



# Improve your reflective practice

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## Why reflective practice is worth it

Some professions have reflective practice built in: nursing, teaching, social work. It's not new and you can choose between heaps of models and approaches.

Obvious values of reflective practice are to:

- increase self-knowledge
- improve performance and impact on others
- professionally develop (More on this later.)
- self-evaluate regularly
- look back before you move forward
- change what you do, and how you do it.

*Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.  
The important thing is not to stop questioning.*

- Albert Einstein

## Models, models and more models

Models aren't compulsory. You don't have to use them. Remember all models are wrong and some are useful.

Here are the models and tools we'll cover.

Schön - 'in' and 'on' reflections	Angels and devils
Gibbs's reflective cycle	Constellations
5Rs	Proud, thankful, learned
The sailboat retrospective	Working well - needs fixing
Ropes and fuels	Improve how you work
EMC <sup>2</sup>	Use metaphor
H	One or three words

## Schön: 'in' and 'on' reflections

I suspect many of us do this instinctively.

### Reflection IN action:

Reflect on what you're doing *in the moment*. You then make judgements and change what you're doing there and then.

### Reflection ON action:

Reflect *after* an event and then change what you're doing as a result.

## Gibbs's reflective cycle

I like this model, because it brings in feelings.

### Description questions

- What was I doing and with whom?
- What happened and what was my part in it?
- What resulted?

### Feelings questions

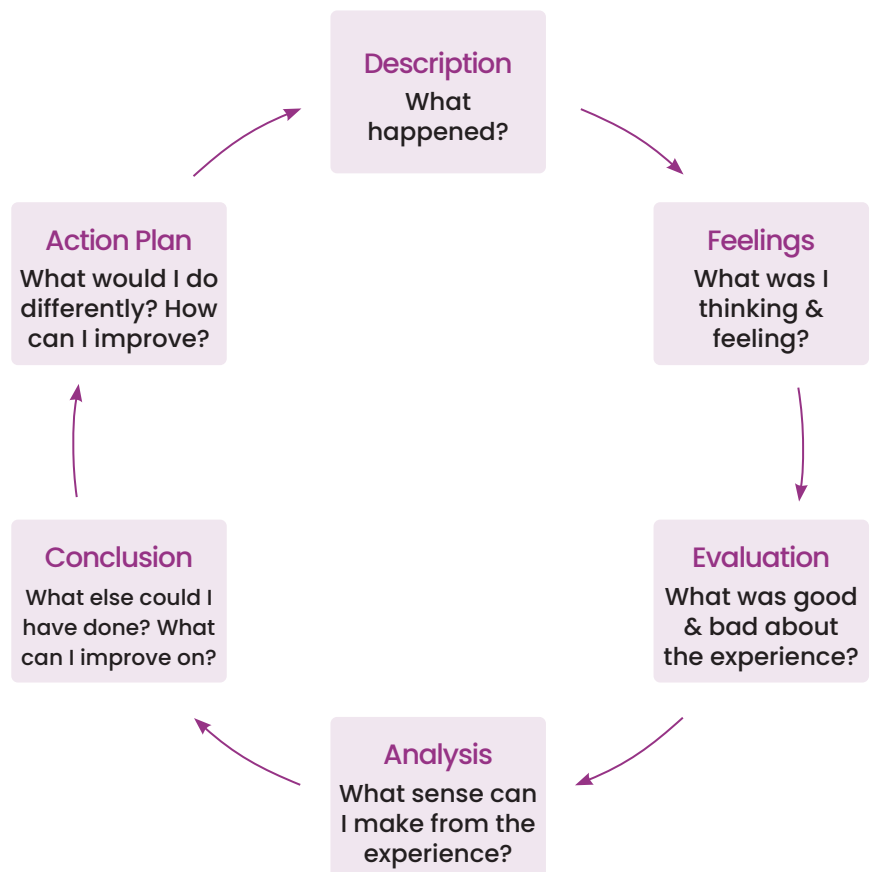
- What did you feel before, during and after?
- What caused those feelings? (*Are they familiar?*)
- How did you feel about the outcome?
- Are your feelings hot or cold?

### Analysing questions

- What went well and badly? (*Did you expect this?*)
- What did you and others do well / badly? (*What did you and others contribute?*)
- What other perspectives do others have? (*Are they different from yours?*)

### Conclusion and Action Plan questions

- What does this tell me?
- What patterns can I see repeated?
- What do I need to change / continue doing? (*Attitudes, behaviours?*)
- What are my learnings and can I translate them to other situations?
- What are the consequences of your conclusions?



## How about a similar, more simple model:



## 5 Rs

**Report**  
the context of the experience.










**Respond**  
to the experience: what you observe, feel, think.

**Relate**  
the experience to knowledge and skills you already have.

**Reason**  
about significant factors/theory to explain the experience.

**Reconstruct**  
your practice: plan future actions for a similar experience.

### The sailboat retrospective

-  **Did you reach your planned destination?**  
*What did you want to achieve?*
-  **What gave you wind in your sails?**  
*What lifted us and added to our journey?*
-  **What anchored you down?**  
*What held us down or stunted our movement?*
-  **What led you to calm and clear waters?**  
*What helped us work well together?*
-  **What led you into a storm?**  
*What hindered us as we worked together?*
-  **What rocks threatened to get in the way?**  
*What risks, unknowns and assumptions could have stopped our journey?*
-  **What helped us reach port safely?**  
*What tools, processes, systems and people made sure we reached our destination?*
-  **Was the compass working?**  
*What was guiding us or providing us direction? How did we know where we were going?*
-  **Who should have been on the ship who wasn't?**  
*Who else should be part of this team?*



## Reflective practice and professional development

Bailey and Rehman (2022) asked 442 business leaders to reflect on which experiences had advanced their professional development and had the biggest impact on them. The results were embarrassing stories, mistakes, careless decisions: failures. They also reported good decisions, things they'd achieved and successes.

They then analysed these results and three themes emerged: surprise, frustration and failure. I think this gives us another reflective practice model.

### Surprise

These were situations that greatly derailed expectations. Leaders expressed shock at poor results or others' behaviour. We tend to think what has happened before will happen again. We reason and apply logic. But we're wrong and then we're surprised.

**Think back during 2024 to any surprises you can think of?**

### Frustration

Delays; not enough money to fund projects; head office versus regional priority differences. They all sound familiar.

Behind frustration is a goal or plan that hasn't come off. And our goals reflect our values and what we care about. So when our goals and values are thwarted, we feel frustrated.

But reflecting on these frustrations became growth opportunities to improve, change and innovate for these leaders. They also led to skill development such as communication, problem-solving and patience.

**What has frustrated you recently? What goals / values did the situation trigger? What could you do to improve or change the situation?**

### Failure

When we focus on how and when we've failed, it often concerns our behaviour. So you messed up; you're human. It sounds like a cliché to treat failure as a learning experience. Reflecting on failure, and then not repeating it, sounds obvious. But we may be surprised!

**What have you failed at recently? What don't you want to repeat?**

## Easy-to-use reflective tools

### Ropes and fuels

This is a variation on the **Working Well – Needs Fixing**.

Ask what:

1. ropes are holding the team back?
2. fuel is driving it forward?



## EMC<sup>2</sup>

<p><b>Emotive Reflection</b></p>	<p><b>Em</b> Listen to what your gut feeling tells you.</p>	<p>Questions: How do I feel now? Why do I feel like this?</p>
<p><b>Critical Reflection</b></p>	<p><b>C1</b> Stand back and critically examine.</p>	<p>Questions: What's working? What's not working? What's at the root of what's happening?</p>
<p><b>Creative Reflection</b></p>	<p><b>C2</b> Create new perspectives.</p>	<p>Questions: What are different perspectives on what's happening and where we are now? What would a complete outsider think?</p>

## H



## Angels and devils

1. Pick a project, situation, or issue.
2. Work out what went well or what contributed to its success.
3. Then put forward all the negatives and aspects that didn't contribute to its success.

## Constellations

1. Put a marker on the floor. The closer you are to the marker, the more positive your answer is.
2. Ask questions, or make statements, and see how far or near, everyone is to the marker.



## Proud, thankful, learned

1. Pick a project, situation, anything in fact you want to reflect on. Divide a wall or use pieces of flipchart paper.
2. Create three columns/sheets with the titles:

Proud	Thankful	Learned
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## Working well – needs fixing

1. Decide on the topic/project/situation you want to reflect on.
2. Use flip charts or Post Its to write your thoughts about specific aspects of it.
3. Options include:

Working well	Needs fixing
Needs tweaking	Good enough
Pushing us forward	Bogging us down
Bright side	Dark side

## Improve how you work

1. List five things that bug you at work.

2. What processes or systems could you, or would you like to, simplify?

3. What processes need to be substantially changed or scrapped?

4. What improvements in any aspect of your work could you introduce in under 30 minutes?

## Use metaphor

This helps people think a bit differently. We talk about:

- a project as a train wreck
- taking a helicopter view
- being on a roller coaster.

So we can use it for reflective practice as well.

Looking back on this team in 2024, how would you describe it as a:

- piece of fruit?
- vehicle?
- drink?
- animal?



## One or three words

The original version of this was one word: a one word reflection. I've changed this to **three words**. Again, you can pick a time period, project or team for this one.

## Notes

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## Bibliography

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Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing*. London: Oxford Polytechnic.

Joyce, P. (2015). *Reflective practice: methods and tools for supporting teaching, learning and professional development*. Wellington: AKO Aotearoa.

Reflective practice models, downloaded from [https://www.ucd.ie/teaching/t4media/reflective\\_practice\\_models.pdf](https://www.ucd.ie/teaching/t4media/reflective_practice_models.pdf)

McWilliams, N. Video: [What is mental health?](#)

# Thanks for coming!

**From The Training Practice team – Hilary, Kristen, Rachel, James and Oli**

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**RSVP to Hilary's November Tea & Toast:**

***How the professional speech writers  
use rhetoric – and how you can too***

***November 29, 8:30 – 9:30am***

