

Critical Reflection as Assessment

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Critical reflection is a metacognitive process whereby learners articulate connections between their own experiences and course content. By engaging in reflection, students are encouraged to think not only about subject matter, but about how they acquire knowledge.

Reflection asks students to:

* Examine their learning process
* Articulate what learning occurred
* Examine how learning occurred
* Explain how newly acquired knowledge altered existing knowledge

# Benefits of Critical Reflection (For Instructors)

Critical reflection can be beneficial for a number of reasons. These include:

* **Academic Integrity** – Reflection is personal, as it requires students to make connections between their own experiences and course content. This makes it difficult for students to plagiarize.
* **Documented Learning** – Reflection provides a record of student learning that be evaluated. Reflection can allow instructors to spot gaps and knowledge and address common problems quickly and efficiently.

# Benefits of Critical Reflection (For Learners)

Critical reflection can be benefit students in a number of ways. These include:

* **Deeper Learning** – Reflection encourages students to confront their own biases by inviting alternative perspectives. Students learn to challenge simplistic and superficial conclusions, and ultimately engage with topics more deeply.
* **Growth Mindset** – Reflection encourages students to evaluate and understand their mistakes with the goal of developing a solution or action plan for improvement. This can turn even a seemingly negative learning experience into something positive.
* **Knowledge Transfer** – Students who think critically about their learning experiences are more likely to be able to apply what they have learned in different contexts. Reflection fosters knowledge transfer by helping students articulate questions, examine causality, contrast theory with practice, and identify connections between topics or disciplines (Ash & Clayton, 2009).

# Incorporating Critical Reflection into an Assessment

Reflection usually involves having students record a response about a recent learning experience. This could be a written response, or students can record a short video or audio clip. Usually, the instructor will provide some guiding questions to serve as prompts.

Responses do not need to be particularly long, which means reflection can be easily incorporated into or alongside existing assessments. Even just 250 words can be enough to get students thinking about their learning. The key is to have students think critically about the learning experience and what it means broadly, rather than simply reporting what happened (Ash & Clayton, 2009).

# Frameworks for Critical Reflection

There are many different frameworks that can help structure reflection. Providing students with prompts can ensure they are moving beyond summary to critically examine their learning experience. Below are four different frameworks to consider.

## The 4R Framework: Reporting and Responding, Relating, Reasoning, Reconstructing

* **Reporting and Responding** – Students notice and deliberate about aspects of their learning experience
* **Relating** – Students connect what they learned to their own prior experiences or a related issue
* **Reasoning** – Students critically analyze the context, the issue, and related impacts
* **Reconstructing** – Students demonstrate new ideas and ways of thinking about an issue

## What? So What? Now What?

* **What** – Students articulate what they learned, what happened during the experience, and what they noticed
* **So What** – Students consider why the experience mattered, what questions it raised, and what conclusions they can draw
* **Now What** – Students articulate how they will use what they learned, how they will apply their learning, and what they may do differently going forward

## DEAL: Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning

* **Describe** – Students describe the experience objectively
* **Examine** – Students examine the learning experience from a personal, academic, and/or civic perspective
* **Articulate** – Students articulate what they learned and why it matters based on their previous responses in the describe and examine phases

## ICE: Ideas, Connections, Extensions

* **Ideas** – Students identify the fundamental elements of a learning experience
* **Connections** – Students make connections between the learning experience, course concepts, and prior knowledge
* **Extensions** – Students extrapolate what they learned and apply it to other situations

# References

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