Reflective writing: an introduction

Reflective writing does not come easily for most of us, in fact “many of us find it quite difficult to write reflectively: like most skills, the earlier you start and the more practice you have; the easier it becomes” (Watson, 2008, p.23).

This introduction gives you some pointers to get you started. The first part looks at reflective practice and reflective writing; the second looks at reflective writing for Professional Registration i.e. Certification, Chartership, Fellowship and Revalidation.

Part 1: Reflective practice and reflective writing

Why do we reflect?
We tend to reflect on why something has not worked, in order to:

- Make decisions or resolve uncertainty
- Critically review something [the process, our own behaviour or when learning something new]
- Engage in self-development (Moon, 1999, p.23)

However, any activity can be reflected upon, and lessons learnt about what works as well as what doesn’t work.

What do we mean by reflection?
We hear or talk about people reflecting on what they are doing but what passes for reflection is often not actual reflection. As Watson says it is not ‘sufficient to have an experience, you need to reflect on that experience and evaluate it, then apply that knowledge to another experience or activity” (Watson, 2008, p.21).

To reflect and engage in a critique of our own practice is not an easy thing to do but it is important to learn from our experiences. In order for us to do that we need to understand what reflective practice is and how we can become reflective practitioners.

Reflective Practice
Reflective practice is a means of learning; it is linked to the learning cycle – experience, reflection, theory, experimentation (Kolb, 1986 model of experimental learning).

It is "something more than thoughtful practice. It is that form of practice that seeks to problematise many situations of professional performance so that they can become potential learning situations and so the practitioners can continue to learn, grow and develop in and through practice” (Jarvis, 1992 p.180).
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Or as Watson (2008, p.23) put it:
- You do something
- You think about it
- You draw conclusions from the experience
- You plan how to do it better
- You do it better

Watson also advises that you ask yourself – “So what?”, “What have I learned from this activity?” and “What am I going to do as a result?”. (Watson, 2008, p.23) This is based upon Rolfe et al (2001) Three Whats:

What?
- A statement of what has happened, describe the situation;
- Achievements, consequences, responses, feelings, and problems.

So what?
- How does it fit in the larger picture of your development; discuss what has been learnt;
- Learning about self, relationships, attitudes, cultures, actions, thoughts, understanding, and improvements.

Now what?
- Identify what needs to be done in order to improve future outcomes, and to develop learning.

Having reflected on an activity or practice you now need to capture that reflection and write reflectively.

**Reflective Writing**

As stated earlier reflective writing does not come easily to most of us. In part this is due to our tendency to write descriptively; we describe what happens and what we are going to do.


Look at *Resource 6: The Presentation* – an exercise in reflective writing. “This is an account of the experience of giving a presentation. It is written in three different versions that demonstrate different levels of reflective writing. At the end of the accounts, there are notes on the criteria for the levels of reflection that each account portrays” (Moon, 2004). Read the accounts and consider how they were written.

**Part 2: Reflective writing for Professional registration.**

A good starting point for advice are the CILIP Professional Registration Handbooks; there is one for each of the three levels of professional registration.

[https://archive.cilip.org.uk/cilip/jobs-careers/professional-registration/what-level-right-you](https://archive.cilip.org.uk/cilip/jobs-careers/professional-registration/what-level-right-you)

In each handbook it states:

*Reflective writing is your response to experiences, opinions, events or new information. It is a way of thinking to help you to explore your learning and gain self-knowledge. Most importantly it is your personal reaction to the situations you encounter and is invaluable when aiming to get the most out of your learning experiences.*
Reflective writing is not pure description, judgement, or instructions.

**Candidate Support Officers (CSOs)**

Candidate Support Officers (CSOs) are a good source of advice and support. They provide:

- Impartial advice.
- Support for Certification, Chartership, Fellowship and Revalidation candidates.
- Portfolio building courses specifically relating to Professional Registration.

You can find their details on the CILIP Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in the dedicated sections for Certification, Chartership, Fellowship and Revalidation.

**How you are assessed**

For all three levels of Professional Registration you are assessed on your evaluation and reflection of:

- Your personal performance
- Your organisational context
- The wider professional context

The Professional Registration and Accreditation Board (PRAB) assess your Portfolios. They are looking for evidence of reflective practice within them.

[The Professional Registration and Accreditation Board] "... can see what you do or have done from your job description, CV and your evidence. They want to know what you think and feel and to hear your 'professional voice'.

"Chartership candidates most often fail to gain their qualification because – they describe their experiences and do not evaluate them". Candidate Support Officer

Below is an example of the difference between a descriptive statement and an evaluative one.

**Descriptive statement**

I visited the high school library.

They are working on class topics and thinking about linking them to personal reading.

**Evaluative statement**

I visited the high school library.

It was really useful to see the reader development initiatives they were using. They are developing this by working with teachers to link to class topics and gave the students a broader scope to their studies.

This is something I could adapt to my own work.

*Remember you need to show reflection throughout your portfolio not just in the Evaluative Statement. There are examples of Professional Registration Portfolios on the CILIP VLE, linked to in each of the sections for Certification, Chartership, Fellowship and Revalidation.*
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More Tips:

- Review any developmental activity and record your feelings – be honest with yourself.

- If you give a presentation, evaluate it; ask colleagues for their opinions, formally or informally; record how you felt and what you would do differently.

- If you go for a visit, record your ideas and note how you could apply anything you saw in your own place of work.

- If you go on a training course, make a note of how useful it was and what skills you were able to apply in the work place.

- Keep an annotated diary or weekly journal. (Watson, 2008 p25)

Don't rely on memory - make a record as soon as possible after the activity / event. Add additional notes once you have had time to step back and reflect more.

Remember ...

- It is your personal reflection – an individual perspective.

- Discuss with trusted colleagues and or your mentor. It is important that you trust the person you share your personal reflection with.

Professional registration workshops

Ask your CSO about any professional registration workshops running near you. These take place across the UK and you can find more details on the CILIP events calendar.

https://www.cilip.org.uk/events/event_list.asp

References


Resources

CILIP Professional Registration Handbooks available from https://archive.cilip.org.uk/cilip/jobs-careers/professional-registration/what-level-right-you


This guide was originally developed by Christine Irving in 2014 and has been updated by CILIP in June 2018