Applying the Gibbs' Reflective Model

'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.' (Gibbs 1988)

Using this 6 step model should help to identify your strengths, areas for development and actions you can take to enhance your professional skills. Steps 1 - 3 relate to what happened during the experience and steps 4 - 6 focus on how you could improve on the experience and outcome in the future.

Step 1 – Description

This should be a brief description of the experience or event to set the scene and give context.

Step 2 – Feelings

Consider what you were thinking and how you felt before the experience.
How did you feel during the experience?
How did you feel after the experience?
This is another short descriptive step, rather than being analytical.

Step 3 – Evaluation

Evaluation looks objectively at both positive and negative aspects of the experience.
Describe key elements that went particularly well.
Was there anything that did not go well or did not work?
If appropriate, you can include what others did or did not do well.

Step 4 – Analysis

Analysis attempts to explain **why** the experience was positive or negative and should form the largest section of your reflection. Take into account points made in the previous steps and identify any factors which helped you e.g. previous experiences, carrying out research or consulting with others. Consider your role in the experience and how you contributed to the success of this experience?
If things did not go to plan, why do you think this was e.g. lack of preparation or external factors beyond your control?
It can be useful to consider other people who were involved in the experience. Did they have similar views or reactions to you? If not, why do you think that was the case?

Step 5 – Conclusion

Focus on what you have learned.
Are there any skills you developed as a result of the experience? If so, how would you apply them in future experiences or situations?
Are there areas of knowledge or particular skills you now need to develop?
Is there anything you would do differently in the future? Try to give specific examples.

Step 6 – Action Plan

What specific actions can you now take to build on your knowledge or skills?
You could include any training that would benefit you (formal or otherwise), as well as identifying sources of information or support (people or resources).

To demonstrate what each of the 6 steps could look like, here is a simplified example:

Step 1 – Description

My group of friends had started to cook for each other and it was my turn to cook and host an evening.

Step 2 – Feelings

In the run up to the event, I felt quite nervous as I had not cooked for so many people before and was not confident I could produce elaborate meals like some of my friends. However, when my friends arrived on the night I was excited and felt more positive. My friends paid me lots of compliments during the night which helped me to relax and enjoy the evening although I did worry afterwards that my meal was not as good as other people's.

Step 3 – Evaluation

On the plus side, there was a really happy atmosphere and everyone seemed to be having fun. On the negative side, the chicken was undercooked so I had to add on an extra 20 minutes' cooking time. The vegetables were over-cooked and we ran out of wine!

Step 4 – Analysis

On reflection, I realised that I should have checked cooking times and used a timer to help me plan better. On balance though, the evening was fun and although some focus was on my food, that was not the sole purpose of our evening. Speaking to some of my friends after the event, their positive feedback helped me realise that my outgoing personality allowed my friends to feel at ease and enjoy the evening.

Step 5 – Conclusion

I grew in confidence as a result of this experience and realised that it is ok to make mistakes.

Step 6 – Acton Plan

The next time I host an evening, I could have a practice run before the night so I am using a tried and tested approach. I could also seek advice from someone who is more used to doing this than me. This will help me feel better organised and confident in the run up to the event.

Using a Word Count

To avoid over-writing and to ensure your reflection is well-balanced and structured, the following is a general guide as to how each section should be weighted depending on the final word count of any reflection you may be asked to produce. For Futures we recommend your reflection is *in the region of* 1000 -1500 words.

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

Reference
Gibbs, G. (1988). Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods. Oxford: Oxford Further Education Unit