

# Reflection: What is it and why is it useful?

Reflection is a process of exploring and examining ourselves, our perspectives, attributes, experiences and actions / interactions. It helps us gain insight and see how to move forward.

Its power lies in being able to help you develop your understanding of the way you learn, the subjects you are studying and to define your longer-term goals. It can help to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills, both of which are key to academic success. But it has further uses that relate to life skills: it is an essential part of personal development and prepares you for the world of work, encouraging you to develop the habit of analysing your actions or events and considering the consequences.

(Gillett, Hammond and Martala, 2009, p.164)

Reflection is often done as writing, possibly because this allows us to probe our reflections and develop them more thoughtfully. However, it can also take the form of a conversation with a 'critical friend', tutor or mentor.

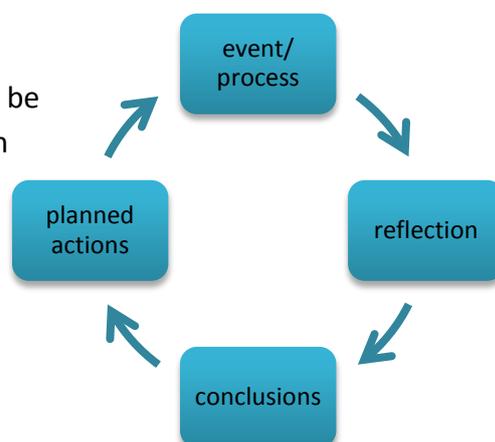
Reflection attempts to move beyond simply describing events. It aims to:

- be considered, thoughtful, analytical
- be honest – even when this is difficult or uncomfortable
- be rational and distanced (Although it often deals with feelings and emotions, we try to look at them dispassionately)
- relate experiences to wider contexts, other perspectives and theoretical frameworks

The kinds of things that people reflect on tend to fall into three broad categories:

- specific events e.g. an activity or task in class
- longer processes e.g. a project, assignment, course or progress over a semester / year
- critical incidents – something which had a significant impact on the writer (positive or negative)

Reflection is often seen as a cycle, which can be gone through once or carried out again when a set of goals or actions are planned as a result of the first cycle.



Reference: Gillett, A., Hammond, A. and Martala, M. (2009) *Successful academic writing*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.