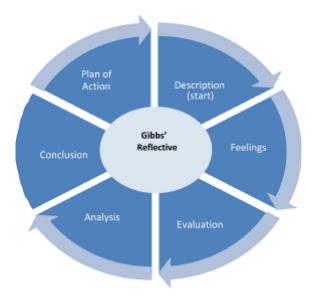# Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (or Gibbs' Reflective Model)

Gibbs' reflective cycle is a theoretical model often used by students as a framework in coursework assignments that require <u>reflective writing</u>. Gibbs' model is sometimes referred to as an **iterative model** (which simply means learning through repetition).

The model was created by Professor Graham Gibbs and appeared in *Learning by Doing* (1988).

Gibbs' reflective cycle has 6 stages. They are usually given the following headings:

1. Description (of <u>YOUR</u> EXPERIENCE: KEY)
2. Feelings
3. Evaluation
4. Analysis
5. Conclusion
6. Action Plan

Structure of a reflective coursework assignment

You <u>must</u> include an Introduction and Conclusion, so your assignment will have the following structure:

Introduction

Description
   Feelings
   Evaluation
   Analysis
   Conclusion
   Action Plan
_____

Conclusion

The **Introduction** should (briefly):

☐   state what the experience was, where it took place and how long it lasted

☐   state that Gibbs' model is being used (a diagram *could* be included immediately after the Introduction or in the Appendix)

The **Conclusion** should **not** be a repetition of the Conclusion in stage 5 of the model. Instead, it could <u>**briefly**</u> address any of the following questions:

☐   How valuable was the reflective tool in identifying your strengths and weaknesses and improving your practice or knowledge?

☐   Was Gibbs' model easy to use?

☐   Do you now understand the value of reflective learning and of using a reflective learning model like Gibbs' model?

*Keep the **Introduction** and **Conclusion** short; they are not the focus of the paper*

The aims of using Gibbs' reflective cycle:

to challenge your assumptions

to explore different/new ideas and approaches towards doing or thinking about things

to promote self-improvement

(*by identifying strengths and weaknesses and taking action to address them*)

to link practice and theory

(*by combining doing or observing with thinking or applying knowledge*)

Using analysis in Gibbs' model

In theory, the reflective process follows the 6 steps of the model so that each step informs the next. Students often confuse the Evaluation, Analysis and Conclusion stages. These parts seem to ask similar questions, so you must do your best to avoid a lot of repetition. **Analytical writing is required in the Analysis stag**e. The other 5 steps are made up of statements of description, statements of value (whether something was good or bad), statements of summation or statements of justification (why something was done). **Most sections may have 1-2 references to literature, but the analysis section has extensive citation and referencing.**

Using a word count

It may be useful to use a word count for each step of the cycle in order to avoid overwriting. Use the table below as a general guide. Remember to adjust the word count if you need to include an Introduction and Conclusion as part of your assignment.

	Steps	%	Approximate number of words for each stage of the reflection:			
			1,000 word reflection:	**1,500 word reflection:**	2,000 word reflection:	2,500 word reflection:
1	Description	20%*	200*	**300***	400*	500*
2	Feeling	10-20%	150	**225**	300	375
3	Evaluation	20%	200	**300**	400	500
4	Analysis	30%	300	**450**	600	750
5	Conclusion	5-10%	75	**112**	150	187
6	Action Plan	5-10%	75	**112**	150	187

*try to keep the Description step as short as possible; it <u>carries the fewest marks </u>in terms of assessment

Including references in your reflective writing

You have been asked to include references in reflection, so you can use **research** (recent studies), **policy documents** (from relevant bodies) or **theory** (from academic sources) to support your reflections. This means <u>most sections should have 1-2 references/citations</u>. You use references:

to show why something is done in a certain way (e*.g. by referring to a policy guideline*)

to explain what brought about certain feelings or reactions (*e.g. by quoting a theory*)

to explain what went well or what went badly (*e.g. a policy guideline, a piece of research or a theory could be used to explain why a certain action had a positive or a negative outcome*)

to discuss what could have been done differently (*e.g. policy, research or theory could be used to support your reflection that doing things differently could have had a better outcome*)

to justify why you plan to do something (*e.g. a research paper might be used to show the value of developing a specific skill or of acquiring relevant knowledge*)

A template for using Gibbs' model

Use the questions and guidelines in the template below to help you write each stage of the model.

In this model, you are using an **example of your personal experience** that demonstrates the concepts in the article that you have read. For example, if the article is about Double Loop Learning, you will think of an example from your life where you used OR DID NOT USE double loop learning and follow the steps below to tell us about it.

Use the headings from each section to organize your writing. (Remember to start with the introduction and end with a final conclusion, as discussed on p. 1 of this handout). You do not have to answer all the questions. Select a few that are relevant to your experience.

Introduction - As outlined on Page 1 of this handout

Description

Using **specific** and **relevant** detail, give a **concise** description of your experience (i.e. what you are reflecting on). It should show us an experience that demonstrates the main concept in the article. (NOT taken from the article)

this part is descriptive, it describes a personal experience (no references here): MAXIMUM 20% of writing

Feelings

Answer any of the following questions that you think are **relevant** to the experience:
- How did you feel and what did you think prior to the experience?
- How did you feel and what did you think during the experience?
- How did you react during the experience?
- How did you feel and what did you think after the experience?
- Compare to events/concepts in the paper: how are they the same? Different?

*this part is **not** analytical, it is descriptive, it describes personal feelings, thoughts and actions (reactions)*

Evaluation

Answer any of the following questions that you think are **relevant** to the experience:
- What went well during the experience (what worked)?
- What went badly during the experience (what didn't work)?
- How did the experience end? Was the experience complete (was there a resolution) or incomplete?
- Connect to events/concepts in the paper - add 1-2 reference citations here

this part makes positive and/or negative judgements about an experience; refer to article once or twice

if a lot of different things happened during the experience, focus on one or two, try to choose the things that are most important, most relevant or most representative of the experience

Analysis

This is a **KEY** section which <u>must include a comparison to/support from the literature</u> (cited work,) and you should do any of the following that you think is **<u>relevant</u>**:

Reconsider the things that went badly and write **why** you think they went badly (causes of action).
 Reconsider the things that went badly and write **what you think this lead to** (consequences of action).
 Think about what could have been done to avoid these negative consequences.

Reconsider the things that went well and write **why** you think they went well (causes of action).
 Reconsider the things that went well and write **what you think this lead to** (consequences of action).
 Think about how this positive action could have been further improved.

Think about your contribution to the experience and say how useful it was and why it was useful
 (did a previous experience help you? can you compare it to a previous experience?).
If you were unable to contribute to the experience say why.

Think about other people present during the experience and try to assess whether their reactions were
 similar or different to yours. Try to say why they were the same or different.

*this part **is analytical,** it does not describe, it tries to explain the causes and consequences of things that happened, it asks questions like why?, so what? and what if?* ***IT <u>MUST</u> CONTAIN RESEARCH & CITATIONS***

Conclusion

Reconsider the experience and answer any of the following questions that you think are **<u>relevant</u>**:
- What should or could I have done differently?
- What stopped me from doing this?
- What did I learn about myself during the experience (positive and/or negative)?
- What did I learn about my current knowledge or level of practice (strengths and weaknesses)?
- Did the experience achieve any of my learning goals or meet any of my required competencies?

this part sums up what you learnt from the experience

*try to be **specific** about what you learnt or realised about yourself, give specific details (avoid making general statements like "I didn't have the adequate knowledge")*

Action Plan

Answer any of the following questions that you think are **<u>relevant</u>** to making a plan:
- What do I need to do in order to be better prepared to face this experience in future?
- Even if the experience was positive and I did well, in which areas can I improve?
- What are the priority areas that need to be developed?
- What **<u>specific</u> <u>steps</u>** do I need to take in order to achieve these improvements?

*this part **is not** analytical, it states actions designed to improve knowledge, ability, experience etc., and the justification for and value of actions in the action plan (i.e. why you plan to do something)*

*try to be **specific** about what you plan to do (e.g. state specific training you may need to undergo, books you will need to read, resources you may need to use or become proficient in)*

Final Conclusion As outlined on page 1 of this handout,