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Blogs for Workplace Assessment

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Assessment & Feedback Use Cases

BLOGS FOR WORK PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT

Author: Julie Dunne, Sinead Ryan

Date: 2014

This use case describes how one assessment method was designed and implemented by a lecturer or a group of lecturers in DIT. The use case was compiled from an interview conducted as part of **DIT's RAFT project (2013-14)**, the aim of which was to provide a database of assessment practices designed and implemented by academic staff across DIT.



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Lecturer

Julie Dunne and Sinead Ryan

Programme and year on which assessment was offered

- Higher Certificate in Pharmacy Technician Studies, Year 2
- BSc Pharmaceutical Healthcare, Year 4

Description

Students out on work placement undertake a period of writing individual reflective blogs (4 x weekly blog @ 400 words per blog) to capture their experiences and reflections on experiences. Assigned to small groups, they also are required to interact with the blogs of peers through reflective comments. Students are also encouraged to read as many blogs written by their peers (outside their assigned group) and comment if they wish. Marking is across several desired outcomes (see rubric). Feedback is provided after the first blog which is not marked. Feedback is via a comment on the student blog. All students can view each other's submissions together with peer and tutor (feedback) comments.

Why did you use this Assessment?

- Student friendly peer and tutor support while isolated from college on placement, thus supporting student retention.
- Use of technology to support an innovative and engaging assessment which promotes critical thinking and deeper analysis through student interaction with their peers.
- Timely tutor feedback and peer review on assessment.
- Peer collaborative learning through promoting the sharing of diverse experiences in a Community of Practice.
- Professional development through reflection on practice, group work and written communication.
- Broadening the curriculum through gaining, sharing and discussing external perspectives on core knowledge gained in lectures.
- Provides a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

Why did you change to this form of assessment?

An end of work placement report was the old assessment method. It did not encourage reflection on practice during placement, did not allow sharing of diverse placement experiences, and was not designed to allow timely formative feedback.

How do you give feedback to students?

The commenting tool on the blog is used to provide written feedback to students. The feedback relates the blog to the assessment rubric. All students can read the feedback on each blog submission.

What have you found are the advantages of using this form of assessment?

- Students share work placement experiences while out on placement, which benefits learning
- Students can support each other through reflective comments on each other's blogs
- All class benefits from timely feedback to each student.
- Hidden curriculum can be uncovered and issues addressed in a timely fashion
- Professional development through reflection on practice
- Students remain connected to their tutor and peers while away on placement.

What have you found are the dis-advantages of using this form of assessment?

- Time consuming, particularly on week one when feedback is being provided.
- Due to online environment, quality of writing can be poorer than other academic assignments

If another lecturer was using this assessment method would you have any tips for them?

- Ensure feedback is provided in a positive and constructive way, as it is visible to whole class.
- Provide feedback which is aligned to a detailed assessment rubric.
- A workshop on how to write reflectively is useful (see Reflective writing handout). It can be coupled to a workshop on how to use the software for blogging.
- Highlight the importance of good quality academic writing, as the 'online' environment can lead to use of inappropriate 'text-speak' language.
- As a time saving measure, consider marking only one of the assessed blogs, and perhaps at the end of the blogging period ask the students to self-evaluate their own submissions and request which blog they prefer is (or is not) chosen for marking.

Do you have any feedback from students about this assessment?

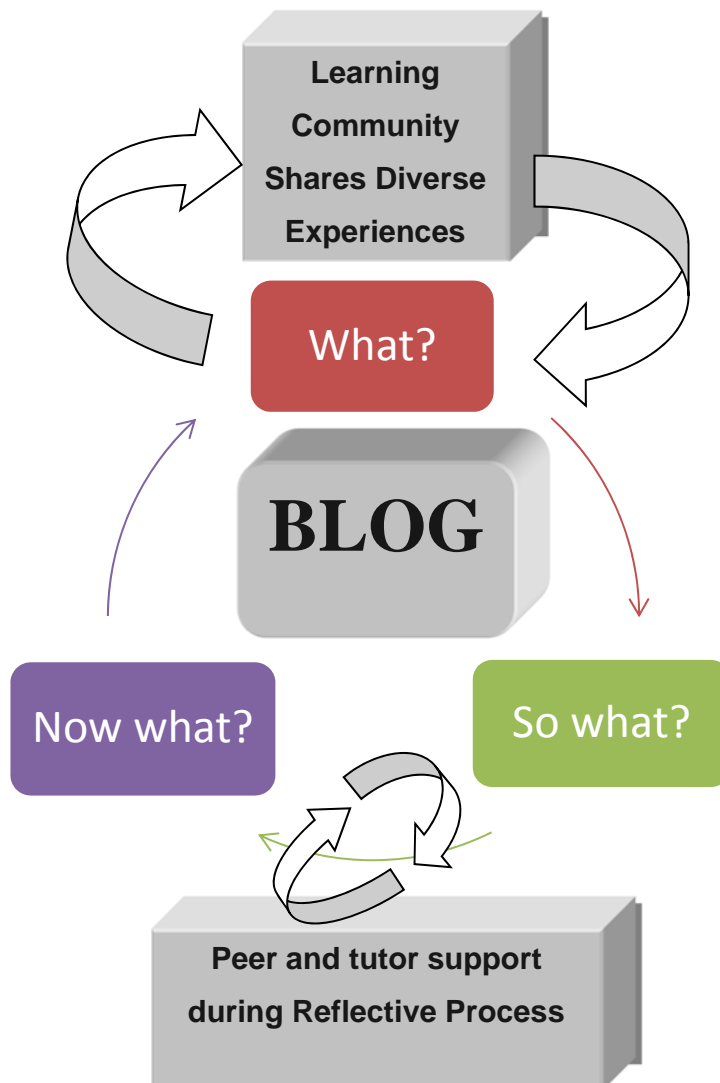
Yes, very popular. 94% (N=37) considered it should be retained as the assessment method. Some anxiety before making first post, but by the end the vast majority were comfortable with the assessment method. Students believed that they learned a lot from reading the posts of others, together with the feedback provided both on their own blog, and those of their peers.

Additional Resources

Work Shop for Reflective Writing and Blog Assessment

Student Handout

The aim of this workshop is to introduce a blog assessment for pharmacy technician students to encourage reflection on performance and the development of a learning community for peer support and sharing of experiences, which together are important steps towards lifelong learning.



Part 1: Reflective Writing

It is recognised that the accelerating pace of technological, social, and economic change requires graduates to be Lifelong Learners, and that much of the learning across the lifespan is unplanned, experiential and emergent (Bourner, 2003). **The key to this type of learning is reflection, which turns experiences into learning** (Boud, D. *et al.*, 1985)

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the workshop you should be able to:

1. Identify examples of good reflective writing
2. Apply an assessment rubric to samples of reflective writing
3. Use the online software to write blog posts and comment on peer blogs

Reflective writing [adapted from University of Portsmouth DCQE]:

Reflective *writing* is evidence of reflective *thinking*. In an academic context, reflective thinking usually involves:

1. Looking back at something (often an event, i.e. something that happened on placement).
2. Analysing the event (thinking in depth and from different perspectives, and trying to explain, often with reference to theory from college).
3. Thinking carefully about what the event means for you and your ongoing progress as a learner and/or practising professional.

To help structure reflective thinking into a Reflective writing piece for your blog, it might be useful to consider **What? So what? Now what?**:

1. **What?** Means a description: a **short** summary of what happened, only focussing on the relevant aspects of the event
2. **So what?** Is an interpretation of what is interesting, relevant and important about the event; and how this relates to the theory in college. Is the event similar or different to other previous experiences (even outside of a workplace, e.g. in a club, hobby etc)
3. **Now what?** Is a consideration of the outcome of the event for yourself, for now and in your future profession.

Reflective writing is characterised by '**revealing**' personal strengths & weaknesses; and successes & mistakes.

Ethical considerations

- Access to blog posts is 'private' i.e. restricted to the class and tutor.
- Each student must respect work placement confidentiality i.e. not to disclose work place private information for example the name(s) of your supervisor(s), co-workers, customers, doctors and patients. The name and address of your work place does not need be mentioned.
- Blog posts should contain course/work placement related content only. Non-course related content is considered not appropriate.
- Blog postings will not be used by the lecturer/tutor without the written consent of the author (student).

Assessment Rubric:

| Criteria | Beginning | Developing | Proficient | Strong | Marks Weighting |
|-------------------|---|---|--|--|-----------------|
| Content | Experiences are poorly described or are not relevant to the course of study or profession | Experiences are reasonably well described and somewhat relevant to the course of study, but not related well to theory | Appropriate experiences are chosen and are well described, but not well related to college theory | Appropriate experiences are well described and related back to college theory. | 25% |
| Reflection | No evidence of reflection on performance or personal response to experiences described | No evidence of reflection on performance but some personal response to experiences described | Evidence of reflection on performance and good personal response to experiences described | Evidence of deep reflection on performance and clear personal response to experiences described, together with statement of learning achieved both from the experience and reflection. | 25% |
| Comments | Lack of comments, or comments of a trivial nature with no evidence of empathy with blog group | Comments of a somewhat trivial nature, and showing only slight empathy with the blog group | Comments show interest and empathy with blog group, requesting further information, and comparing to own experience. Replying to peer comments and questions is evident. | Comments show empathy with blog group, requesting further information, making suggestions, and evidence of deep reflection of experience of others, and how this relates to own practice. Replying to peer comments and questions is evident and very meaningful and purposeful. | 15% |
| Frequency | Completely insufficient blog posts. | Sufficient blog posts, but always late. | Sufficient blog posts, rarely late. Comments mostly on time. | Always posts blogs and comments on time. | 25% |
| Style | Poor grammar and spelling, and poor general language usage makes blogs difficult to read or follow. Blog is incorrect length. | Spelling and grammar are good, but little thought out into construction of blog post into a coherent piece. Incorrect length. | Good grammar and spelling, and correct language usage. Blog is correct length. | Good grammar and spelling, excellent language usage, demonstrating style and personal expression. Blog is correct length. | 10% |

A series of activities to demonstrate the principles of reflection applied to a work placement experience.

Scenario: A customer asks for Solpadine tablets, and becomes irate when you proceed to ask questions relating to the sale of codeine-containing over-the-counter products.

The following blog and comments would fall into the 'Strong' category.

Blogger:

Blog subject: The topic of my blog this week relates to selling codeine containing products.

As I have learned in pharmacy practice and pharmacology modules, codeine phosphate is a mild to moderate painkiller related to morphine and has a weak cough suppressant activity. It mimics the action of natural endorphins by combining with the opioid receptors in the brain and spinal cord, thus reducing pain. Taking codeine containing painkillers for longer than 3 days or in doses higher than are recommended can cause tolerance and addiction, as well as increasing the risk of other side effects. I have learned about a number of regulations which have recently been put in place to restrict the sale of codeine containing products, and during work placement this week, I had to implement the pharmacy's policy for sale of codeine. A customer appearing in a hurry asked for *Solpadine*. I was aware that I could not sell the product without questioning him, and relating the discussion to the pharmacist. I attempted to use the WWHAM technique I learned in pharmacy practice to commence questioning, however the customer quickly became angry and demanded to speak to the manager. I asked him to wait while I called the pharmacist. In the dispensary, I discreetly explained the situation. The pharmacist spoke to the customer and decided it was appropriate not to sell the medication, explaining to me afterwards that he was not convinced that a codeine containing product was required for the customer's pain. Initially, while I was a little taken back by the customer's anger, I was satisfied that I had sufficient knowledge of the regulations for codeine sales, and was working within my remit as a trainee technician and within the law. Subsequently, I considered that a more appropriate approach to the initial questioning of the customer might be to find a way to obtain the necessary information in a friendly manner, rather than to adopt a more interrogating approach. I decided it might be helpful as a professional to have a more comprehensive understanding of the codeine regulations for the future. Therefore I read the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland's guideline on sale of Codeine containing products (2011). While I would not undertake to counsel a customer on this topic and would always refer to the pharmacist, I now feel I can be more sympathetic to the situation, and I feel more confident in dealing with this topic with the added knowledge. I am interested to hear if any of you in the class have had a similar situation, and how you dealt with it?

Comments:

Commentator:

I have often experienced customers becoming irate when questioned about codeine sales, and I have to explain to them that it is the law. I wonder if many customers now know the 'right answer' to my questions, as I find it hard to determine if they are genuine or not. Do any of you have this experience? At the following links, you can read my pharmacy's guidelines on the risks of codeine and on helping a customer identify if they had developed a codeine dependency

(<http://www.hickeyspharmacies.ie/codeine.htm>), and guidelines on how to become codeine free

(<http://www.hickeyspharmacies.ie/downloads/CodeineFree.pdf>) Do you have similar policies in your pharmacies? I find it quite upsetting to see customers who have developed a dependency. I worked in pharmacy before the new regulations came in, and I think they are useful in limiting the availability of codeine, and hopefully it will reduce the new cases of addiction. Where do you store the codeine products in your pharmacies?

Activity 1:

Read the blog and comments above, and with reference to the assessment rubric, see if you can identify why this blog would fall into the 'strong category. To help you with this, you could answer the questions below:

In the blog, can you identify examples of relating the topic to college theory?

In the blog, is the description of the situation itself relatively long or short (Is it concise)? Does it give sufficient information for you to 'picture' the situation in enough detail to allow you consider the pertinent issues?

In the blog, can you find reflection on the immediate personal response to the situation described itself?

In the blog, can you find reflection on how a similar situation might be better handled the next time?

In the blog, can you find an example of deeper reflection, self-directed learning or critical thinking to allow further professional development based on the situation?

In the blog, can you identify a 'statement of learning' that the author made based on the situation and the reflections?

In the comments, is there evidence of empathy with the blogger's situation?

In the comments, is there evidence of reflection on the commentator's similar experiences?

based on the commentator's experience of a similar situation?

In the comments, is there evidence of seeking further response to specific issues raised by the commentator, arising from the original blog?

In the comments, are the observations meaningful and purposeful?

Is the language usage (in the blog and comments) of high quality and professional? Are there spelling mistakes, typos, or grammar errors?

When you have completed your own blog and comments, ask yourself the same questions!

Activity 2:

Read the alternative blog below. Explain how it differs from the first one. You can use the questions above to help you explain how it differs. Fill out the rubric provided. What category would this blog report fall into? How would you categorise the Comments made on this blog?

Blog:

Today I had to deal with a situation in the pharmacy when a customer asked me for a packet of Solpadine. He was a middle aged man. The pharmacy was very busy at the time, and all the other pharmacy technicians were dealing with other customers. Solpadine contains codeine. The new codeine regulations include the following key points:

- Non-prescription medicinal products containing codeine should be stored in a retail pharmacy business (pharmacy), out of the view of the public, to facilitate the legislative requirement that these products must not be accessible to the public for self-selection.
- Non-prescription 'combination' products, containing codeine and paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen, should be supplied only as 'second line' products for the treatment of pain relief, when single ingredient products, such as paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen, have not shown to be effective.
- Non-prescription medicinal products containing codeine should only be used in accordance with the terms of their marketing authorisations, which all state that the product be used for short-term use, no longer than three days.
- Patients need to be fully advised of the correct use of these products and the risks associated with their misuse. It is also essential that patients be facilitated in obtaining medical assistance for any health problems related to their misuse that may arise.

Therefore I needed to determine if non-codeine containing products had been already been tried. So I started to ask the man questions based on the WWHAM questioning technique. I had only started asking him about 'Who the patient was' to determine if the Solpadine was for him or for someone else, when he started to become quite angry, and asked me to speak to the manager. So I went into the dispensary and explained to the pharmacist that a customer had come in and had requested Solpadine. I told her that when I tried to find out the relevant information, but that he had become angry. The pharmacist told me that she would deal with the situation. She spoke to the man, and he told her that he had back ache. She asked him if he had tried ibuprofen. He said he had not. So she explained that she would only sell him Nurofen, and if he tried this and it wasn't effective, to come back. The pharmacist suggested that I read the pharmacy's policy on sale of codeine containing products, which I proceeded to do. I now feel more prepared to deal with such a situation should it arise again.

Comments:

Comment 1: That sounds quite scary. But it sounds like you handled it appropriately. Well done!

Comment 2: Did the man come back into the shop the next day?

Activity 3:

Read the alternative blog below. Again, explain how it differs from the first one. You can use the questions above to help you explain how it differs. Based on the rubric, what category would this blog report fall into? How would you categorise the Comments made on this blog?

Blog:

Hey everyone. Today this guy came in to the shop lookin for Solfadene and when i asked him who it was for he started yelling at me and i couldn't believe it cause i'd never seen anyone gettin so mad in the shop! I suppose maybe he hadn't heard that there are these new rules about selling Solfadine? Or maybe he was addicted and is geting angry because he was afraid we wouldn't sell him any? I heard that sometimes they have to go around to loadz of different shops to see if they can get someone to sell them the tablets which must be dead frustrating especially if you are starting to feel withdrawal symptoms that you get when you stop taking it and I suppose I felt a bit sorry for him when i thought about that. Anyway I ran into the dispensary and whispered to the pharmacist about the man and she dealt with him. I think i handled it alrite. i didn't break the law and sell him the Solphadine 😊 Afterwards i said i better read up a bit more about the rules for selling Solfadene so that I'd be a bit more ready the next time! Did any of u ever have to deal with this?

Comments:

Comment 1: No way, that's mad! I heard that there are loads of people addicted to Solphadine in Ireland. I'll ask my pharmacist about it and see if we have a policy, and I'll let ye know next week.

Activity 4:

In the last blog, there are many grammar, spelling, punctuation mistakes, along with general non-professional language usage. Can you pick out examples of:

1. Sentences which are too long?
2. Bad grammar?
3. Spelling errors?
4. Unprofessional terminology?

Part 2

Activity 5

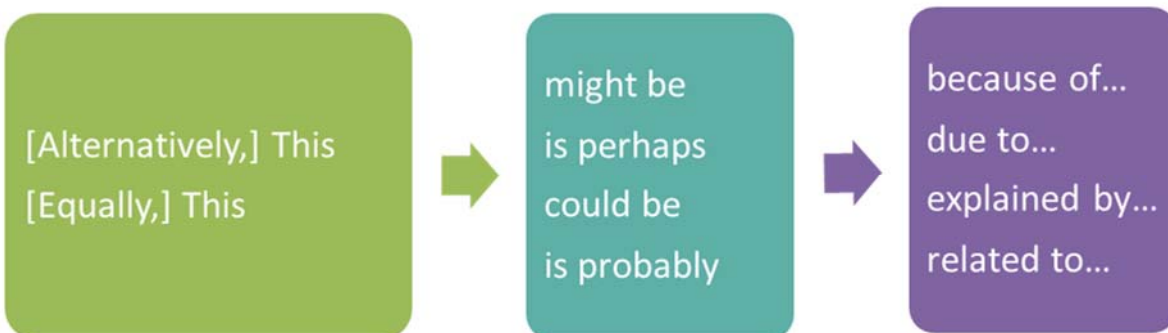
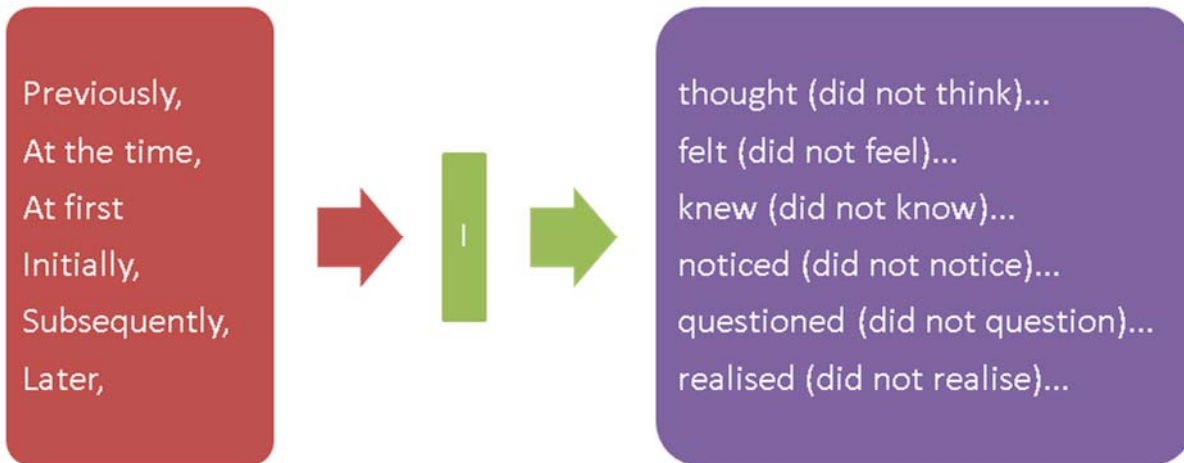
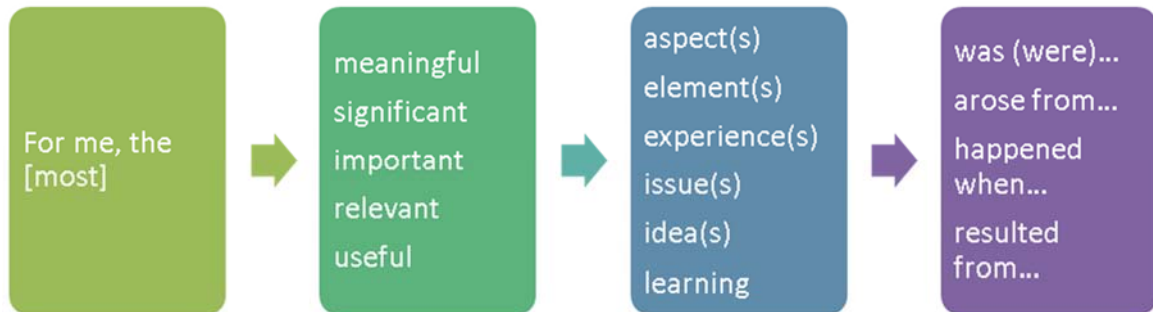
Watch the first video, and then log in to your blog space. Write a short reflective piece (about 100 – 150 words) on what you learned in the last hour. [20 mins]

Activity 6

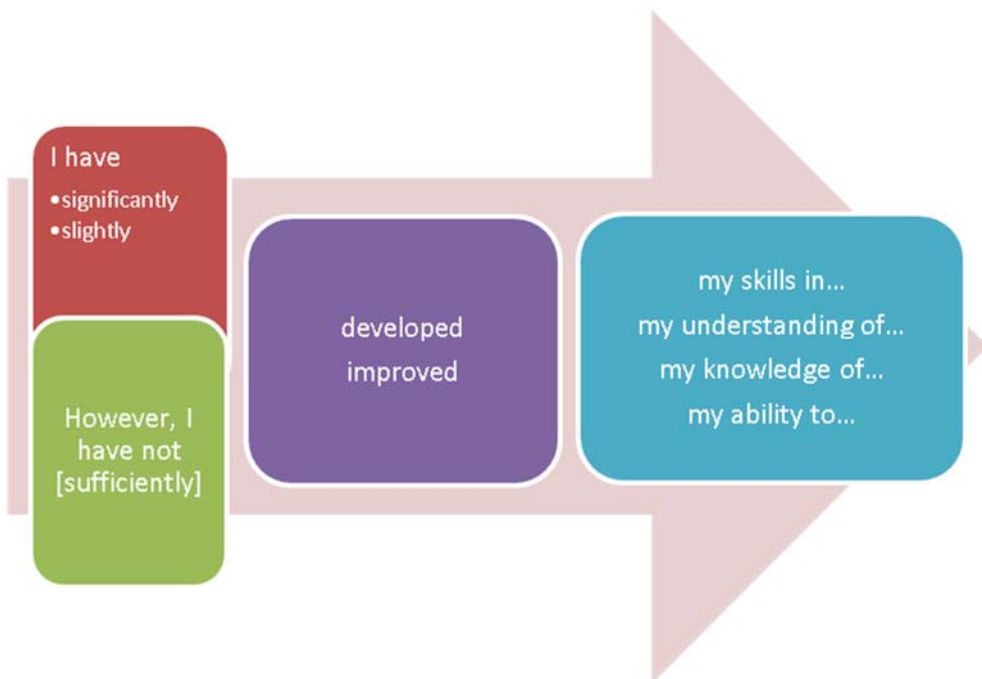
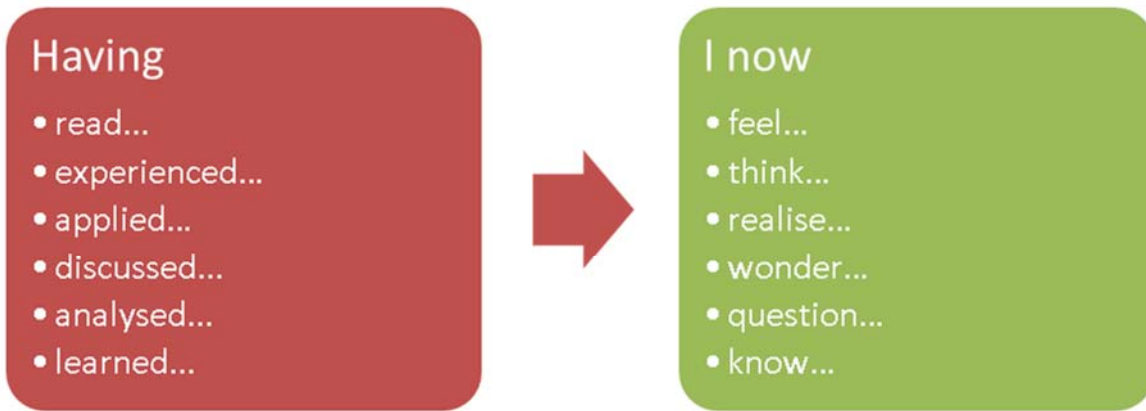
Watch the second video, and return to the blog space, and make a comment on the Reflections of one member of your group. [10 mins]

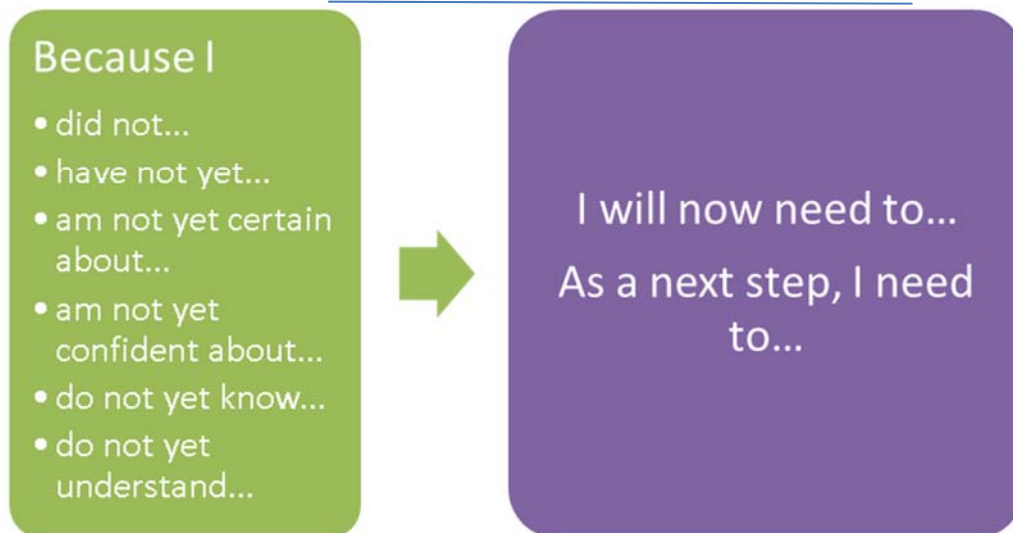
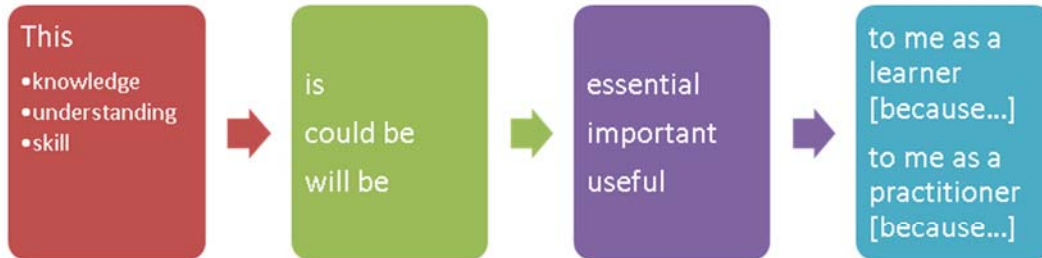
Appendix 1: Vocabulary for Reflective Writing (adapted from Portsmouth DCQE)

So What? Interpretation



Now what? Outcome





References:

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