

Gibbs' (1988) Reflective cycle

Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle (see figure 2) is an effective tool to reflect after the event on 'critical' incidents; those events that have had a profound negative or positive impact on you – learning by doing. These can be events that have occurred in learning, practical or personal areas. Gibbs' (1988) cycle is considered useful for students who are new to reflecting as it has clearly defined sections:



Figure 2: Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle

When following the cycle it is important to ensure that you keep each section 'clean'; for example the description section should only describe the event. Some tutors prefer students to remove the subheadings when using the Gibbs (1988) cycle, others do not mind if you keep them in – check with your tutor which they prefer. If the tutor prefers them removed, you might find it useful to use the subheadings whilst you are writing the assessment in order to ensure that you include all the components and remove them before submission. Importantly, if you do remove the subheadings, ensure that the assignment flows from section to section. Below is a guide for how to use Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle:

Description

In this section, briefly *describe* the event; this should be one of the smallest sections of your reflection. Include important details to indicate what happened; such as the reason for your involvement, what you did and who was there and what they did (if appropriate). Whilst it is important that you include information that is necessary to make sense of the event, the key point here is on keeping it brief.

Feelings

This section gives you the opportunity to explore any thoughts or feelings that you were having at the time of the event in isolation from the other components. In order to achieve this, it is important that you do not include any further description and do not try to evaluate them. Ensure that you make a clear distinction between thoughts and feelings. Also, do not just use descriptive words for how you were feeling; tell your reader what this actually felt like. For example, what is it like to feel nervous – do your hands shake? An important component in this section is that you expand to tell your reader how the thoughts and feelings that you were having have impacted on the event.

Evaluation

The evaluation section gives you the opportunity to explore what was good about the event and what did not go so well. It is important that you try to consider both the good and the bad, even if the incident seemed totally negative or positive. This includes what others did or didn't do well.

Please note, that the previous components of this cycle all concern what happened, the components that follow relate to making sense of the incident and how you could improve on the situation if it happened again.

Analysis

This section is where you make sense of the event and should be the largest section of your reflection. It is useful at this point to take all the issues that you have highlighted previously in the reflection and consider them separately. It is important in this section that you consult relevant academic literature to help you make sense of the incident. For example, if the reflection relates to being nervous about asking a placement supervisor to explain details of a complicated procedure and this has had a negative impact on your understanding of the procedure; in this section you could consult the literature on how to communicate effectively.

Conclusion

At this stage, if you have completed all the sections effectively (this includes being honest about your contribution and feelings) you bring them all together so that you can sensibly conclude from examining the incident and consulting the relevant literature, how what you did led up to the incident (and what others did if appropriate). From this, you should be able to make a logical conclusion about how you can overcome or develop in this area.

Action plan

In this section, taking into account the previous elements of the cycle, you suggest a plan for if this event (or similar) were to happen again. What would you do differently or keep the same? This is the final section of the cycle and the end of this particular reflection.

Therefore, even if a similar incident happened in the future, it is important that you revisit the cycle rather than assuming that it is already dealt with and that you already have the answer.

Reference

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Oxford Further Education Unit