

Reflection

What is reflection, and how does it differ from critical reflection?

Reflection and critical reflection have been variously defined and can be understood to mean different things to different people depending on their perspective and the context (Lucas, 2012).

- Generally speaking, most definitions of reflection describe individuals reviewing and thinking about their past activities and the world.
- Most definitions of critical reflection take reflection one step further with respect to cognitive complexity and describe individuals thinking critically to create or clarify the meaning of past experience in terms of self (self in relation to the self, and self in relation to the world) – identifying their assumptions, assessing them, and modifying/clarifying them.

What might reflection look like in the university context?

Some examples of how you may be (or may have been) asked to reflect in the university context are:

Example #1: *“What happened in the video?”*

Example #2: *“What are the main points that you have taken from the readings?”*

Example #3: *“Has what we just discussed changed your view of x? If so, how?”*

Example #4: *“What questions are you left with after working on the group project?”*

Example #5: *“If you were to run the simulation again, would you do anything different? If so, what would you do different, and why?”*

What benefits are associated with students reflecting?

Many educators (e.g., Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Moon, 2006; Wolf, 2010) have noted that critical reflection is an important capacity for students to develop because it contributes to deeper understanding and learning. “Teaching critical reflection supports the well-established argument that learning should include both the assimilation of subject knowledge and the confidence to question and adapt that knowledge” (Smith, 2011, p. 217). Some of the benefits of critical reflection that have been noted in the literature (e.g., Irvin, 2013; University of Technology Sydney, 2013; Wolf, n.d.) are:

- It makes students active participants in the learning process.
- It increases students’ awareness of connections between the course material, the self, and the world.
- It increases transfer of learning from inside the classroom to outside the classroom.
- It provides students with the opportunity to frame and reframe information in relation to their existing knowledge.
- It helps students identify, evaluate, and clarify their opinions.
- It permits students to strengthen their metacognitive skills (i.e., thinking that enables them to understand, analyze, and control their cognitive processes).

- It helps students learn more about how they learn.
- If the reflection is ongoing, it enables students to document their learning over time and to identify changes in their thinking, better equipping them to help others.
- If the reflections are submitted to the instructor it gives the instructor insight into students' thinking and development – insight that is not normally otherwise obtained. It also fosters open dialogue between instructor and student and enables the instructor to respond to and encourage students' growth.

How might you make reflection a regular part of your learning experience?

At the end of each course-related activity (e.g., reading, paper, group project), ask yourself one or more of the following questions, or other questions that require you to reflect on the activity:

Example #1: *"What happened?"*

Example #2: *"What did I learn from the activity?"*

Example #3: *"How can I apply what I have learned?"*

Example #4: *"What would I like to learn more about, related to the activity?"*

Example #5: *"What would I do differently if I were to do the activity again?"*

You can simply think about the answers to the questions you pose, or you can record them (along with the questions) in writing. Two benefits of recording your questions and answers are: 1) you will be able to track your learning over time, and 2) you will have the option to keep your reflections private (e.g., via a personal learning journal), or to share them publicly (e.g., via a reflection blog).

What are some useful reflection resources?

Assessment Resource Centre at The University of Hong Kong (2009). *Types of assessment methods: Reflective journal*. Retrieved from http://ar.cetl.hku.hk/am_rj.htm

Boud, D. (1995). *Enhancing learning through self assessment*. London: Kogan Page.

Hinett, K. (2002). Improving learning through reflection: Part I. Retrieved from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/resources/database/id485_improving_learning_part_one.pdf

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Moon, J. (1999). *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page.

Zubizarreta, J. (2008). The learning portfolio: A powerful idea for significant learning. Retrieved from http://orgs.bloomu.edu/tale/documents/IDEA_Paper_44.pdf