



*Personal Learning
Journal*

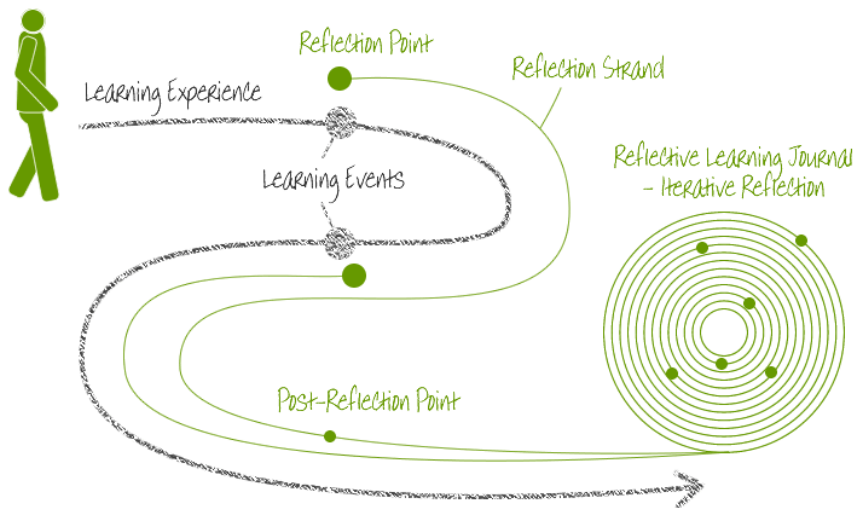
'It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively.'

Personal Learning Journals can be a very valuable part of the professional development process. The key is to have a focus and purpose also to have a clear approach to the kind of critical thinking necessary to make it a fruitful experience.

Any Harry Potter fans may remember a conversation between Harry and Dumbledore about the 'pensieve'. In Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Dumbledore explains to the young Harry that the stone basin he calls the 'pensieve' is used to hold excess thoughts from one's mind so that they can be examined at leisure. "It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form", says Dumbledore.

It's a great analogy. OK, the 'pensieve' itself remains a figment of the imagination but the principle of 'downloading' – in our case into a journal – for the purpose of later examination is a sound one.

The process might be visually expressed as follows:



Here are some helpful terms:

Learning Experience: A learning experience can either be a dedicated course of training or it may be something in everyday life. Externalising your thoughts and observations as a physical record helps to ensure that your memory does not distort events over time and prevents you falling into the trap of taking what you have learned for granted.

Learning Journal: The journal or diary is the physical output of your personal reflections. One of the purposes of your journal is for you to easily find your entries and cross reference them with other entries so that you can develop strands of observation and gain new understanding.

Learning Event: A learning event is a moment in time, in which you believe that you have realised something new, gained some insight or maybe experienced a change in your understanding of something. Reflecting on the learning event could reveal insights that will further your personal and professional development.

Reflection Point: A Reflection Point captures and records the main essence of the learning event, it will typically capture not only the facts but your emotional response and the learning outcome. A fuller picture is produced if both subjective and objective perspectives are recorded.

Reflection Strand: It may be helpful to consider your journal entries as strands of observation that you will interweave with other strands coming from other learning events. When woven together the strands will eventually reveal patterns that may have otherwise been hidden and these will give you further insight and understanding.

Post Reflection: After the initial reflection it is beneficial to revisit the reflection point at a later time and ponder on your contemplation. During post reflection consider any changes to your perspective on the learning event, maybe you would now feel and behave differently.

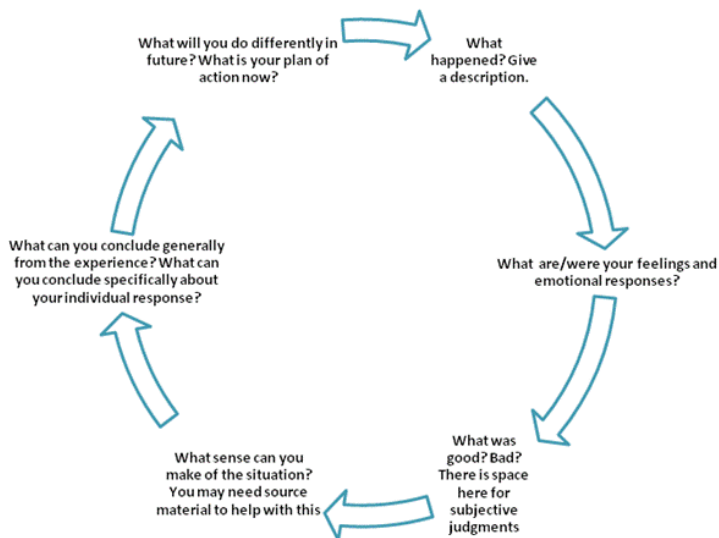
What do we mean by 'reflection'?

It's about thinking deeply about something so that you are able to understand it more thoroughly. It might include one or all of the following:

- Taking a 'step away' from ourselves to gain perspective.
- Reviewing or replaying an action or interaction to make sure nothing has been overlooked.
- Being brutally honest with yourself about your part in something.
- Evaluating everything available about an experience.
- Trying to find a clear way through something complicated to arrive at a conclusion.
- Finding connections and relationships, often between something abstract (such as a theory) and something concrete (such as an incident which occurred when working in a practical environment).

Ultimately, 'reflection' is about "making sense of experience"

Here's a model you may find helpful.



Reflection is not about describing an event in simply narrative terms. It's about capturing thoughts, understandings and critical insights.

In the following pages we have provided three pro-forma journal entries, feel free to use them as they are or use them as a starting point for you to redesign your own. Remember the structure is nowhere near as important as the activity itself!



Journal Entry

Name and Date of Event

What I enjoyed about this event was:

What I found difficult about this event was:

What I found challenging about this event was:

What I have learned is:

What I have learned connects with:

Ways in which I could apply what I have learned in this event:

People I should talk to about what I have learned in this event:

Other ways in which I intend to follow up are:

Use this space for any additional thoughts, feelings or connections you haven't noted elsewhere:

Journal Entry

Name and Date of Event

What I enjoyed about this event was:

What I found difficult about this event was:

What I found challenging about this event was:

What I have learned is:

What I have learned connects with:

Ways in which I could apply what I have learned in this event:

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