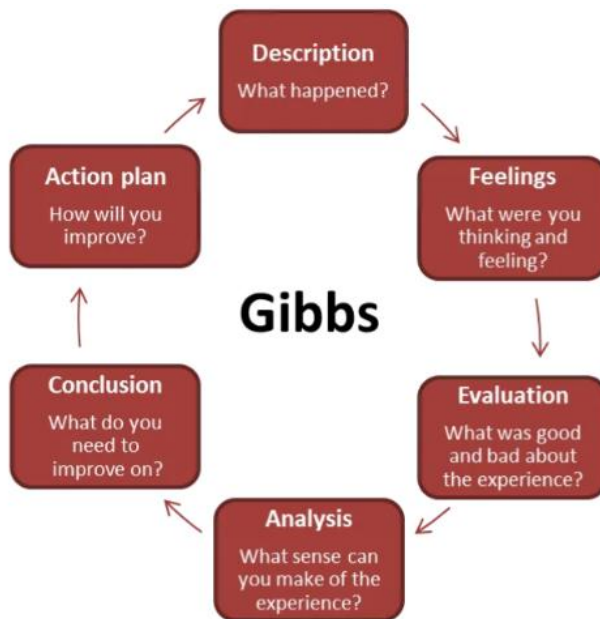
THE THEORY BEHIND REFLECTION

- Cycles –
- Kolb – learning from experiences is cyclical moving from having an experience, through examining that experience – actively questioning to see what was going on, forming concepts and ideas, testing these out in practice.
- Gibbs – adds more stages with specific directions (does not necessarily challenge assumptions or view things from a variety of perspectives).

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LESS
BASIC –
GIBBS
1988



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BOTH REFER
TO IDEAS
CAPTURED
BY
SCHÖN, 1991



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FROM REFLECTION TO CRITICAL REFLECTION

- Critical reflective practice is underpinned by reflexivity – a concept that is important in research and assists us in avoiding *seeing what we expect to see*.
- Demonstrates awareness of the impact of values, emotions and assumptions but also context and power relationships.
- Brookfield argues for the use of 4 lenses in critical reflection
 - 1. Ourselves in terms of our own autobiographies, impact of past experiences, values, beliefs and assumptions in your practice.
 - 2. Brookfield talks of 'our students eyes' but you can consider your followers - makes you aware of issues of power and power relationships. What feedback are they giving you? What are they learning from you?
 - 3. The experiences of colleagues – what can you learn from their feedback?
 - 4. Theoretical and professional literature – what can you learn from this?



THE CONTEXT OF REFLECTION

- Learning milieu (Boud & Walker, 1990)
 - Totality of the human and material influences which impact on you in any particular situation.
 - Includes co learners, teachers, learning materials, the physical environment and everything within it
 - But it also includes the broader taken for granted features such as:
 - What social groups are dominant or oppressed – who is heard and who is acted upon (class, race, gender)
 - Wider social, cultural and political considerations (institutional rules and modes of operation, cultural assumptions etc.)



BECOMING MORE SELF AWARE

- Being more critically aware will feed into how you approach learning.
- Developing a questioning mindset starts with self awareness.
- Questioning your values, emotions, assumptions, strengths and weaknesses, knowledge.
 - Why did this happen, why did I react this way?
 - What didn't I see, what wasn't I aware of?
 - What were my assumptions? What previous knowledge might have contributed to this?
 - What organisational pressures or ideologies were involved in or obstructed my perception?
 - How and in what way were my actions perceived by others?

Scrutinising ourselves can feel embarrassing and awkward. You need to lean into that uncertainty.



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STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

JOT DOWN

What is one of my key strengths/ key weaknesses?

How do I know this?

What does this look like in practice (e.g, someone who is organised might make lists, keep a calendar, always be on time, or never miss a deadline.. The converse is also true)

What might have contributed to this?

THEN

What have others complimented me about? What does that suggest in terms of my strengths?

What have others had to help me with? What does this tell me about my weaknesses?

What tasks energise me? Why?

You can also ask others about what they think your strengths and weaknesses are (family, partners, friends, colleagues)

You may not agree with this assessment, but it will be useful to think about why they experience you in this way.



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VALUES

- Values are the things that are important to us. – Family, friends, relationships, work, education. Consciously and unconsciously underpin many decisions that we make.
- Developed through life, and they are a lens through which we evaluate our own actions and those of others.
- A focus on the 'me' is often useful in evaluating what you are doing/where you are going, how you understand people and situations
- You need time to think about this, values are tricky to narrow down, ask yourself
 - What values are important to me as a person?
 - What values are important to me as a military officer?
 - Are they the same? Do they conflict?
- (see list Exercise 1)



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EMOTIONS

- Processing feelings can be uncomfortable but the effects of not processing them can be damaging to ourselves, our relationships and our work. Negative feelings are often related to
 - Low motivation
 - Job dissatisfaction
 - Anxiety
 - Fatigue
 - Cynicism
 - Anger
 - Burnout
 - Low self esteem
- It is important to consider feelings as part of the reflective cycle.



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EMOTIONS

- Learners always bring previous learning experiences into new ones. This can be positive or negative, and it is important to be aware of this.
- Awareness of what worries you, inhibits you, acts as a learning block
- Be prepared for emotional responses – to other people, to grades, to deadlines, to interruptions, other people's frustrations. How will you process these?
- Separate thoughts and feelings (thoughts and self beliefs can intensify anxiety, different thoughts can generate different feelings, and often memories of an event can often have a more direct emotional impact than the events themselves)
- Process
 - One way is through writing in your journal – being open and honest – often committing something to paper allows you to leave it there.
 - Through talking – with a trusted colleague or critical friend
 - Establishing a safe space or a supportive group (or counselling if needed)



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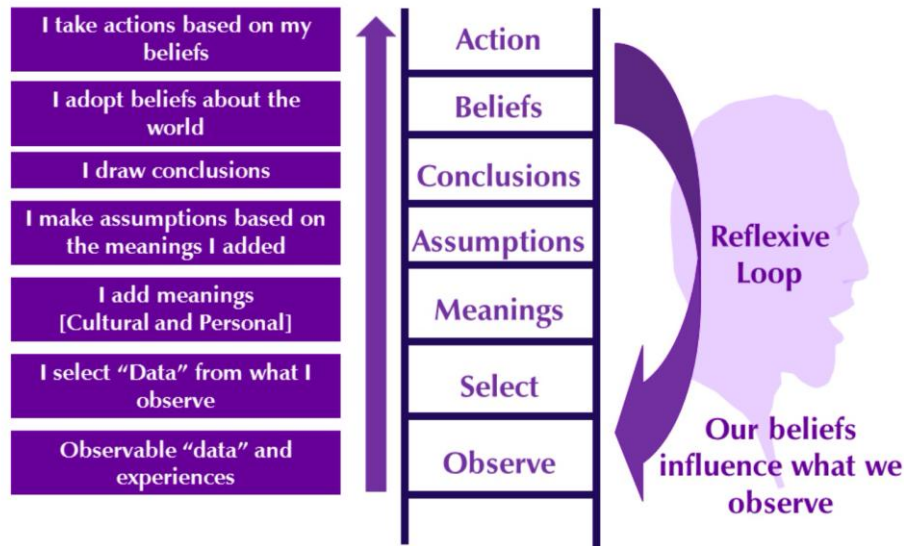
ASSUMPTIONS

- Assumptions are things we take for granted and fail to question in any way – (automatic thinking). *We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are (Cicero)*
- This can lead to stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. They can lead to unconscious bias particularly around groups of people, or the way things are done.
- I encourage you to read Gerras '[Thinking critically about critical thinking](#)'
- Also relevant is Mezirow's (2001) 'Habits of mind' – those comfortable unchallenged ways of thinking.
- A useful way of conceptualising this is via Argyris (1982) Ladder of inference



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The Ladder of Inference



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EXAMPLE

- Someone you are working with behaves badly and you select data from what you observe. You only see the bad behaviour rather than anything good they might do. The meaning you add is that you are not surprised they behave badly as many people you work with in this particular context behave like this. You then make assumptions about this person based on this (people in this context, or from this group always behave like this, and this person is no different).
- From this, you draw your own conclusions that whenever you work in this particular context, you expect to deal with difficult people. These conclusions form the basis of your beliefs, which in turn influence your future actions. In your actions, you are then most likely to select the data that confirm your existing beliefs. Without even realising, you get to the point where you see what you expect to see, rather than what actually happens.
- (adapted from Bissot, 2024, p.87)

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WHAT TO DO

- Consciously going to the bottom of the ladder and questioning the assumptions you make and the conclusions you draw from them.
- Seek out data that contradicts your assumptions. Look for evidence of contrary behaviour.
- Make your reasoning more visible to others
- Inquire into others thinking and reasoning behind their actions
- Ask does everyone agree on what we see, or understand



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WRITE REFLECTIVELY?

Reflective writing is

- Always written in the first person (I) with a focus on yourself
- Focused on your experience, thoughts, feelings and assumptions
- Honest, spontaneous and subjective
- A record of your thoughts and experience



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REFLECTIVE WRITING IS NOT

1. Simply a description
2. Calculated
3. Objective
4. Something that can be rushed
5. Simply planning what you will do next

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WHEN WRITING REFLECTIVELY

- Constable (2023) offers a structure for this
- **Stage 1: Reflection** – use free writing to focus on an issue, concern, incident that you have encountered on the course or in your own learning. Do this spontaneously to capture all your thoughts. If you find this challenging I have included some questions in the portfolio to help you structure your writing.
- **Stage 2: Analysis** – interrogate your text
 - What is going on here?
 - What am I feeling?
 - What assumptions am I making?
 - What does this tell me about my knowledge and beliefs or practice?
 - Are there other ways of looking at this?

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WHEN WRITING REFLECTIVELY

■ Stage 3: Action

- What action could I take?
- Or in what ways have I learned from this?
- How might I respond differently (the same) if this occurs again?
- What does this tell me about the beliefs and assumptions I hold
- What does it tell me about knowledge?



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THE 6 MINUTE WRITE (BOLTON, 2018)

- Time yourself, write for six minutes without stopping
- Don't stop to examine, just keep writing even if it doesn't make sense
- Don't worry about spelling, grammar or punctuation
- Give yourself permission to write anything
- Whatever you write cannot be wrong
- Lots may be written, or a little



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REMEMBER

- This is not self-indulgent
- We reflect in order to understand ourselves better, explore what is holding us back, how can we capitalise on our successes.



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SHORT 6 MINUTE WRITE

Try freewriting the following.

1. List the milestones of your professional career so far, quickly without thinking about it too much
2. Choose one milestone, write a short piece about it – 6 minutes tops. Think about -
 - Why did you pick this?
 - What does it mean now to you now that you focus on it?



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THE PORTFOLIO



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HOW DID I GET HERE?

- Describe the most significant parts of your story so far: (joining the DF, key steps, experiences – reflect on what are the most important things to you)
 - Why did I make these choices?
 - How did I make these choices?
- What has changed about yourself over the years?
- What has stayed the same?
- What does this say about you as a person, colleague, and leader? Consider your values and how you feel about it.
- You can reflect on your personality reflection as part of this



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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Personal analysis grid:
 - What am I bringing to the course, what are my strengths, what are my areas for improvement.
- Goals
 - What do I want to learn and do? What do I want to get out of this course?
 - When and how will I do this – a plan of action
 - Goals need to be SMART
- Specific (simple, sensible, significant).
- Measurable (meaningful, motivating).
- Achievable (agreed, attainable).
- Relevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- Time bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive)



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LEADERSHIP STATEMENT

- What sort of leader are you? What are your values, how do you relate to others both above and below?
- In this discussion reference leadership theory, what resonates with you, it may be a combination of approaches
- Include a bibliography!!



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MODULE REFLECTIONS

- 6 module reflections paced throughout the year to develop your writing

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FINALLY

- Final course reflection
- Final goal reflection and plans

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MODULE REFLECTIONS

- Each MODULE piece that you write should enquire into
 - What happened, experienced, encountered – be specific (*do not write a description of the module*)
 - Thought and what others might have thought
 - Felt and what others might have felt
 - Believed and how these beliefs influenced your actions.
 - Are prejudiced about, take for granted, and unquestioningly assume
 - How this affected you.
 - **What will you take with you into the next module – learning points.**



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WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO

- Pick something
 - A set of ideas or theory you encountered that challenged you
 - An interaction with a group, a colleague, an instructor
 - An experience – such as giving a presentation, writing an essay, managing time, using the library
 - It does not have to be negative
 - Something you loved
 - Something you hated



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THE PRESENTATION AN EXAMPLE

Handout contains 3 pieces written about the same event. After class I want you to read all 3 pieces.

This is an important exercise in capturing the 3 levels of reflective writing – you will be aiming for level 3. (by the end of the year ☺)

- Level 1 Descriptive writing
- Level 2 Descriptive reflection
- Level 3 Dialogic and critical reflection



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ADDITIONAL READING

- Bassot, B. (2024) *The Reflective Journal* (4th Ed) London: Bloomsbury
- Bolton, G. (2018). *Reflective Practice*. London: Sage.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R, & Walker, D (1985) *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Routledge.
- Brookfield, S.D. (2017). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Constable, G. (2023) Reflection as a catalyst in the development of personal and professional effectiveness, in A. Mantell and T. Scragg (eds). *Reflective Practice in Social Work*. London: Sage



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