

# Reflective essay:

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The aim of this essay is to reflect on the seven week course we have recently completed. At the beginning of the course, several aims were put forward. It was hoped that the course would help us to develop our oral and written communication skills as well as our planning and organisational skills. It also aimed to help us to acquire self and peer assessment skills, time keeping and time management skills, and to work productively in groups. With these aims in mind, each workshop was designed to develop a different skill, the main focus however, being on presentation skills. In this essay, I am going to work through each of the seven workshops, outlining the tasks involved, the aims and objectives, and how productive I feel each session was. By doing this, I will therefore be able to evaluate how productive I believe the course was to me personally, and perhaps what could be improved.

In the first workshop, the focus was on getting to know other members of the group, though short presentations. An icebreaker was first used, which involved each member of the group briefly taking about themselves and their presentation styles and skills. I personally found this a horrible experience, as I get extremely nervous when talking in front of groups of people, especially when put on the spot and with no preparation time. Although a good indicator of what was later to come in the course, I don't believe that this can give a true representation of my personality, as I am very nervous in those kinds of situations, but a lot more confident in most other less demanding situations. The second task however, was a bit more structured, and we were given a little more time to prepare our talk. I chose to talk about travel and my experiences on the subject. My presentation here was slightly better than the previous one, as it was a topic I found interesting and knew a lot about. This in turn made it more interesting to listen to. In terms of how nervous I was however, I didn't feel any calmer about this talk than the last. What I learnt from this workshop, is the importance of planning, especially when providing visual aids. Because of the time restrictions, I rushed into my poster, and as a result it was very badly organised, and not clear to the listeners. I now know therefore, that just a little planning time is always needed before you begin to write a presentation, or draw a poster, so as to make it more interesting, more structured, and easier to follow.

In the second workshop, I had therefore planned to put into practise what I had previously learned, putting more time into planning and organising. This was not possible in this workshop however, as time restrictions were too tight, and I believe that this was a big error of judgement in the organisation of this workshop. The articles we were to work with were very long, and fairly difficult to understand, and my group found that we would need the full hour and a half, purely to read and get a full understanding of the main points in the text. We also had to prepare overheads in this time however, and as a result our presentation was extremely confusing for the listeners, mainly because we ourselves didn't completely understand what we were talking about! If given more time, we could have given a more comprehensive summary of the text, with relevant facts, making it clearer to the listeners where the talk was going.

A second aim involved in this workshop, which was not present in the previous, was team skills. In terms of this, I think that our group was successful. We worked well together, dividing the task evenly in order to try and save time, and

helping each other to understand the complicated text. The structure of the presentation therefore was clear, with four sections, i.e. introduction, method, results, and discussion. Each person in the group therefore had one section to talk about. In terms of oral communication therefore, to me this was very poor in our presentation, however I do believe that our team skills were a success here.

Workshop three was a useful workshop, aiding planning and organisational skills. Because in the previous workshop our group had divided the task into four sections, it seemed sensible to continue with our own individual sections here. We decided on the research proposal together, with each team member contributing ideas as to what should go in each section, after which we could all go away and add the extra detail needed for our particular section. The final products, which were a number of sheets, designed to go on the following weeks poster, were clear, well designed, with an easy to follow structure. The diagrams produced on the computer for example, aided the reader in understanding our slightly complicated method. As well as this, all work was completed in the allocated amount of time. I therefore feel that this workshop was very successful, in developing my organisational, written communication, and team skills, and that these skills were put to good use.

Workshop four solely involved assembling the poster and decorating it, so it could be shown to the other groups. Our group worked well once more in putting the poster together, and deciding what colourful detail should be added, if any. I felt that our poster looked very good, with a clear simple design. After seeing some of the other posters however, I now think we could have added some more pictures and colour to our poster in this workshop, which is something that we would have had to have planned in advance, as extra materials for this were not provided. There were restrictions in terms of ink colour, but we could have added our own ideas around the writing. Another point made about our poster, was that although easy to read and clear, it was lacking in detail, and perhaps more background information could have been included. It is however difficult to know how much information to include on a poster, without making it look too sparse, or too cluttered, but we could have added a little more. As a whole however, the research proposal was a good one, and the poster looked very nice, and therefore that in terms of written or verbal communication, the poster was a success. In my opinion however, in terms of timing, three hours was not needed for this workshop, and perhaps some of the time from this workshop would have been more useful in workshop 2 where it was very much lacking. It only took half an hour to put the poster together, and half an hour to look at all the others.

In workshop five, we yet again used the same research used in workshops three and four, this time presenting orally the poster presentation given last week. For our group therefore, this basically involved using the sheets made in workshop three, and reading out the information orally. I therefore don't think that this was a particularly productive workshop, as it just involved using oral communication skills already used in workshops one and two, and to be used in workshop seven. Again, I was just as nervous doing this talk, although at least here I was well prepared and knew exactly what I was talking about. Our team used the same structure here as we previously had, with four sections, one per person, and made the structure easy to follow. The content of each section was also much easier to understand for the listeners, and in this way I believe that the talk was a success.

One skill here that has been developed in previous workshops, but that I haven't yet mentioned is peer assessment. As well as assessing our own

performance in terms of presentations, it is also important to listen to other people's opinions. This is where peer assessment applies: it is important to learn how to give both praise and constructive criticism of other people's work. They may have different opinions and angles on your work that you hadn't thought of. This is why we have to understand not to take the comments personally, but to take on board these ideas so that we can improve in the future. In this presentation for example, although to the four members of our group the method we had come up with seemed very simple, trying to explain them verbally, without the aid of the diagrams we used on the poster, is quite difficult. It is only from hearing people's feedback however, that we can discover whether or not we explained it well, and whether they understood. In this case, a few of the listeners commented that further clarification of the method would have been helpful. This is something that therefore could be improved, if we were to do the presentation again. Apart from the nerves aspect however, I think that as a whole this presentation went well.

Workshop six, was again designed to develop planning and organisational skills, as we had to develop what we were going to talk about in our final individual presentation the following week. I personally find it difficult to plan a talk with other people around, and when I don't have all the resources that I need. After about half an hour, I therefore left this workshop and continued my planning at home. I believe that the majority of people did this, and as a result feel that perhaps this workshop was unnecessary, and we could have just been given two weeks in which to prepare. One skill I noticed was very important during the planning of this talk, was time keeping. The presentation was to last about ten minutes, and I found it difficult to find the right amount of information, that could be presented in ten minutes. In order to do this, I had to practise my talk a lot, talking out loud, and timing it, in order to get it to approximately ten minutes. I feel that this is an important skill that I acquired during this preparation time.

The final workshop, workshop seven, was what all the previous workshops had been building up to. Planning, organisational, and time management skills had to be used beforehand, time keeping and oral communication skill during the presentation itself, and self and peer assessment afterwards. As I have said before, in my opinion I have developed most of these skills fairly well. I based my talk on an essay that I had written a while ago, about obedience, and therefore had a very clear structure to follow. I could therefore divide up my overheads into the five main paragraphs of the essay, giving the talk a clear, easy to follow structure. My planning and organisational skills were therefore used well. In terms of the presentation itself, although it was a good length, and near enough to ten minutes, my nerves were no better. I read from the notes that I had made too much, and did not come across as confident in my delivery. To me therefore, in terms of my oral communication skills, I have failed. Team and peer assessment was again used after each presentation, and I think that my skills here are again good.

In conclusion, I feel that the main skill that was to be developed here was that of oral communication, and that I personally have failed. I therefore don't personally think that this course was particularly useful to me. Many other skills were also developed during the course, but I believe that these are skills I already had, and could just be put to use here. I do know what makes a good presentation, and this course did highlight some other points in terms of this, but I get too nervous when doing presentations, to ever be able to do one well, and with confidence. What I did

enjoy about the course was that I got to meet other people who do psychology, that I would not have met otherwise, and in my opinion this is a benefit of the course.

If this course was to be run again, it could be made a lot more interesting and less time consuming. I believe that it is important to develop team skills, and days like the one organised a few months ago make this an enjoyable experience. Perhaps it is important to do one or two presentations, in order to get used to the idea, but I don't think that so much time should be put into this. I feel that the one main benefit of the course was meeting new people and working in teams, but it seems to me that there are much more interesting ways of doing this, that do not need to be assessed as part of a psychology degree.