

Reflective Learning Logs

as an Assignment Tool for Students

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Reflective learning has become an established component of higher education, particularly within disciplines such as social and public policy that require students to **engage critically with complex social issues**, normative frameworks, and real-world applications. Traditional assessment methods, which often prioritise outputs such as essays or examinations, may not fully capture the processes through which students develop understanding, reflexivity, and analytical capacity. Reflective learning logs offer an alternative assessment approach by **foregrounding the learning process itself**.



LITERATURE REVIEW



THE BENEFITS

- ✓ Influenced by the theories of **Donald Schön** and **David Kolb**, who emphasised reflection as an important part of experiential and professional learning (Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984).
- ✓ Helps students **connect theoretical perspectives to contemporary social problems** such as inequality, welfare reform, and social justice.
- ✓ Promotes **critical thinking and independent learning** by requiring students to analyse their understanding of policies and their impact on society (Moon, 2006).
- ✓ Provides opportunities for **ongoing formative feedback**, allowing lecturers to monitor the development of analytical and evaluative skills throughout a module (Gibbs, 1988).
- ✓ Models such as **Gibbs' Reflective Cycle** are useful for supporting students to organise and evaluate their reflections more critically (Gibbs, 1988).

Figure 1. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988)



THE CHALLENGES

- ✗ **Subjectivity** in assessing reflective writing can make it difficult to grade consistently and fairly (Moon, 2006).
- ✗ Students may write what they think assessors want to hear rather than engage in **genuine critical reflection**.
- ✗ Some students struggle to move beyond descriptive accounts and need **structured guidance** to develop deeper analysis.



Overall, reflective learning logs can be an effective assessment tool in Social Policy when supported by clear assessment criteria, feedback, and guidance, as they encourage students to **link academic theory with real-world social and political issues**.



USE IN HONOURS AND MSc COURSES

In University of Glasgow Honours Social Policy courses and related MSc programmes, many students report that reflective learning logs are a more **engaging** form of assessment compared with traditional exams or essays, as they allow space to connect academic material with personal insight and real-world social issues.



They are often valued for their **flexibility** and for giving students a sense of **ownership** over their learning, particularly when engaging with complex topics such as welfare systems, inequality, and public policy.



In the current graduate labour market, reflective logs help students review and clearly articulate the **employability skills** they are developing—such as critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and self-management. This makes them not only a learning tool, but also a practical resource for preparing CVs, interviews, and applications in a competitive graduate employment climate.



EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Reflective learning logs align closely with the University of Glasgow's Employability Framework because they operationalise its emphasis on helping students **"surface"** and articulate the skills developed through their academic study. The framework stresses that employability is strengthened when students are supported to recognise and explicitly communicate the transferable skills embedded in their disciplinary learning, rather than leaving these implicit within coursework (University of Glasgow, 2024). Reflective logs achieve this by requiring Social Policy students to critically examine their learning experiences, connect theory to real-world social issues such as inequality and welfare provision, and identify the development of skills including critical analysis, communication, and problem-solving.



In addition, reflective learning logs support the framework's focus on **experiential and assessment-based learning** by encouraging students to integrate reflection into ongoing assessment practice. The University of Glasgow highlights reflection as a key mechanism for helping students evaluate their progress and make sense of their learning in relation to future employability (University of Glasgow, 2024). As a result, reflective learning logs function not only as a form of assessment but also as a **structured way of developing employability awareness**, enabling students to translate academic learning into clearly articulated graduate attributes.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING LOGS HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP VALUABLE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS:



CRITICAL THINKING



COMMUNICATION



PROBLEM SOLVING



SELF-MANAGEMENT



ANALYTICAL THINKING

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Reflect.
Learn.
Grow.