



Session

BEING IN CONTROL AND LEARNING BY REFLECTING

At the end of this session, international students will be able to:

- Review their use of English to identify existing practices, strengths and limitations
- Reflect on their own learning
- Begin the process of setting goals and developing self-monitoring strategies

How and when to use this material

This is the fourth session (at the end of the first day) in a pre-semester course, intended to be delivered by Student Learning Centre lecturers – although some of the activities may be useful as interventions by media and communication lecturers into their regular teaching. The use of a reflective journal to develop students' analytical abilities could be employed to support learning on a masters program as well as in introductory or pre-semester study skills courses.

Introduction

The session introduces students to the concept of reflection, the possibility of using a reflective journal, and the processes associated with beginning to take responsibility for their own learning. Students from mainland China may initially experience difficulty with the concept of reflection because 'description and synopsis' may be a more significant part of their previous university experience than 'reflection and analysis'. The viewing of a video about international students' experiences in Australian tertiary education enables students to engage with the thoughts and experiences of others as they explore the notion of transition to study in an Australian university context.

Note to lecturer

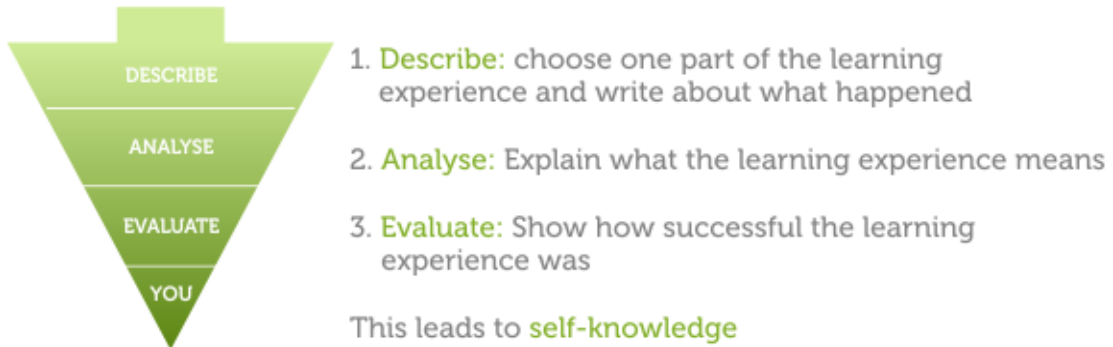
As this is the last session of the first day, feel free to adapt the activities and their order to suit your student cohort and the time available. In the previous three sessions, we have been relatively prescriptive about how to deliver the various activities in order to ensure that student learning is supported by a secure and culturally-engaged learning environment. However, by now, you will have a sense of students' interests and abilities, and will be able to judge which of the following activities will be most appropriate for your cohort.

Lecturer input: The role of reflection in learning

- Introduce to the class the idea of reflection through the use of the quotes below:
 - *'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.'* (Søren Kierkegaard)
 - *'By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest, second, by imitation, which is easiest, and third by experience, which is the bitterest.'* (Confucius)
- Highlight the idea of 'understanding backwards' – i.e. reflecting on past experiences and learning - by asking students to complete the attached **Needs analysis: Using your English**. Provide support to students if necessary as they complete this needs analysis. (Collect on completion, and review after class, as this will provide useful information in terms of tailoring following sessions to the specific needs of a given cohort of learners.)
- Tell students that what they have just done is reflect on their own learning. Go back to the Confucius quote and highlight the idea of reflection being the noblest way of learning wisdom. Identify too that the role of 'experience' in gaining wisdom is going to be central to their time in Australia - although hopefully not too 'bitter'!

Student activity 1: Reflecting on the learning experience

In order to look more deeply at this concept of reflection, provide students with the following diagram (see attached **Slide: How to reflect**).



Source: <http://emedia.mit.edu.au/learninglab/content/reflective-journal-1>

- Talk through each step with the class with reference to an example of one of the activities from earlier sessions in the day (e.g. being introduced to the 'Parameters of politeness' in the earlier session on **Communicating with and across cultures**, or meeting their peers for the first time, etc).
- Now ask each student to pair up with another and decide on an activity (which differs from the example the lecturer has just given). Together with their partner, they should write three sentences about the chosen activity: (1) a descriptive sentence about the activity, (2) an analytical sentence and then (3) a sentence that evaluates the experience.
- Choose two or three pairs to write their sentences on the whiteboard.
- Introduce the idea of a reflective learning journal. Show examples (there are many examples able to be accessed from the Internet if examples from your course are not readily available). Make the point that reflective journals do not have to be long pieces of written text, but may also include graphic or pictorial material.

Student activity 2: Writing a reflective journal entry about learning sessions

Note to lecturer

The below activity uses the PMI technique (Positive, Minus, Interesting) which is a useful way to cluster ideas for reflection or critique and comment. This is a particularly useful technique to use with Chinese students because they often find it difficult to take a stance, or voice personal opinion, because they are rarely required to do this in their undergraduate studies in China. PMI is a 'gentle' way to ease them into giving voice to their personal ideas.

Allow Chinese students and others who are second language speakers to complete the following reflection in their most comfortable written language (e.g. Chinese) because it is very difficult to focus on reflecting and analysing at the same time as writing in a language that you are not comfortable with. Problems in this regard can often be compounded if a student focuses on grammatical accuracy rather than on meaning making.

- Ask students to write a reflection on any of the earlier sessions they have completed. (As this session is designed to be the fourth in a pre-semester program – i.e. delivered at the end of the first day – students might be directed to concentrate on earlier sessions in the same day.) Encourage them to use diagrams and sketches as well as stream of consciousness writing rather than a prescribed style.
- Advise students that the **focus of this activity is on meaning making and not grammatical accuracy** and that they should not be too worried about their grammar.
- To assist with teasing out their ideas, write three headings on the whiteboard: Positive, Minus, and Interesting. Jot their ideas down under appropriate headings.

Positive: what learning techniques or skills they were excited or feeling (P) positive about the prospect of using, or could imagine using.

Minus: what they didn't understand and/or were not looking forward to, or didn't like (M).

Interesting: what they learned or found interesting (I) but may not be relevant to their actual course.

- Now ask students to identify one thing that they have realised that they will need to work on to improve their learning / engagement in their new university context. (This can be done orally or in writing depending on the student or cohort.) State that this can be described as a 'personal goal'.
- Note that students may want to add the above to their document 'Teaching and Learning Differences in Australia' which was introduced in the previous session: **Learning in a different cultural context.**

Lecturer input: Students reflecting on their own needs: Beginning the process of being in control

Introduce students to the concepts of long-term personal goals and short-term personal goals. Give examples that might relate to the course (e.g. short-term – not be nervous about speaking in a seminar; longer-term – being comfortable interacting socially with a large number of Australians.)

Emphasise that having goals enables students to take control of their own learning and that studies suggest that students with explicit goals perform better.

Student activity 3: Goal setting and glossary

- Students view YouTube clip: **Talking about transition - Tell us what to talk about** (Victoria University students talk here about transition and how hard it was at first but they hung in there.)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8yrHmz1gKk&feature=BFa&list=PL590269346234BEFC&lf=plcp>
- Note that there are a series of these that students can watch in their own time.
- Students to use this, and the other experiences of the day to set some goals.
- Students to write:
 - A goal related to their English language use (drawn out of their completion of the **Needs analysis: Using your English.**)
 - A goal related to their study experience in general

- Students to add to their Personal Glossary any new terms or ideas.
- To seal the completion of the first day of the pre-session course, give students the **Handout: Commencing study in Australia: A quick reference guide for Chinese Students.**



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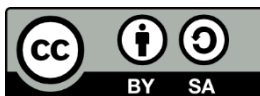
Produced for the project
'Collaborating for Success: Enhancing the Transition of
Chinese students into Australian postgraduate
education'

Additional materials and resources are available from
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

Project Team

Christine Daymon (Murdoch University, Project Leader)
Lindy Norris (Murdoch University)
Maree Keating (Victoria University)
Fiona Henderson (Victoria University)
Haixia Yu (Communication University of China)
Dawei Wang (Communication University of China)
Jennie Bickmore-Brand
Linda Butcher (Murdoch, Project Manager)
Yibing Liu (Research Assistant)

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