

Reflective practice for researchers

What is reflective practice?

Reflective practice is about exploring experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions in order to make sense of them, support learning and inform future activity. It is done deliberately, with purpose and requires focused attention.

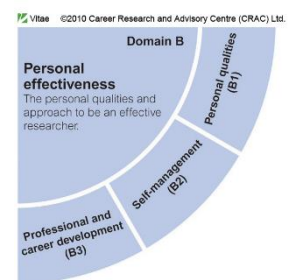
As noted by Bassot (2016), it is interesting that definitions of reflection refer to either mirror images or to the act of deep thinking. The idea of “*looking into a mirror to see our practice and ourselves more clearly*” epitomises what reflective practice involves.

Reflective practice is continuous rather than a one-off process. Bolton and Delderfield (2018) describe it as “*...a state of mind, an ongoing attitude to life and work...*”.

Why is reflective practice important?

Taking time to reflect consciously can help us develop our self-awareness, challenge our thinking and assumptions, and improve the way we do things.

Vitae’s [Researcher Development Framework \(RDF\)](#) also identifies self-reflection as one of the key personal qualities (B1) that are important in being an effective researcher.



Reflective practice can be applied in different contexts and used to support all five development themes identified for Huddersfield researchers:

- **Your research practice** – reflecting on your work and experiences as an academic researcher.
- **Your research identity** – reflecting on your identity and reputation as a researcher.
- **Your research career** – reflecting on your professional career development as a researcher.
- **Your research leadership** – reflecting on your role and contributions as a research leader.
- **Your research impact** – reflecting on how and where your research has impact.

How do I reflect?

There’s no single method of reflection, or right or wrong way to do this, and it should be a personal rather than overly prescriptive process. However, reflective approaches could include:

Reflective writing: this means using writing itself as the tool for reflection and learning (rather than as a means of recording something or to create an output). It might involve the technique of free writing (i.e. writing quickly about a topic for a short period of time without rules or judgment), using different writing exercises or prompts, or keeping a reflective practice journal. Writing can also be shared, if appropriate

Thinking in your head/out loud: this involves reflecting alone, either thinking things through in your head, or by talking out loud if preferred (which could also be recorded or videoed). It must be conscious.

Group reflection: reflecting together with others in a group can help to bring different insights and perspectives. This might be done as part of a peer support group, action learning set or group supervision.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI): this is about deliberately taking a positive and strengths-based approach to reflection. The focus is on acknowledging successes and strengths, appreciating what’s gone well and recognising future potential or opportunities.

Creative reflection: you could also choose to reflect through a more creative method, for example drawing, collage, or poetry.

Some models and frameworks for reflection

Models can help provide some structure and a useful starting point for reflection on an experience:

'What?' model (Driscoll)

This is one of the simplest frameworks to use for reflection, with three key stages/questions:

- What? – *what was the situation or experience? what happened? what feelings do I have?*
- So What? – *what does this mean for me? what have I learned?*
- Now what? – *what action will I take as a result of this?*

5R reflection framework (Bain et al)

- Reporting – *what was the situation or experience? what happened?*
- Responding – *how did I feel about this?*
- Relating – *have I experienced anything similar before? what skills do I have to deal with it?*
- Reasoning – *what is significant here? What else can help me to make sense of this?*
- Reconstructing – *what might I need to do differently in the future?*

Gibbs reflective cycle

- Description – *what was the situation or experience? what happened?*
- Feelings – *what did I think about this? how did I feel? (before, during and after)*
- Evaluation – *what went well? what went less well? What was good and bad about this?*
- Analysis – *what sense can I make of this? what helps me to understand what happened?*
- Conclusion – *what have I learned? What else could I have done?*
- Action plan – *what will I do? (now and in the future)*

Some prompts for self-reflection

Here are some general prompts for self-reflection that you might find helpful:

- What's gone well today/this week/this month? (and how do I know that?)
- What's been challenging? (and how have I worked through that?)
- What am I proud of?
- What has surprised me?
- What have I learned?
- What might I choose to do differently in the future?
- What would I like to change?
- What inspires me?
- What other perspectives are there? What would [X] think about this?
- Where would I like to be in 12 month's time?
- What would happen if...?
- I wonder if...



References and resources

- Bassot, B (2016) *The reflective practice guide. An interdisciplinary approach to critical reflection*. Routledge.
- Bolton, G and Delderfield, R (2018) *Reflective Practice, Writing and Professional Development*, 5th edn. Sage.
- [Reflection Toolkit \(The University of Edinburgh\)](#)
- [Reflective Practice Toolkit \(The University of Cambridge\)](#)

Give yourself some space and time for reflection...

Join one of our monthly (online) 'Reflections for Researchers' sessions – due to start April 2024.