

Careers and Employability for PhD students

Student Handbook

5 ECTS Careers and Employability module for PhD students

2026 2027

NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

HEA AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY

Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland

This initiative has been funded through the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund 2019.

Overview

Welcome to this interdisciplinary 5 ECTS *Careers and Employability module* for PhD students. This module is led by the Trinity Careers Service (TCS). It will support you with career planning, critical reflection and decision-making as well as enabling you to establish networks to help support your future career.

Map My Future

Trinity Careers Service have developed a careers framework which focuses on career development through life. There are six key themes, allowing you to reflect on where you are currently on your career journey and choose an area to focus on. The themes should help as you progress through this module. See our website for videos, resources and further information - https://www.tcd.ie/careers/map-my-future/

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1. Module Guide

Overview and Ethos

This 5 ECTS *Careers and Employability module* is offered in a blended learning format which includes in person workshops, online content and activities, and an online *Skills Audit* tool to help you to develop transferable skills that can be applied during and after your PhD. It has been designed in collaboration with a range of industry partners from different sectors and will build your readiness for future careers within or outside of academia.

The overall aim of the module is to foster critical reflection on your career development through a combination of shared and self-directed learning, and to create a network with students, employers and alumni to support you to fulfil your career potential.

The module consists of two streams: Careers and Skills. It is open to students in any year of a full-time or part-time PhD across all disciplines.

Key Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Critically reflect on, develop and articulate your skills in relation to your PhD and for the workplace.
- Create a career path that reflects your beliefs, values, interests and potential.
- Apply tools to proactively manage your own career.
- Develop the skills to create meaningful connections with PhD students from other disciplines and industry partners/alumni.

Module Structure and Content

The Careers and Employability module comprises a suite of workshops in two streams (Careers and Skills) with students undertaking a combination of face-to-face and online sessions. Please view the *Module Timetable* to see a detailed breakdown of sessions and supporting activities per week. After the initial in-person session (please refer to timetable), module content will be released on Blackboard at regular intervals, for you to complete by the module deadline. Please take note of assessment deadlines and requirements. Discuss the module structure and content with your Academic Supervisor.

Pre-work for the Module

Completion of the *Skills Audit* and reflective *Professional Development Plan (PDP)* is a requirement before you start this module. You will need to bring a print-out of your completed *PDP* to the in-person workshop,



Mapping Skills onto Career Options. Take time to read the *Student Guide to completing the Skills Audit and Professional Development Plan* document to allow you to make the most of this tool.

You are also encouraged to listen to the audio recording *Why is this module important?* prior to attending the first workshop.

Module Streams

Careers Stream:

a) Designing your Career (online)
b) Navigating the Emotions of Planning and Managing your Career (online)

Skills Stream:

(a) Mapping Skills onto Career Options (face-to-face)
(b) Networking with Confidence (face-to-face)
(c) The Art and Craft of a great CV and Writing an Effective Cover Letter (online)
(d) Presenting your Best Self at Interview (online)
(e) Intercultural Competence and the Global Workplace (online)

Teaching and Learning Activities

A range of activities will support you to learn and reflect within the module, including the online *Skills Audit* and *Professional Development Plan (PDP)*, and optional activities such as journal entries, podcasts and videos, webinars, and alumni mentoring. The wider Careers Service will also offer additional support e.g. CV/LinkedIn Clinics, Shortlist.Me video interviews, live practice interviews, one-to-one careers guidance appointments, access to labour market information and psychometric tools.

Time required

It is important to consider and plan for the time required to fully participate and benefit from the many resources and activities available to you on this module. The more time and thought you give to the module, the more you will benefit in terms of critical reflection, planning and decision-making for your future career. Please see your *Module Timetable* document for full details on the time commitment required.

As a guideline, it is suggested that you allocate 3 hours to the *Skills Audit* and *Professional Development Plan (PDP)*. The online sessions are approximately 30 minutes in length and you can pause, reflect and restart these at any stage. The face-to-face sessions take place over the course of a one-day event (please refer to timetable). Each session requires pre and post work which is optional but hugely beneficial in terms of your overall development. It is also recommended that you regularly maintain and update your reflective journal on Blackboard – this will also assist you with the final critical reflection assessment.

The supporting materials such as the webinars, podcasts and videos will assist you to apply and reflect on your learning. Industry and alumni events on MyCareer will also assist you to develop a network which will support you going forward.

Summary breakdown of student effort hours:

Activity	Hours
Skills audit & PDP	3
Face-to-face sessions as part of day event	5.5
Online sessions	10
Teaching & Learning activities e.g. further reading, journaling, events	61.5
Assessment	45
Total	**125**

Assessment

There are three formal assessments in the module. For full details please see the *Guide to Assessment* in this document.

1. Group poster project (10%)

You are assigned to mixed groups and work to respond to the Group Poster Project Question: Showcase the employability skills of a PhD student in pursuing a career in academia or beyond academia. Each group is required to produce a poster and submit online via postgrad.careers@tcd.ie (please refer to the *Module Timetable*). A poster presentation may be required.

2. CV and Cover Letter Review (10%)

After reviewing "The art and craft of a great CV and Cover Letter" session on Blackboard, complete a CV and Cover Letter tailored to a position of your choice (academic or non-academic). Attend a CV and Cover Letter Review session with TCS. The assessment rubrics are available to view on Blackboard.

Please note that to complete this element you will need to organise an individual review by booking **a Student appointment with your Careers Consultant via MyCareer**, attach your CV, cover letter and job description to the booking, and attend your individual CV and cover letter feedback (please refer to timetable). **Appointments can book out in advance so we encourage you to book this session in plenty of time ahead of the deadline.** Please note CV Clinics are a separate offering and attendance at a CV clinic will not meet module requirements.

3. Final critical reflection (80%)

A written piece (2,000 – 2,500 words) supported by an optional image, video or audio recording which captures the students' individual career and employability journey. Informed by regular online journal entries on Blackboard, teaching and learning activities and reflection on the *Skills Audit*. The assessment rubric is available on Blackboard. For the assignment deadline please refer to the module timetable.

Pass Standard

50% - The module will be assessed on a pass or fail standard. Students who do not reach the required standard in the required assessments must re-submit following feedback.

When students successfully complete the Careers and Skills module components, they will be given the option to transfer to the 10 ECTS module, which includes an additional work-based learning component, or to continue to complete the final assessment and exit with 5 ECTS.

2. Guide to Assessment

This 5 ECTS module consists of three formal assessments: *Group Poster Project*, *CV and Cover Letter Review* and *Final Critical Reflection*. Details of each assessment are presented below, together with the weighting. Please refer to the *Module Timetable* for submission dates.

Please take time to review the marking rubrics for all assessments so that you are fully informed before completing.

GenAI and your Assessments

We recognise that GenAI may form part of your preparation for these assessments and guidance will be given on responsible use. As such we have a GenAI declaration document which you must sign for each assessment submitted, whether you have used GenAI or not. You can find this form on Blackboard.

Group Poster Project - 10% weighting

The group poster project aims to identify the transferable skills that PhD students develop through the course of their studies. You will work collaboratively with other PhD students on the module to produce a poster which addresses:

Group Poster Project Question:

> ***Showcase the employability skills of a PhD student in pursuing a career in academia or beyond academia***

You will be allocated to a group of students and each group will be diverse in terms of research area and stage in their PhD. You are encouraged to meet separately as a group to decide on your focus and areas of responsibility. Try to consider each group member's areas of interest and expertise – this is a good opportunity to learn from each other. Please allow time to have engaging conversations on this topic.

Groups are asked to explore all information relevant to this topic as fully as possible and as a minimum should consider the following points and tips:

- Research existing skills tools e.g. IUA Graduate Skills Statement, Vitae RDF.
- Reflect on your experience of completing the online *Skills Audit*, *Reflective PDP* and attending the *Mapping Skills onto Career Options* session.
- Reflect on skills you have developed during your PhD. How might some of these transfer onto academic or non-academic settings?
- Include skills which are relevant to your chosen focus: careers in academia or beyond academia.
- We are looking for employability skills which transcend specific discipline requirements, so it is important to think of general or global skills (e.g. problem-solving) as opposed to a more granular focus (e.g. a specific lab technique).
- Consider how to present your content – how best can you graphically depict it in such a way that your poster clearly communicates the information you want to convey?
- Make sure your content is supported by evidence.

Create a Poster of size A0/A1 and submit to postgrad.careers@tcd.ie (please refer to the *Module Timetable* for submission date). A poster presentation may be required.

CV & Cover Letter Review - 10% weighting

Complete a CV and Cover Letter tailored to a particular academic or non-academic position submitted to Trinity Careers Service for feedback. Please submit three documents - your CV, Cover Letter and job advertisement through MyCareer (https://www.tcd.ie/Careers/mycareer/students.php). For the assignment deadline please refer to the *Module Timetable*.

Please book a Next Step appointment on MyCareer with your Careers Consultant. When booking please submit three documents - your CV, your Cover Letter and the job advertisement. Please refer to timetable for CV review dates with your career consultant. You Career Consultant will grade your application, and if it is deemed to not meet a pass standard you will be asked to resubmit. For resubmission date please refer to timetable.

Prior to completing this assessment, you should take time to review *The Art and Craft of a Great CV* and *Writing an Effective Cover Letter* sessions, including all pre- and post-session tasks.

Final Critical Reflection assessment - 80% weighting

This is a holistic assessment of your individual career and employability journey on this module. It requires you to critically reflect on the entire module and apply the learning to your own personal and professional development.

You should reflect on:

- Your skills in relation to your PhD and the workplace.
- Your beliefs, values, interests and potential.
- The tools you have utilised to plan and manage your career and the connections you have made with other students, alumni and employers.
- Your pre and post-course work, online *Skills Audit* tool and *Reflective PDP*, in-session reflective exercises, journal entries, webinars, podcasts and videos, online tasks and tools (e.g. Profiling for Success assessments) and any other activities you feel will contribute.

With all of this in mind, you are required to write a 2,000 – 2,500 word critical reflection, which can be supported a 5-minute video or audio recording or an optional image/s.

Submission of a video/audio recording will mean that the overall wordcount requirement is reduced. A 5-minute video/audio recording is the equivalent of 1,000 - 1,500 words and so reduces the word count to c. 1,000 words for the 5 ECTS module. However, the video/audio recording must not be a repeat of the written submission. It must add to and further develop or showcase the reflection discussed in the written assessment. The use of an image will not reduce the overall wordcount. However, it may be useful to support the reflection. Any images will need permission to photograph from the relevant individuals and/or workplace.

Final Critical Reflection Question:

> ***Write a critical reflection of your individual career and employability journey on this module, which includes your personal and career plans and the career path which you feel, at this stage, is of most interest to you.***

Prompt questions to aid the development of your Final Critical Reflection:

- Have my goals for how I would like to make an impact on the world changed? If so, how?
- At this point in my life, how do I want to continue to do things/do things differently in my career/professional life?
- At this point in my life, what are the areas of professional development that I will focus on?
- What key skills do I offer?
    - What are my key strengths and areas for development?
    - How can I maximise my strengths and minimise/manage my areas of weakness?
- What skills do I realistically need in order to enter and succeed in this career? Are there any immediate skills or knowledge gaps and how will I address these?
- What approaches could I take to designing my career?
- How does this career fit in with my beliefs, strengths, values, personality and areas of interest?
- How have I managed the emotions of navigating this career path? Are there internal obstacles I need to overcome?
- Would I describe myself as career resilient? Why?
- What tools have I developed which could be applied e.g. networking with alumni, tailoring my CV for a particular sector?

- How has my understanding of my work style changed/evolved e.g. am I a team-player or more individual?
- What are my crucial next steps and long-term actions that I could take to support myself on my career and employability journey?

For the assignment deadline please refer to the *Module Timetable*.

Pass Standard

50% - The module will be assessed on a pass or fail standard.

Students who do not reach the required standard in any of the required assessments must re-submit within one week of receiving feedback.

You may wish to share and discuss your assessments with your Academic Supervisor to identify and progress areas for development.

When students successfully complete the Careers and Skills module components, they will be given the option to transfer to the 10 ECTS module, which includes an additional work-based learning component, or to continue to complete the assessment requirements for the 5 ECTS module.

Reflection Guide

The overall approach of the module is to foster *critical reflection* through a combination of shared and self-directed learning, and to create a community with participating students, employers and alumni to support you to fulfil your career potential.

Reflection is a type of thinking associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding. It includes a mixture of these elements:

- Making sense of experience - reflection is an important part of the learning experience. It is where we analyse experience, actively attempting to make sense of find meaning in it.
- Standing back - to gain perspective of an experience, issue or action. It is not easy to reflect when caught up in the midst of activity.
- Repetition - going over something several times.
- Deeper honesty - reflection strives after the “truth.” We can come to acknowledge things we find difficult to admit normally.
- Weighing up - reflection involves even handed judgement or evaluation.
- Clarity - reflection can bring clarity, become more aware of our hidden motivations, our thinking styles, and of how we appear to other people.
- Understanding - opening up to learning and understanding at a deeper level including gaining insight into concepts that are difficult to access by other means; develop a better understanding of what affects our own performance and progress.
- Making judgements & drawing conclusions.

Source: Cottrell, 2003

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing will help you to clarify, develop and demonstrate (to yourself as well as others) the connections between your prior knowledge and experience (theory and practice), your new learning, the rationale for your learning and future action, and identify what you have yet to learn. Reflecting on your successes is a basis for a successful career, while reflecting on mistakes or problems can help you avoid repeating them or help to find an appropriate solution. Bear in mind that reflective writing is explorative in nature; it includes description (What? When? Who?), and analysis (How? Why? What if?) and can also result in more questions than answers.

Open University Figures 2 and 3 provide words and phrases that you may find useful in your reflective writing https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=64108&section=3

A note on Reflection and Discomfort

It is useful to acknowledge that reflection can be uncomfortable as it reveals hitherto hidden 'truths' – feelings of disquiet/discomfort. These are not bad in themselves as they can be interpreted as calls, messages and opportunities to explore further. Suppression is not always the healthiest response, especially in the long term. It's also possible that these concerns may not be dissipated by active engagement with them, and that a period of open processing is required before the appearance of a creative insight. Any form of self-development is about carrying out a creative project on ourselves and this may be uncomfortable.

Source: CAPSL, TCD (2020)

Opportunities to use Reflection in the module

Module Sessions and Skills Audit

You are encouraged to engage with the many individual and group reflective tasks and activities before, during and after the module sessions. Your reflective work on interpreting the Skills Audit is also an essential component of your development on the module. The more time you devote to critically reflecting on the topics discussed, the more you will benefit in terms of your future career and direction.

Journal

It will be helpful to keep a record or journal that you can draw upon for your reflection at the end of the module. Memories fade quickly so it is good to have a record to look back on when the time comes to write up your reflections for assessment. Jot down anything of note or of interest that occurred, and your response, while they're still fresh in your mind. If you are finding it very difficult to get started with your reflective writing, it might help to frame your writing in response to questions that you can make up for yourself to answer or use the reflection models suggested below.

Assessments

Remember that your reflective writing will not be assessed on what you did or failed to do; it will be assessed on your ability to write honestly and comprehensively about your experiences and your learning. It is important to recognise that subjective assessments of feelings and thoughts about a situation are valuable and valid and to be included in your reflections.

Different Models of Reflection

While some students will be confident and proficient in their critical reflection, others may appreciate a framework to guide their reflection. Below are a variety of reflection models to prompt questions to guide your reflections.

There is a useful guide to the role of reflection in learning at the Academic Practice website.

The **Trinity Reflection Tool** www.tcd.ie/students/reflection (use your Trinity username and password). This tool was developed for undergraduate (primarily) and postgraduate students. It is aimed at guiding students to reflect on their experiences outside the classroom, and to help capture and articulate their learning.

A Strengths-based Reflective Framework

Ghaye emphasised that it may be most useful to do more of what we're good at and less of what we're not so good at. He calls this 'amplifying strengths.'

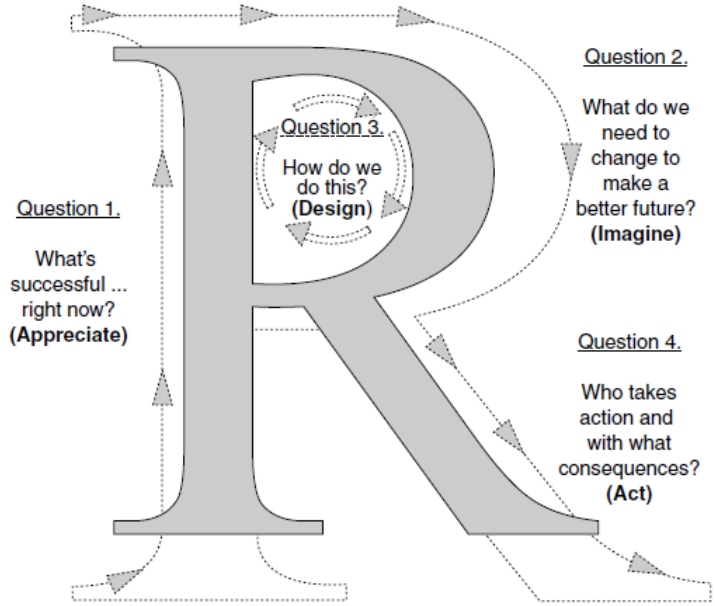


FIGURE 1.3 A strengths-based reflective framework (Ghaye *et al.* 2008)

Gibbs Reflection Cycle

A cyclical model of reflection which leads you through six stages when exploring an experience: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan.

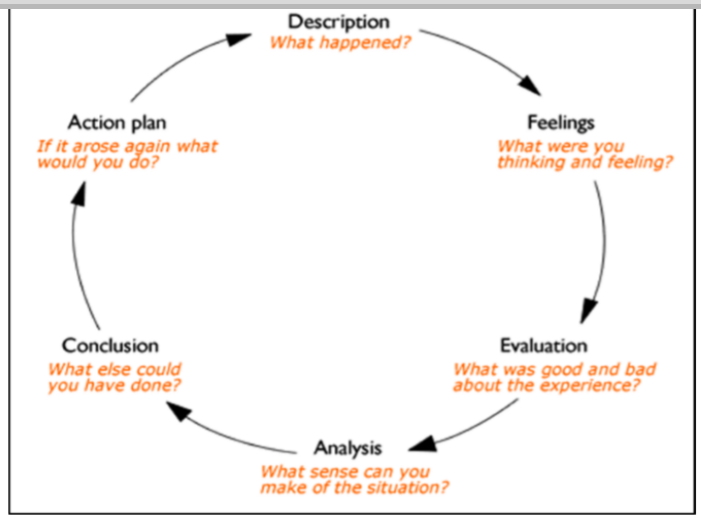


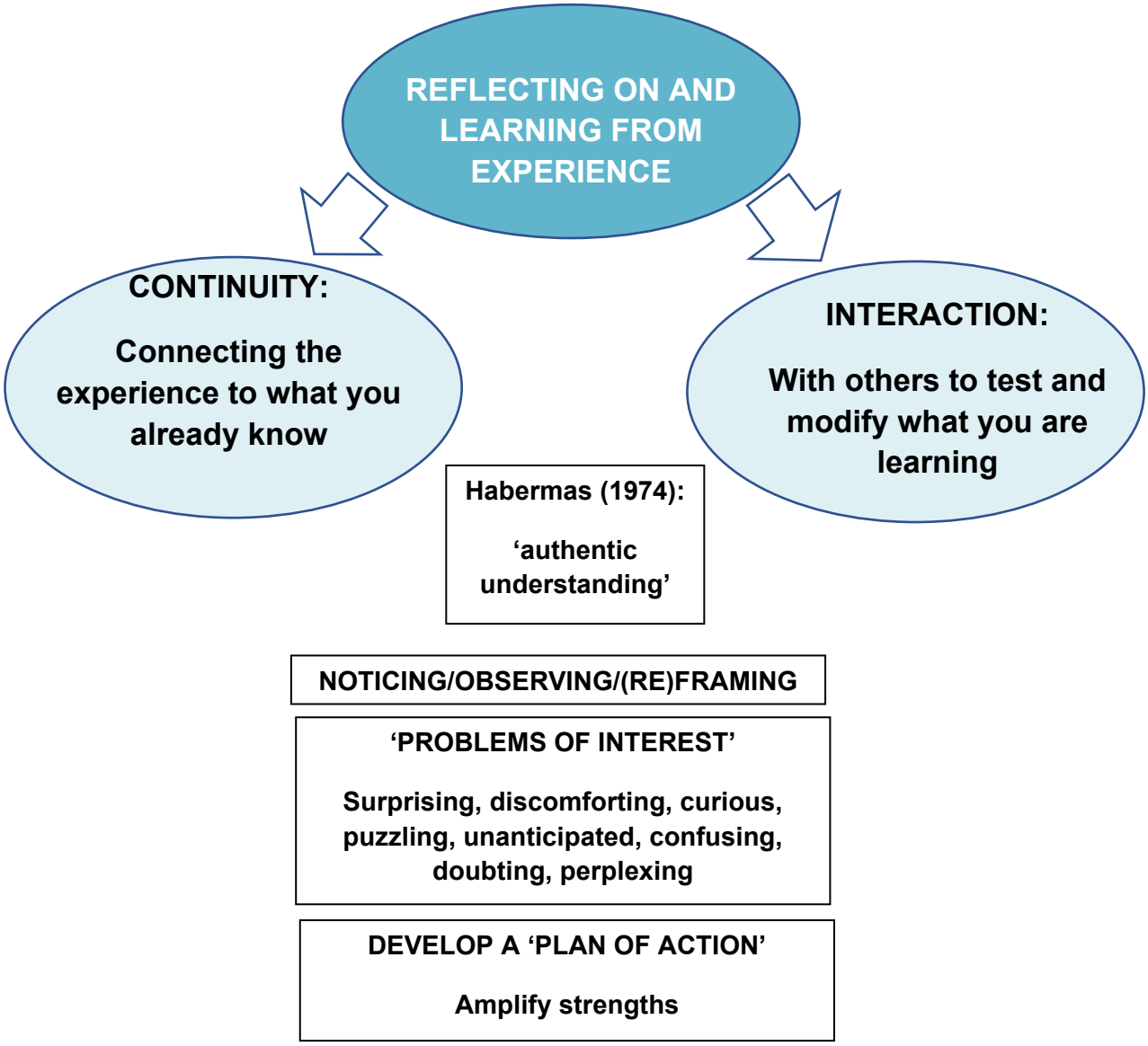
Figure 1: Debriefing sequence following an experiential cycle (Gibbs, 1988)

Depths of reflection (Moon, 2004; Hatton & Smith, 1995)

A model which explores different depths of reflection, with an emphasis in this module on Levels 3 and 4.

Reflection Depth	Explanation
1. Descriptive writing	There is no discussion beyond description of events i.e. the writing does not show evidence of reflection.
2. Descriptive reflection	Evidence of deeper consideration in relatively descriptive language, but alternative viewpoints are not apparent.
3. Dialogic reflection	Exploring the role of the 'self' in events, the reflection is analytical or integrative, linking factors and perspectives.
4. Critical reflection	Aware that events may be seen in different contexts, the impact of learning on future practice is also considered.

Dewey & Habermas
Dewey (1933)



Examples of good and poor practice in critical reflection:

Aspect	Strong critical reflection	Room for improvement
Experience	Draws on personal, group or workplace experience as a means of testing out theory or new learning; looking at experiences with a 'critical eye.'	Assumes 'experience' is an end in itself; that one's own experience is typical of others' without good evidence that this is so; that experience automatically equates to 'insight' without critical thought.
Personal Responsibility	Demonstrates integrity both in focusing on one's personal role, such as the assumptions brought to a situation or actions taken or omitted, and in taking responsibility for the consequences of these.	Finds ways of reflecting blame on to other people or the context itself for the way events unfolded; alternatively, personal responsibility is addressed in a superficial way, so that the relation of action and consequence is not considered in depth.
Focus	Selects a focus, such as a particular time period, set of events, specific kinds of incident or examples of interactions.	Is non-specific or covers too many dimensions, so the focus of the reflection is not clear.
Scale	The focus is broad enough to offer challenge and meaningful insights and can be reasonably explored in the timescale and any word limits.	Is either too narrow to provide the insights needed or too broad to look at issues in any depth.
Direction	Begins to take direction as one starts to identify, and then focus on, selected themes for closer attention.	Wanders or jumps about rather than finds a direction.
Depth	Delves below the surface: it picks up on initial thoughts and insights, analysing these further with the aim of gaining deeper insights or broader applications.	Is superficial and does not demonstrate any interest in burrowing beneath the surface to understand more.
Challenge	Usually tackles a difficult area or enters difficult terrain, such as matters that are personally difficult, or issues that are complex and do not lend themselves to easy answers.	Tends to stay within 'safe territory', or deals with difficult issues in a superficial way, or does not seem to take the person forward in their understanding.
Theory	Draws on relevant theoretical standpoints, research, or established professional practice in ways that demonstrate how these have helped understanding; where relevant, it relates the particular incident to broader social and political issues.	Draws only on the person's own ideas, experiences and anecdotes, or makes superficial passing references to theory and research.
Criticality	Brings a searching critical eye to the focus of the reflection, to emerging insights, and to any theories or sources of information. This criticality is used to take the person forward in their understanding of the core emerging issues by, for example, challenging their own ideas and actions, or showing how their experience supports or challenges existing knowledge.	Is preoccupied mainly with describing situations, content or events. May include critical analysis but this does not seem to be used in a way that really develops an understanding of the core emerging issues.

Aspect	Strong critical reflection	Room for improvement
Insight	The reflection takes the person forward in their understanding, such that they can make more sense of their situation, work or study, manage better within it, do things differently, apply understanding to new contexts etc.	The reflection gives little indication that the person has moved forward in their understanding of the context or issue, or self-knowledge.
End-points (extrapolated conclusions)	The process of reflection may take the person in many different directions. However, by the end, they have stood back, drawn out the key messages of what they have learnt and summarised these as conclusions or recommendations.	The reflection reads more as a description of a process or rambling free association. The lessons learned are not drawn out clearly as conclusions or recommendations.
Audience (if reflection is to be shared)	If this is to be used in academic, work or public contexts, the writing up of reflection demonstrates a sound understanding of ethical considerations and stylistic or academic conventions that may apply, and any issues of confidentiality will have been addressed appropriately.	The reflection is submitted or made public without all due care being taken to ensure that confidentiality and other data protection issues are addressed; no thought is given to how to make the reflection manageable for others to read.

(Adapted from Cottrell, 2013)
Source: https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=64108&section=3.2

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