



Reflecting on mentoring

A practical guide to reflection tools that support learning, growth and stronger mentoring practice

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

About this reference guide

This reference guide introduces practical reflection tools that mentors and mentees can use to support learning, confidence and professional growth.

The tools can be used during a mentoring session, after a session or at the end of a mentoring cycle. Each tool is designed to help mentors and mentees pause, make sense of their experience, recognise progress and identify practical next steps.

Use the guide flexibly by choosing the reflection tool that best suits your mentoring context.

Why is reflection important?

Reflection is essential for mentors and mentees alike. It offers dedicated time and space to think about what has been undertaken and clearly contributes to personal confidence and professional growth. Additionally, reflection develops vital skills associated with flexibility, problem-solving and innovation.

Finlay (2008) tells us that reflection is, "...the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and/or practice." So learning is at the centre of reflection, and this is certainly the focus in a mentoring context.

The mentoring partnership often holds surprises, and Ghaye (2000) recognises this: "...reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos."

We can reflect during a mentoring session, after it or after the mentoring cycle is complete. While there is no right time, it is beneficial to spend a few minutes at the end of each mentoring session reflecting on the time spent with the mentor/mentee and your role in that experience. Schon (1991) considers reflection-in-action to be thinking about the situation and the choices you will make. Reflection-on-action happens after the session, when there is time to look back, consider what worked well and identify what could be improved next time.

Reflection also offers opportunities to celebrate achievements and recognise growth. This is vital, as one of the key foundations of mentoring is individual growth.



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Sample reflective practice tools for you to use

The following 6 tools are not a complete list but rather a selected group that can offer some initial guidance around reflecting on your mentoring sessions. They will also be useful to share with your mentee and, potentially, with your learners.

Reflection tools at a glance

1. What, so what, what now?
2. A box reflection.
3. Start, stop, continue.
4. 3-2-1 reflection.
5. A reflective podcast.
6. A reflection journal.

1. What, so what, what now?

This model is a three-stage reflection framework that moves a mentor/mentee from describing an event to analysing its significance and planning future actions. By first identifying what happened, it is then possible to determine why it matters before committing to a specific, practical response for the next time a similar situation occurs.

What?	So what?	What now?
Understanding the event	Making sense of the facts and implications	Identifying the course of action or new solutions
My mentee asked me a question, and I did not know the answer.	So, it is OK to tell the mentee I am unsure but will investigate before the next session.	In the future, I will ask the mentee to share a conversation around the uncertain topic and investigate solutions together.

This model was researched and developed by Rolfe et al. in 2001. It is also attributed to Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless <https://www.fearlessculture.design/blog-posts/what-so-what-now-what>



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2. A box reflection

This tool has been adapted from the Harvard thinking routines. The purpose of the tool is to consider a number of prompts that look back to the session undertaken, but also look to the future, to give direction and focus.

2 things I learnt in the mentoring session today	Questions I still have
1 thing I am not understanding yet	The next thing I would like to discuss

3. Start, stop, continue

The start, stop, continue technique was initially developed by Phil Daniels, a psychology professor at Brigham Young University, USA. It offers a direct and efficient way to reflect on our mentoring sessions. It determines what you should start, stop, and continue for future initiatives.

4. 3-2-1 reflection

In a mentoring context, the 3-2-1 reflection strategy helps mentees process a shared session by identifying:

- 3 key insights they gained
- 2 specific actions they plan to take
- 1 challenge or question for future guidance.

This structure encourages the mentee to take ownership of their professional growth while providing the mentor with clear feedback on where more support is needed. It serves as a powerful closing tool and ensures a clear path forward with mutual understanding.

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>



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5. A reflective podcast

A reflective podcast serves as a simple voice memo recorded on a mobile device after a session, providing both mentors and mentees with a private space for total honesty. By capturing raw thoughts out loud, participants create an "audio journal" that reveals important patterns and recurring themes in their mentoring journey over time.

This practice allows mentors and mentees to track their experience effectively, making it easy to look back, see how far they have progressed, and celebrate their personal growth.

Reflection questions useful in the podcast

What worked well in the mentoring session?

What are the signs that the session worked well?

What did not quite go as planned?

Why do you think this was the case?

What might be a good option to consider for the next mentoring session?



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6. A reflection journal

A reflection journal helps both mentors and mentees process their sessions by turning ideas into actions. For the mentee, it is a private space to track progress and stay focused. For the mentor, it is a tool to improve their mentoring style and see what advice sticks. This shared practice highlights patterns over time, making it easy for both people to see real results and to celebrate what they have achieved.

Reflection questions useful in the journal

What did I learn today?

What was new for me today?

What ideas challenged me?

How did I relate to my mentor/mentee?

What did I hear?

What will I try?

Adapted from Donald Schön (1983)

Final reflection

Engaging in regular reflective practice transforms fleeting mentoring moments into lasting opportunities for professional growth by building the self-awareness and resilience needed to navigate workplace challenges. Start your journey by choosing one tool and build your reflection skills as you go.



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Useful references

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