



Reflection Toolkit

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By: Angela Guitierrez and Vida Luz Villegas



Reflection can be a powerful tool for fostering and developing various essential skills. By engaging in reflective practices, students can significantly improve their critical thinking, logical thinking, self-awareness, and problem-solving abilities.

Reflection & Logical Thinking

Logical thinking is a cognitive process that relies on reasoning and systematically organizing ideas and information. Reflective writing serves as a powerful tool for organizing bits of knowledge, ideas, feelings, and awareness of our actions in different situations. By engaging in this process, students can gain new insights and understanding. As they sort out these elements in their minds and represent them on paper, they may discover new learning or recognize the need for further reflection and additional input (Moon, 1999). This reflective practice enhances students' logical thinking abilities which encourages deeper understanding of their experience.

Reflection & Problem-Solving

Reflective thinking can play a crucial role when students encounter challenging situations because this skill enables them to choose appropriate problem-solving strategies. By taking a step back and reflecting, students can tap into their past experiences and learning, leading them to make informed decisions on how to navigate and overcome problems effectively. This reflective process equips students with the tools they need to tackle challenges successfully.

Reflection & Self-awareness

Through the process of self-discovery, understanding inner motivations, and challenging assumptions, students can cultivate a repertoire of knowledge and skills that empower them to perform their best and achieve their greatest potential. Certain aspects of oneself, such as strengths, weaknesses, and values, tend to remain relatively stable over time. Nevertheless, they may still evolve. By being mindful and reflective, students can address these aspects of themselves.

Reflection & Creative Thinking

Reflective practices provide students the opportunity to gain new perspectives and understandings which can lead to creativity (Bassot, 2015). As they critically assess their learning experiences, they may come up with fresh ideas and novel approaches to apply to different situations. The process of reflection enables them to identify what works well and what needs improvement, inspiring them to experiment with different strategies.

Reflection, Critical Thinking & Intellectual Curiosity

Reflective thinking empowers students to critically analyze and question not only their own thoughts, ideas, and biases but also those presented by others. As a result, it fosters the refinement of critical thinking and an inquisitive mindset, discouraging the mere acceptance of information at face value (Bassot, 2015).

DEFINITION

Reflection is a purposeful activity that provides the students the chance to look back on their learning experiences, understand them better, and evaluate what they have learned. It allows them to actively engage with their feelings and understanding of the course material or lecture, making their learning process more meaningful (Boud et al., 1985).

Moreover, reflection is not limited to academic benefits. It plays a crucial role in students' personal life and self-development. Taking time for reflection can significantly impact their well-being as it helps them contextualize their experiences and internalize the lessons learned from specific situations. This new understanding paves the way for generating novel ideas and approaches that they can apply in their future endeavors.

Carefully examining past experiences, thoughts, and actions is at the heart of reflection. By doing so, students can find profound meaning in their experiences, enabling them to make informed decisions and better guide themselves on their life and learning journey. Reflecting can become a valuable tool for their continuous improvement and growth.

PURPOSE

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

- Students can control their learning process through reflective thinking, as this allows them to evaluate what they already know, identify what they need to know, and determine how they will bridge the gap between the two.
- Reflection aids students in transforming their practical experience into abstract concepts. These abstract concepts can then be applied to other areas of their life.

DEEPENING OF UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE/ MATERIAL/LECTURE

- Reflection offers the opportunity for students to explore their thoughts and observations about the material and relate it to their personal experience. It encourages students to communicate their own opinions and draw their conclusions, rather than just summarizing the content of the lecture or course material.
- Reflective activities allow students to recognize that their thoughts are formed by their assumptions and preconceived ideas. They can then assess whether these ideas support or oppose the material they have learned, gaining deeper insights into their own thought processes.
- Reflection helps students actively engage with the material, allowing them to link their ideas, observations, and experiences to the material.

DOCUMENTATION OF STUDENT'S LEARNING JOURNEY

- As students develop on their learning journey, their accumulated experience can be documented through reflections. Reflection also enables them to keep a log of their gradual learning and skill improvement while offering valuable information to other students in the future.



CREATIVE WRITING TYPES

JOURNAL/ENTRY DIARIES

- This ongoing practice usually extends throughout training and development, such as during a placement or course. Like a diary, it involves making regular and chronological entries usually done weekly. This kind of reflective writing aims to promote the habit of reflecting consistently on students' learning during this period. As part of the assessment, students may have to submit the entire journal or a selection of entries as a portfolio.

CRITICAL INCIDENT ANALYSIS

- This type of reflective writing encompasses incidents or events that have significantly impacted students. It prompts students to assess situations or events that they find challenging. The goal for them is to identify the reasons behind these challenges, evaluate their actions, and explore ways to overcome them should they encounter similar situations in the future.

REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

- A reflective essay is a common type of assignment in which students share their thoughts and experiences in a structured way. It can be used for both formative and summative assessments. When writing a reflective essay, students need to answer a specific question and explain their ideas systematically. This means drawing on their own experiences and using theories to support their answer. This type of essay requires students to express their reflections and allow others to understand their point of view in a more formal manner.

JOURNAL/ENTRY DIARIES

- **Introduction:** This entails describing the event, incident, or topic under reflection.
- **Description and critical evaluation:** Here, the critical event is described, and any associated issues are highlighted.
- **Cause and effect analysis:** Briefly identify the causes and effects of the critical event, avoiding excessive detail at this point.
- **Explanation and assessment:** Reflect on what happened, the resolutions being sought, the lessons learned, and plans for moving forward.

CHARACTERISTICS

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- **Explanation and assessment:** Reflect on what happened, the resolutions being sought, the lessons learned, and plans for moving forward.
- **On action** - reflecting on past experiences
- **In action** - reflecting on situations as they happen
- **For action** - reflecting on actions to be taken in the future
- Dewey (1933) described reflection as a **learning loop** that involves going back and forth from the experience and the insights we draw from it.
- Reflecting **encourages one to generate new ideas** which can be utilized for future learning phases
- It is a purposeful activity aimed at achieving a goal rather than mere undirected thought (Boud et al, 1985).

1

REFLECTION IS INTENTIONAL.

2

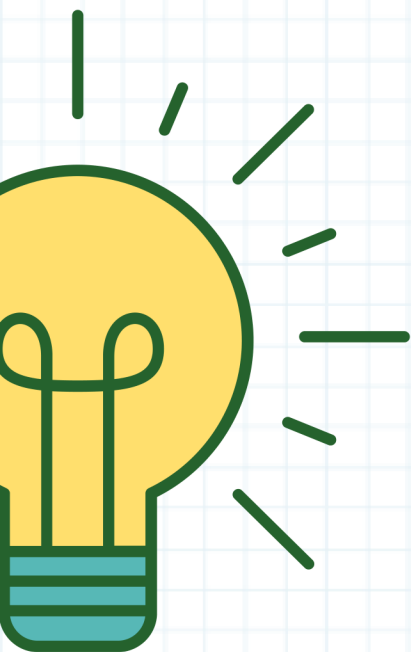
REFLECTION IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS THAT CAN TAKE DIFFERENT FORMS

3

REFLECTION IS A CYCLIC PROCESS, NOT A LINEAR ONE.

4

REFLECTION ENABLES MULTI-PERSPECTIVE UNDERSTANDING.





CHARACTERISTICS OF REFLECTIVE WRITING

INCORPORATION OF DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC TERMS

- Integrate key terms and language relevant to one's field of study to enhance the depth and precision of the reflective paper.

INFORMAL TONE

- Reflective writing allows for a more casual and informal style compared to academic essays. It resembles a conversation with oneself, encouraging a comfortable writing style that facilitates genuine self-reflection. However, one may need to adapt the tone for a specific task. For example, formal reflective essays call for a more structured style of writing.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

- Reflective writing often requires the use of the first person, especially when discussing personal experiences or expressing thoughts about a particular issue or area of study.

COMPLETE SENTENCES

- Reflective writing goes beyond mere notetaking; it involves crafting complete sentences that articulate one's reflections coherently.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

- Effective reflection relies on describing ideas or situations thoroughly. Dedicate time and effort to provide concise descriptions that serve as a foundation for reflections.

CLARITY

- A strong connection exists between language and ideas. Avoid using overly complex language that may obscure thoughts. Strive for simplicity and directness in expressing reflections concisely. Refrain from the use of excessively sophisticated language.

KEY IDEAS

Reflection as a Tool for Skill Development

Reflective practices can significantly enhance essential skills such as critical thinking, logical thinking, self-awareness, and problem-solving abilities in students.

- Reflection and Self-Awareness: Through self-discovery and introspection, students can develop a deeper understanding of themselves, including their strengths, weaknesses, and values, leading to personal growth and improved performance.
- Reflection and Logical Thinking: Engaging in reflective writing enables students to organize their thoughts and experiences systematically, leading to better logical thinking and deeper understanding.
- Reflection and Creative Thinking: Reflective practices provide students with new perspectives and insights, inspiring creativity and the generation of new ideas.
- Reflection and Problem-Solving: Reflective thinking equips students with the ability to tackle challenges effectively by drawing on past experiences and making informed decisions.



Definition of Reflection

1

Reflection is a purposeful activity that allows students to reevaluate their learning experiences, understand them better, and assess their knowledge and understanding. It goes beyond academic benefits and plays a crucial role in personal life and self-development, positively impacting students' well-being and future endeavors.

Purpose of Reflection

2

Reflection is a powerful tool that allows students to take charge of their learning by evaluating what they know, identifying areas for improvement, and applying their experiences to real-life situations. Through reflection, students can explore their thoughts and feelings about their learning, deepening their understanding and making it more meaningful. In addition, keeping a record of their learning journey through reflection benefits others and provides a sense of progress. Reflection can also enhance students' self-awareness which guides their personal growth. Reflecting enables effective learning, stronger connections with experiences, and identification of ways or strategies for improvement.

Characteristics of Reflection

3

Reflection is an active and cyclic process that can take various forms, such as reflecting on past experiences (on action), situations as they happen (in action), and actions to be taken in the future (for action). It encourages generating new ideas for future learning stages and enables multi-perspective understanding through the evaluation of ideas, values, and assumptions. Reflection is intentional, being a purposeful activity aimed at achieving specific goals.

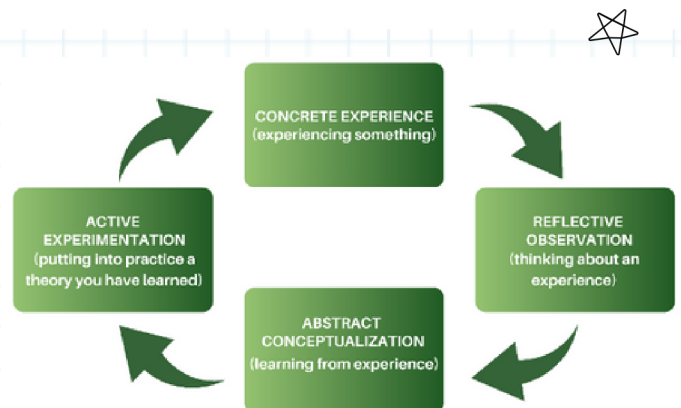
In reflective writing, a personal perspective is often used, with an informal tone resembling a conversation with oneself. It involves crafting complete sentences and prioritizing clarity over complexity. Effective reflection includes providing concise and thoughtful insights and incorporating discipline-specific terms to enhance accuracy and relevance in the writing process.

Here are some widely used models for reflection that can help students gain deeper insights into their experiences and learning processes:

1. KOLB'S CYCLE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

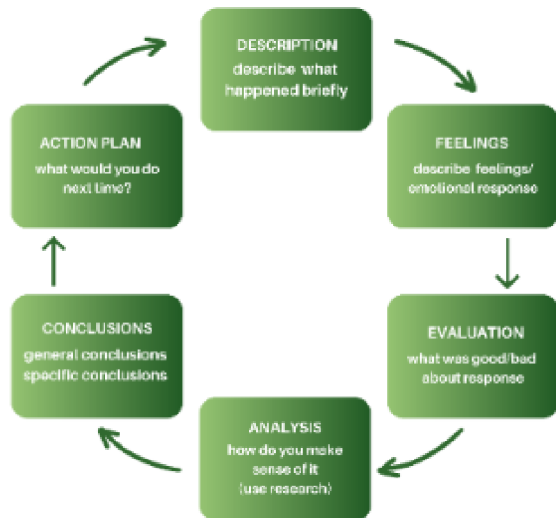
Introduced by Kolb in 1984, it is a model designed to facilitate learning from experiences. Kolb's model serves as a foundation for structuring a reflective essay or organizing one's thought process. The cycle comprises four stages, each requiring completion before moving on to new experiences, and then cycling back around.

- **Concrete Experience:** In this stage, students engage in a direct experience. For a written reflection, this step typically involves describing the experience and their thoughts at the time.
- **Reflective Observation:** At this stage, students contemplate the experience and begin genuine introspection. The focus is on their feelings and the connections between the experience and their skills, knowledge, and prior experiences.
- **Abstract Conceptualization:** The third stage revolves around learning from the experience. Students analyze and explain their reflection, delving into its meaning and exploring alternative possibilities. Both positive and negative aspects of the experience are acknowledged, and potential areas for further exploration are identified.
- **Active Experimentation:** The final stage involves applying the newfound learning. Here, students translate their analysis and explanations into actionable plans and steps for the future. Moreover, this stage encourages students to embark on new experiences based on their learning, thus linking back to the first stage.



Note. This model was designed by David Kolb in 1984. From Reflective writing: Kolb, University of Hull, 2024. <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/reflectivewriting/kolb>

2. GIBBS' REFLECTIVE CYCLE



Note. This model was designed by Graham Gibbs in 1988. From Reflective writing: Gibbs, University of Hull, 2024. <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/reflectivewriting/gibbs>

Devised by Graham Gibbs in 1988, this model serves as a structured approach to learning from experiences. It provides a comprehensive framework for examining different situations, and its cyclic nature makes it especially conducive to revisiting and learning from both successful and challenging experiences. The cycle consists of six stages:

- **Description of the Experience:** This stage offers an opportunity to provide a detailed account of the situation, focusing on what transpired. Emotions and conclusions are to be addressed later in the process.
- **Feelings and Thoughts about the Experience:** Here, students can delve into their emotions and thoughts during the situation and how these might have influenced the outcome.
- **Evaluation of the Experience, both Positive and Negative:** In this phase, students can evaluate what aspects of the situation worked well and what did not. Maintaining objectivity and honesty is crucial. To gain maximum insights from reflection, it is essential to consider both positive and negative elements, even if one aspect dominated the experience.

- **Analysis to Make Sense of the Situation:** The analysis step provides an opportunity to derive meaning from the experience. Students focus on various aspects that contributed to the positive or negative outcome while also asking themselves why these may have occurred. Incorporating relevant academic literature is appropriate at this point.
- **Conclusion about Lessons Learned and Potential Improvements:** This section allows students to draw conclusions about the experience. Students summarize their learnings and highlight changes in their actions that could enhance future outcomes. It must naturally flow from the preceding sections.
- **Action Plan for Future Similar Situations or Appropriate General Changes:** In this section, students outline their action plan based on the lessons learned. They must highlight how they would approach similar situations in the future or propose general changes that seem appropriate. Once again, this section must naturally follow the reflections and conclusions made earlier.

3. THE SCHÖN REFLECTIVE MODEL

Described by Schön (1991), this framework introduces an additional element by differentiating between two types of reflection: "Reflection in action" and "Reflection on action." This distinction becomes an important consideration in one's reflective practice.

In practical situations such as teaching or nursing, where quick decision-making and adaptability are crucial, the ability to think on your feet and experiment with new approaches becomes essential when things do not unfold as expected. Schön's framework enables students to incorporate this aspect of reflective practice, allowing them to effectively capture and learn from real-time experiences and post-event reflections.

Reflection *IN* Action (as it happens)

- The experience itself
- Thinking about it during the event
- Deciding how to act at the time
- Acting immediately

Reflection *ON* Action (afterwards)

- Reflection on something that has happened
- What would you do differently if it happen again?
- New information gained and/or theoretical perspectives studied that inform experience and help process feelings and actions

Note. This model was designed by Donald Schön in 1991. From Reflective writing: Schön, University of Hull, 2024. <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/reflectivewriting/schon>

4. SWOT/B AND SWAIN ANALYSIS

Becoming more self-aware through reflection

Increasing self-awareness often involves being ready to delve into self-analysis. Here are two tools that can assist students in achieving this (Bassot, 2016).

SWOT/B - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats/Barriers

The SWOT analysis is a valuable business tool that allows for a critical evaluation of various aspects related to work or a project. Beyond its corporate use, it can also be applied individually to facilitate self-analysis, helping one understand their current position. In this context, strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, while opportunities and threats are external (Bassot, 2016).

STRENGTHS

- What am I good at and
- Where do my talents lie?
- What do I find easy?
- What do I enjoy?
- Where do I have expertise?
- How have I excelled in the past and which of my achievements am I most proud of?

WEAKNESSES

- Where am I most likely to have difficulties and why?
- What do I dislike?
- What do I struggle with?
- What would I like to do better?
- What do I put off doing?

OPPORTUNITIES

- What opportunities are there for my development?
- What could I do to gain more skills?
- What could I do to become more confident in my weakest areas?
- Who can I ask for support?
- Who can I find to act as my mentor?

THREATS/BARRIERS

- What will hinder my development?
- What obstacles do I face in my development?
- What or who might discourage me?
- How can I prevent this from happening?
- What strategies can I put in place to try to ensure my success?



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ASPIRATIONS

- Where would I like to be in a year's time?
- In three years?
- In five years?
- When I look back on my academic life, what would I like to be able to say I have achieved?
- What might be my greatest achievement?

INTERESTS

- What do I love doing?
- What do I have a real passion for?
- What gives me energy?
- What would I really struggle to give up?

NEEDS

- What do I need to do to succeed?
- What knowledge and skills do I need to develop?
- Do my ways of thinking need to change and if so, how?

SWAIN - Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations, Interests, Needs

This tool provides an excellent opportunity for self-analysis. In addition to recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses, it prompts an individual to reflect on their aspirations, interests, and needs. By considering these aspects, one can gain deeper insights into themselves and pave the way for personal growth (Bassot, 2016).

Note. SWOT and SWAIN models. From The reflective practice guide: An interdisciplinary approach to critical reflection (2nd ed.), by B. Bassot, 2023, Routledge.

Reflective Thinking about Course Readings

This type of reflective writing focuses on thoughtfully engaging with the materials that form the basis of student's knowledge in a course. These are commonly assigned in interdisciplinary courses in the first-year level, where readings explore topics from multiple perspectives, providing numerous ways to analyze them. Reflecting on course readings aims to express one's opinions, beliefs, and feelings about a subject and its importance. This type of writing allows students to challenge assumptions that may hold and uncover any biases that affect how they interpret academic work.

HERE ARE SOME PROMPTS TO HELP A STUDENT GET STARTED IN REFLECTING ON THEIR COURSE READINGS

1

DEVELOP IDEAS BASED ON THE READINGS

Students must consider their existing knowledge about the topic and where that knowledge comes from. Think over personal observations and experiences that shape their understanding of the topic. Reflect on whether they agree or disagree with the main arguments, recommended actions, or conclusions the author(s) presented. Why do they feel this way, and what evidence or reasoning supports their stance?

2

MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND THEIR OWN BELIEFS

Reflect on how the readings reinforce or challenge existing ideas or assumptions. Consider how the material helps gain a deeper understanding of the topic and motivates them to learn more about it.



3

EXPLORE THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE READING

Think about the purpose of the material, the theoretical framework employed to examine assumptions, and the questions explored within the text. Reflect on which ideas stood out and why. Were these ideas new, or did they resonate with their prior experiences or knowledge?

Reflective Thinking about Course Experience

In this type of reflective writing, students are encouraged to consider the connection between theory and practice thoughtfully. The main goal is to evaluate theories and models concerning their own experiences. By reflecting on how hypothetical ideas relate to real-world applications, they gain insights into how their knowledge and skills align with professional practice. This type of writing also allows them to assess their decision-making process, actions taken, and how they handled successes and failures, all within a specific academic framework. As a result, abstract concepts become more apparent and meaningful when they connect them to their experiences. This reflection process empowers them to create plans for personal growth and improvement as they continue to learn.

HERE ARE SOME PROMPTS TO HELP A STUDENT GET STARTED IN REFLECTING ON THEIR COURSE EXPERIENCE:

1

ANALYZE COURSE EXPERIENCE

Students must reflect on what they have learned from the experience. Think about the insights gained about themselves, working in the field of study, and the course's relevance to society. Examine any assumptions about the course that were either supported or challenged.



3

REFLECT ON THEIR LEARNING JOURNEY

Students must evaluate how their learning experiences align with the course's goals and concepts. Explore why they feel this way and consider what aspects were successful and why. Identify the things they would do differently and explain the importance of these changes. Think about how they can prepare for future experiences in this field of study.

2

CONTEXTUALIZE REFLECTION

Connect reflection to the primary purpose of the course. Students must ask themselves what they hope to learn and how these fit within the learning goals. Consider how these goals relate to the course's main themes and concepts.

Examples



SOCIAL SCIENCE FIELD REPORTS

The field notes were written by hand on lined paper. They consisted of jotted notes and mental triggers (personal notes that would remind me of specific things when it came to writing the notes up). I took some direct observational notes recording what I saw where this was relevant to the research questions and, as I was aiming to get a sense of the culture and working environment, I also made researcher inference notes. [1] [2] [3] I found the note-taking process itself helpful, as it ensured that I listened carefully and decoded information. Not all the information I recorded was relevant but noting what I found informative contributed to my ability to form an overview on re-reading. However, the reliability of jotted notes alone can be questionable. For example, the notes were not a direct transcription of what the subjects said but consisted of pertinent or interesting information.

1 DESCRIPTION/EXPLANATION OF METHOD

2 INCLUDES DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC LANGUAGE

3 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF METHOD

4 INCLUDES AN RECOMMENDATION BASED ON THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Rarely did I have time to transcribe a direct quotation, so relied on my own fairly rapid paraphrasing, which risks changing the meaning. Some technical information was difficult to note down accurately. [3] A tape recorder would have been a better, more accurate method. However, one student brought a tape recorder and was asked to switch it off by a participant who was uneasy about her comments being directly recorded. It seems that subjects feel differently about being recorded or photographed (as opposed to observers taking notes), so specific consent should be sought before using these technologies [4].

LEARNING JOURNAL (WEEKLY REFLECTION)

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Note. Sample reflective works. From Examples of reflective writing, UNSW Sydney Current Students, n.d. <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/examples-reflective-writing>

Paul is a newly qualified counsellor, and his supervisor encouraged him to analyze his strengths and areas for development. Paul decides to use a SWOT/B analysis and consider his aspirations, interests, and needs.

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening skills • Empathy • Dedication • Commitment 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming too involved with clients • Wanting to protect clients rather than enable them • Showing sympathy • Taking on too much
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing well for supervision so weaknesses can be expressed and worked on • Discussion of cases in supervision, particularly when tempted to solve the client's problems • Applying for training in time management • Observing his own language for signs of sympathy 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming overloaded • Lack of preparation time for supervision • Taking work home on a regular basis • Not being able to 'switch off' from work when he gets home
Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some lack of confidence in his abilities • His view of the world which is different from that of his clients • Lack of time for reflection 	Aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be known as an outstanding counsellor • To help clients to see their own potential • To enable clients to lead full and satisfying lives
Interests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting people • Seeing people overcome their challenges and obstacles • Being there for clients who are struggling 	Needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making time for reflection • A sounding board for his ideas • Reading literature on time management

Practice Study

Case study reference: Bassot, B. (2023). The reflective practice guide: An interdisciplinary approach to critical reflection. Routledge.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Spend some time doing a SWOT/B and SWAIN analysis. What does this tell you about yourself that you did not know before?

MATERIALS FOR FURTHER READING

BOOKS:

- Bassot, B. (2023). *The reflective practice guide: An interdisciplinary approach to critical reflection* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Boud, D. (1985). *Reflection: Turning experience into learning: Turning experience into learning*. Routledge.
- Moon, J. A. (2004). *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

- *4 models of reflection – core concepts for reflective thinking*. (n.d.). OpenLearn. <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=51386§ion=4>
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