Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (or Gibbs' Reflective Model)
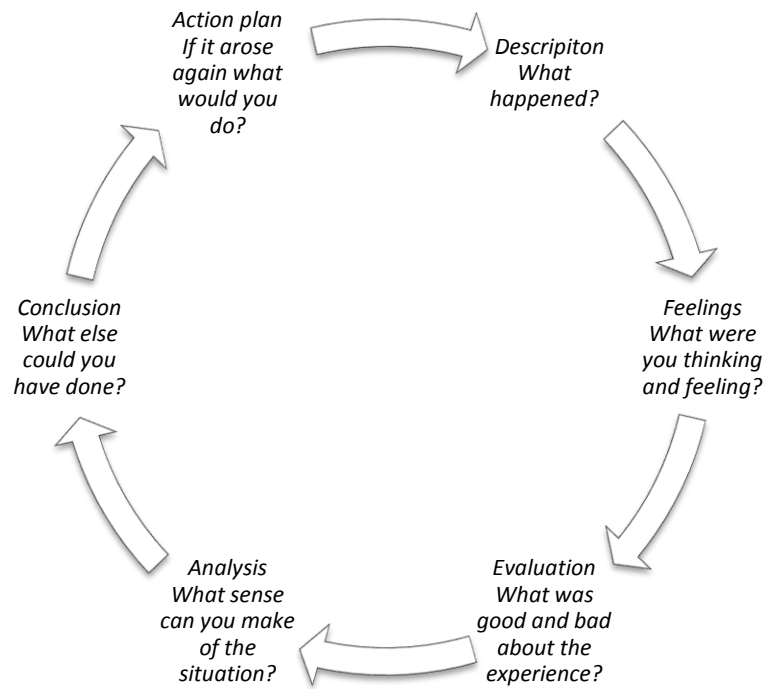
Gibbs' reflective cycle is a theoretical model often used by students as a framework in coursework assignments that require reflective writing.

The model was created by Professor Graham Gibbs and appeared in *Learning by Doing* (1988). It looks like this:

Gibbs' reflective cycle has 6 stages. They are usually given the following headings:

1. Description
2. Feelings
3. Evaluation
4. Analysis
5. Conclusion
6. Action Plan

Gibbs' model was developed from an earlier theoretical model; David Kolb's 4 stage experiential learning cycle (1984).

Whereas Kolb's model is sometimes referred to as an **experiential learning** model (which simply means learning through experience), Gibbs' model is sometimes referred to as an **iterative model** (which simply means learning through repetition).

The version of Gibbs' model given to students may be slightly adapted, such as the one that appears in Bulman and Schultz (2013) *Reflective Practice in Nursing* p232.
It looks like this:

Description
what
happened?

What were your
feelings and how
did you react?

Final evaluation
and action plan
what would you
do differently?

Initial evaluaion
of the experience
what was good
and bad about it?

Conclusion
what have you
learnt from
reflecting on this
experience?

Critical analysis
what sense did
you make of the
experience?

### Using analysis in Gibbs' model

In theory, the reflective process follows the 6 steps of the model so that each step informs the next. In practice, students often confuse the Evaluation, Analysis and Conclusion stages. These parts seem to ask similar questions and as a result, there can be a lot of repetition. **Analytical writing is only required in the Analysis stag**e. The other 5 steps are made up of statements of description, statements of value (whether something was good or bad), statements of summation or statements of justification (why something was done).

The aims of using Gibbs' reflective cycle:

- to challenge your assumptions
- to explore different/new ideas and approaches towards doing or thinking about things
- to promote self-improvement
  (*by identifying strengths and weaknesses and taking action to address them*)
- to link practice and theory
  (*by combining doing or observing with thinking or applying knowledge*)

A template for using Gibbs' model

Use the questions and guidelines in the template below to help you write each stage of the model. You do not have to answer all the questions. Try to select those that are relevant.

Gibbs' Reflective

- Plan of Action
- Description
- Feelings
- Evaluation
- Analysis
- Conclusion
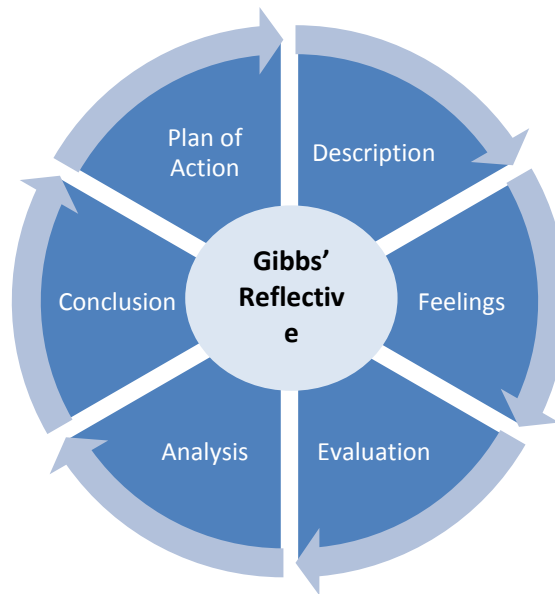
Description

Using **specific** and **relevant** detail, give a **concise** description of your experience (i.e. what you are reflecting on).

*this part is **not** analytical, it is descriptive, it describes an experience*

Feelings

Answer any of the following questions that you think are **relevant** to the experience:
- How did you feel and what did you think prior to the experience?
- How did you feel and what did you think during the experience?
- How did you react during the experience?
- How did you feel and what did you think after the experience?

*this part is **not** analytical, it is descriptive, it describes personal feelings and thoughts and actions (reactions)*

Evaluation

Answer any of the following questions that you think are **relevant** to the experience:
- What went well during the experience (what worked)?
- What went badly during the experience (what didn't work)?
- How did the experience end? Was the experience complete (was there a resolution) or incomplete?

*this part is **not** analytical, it makes positive and/or negative judgements about an experience*

if a lot of different things happened during the experience, focus on one or two, try to choose the things that are most important, most relevant or most representative of the experience

Analysis

Do any of the following that you think is **relevant**:

Reconsider the things that went badly and write **why** you think they went badly (causes of action).
Reconsider the things that went badly and write **what you think this lead to** (consequences of action).
Think about what could have been done to have avoided these negative consequences.

Reconsider the things that went well and write **why** you think they went well (causes of action).
Reconsider the things that went well and write **what you think this lead to** (consequences of action).
Think about how this positive action could have been further improved.

Think about your contribution to the experience and say how useful it was and why it was useful
(did a previous experience help you? can you compare it to a previous experience?).
If you were unable to contribute to the experience say why.

Think about other people present during the experience and try to assess whether their reactions were similar or different to yours. Try to say why they were the same or different.

*this part **is** analytical, it does not describe, it tries to explain the causes and consequences of things that happened, it asks questions like why?, so what? and what if?*

Conclusion

Reconsider the experience and answer any of the following questions that you think are **relevant**:
- What should or could I have done differently?
- What stopped me from doing this?
- What did I learn about myself during the experience (positive and/or negative)?
- What did I learn about my current knowledge or level of practice (strengths and weaknesses)?
- Did the experience achieve any of my learning goals or meet any of my required competencies?

this part sums up what you learnt from the experience

*try to be **specific** about what you learnt or realised about yourself, give specific details (avoid making general statements like "I didn't have the adequate knowledge")*

Action Plan

Answer any of the following questions that you think are **relevant** to making a plan:
- What do I need to do in order to be better prepared to face this experience in future?
- Even if the experience was positive and I did well, in which areas can I improve?
- What are the priority areas that need to be developed?
- What **specific** steps do I need to take in order to achieve these improvements?

*this part **is not** analytical, it states actions designed to improve knowledge, ability, experience etc., you can include the justification for and value of actions in the action plan (i.e. why you plan to do something)*

*try to be **specific** about what you plan to do (e.g. state specific training you may need to undergo, books or policy guidelines you will need to read, resources you may need to use and become proficient in)*

Structure of a reflective coursework assignment

If you include an Introduction and Conclusion, your assignment will have the following structure:

Introduction	The **Introduction** should • state what the experience was, where it took place and how long it lasted • state that Gibbs' model is being used (a diagram can be included immediately after the Introduction or in the Appendix)
Description Feelings Evaluation Analysis Conclusion Action Plan	The **Conclusion** should **not** be a repetition of the Conclusion in stage 5 of the model. Instead, it could **briefly** address any of the following questions: • How valuable was the reflective tool in identifying your strengths and weaknesses and improving your practice or knowledge? • Was Gibbs' model easy to use? • Do you now understand the value of reflective learning and of using a reflective learning model like Gibbs' model?
Conclusion	

*unless told otherwise, keep the **Introduction** and **Conclusion** short*

Using a word count

It may be useful to use a word count for each step of the cycle in order to avoid overwriting. Use the table below as a general guide. Remember to adjust the word count if you need to include an Introduction and Conclusion as part of your assignment.

	Steps	%	Approximate number of words for each stage of the reflection:			
			1,000 word reflection:	1,500 word reflection:	2,000 word reflection:	2,500 word reflection:
1	Description	20%*	200*	300*	400*	500*
2	Feeling	10-20%	150	225	300	375
3	Evaluation	20%	200	300	400	500
4	Analysis	30%	300	450	600	750
5	Conclusion	5-10%	75	112	150	187
6	Action Plan	5-10%	75	112	150	187

try to keep the Description step as short as possible; it carries the least marks in terms of assessment

Including references in your reflective writing

If you are asked to include references in reflection, you can use **research** (recent studies are best), **policy documents** (from relevant bodies) or **theory** (from academic sources) to support your reflections. You might use references:

- to show why something is done in a certain way (e*.g. by referring to a policy guideline*)

- to explain what brought about certain feelings or reactions (*e.g. by quoting a theory*)

- to explain what went well or what went badly (*e.g. a policy guideline, a piece of research or a theory could be used to explain why a certain action had a positive or a negative outcome*)

- to discuss what could have been done differently (*e.g. policy, research or theory could be used to support your reflection that doing things differently could have had a better outcome*)

- to justify why you plan to do something (*e.g. a research paper might be used to show the value of developing a specific skill or of acquiring relevant knowledge*)