

Gibbs' reflective cycle

This model is a good way to work through an experience. This can be either a stand-alone experience or a situation you go through frequently, for example, undertaking a non-surgical aesthetic treatment. Gibbs originally advocated its use in repeated situations, but the stages and principles apply equally well for single experiences too. If done with a stand-alone experience, the action plan may become more general and look at how you can apply your conclusions in the future.

For each of the stages of the model a number of helpful questions are outlined below. You don't have to answer all of them, but they can guide you about what sort of things make sense to include in that stage. You might have other prompts that work better for you.

Description

Here you have a chance to describe the situation in detail. The main points to include here concern what happened. Your feelings and conclusions will come later.

Helpful questions:

- What happened?
- When and where did it happen?
- Who was present?
- What did you and the other people do?
- What was the outcome of the situation?
- Why were you there?
- What did you want to happen?

Feelings

Here you can explore any feelings or thoughts that you had during the experience and how they may have impacted the experience.

Helpful questions:

- What were you feeling during the situation?
- What were you feeling before and after the situation?
- What do you think other people were feeling about the situation?
- What do you think other people feel about the situation now?
- What were you thinking during the situation?
- What do you think about the situation now?

Evaluation

Here you have a chance to evaluate what worked and what didn't work in the situation. Try to be as objective and honest as possible. To get the most out of your reflection focus on both the positive and the negative aspects of the situation, even if it was primarily one or the other.

Helpful questions:

- What was good and bad about the experience?
- What went well?
- What didn't go so well?
- What did you and other people contribute to the situation (positively or negatively)?

Analysis

The analysis step is where you have a chance to make sense of what happened. Up until now you have focused on details around what happened in the situation. Now you have a chance to extract meaning from it. You want to target the different aspects that went well or poorly and ask yourself why. If you are looking to include academic literature, this is the natural place to include it.

Helpful questions:

- Why did things go well?
- Why didn't it go well?
- What sense can I make of the situation?
- What knowledge – my own or others (for example academic literature) can help me understand the situation?

Conclusions

In this section you can make conclusions about what happened. This is where you summarise your learning and highlight what changes could improve the outcome in the future. It should be a natural response to the previous sections.

Helpful questions:

- What did I learn from this situation?
- How could this have been a more positive situation for everyone involved?
- What skills do I need to develop for me to handle a situation like this better?
- What else could I have done?

Action plan

At this step you plan for what you would do differently in a similar or related situation in the future. It can also be extremely helpful to think about how you will help yourself to act differently – such that you don't only plan what you will do differently, but also how you will make sure it happens. Sometimes just the realisation is enough, but other times reminders might be helpful.

Helpful questions:

If I had to do the same thing again, what would I do differently?

How will I develop the required skills I need?

How can I make sure that I can act differently next time?