Reflection for Acting

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Reflection for Acting

What is reflection?
All human beings learn from experience and reflection is a part of this natural learning process. Kolb has described this very succinctly in his model of experiential learning.

Here is an everyday example of experiential learning.
Imagine you always travel to the Conservatoire with the 8.35am bus. When you miss the bus the first day, you might think it was just bad luck, but when you arrive at the bus stop at 8.32 for the third time just to see it leave from afar (1. Concrete experience), you will start to wonder why this happened (2. Observation and reflection). Maybe the timetable changed (3. Forming an abstract concept)? You could test this concept (4.) by checking the timetable or by arriving at the bus stop earlier. If it turns out that the bus is indeed leaving at 8.30am now, you have learned something through experience.

While this example is, admittedly, a very simple one, the model can also be used for much more complex learning situations, such as those that you experience at the Conservatoire. Whether you are asked to keep a reflective learning blog or not, you will reflect on your experiences to learn from them.

Why do I need to use formal reflection then?
Because the situations you experience at the Conservatoire are much more complex than our example of a change in the bus timetable, it can be useful to formalise the reflection process. Writing a regular learning (b)log helps you to remember specific situations and allows you to reflect on experiences you might otherwise forget. Sitting down to read earlier entries, adding new ones to your blog and perhaps reading about other students’ experiences also provides a good opportunity to take time to think about them in greater depth. This means making an effort, but it also means that you will learn more.
Do I need to use a model of reflection?
A model of reflection can be useful to structure your thinking. Although the different models may look quite different, they all share the 3 step process described in Driscoll’s very simple model:

WHAT?  ➔  SO WHAT?  ➔  THEN WHAT?


The 3 steps could also be written as:

What happened? ➔  What was the effect (good and bad)? ➔  What can I learn from it?

This is a fairly general model that describes the basic process, but does not offer much guidance for reflection. Other people use additional steps that can help us to think more thoroughly about something.


You can use the questions associated with every step of the cycle as prompts for your reflection and structure the entries in your RPJ based on them.

Have a look at the example on the next page. It shows the answers to the questions in Gibbs’ s cycle in note form.
You could take notes like this for yourself and then turn them into complete sentences for your RPJ.

Here is an example of an entry based on the notes you just read:

I am quite upset about my performance today and the negative feedback I received on it. I agree that I was not convincing, but I had hoped that after the process I made last semester in overcoming self-consciousness and becoming more confident in playing roles that are very different from myself, I would continue to grow and improve. However, my actions in the performance did not reflect the progress I have made. I realize that my fear of failure is still holding me back.

Reflection on Acting

- [ ] I am proud of myself for trying something new.
- [ ] I learned from my mistakes and will improve in the future.
- [ ] I need to work on my confidence and presence.
- [ ] I should have prepared more and practiced more to feel more comfortable on stage.
- [ ] I need to work on my voice and diction to be more clear.
- [ ] I need to work on my expression and facial cues to be more engaging.
- [ ] I need to work on my timing and pacing to be more consistent.
- [ ] I need to work on my energy and enthusiasm to be more engaging.
- [ ] I need to work on my physicality and movement to be more dynamic.
- [ ] I need to work on my ability to take direction and feedback to be more receptive.
- [ ] I need to work on my ability to remember my lines and blocking to be more confident.
- [ ] I need to work on my ability to connect with the audience to be more impactful.

Action Plan

- [ ] I will rehearse my lines and blocking with a friend to improve my confidence.
- [ ] I will work with the director to strengthen my performance.
- [ ] I will research more about the character to better understand their motivation.
- [ ] I will work on my vocal warm-ups to improve my voice quality.
- [ ] I will work on my physical warm-ups to improve my stage presence.
- [ ] I will work on my emotional preparation to improve my performance.
- [ ] I will work on my ability to take direction and feedback to improve my performance.
- [ ] I will work on my ability to connect with the audience to improve my performance.
- [ ] I will work on my ability to remember my lines and blocking to improve my performance.
- [ ] I will work on my ability to connect with the audience to improve my performance.

Evaluation

- [ ] What went well?
- [ ] What was not?
- [ ] Why did the positive and negative outcomes occur?

Analysis

- [ ] What happened?
- [ ] How did you feel?
- [ ] Did you notice anything?

Thoughts and Feelings

- [ ] What would you do next time?
- [ ] How do you feel about this experience?
I would have done better in this role. Today I certainly did not, but I am starting to wonder whether my self-consciousness comes, perhaps, from the fact that I am unhappy with my own interpretation of the character. I tried to work on purpose and intentions, but I feel that I am imposing ideas that are too general on it. If I just resort to my own experience to interpret the experiences of a Somali mother in a Kenyan refugee camp, I feel I cannot really create an authentic character. If this is the case, I probably do not have to work on my performance, but on the character. I could try to find clues in the text, but it might be more useful to do some research into the circumstances of young mothers, refugees or Somali culture. I will start with the easy one and have a chat with my cousin who just had a baby about how she feels as a mother and how it would be for her if she was in a similar situation, but I will also try to find articles on Somali culture (especially women) in general, ideally even testimonies from Somali women in Kenyan refugee camps.

Is reflection only useful for students?
No, reflection is useful for anyone who has to learn or develop their career. It is unlikely that you will find a job you will stay in for the rest of your life doing exactly the same thing for 40 odd years. Instead you will probably work on different projects and in different jobs. This means that you need to take important decisions about the direction of your career and you will have to explain these decisions to others. Reflection can help you to do both: to think about your professional situation and aims in order to take good decisions and to explain your strength to others.

What do I need to do for the reflective summary?
The reflective summary is a kind of “meta reflection” that asks you to review and reflect on your progress over a module. The structure suggested for this summary is

your GOALS ➔ your PRESENT reality ➔ the SUCCESS of your strategy

⇒ new GOALS

In other words, it asks you to:
The description of your current situation is, of course, more complex than that of the specific instances you reflect on in your RPJ. That is why it is a good idea, to divide it into different themes to make it more manageable. You could, for example, divide your statement into areas, such as “performance”, “daily practice”, “voice work” etc. and then reflect on each of them separately. Which themes you choose depends on the entries in your RPJ, the module on which you reflect and your personal priorities.