

WHAT IS CRITICAL REFLECTION?

Excerpt from Defining Critical Reflection, 2017, GVI. Accessed and adapted from:
<https://www.gviusa.com/blog/defining-critical-reflection/>

As Jack Mezirow (1991) wrote in [Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning](#), “through reflection we see through the habitual way that we have interpreted the experience of everyday life, in order to reassess rationally the implicit claim of validity made by a previously unquestioned meaning scheme or perspective.”

Critical reflection contributes to students becoming more conscious about their motivations, and the concept of ‘doing no harm’ to the communities and partners with which they serve. So how can we deconstruct this broad term to better fit within our methods of learning and teaching?

Below are four key characteristics of reflection that can aid us both in better understanding and facilitating it.

1. Reflection is personal

It primarily relates to the self and is self-learning and self-growth. The process of engaging students in critical reflection is then a process of self-knowledge and questioning. As practitioners, we can use critical reflection to engage our students in a learning process that examines relations of culture, power, hegemony, ideology, and existing institutional or governmental arrangements.

2. Reflection is active

It is experiential learning at its best. As John Dewey (1916) has described, learning must be connected to activity and analysis if it is to truly be considered learning: “mere activity does not constitute experience...experience involves change, but change is a meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it.” The process of reflection can be practiced through an array of classroom activities that engage and challenge students to expand their own worldview.

3. Reflection is intentional

It is an integrated understanding and intentional analyses of complex processes that will better inform how students engage with life, other people, and other cultures. It is a method of gaining intercultural competence and an understanding of cultural diversity.

4. Reflection is a process

It is a cycle whereby we look at an experience, frame it, and derive meaning from it. Critical thinking is integral to this process and demonstrates student ability to evaluate relevant information and opinions gathered in a systematic, purposeful, and efficient manner.

Critical analysis, problem-solving, and deep interpretation of this kind will provide students with greater access to leadership capacities as well as transformative knowledge.

Reflection, when practiced through a critical lens, is a tool that will create more engaged students and more meaningful experiences.

SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

(K. Rice)

SKILLS	GUIDING QUESTION	DESCRIPTION
Knowledge	What do I know?	“Facts” about the site and its programs, the larger social issues, data, the who/what/where/when...
Comprehension	What do I understand?	Why does community address issues in the way they do? Compare/contrast, summarize, explain
Analysis	How can theory help me understand what I see and experience?	Examining my experience in relation to curricular/co-curricular content. How do my experience and the theory, data, etc. inform each other? How are they contradictory? What patterns am I noticing? What are the root causes of the “need” for this service? What inequities are at play?
Application	How can I use this knowledge?	How does this issue impact my life? How does my life impact this issue? How will I concretely use what I have learned?
Synthesis	How do the pieces fit together?	Generalizing. Connecting knowledge from several areas. Looking at issues on the individual, relationship, group and societal/institutional levels
Evaluation	How well did I do it? What can I do now?	Of my own capacity to contribute. What would I do differently next time? If students are asked to identify recommendations for a site, agreement with community partners on this is important. Encourage students to recognize the often limited experience they have had in framing their recommendations
Description	What do I see and hear?	Separating skills in description from skills in analysis and application.
Critical Thinking	How do I question what I think I have learned, and what others say about this issue?	Building the capacity to look at issues from multiple perspectives, and to question. Moving from dichotomous thinking to more complex thinking.
Naming Feelings	What am I feeling and how does it impact my perspective?	Recognizing, acknowledging, naming feelings as a compass for learning.
Career Development	How does this experience shape my career goals?	Examining the role of community in careers. How do these skills transfer to a profession?
Personal Growth	How am I changing as a person?	Exploring how I am different after this experience. How are my relationships different?
Identity Development	How am I becoming clearer about who I am?	How have I become more aware of my values, perspectives, cultural identities...?
Leadership	How can I make a difference?	What leadership skills have I learned and developed?
Social Change	How can I affect change?	What knowledge and tools do I now have to contribute to change?

REFLECTION FRAMEWORKS

(A. Hall adapted from K. Rice)

These frameworks can be used as guides for developing reflection questions that can be used in written, oral, or artistic/creative activities.

FRAMEWORK	What, So What, Now What?	ORID	DIGA	DEAL
	(Borton, 1970; Driscoll, 1994; Rolfe, 2001)	(Spencer, 1989; Stanfield, 2000)	(Gibbs, 1988)	(Ash & Clayton, 2004/2009)
COGNITIVE DESCRIPTION	What?	Objective	Describe	Describe
AFFECTIVE EXPRESSION		Reflective	Interpret (Feelings/Evaluation)	
ANALYSIS	So What?	Interpretive	Generalize (Analysis/Conclusion)	Examine
APPLICATION	Now What?	Decisional	Action	Articulate Learning

What?, So What?, Now What? Model for Critical Reflection

Borton. T. (1970). Reach Touch and Teach: Student Concerns and Process Education. McGraw-Hill, New York. Driscoll J. (1994). Reflective practice for practice. Senior Nurse, 13, 47 -50.
 Rolfe, G., Freshwater, D., Jasper, M. (2001). Critical reflection in nursing and the helping professions: a user's guide. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Accessed and Adapted from University of Edinburgh, Reflection Toolkit, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/reflective-support>



The simplicity of this model is both a great strength and a possible limitation. It is very easy to remember and can be applied to any field or experience. However, there is a possibility that by just answering the three main questions the reflection does not achieve a meaningful and critical depth.

To ensure that you have depth and breadth it can be helpful to work through the question prompts outlined below for each stage. You don't have to answer all of them, but they can guide you to what sort of things make sense to include in that stage. You might have others questions that work better for you.

What? - The experience of the situation

Helpful Questions: What.....

- is the context?
- is the problem/situation/difficulty/reason for being stuck/reason for success?
- was I/we/others trying to achieve?
- was the outcome of the situation?
- was my role in the situation?
- was the role of other people in the situation (if others were involved)?
- feelings did the situation evoke in me? And in others (to the extent you know)?
- were the consequences for me? And for others?
- was good/bad about the experience?

So What? - The implications of the situation

You might want to supplement your own knowledge and thoughts with other people's ideas, references, and theories. This can be to show what helped shape your thoughts and further explore them. This comes down to how much you are looking to formalize your reflections. This can especially be important if the reflection is assessed.

Helpful Questions: So what...

- does this tell me/teach me/imply about the situation/my attitude/my practice/the problem?
- was going through my mind in the situation?
- did I base my decisions/actions on?
- other information/theories/models/literature can I use to help understand the situation?
- could I have done differently to get a more desirable outcome?
- is my new understanding of the situation?
- does this experience tell me about the way I work?

Now What? - The action plan

Ensure that you are concrete in your action plan and not only saying generic comments such as 'I will do things differently/better'. The more concrete you can be regarding what you want to do, how you will do it, and how you will remind yourself, the easier and more likely it will be to implement.

Helpful Questions: Now what...

- do I need to do in the future to do better/fix a similar situation/stop being stuck?
- might be the consequences of this new action?
- considerations do I need about me/others/the situation to make sure this plan is successful?
- do I need to do to ensure that I will follow my plan?

ORID Model for Critical Reflection – Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional



Spencer, L. (1989). *Winning Through Participation*. Institute of Cultural Affairs. Stanfield, B. (2000). *The Art of Focused Conversation*. New Society Publishers.

Accessed and adapted from: Beever, G. (2017). The ORID Method (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional). AgriFutures Australia.
<https://extensionaus.com.au/extension-practice/the-orid-method-objective-reflective-interpretive-and-decisional/>

OBJECTIVE – This first sets the scene. Provides the context. Establishes the facts and introduces any data sources that are behind the subject. It provides the basis for all parties to “get on the same page.” Using the method you ask questions that relate to establishing people’s knowledge and understanding of the subject area in question.

Helpful Questions

- Imagine you were a video camera recording what you saw happening that day. What actions, words, phrases, objects, and scenes are recorded on your tape? Let’s get everything out so we all have a
- full picture of what happened.
- What has happened since?

REFLECTIVE - During this phase participants are helped to identify or context their own situation to the subject, objectives, or learning outcomes in question. It gets out their reactions and feelings towards the subject. Providing key questions, analogies, practical examples or benchmarks are useful in helping participants reflect. By having first established the facts and understanding of the situation by objective questioning; reflexive questioning commences a learning journey in relation to the topic.

Helpful Questions:

- What shocked you?
- What was most frightening?
- What made you want to escape?
- How else did you find yourself reacting? Were you disappointed? Angry? Sad?
- Any place you wanted to cheer?

INTERPRETIVE – In this phase assistance is provided with additional information or the opportunity for further questioning that helps participants to learn further about the subject and identify what it is that may be important to them in respect to it. Using the context provided in the objective and reflexive phase, the interpretive phase is used to delve deeper into the subject area and develop a greater understanding.

Helpful Questions:

- What are all the things you think lead up to this event?
- What might have been some other contributing factors?
- What impact does it have on you?
- How are you different now?
- How might we be different a year from now?
- What can we learn from this?

DECISIONAL - This is the final stage that helps draw conclusions and documents what future actions may be taken by people; given the discussion that has already taken place in the first three phases.

Helpful Questions:

- What can we do to prevent this from happening again?
- Who else do you need to see or talk with?
- What can we do to help each other now?
- What can we do to symbolize how we changed or what we have learned?

As the ORID process is based on Kolb’s experiential learning model, the suggested elements to check your process against are:

Review/Reflect – To what degree are the participants able to identify their current level of ability in respect to the subject area and/or how well are the participants able to identify the importance of the content to themselves and their own circumstances?

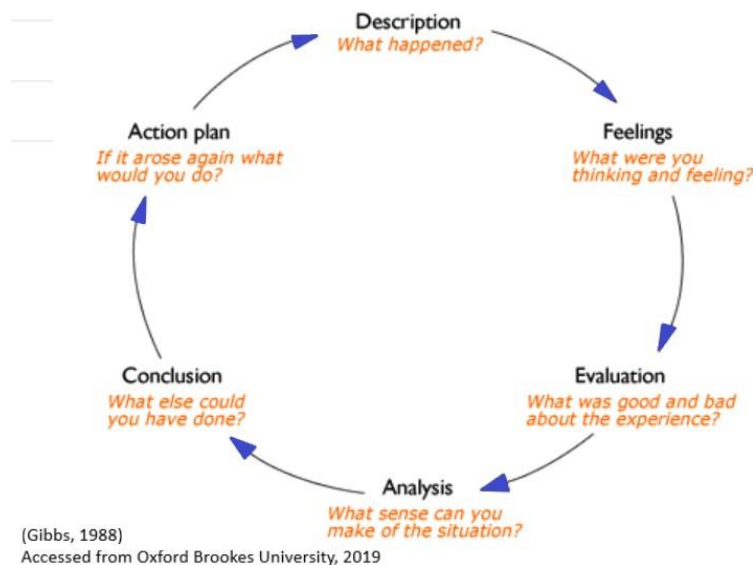
Context/Interpret/Make Sense Of – To what degree are participants able to interpret the information you provide against their own personal situation(s)?

Plan – To what degree are the participants able to identify what they should do that may be important to them, in relation to the objectives you set for the activity?

Act – As a result of the use of ORID, to what degree are the participants able to identify actions that will assist them in achieving the outcomes set for the activity or subject area?

DIGA Model for Critical Reflection – Describe, Interpret, Generalize, Apply

Gibbs, G (1988). Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford. Accessed and Adapted from University of Edinburgh, Reflection Toolkit, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle>



Description of the experience

Interpret

- Feelings and thoughts about the experience
- Evaluation of the experience, both good and bad

Generalize

- Analysis to make sense of the situation
- Conclusion about what you learned and what you could have done differently

Action plan for how you would act in a similar situations in the future, or general changes you find appropriate.

This model is a good way to work through an experience. This can be either a stand-alone experience or a situation you go through frequently, for example meetings with a team you have to collaborate with. Gibbs originally advocated its use in repeated situations, but the stages and principles apply equally well for single experiences too. If done with a stand-alone experience, the action plan may become more general and look at how you can apply your conclusions in the future.

DESCRIPTION

Here you have a chance to describe the situation in detail. The main points to include here concern what happened. Your feelings and conclusions will come later.

Helpful Questions:

- What happened?
- When and where did it happen?
- Who was present?
- What did you and the other people do?
- What was the outcome of the situation?
- Why were you there?
- What did you want to happen?

INTERPRET

1. Feelings

Here you can explore any feelings or thoughts that you had during the experience and how they may have impacted

the experience.

Helpful Questions:

- What were you feeling during the situation?
- What were you feeling before and after the situation?
- What do you think other people were feeling about the situation?
- What do you think other people feel about the situation now?
- What were you thinking during the situation?
- What do you think about the situation now?

2. Evaluation

Here you have a chance to evaluate what worked and what didn't work in the situation. Try to be as objective and honest as possible. To get the most out of your reflection focus on both the positive and the negative aspects of the situation, even if it was primarily one or the other.

Helpful Questions:

- What was good and bad about the experience?
- What went well?
- What didn't go so well?
- What did you and other people contribute to the situation (positively or negatively)?

GENERALIZE

1. Analysis

The analysis step is where you have a chance to make sense of what happened. Up until now you have focused on details around what happened in the situation. Now you have a chance to extract meaning from it. You want to target the different aspects that went well or poorly and ask yourself why. If you are looking to include academic literature, this is the natural place to include it.

Helpful Questions:

- Why did things go well?
- Why didn't it go well?
- What sense can I make of the situation?
- What knowledge – my own or others (for example academic literature) can help me understand the situation?

2. Conclusions

In this section you can make conclusions about what happened. This is where you summarize your learning and highlight what changes to your actions could improve the outcome in the future. It should be a natural response to the previous sections.

Helpful Questions:

- What did I learn from this situation?
- How could this have been a more positive situation for everyone involved?
- What skills do I need to develop for me to handle a situation like this better?
- What else could I have done?

ACTION

At this step, you plan for what you would do differently in a similar or related situation in the future. It can also be extremely helpful to think about how you will help yourself to act differently – such that you don't only plan what you will do differently, but also how you will make sure it happens. Sometimes just the realization is enough, but other times, reminders might be helpful.

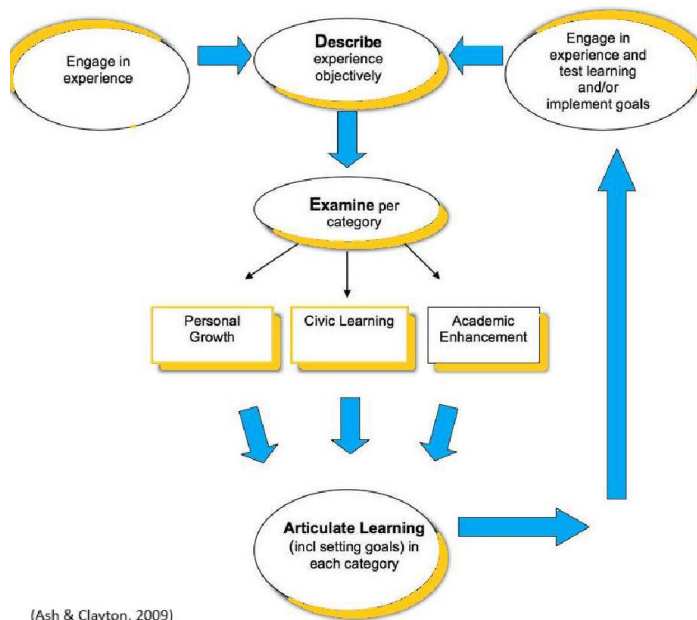
Helpful Questions:

- If I had to do the same thing again, what would I do differently?
- How will I develop the required skills I need?
- How can I make sure that I can act differently next time?

The DEAL Model for Critical Reflection – Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning

Accessed and adapted from Duke Service-Learning at

<https://servicelearning.duke.edu/sites/servicelearning.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/deal-reflection-questions.original.pdf>. The DEAL model was developed by Ash & Clayton (2004, 2009) of North Carolina State University and can be referenced [here](#).



DESCRIBE EXPERIENCE(S) OBJECTIVELY

Part I: Overview of “big picture” – what have I done since the last reflection session?

Part II: Home in on 2 or 3 key experiences to focus the reflection on - What were the most significant or reflection-worthy experiences?

- Where was I?
- Who else was there?
- When did this experience take place?
- What was said?
- What did I/others do?
- Why were we there? (NOTE: Be careful here. “Why” can be an objective question, as in “we were having this conversation because the Director had scheduled a meeting of the entire group and had invited both me and Mr. Smith” but it can also open the door to interpretation, as in “we were having this conversation because the Director wanted me and Mr. Smith to advise her”)

ASSESS PROGRESS SINCE LAST REFLECTION

- What were my goals as articulated at the end of the previous reflection session and/or in my articulated learnings from the previous reflection session? What specific conclusions did I intend to enact or test based on my previous articulated learnings?
- What specific steps did I take in order to attain these goals?
- What obstacles—internal and external—hindered me? What factors made me more effective?
- In what ways did my attempts to attain goals or to enact or test conclusions proceed as expected, based on my earlier understanding, and in what ways was I surprised?
- What do my attempts to enact or test previous conclusions tell me about the validity of those conclusions? In what specific ways is my understanding of those conclusions changing yet again?
- How can I change my behavior or mentality in order to make better progress toward my goals? What specific steps do I need to take in order to continue refining my understanding?

EXAMINE EXPERIENCE

FROM A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

- How did this experience make me feel (positively and/or negatively)? How did I handle my emotional reactions? Do I believe I should have felt differently than I did?
- What assumptions or expectations did I bring to the situation (including my assumptions about other persons involved) and how did they affect my actions? To what extent did they prove true? If they did not prove true, why was there a discrepancy?
- How have past experiences influenced the manner in which I acted or responded to this situation? Am I comfortable with the influence past experiences has on me?
- What personal strengths / weaknesses of mine did the situation reveal? In what ways did they affect the situation, positively and negatively? What might I do to build on strengths/overcome weaknesses?
- Why did I, or did I not, experience difficulty working/interacting with other people? What might I do differently next time to minimize such difficulties?
- What personal skills did I draw on in handling this situation? What personal skills would I like to have had in order to have handled it better and how might I develop them?
- How did this situation reveal my own attitudes or biases, toward other people, toward the organization in question, etc.? Do I need to make any changes?

FROM A CIVIC PERSPECTIVE

- What was I / someone else trying to accomplish? In taking the actions I/they did, was the focus on symptoms of problems or causes of problems? Was the focus (symptom or cause) appropriate to the situation? How might I/they focus more on underlying causes in the future?
- What roles did each person/group/organization involved in the situation play and why? What alternative roles could each have played?
- Did I reinforce or challenge an assumption or social system by the way I acted? How does this experience highlight the relationship between larger systems?
- How else could I have handled the situation? Identify both the paths of least resistance and the paths of greater resistance. Why did I / others follow the path I/they did?
- What agendas did I and others bring to the situation? Are these agendas appropriate? Are they understandable? Are they shared? How are these agendas related to larger social or cultural issues?
- What privilege did I/others bring to this situation? What are the sources of such privilege? How am I, or others, disempowered by lack of privilege?
- In what way did any other tradeoffs (long-term/short-term; justice/efficiency; etc.) emerge in this situation? Were the trade-offs made appropriate or inappropriate and why?
- How does this experience help me to better understand the organization's vision, mission, and goals? What does it reveal to me about the relationship between the organization and those it serves? What does it suggest about how this relationship might be improved?

FROM AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

- What specific elements of our course materials relate to this experience?
- How was I able to apply a skill, perspective, or concept related to our academic material?
- What similarities and differences are there between the perspective on the situation offered by our academic material, and the situation as it in fact unfolded?
- How does this experience enhance my knowledge of a specific reading, theory, or concept? Does it challenge or reinforce my prior understanding?
- Based on analysis of the experience in light of course material, is the material (or my prior understanding of it) adequate? What reasons might there be for any differences or inadequacies? What questions should I ask to put myself in a better position to judge the adequacy of the material?

ARTICULATE LEARNING

- What did I learn?
- How, specifically, did I learn it?
- Why does this learning matter, why is it important?
- In what ways will I use this learning
- What goals shall I set in accordance with what I have learned in order to improve myself and/or the quality of my learning and/or the quality of my future?