

Soft Skills | Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is imperative in helping you become the best practitioner you can be! It not only helps improve your practice as you start out, it will also continue to help you develop/refine your skills throughout your nutrition career.

Reflective Practice | What is it?

Reflective practice can be defined as “learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice” – Finlay (2008).

Reflective practice is about learning through your own experience; it is a process you should ideally go through after delivering any nutrition service (presentation, workshop, consultation, lecture etc.). It will help accurately consolidate and record your reflections on what went well and what could be improved to ensure you are continually progressing.

Reflective Practice | Why is it beneficial for a practitioner?

This process is beneficial in many ways:

- ▲ By considering how your actions affected your client/audience, you develop a client-centric approach
- ▲ You will get a deeper understanding of how your clients learn so you can find the best ways to help them reach their goals
- ▲ As you find new methods of practice and have more ‘tools in your toolbox’, you will build your confidence as a practitioner
- ▲ You will develop a wide range of skills through reflection, helping you to identify what works well for your clients
- ▲ It will give you insights into how you can adapt your practice to different clients who have different personalities and needs
- ▲ Through constantly advancing your methods of practice, you will discover new and innovative solutions to common problems, thus be a more flexible practitioner



Reflective Practice | How can you do it?

It's best to think of reflective practice as a cyclical process, there is no endpoint!

A good framework for how to be reflective can be found from Gibbs (1988):

- ▲ **Description**
 - As a practitioner, outline your experiences from a recent consultation/presentation clearly, think of this as a factual account of what happened
- ▲ **Feelings**
 - Try to explore the thoughts and feelings you experienced during the consultation/presentation. Try to be honest with your feelings; both positive and negative
- ▲ **Evaluation**
 - Here you should discuss what went well and what areas you could have improved on. What did and did not go to plan? Consider your experience and your clients'/audiences' experience too
- ▲ **Analysis**
 - Try to make sense of your experience and consider what you could have done differently in the areas highlighted above and how you might learn the necessary skills to be able to do this in the future
- ▲ **Conclusion**
 - Draw on all the previous steps to sum up what you need to improve on and what you did well that you should keep doing
- ▲ **Action Plan**
 - Create a step-by-step plan for improvement next time around. What will you keep the same, what will you do differently? Is there anything you need to research/practise before your next consultation/presentation to achieve this?

It is cyclical because, in the list above, the actions you take in the final step will lead you back to the first step after you've done your next consultation/presentation!

You can complete reflective practice by thinking back to the situation and answering some specific questions to help you identify the positives and some areas of improvement, which will help you form your action points for future consultations/presentations. We have created some forms for you to use to help support this.



Alternatively, you may choose to record your consultation/presentation via audio or video to help you perform your reflective practice. This may be beneficial as it is not always easy to remember what you said/did (especially if you experience nerves)!

It can also help you identify:

- ⚠ The tone of voice that you used at different points in the session
- ⚠ How you phrased questions e.g. were your questions generally open-ended or closed?
- ⚠ Your body language and facial expressions (including how you reacted to their comments)
- ⚠ The client/audience's body language (including their reactions to your comments)

If you do want to record yourself, always make sure you check you have your clients'/audience's permission to record beforehand. You can inform them that it is purely for your own personal reflective purposes, though, they don't have to accept if they're not comfortable with it! Do consider recording it may change the what they say or the way they behave.

Reflective Practice | How it can be done badly

1) Just going through the motions

It is easy to write words on a piece of paper, but this does not equal reflective practice and will not support your development as a practitioner.

Examples of poor reflective practice:

- ⚠ *"I think my performance was good."*
- ⚠ *"I think my consultation went well!"*

Try to avoid using words like *fine*, *okay* or *good* as these are not detailed or descriptive. Instead, try to think deeper about your performance; how it made you feel and the impact you had on your client. Be specific with what went well.



2) Being too negative/hard on yourself

Example:

⚠️ *“Everything went terribly, I didn’t do anything right!”*

Try not to be too negative/hard on yourself. If you feel it didn't go too well, try and find some positives within what you did. It's good to recognise something that you did do well, even if it is something small.

Rather than writing everything that went wrong, try and focus on a few constructive (actionable) points within your control that you can work on the next time. Remember, becoming an expert practitioner takes time. Every consultation/presentation is part of your journey and reflective practice should play a big role in that.

3) Blaming others for what happened

Example:

⚠️ *“My client was so quiet it was like getting blood from a stone, so I had no choice but to tell them what to do!”*

Being adaptable is one of the many skills of an expert practitioner. Instead of blaming others/focusing on the client in this scenario, reflect on how *you* could have adapted to get the best out of this client. What could *you* have done differently? Could you have changed the order of the consultation to encourage rapport? Etc.

4) Not being specific enough

Having no clear plan or direction for your reflective practice is often a reason it's avoided. Use the reflective practice forms we have created to help guide your thoughts and provide some structure for your reflections!

References

Gibbs (1988). Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford.

