

# Four Levels of Student Reflection

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Promoting reflection is a goal endorsed by many faculty. They believe that students need to develop skills that will enable them to look at a piece of work they produce or an aspect of their professional practice and make accurate judgments about it. It's not an easy skill to acquire, and practice is essential to its development. If teachers are giving students opportunities to reflect, they need to be able to assess how well students are reflecting and provide feedback that deepens the students' skills.

The concept of reflection isn't all that easy to define, even though interest in promoting it is now widespread. David Kember and a group of collaborators reviewed the literature on reflection and consequently proposed these definitions. "Reflection operates through a careful reexamination and evaluation of experience, beliefs, and knowledge." "Reflection most commonly involves looking back or reviewing past actions, though competent professionals can develop the ability to reflect while carrying out their practice." (p. 370)

Most commonly teachers promote student reflection via written assignments. They use assignments like journals and have students respond to case studies or take part in online discussions. Kember and his collaborators have developed a scheme that can be used to assess the level of reflection seen in these kinds of written work. They point out that this is not a precise measure but can provide guidelines that will prevent purely subjective assessment of the work. They also recommend that these levels are best applied to a whole paper rather than to individual sections of it. They identify four levels of reflection, described in detail in their article and highlighted below.

**1. Habitual action** — "In professional practice, habitual action occurs when a procedure is followed without significant thought about it." (p. 373) In the case of students it occurs when a student offers an answer without attempting to understand it. Students exemplify this level when they plug-and-chug a formula or follow the steps in a lab manual without any consideration of what they are doing or why. In writing, at this level students look for material that answers the question. Sometimes they plagiarize that answer; more often they paraphrase or summarize it, but without any real understanding. When asked, they cannot explain what they have written.

**2. Understanding** — In this case, there is an attempt to understand the topic or concept. Although students may search for underlying meaning, at this level, there is still no reflection. "The concepts are understood as theory without being related to personal experiences or real-life applications." (p. 373) Most students begin at this level. In their writing they rely heavily on what the textbook or teacher has said. They

will report that content accurately and with understanding but do not add any personal response to it.

**3. Reflection** — At this level, students not only have accurate understanding, they reflect on that understanding and are able to relate it to personal experiences, or they can make practical applications. If students are writing about professional experiences, those experiences “will be considered and successfully discussed in relationship to what has been taught. There will be personal insights that go beyond book theory.” (p. 374)

**4. Critical reflection** — This highest level of reflection implies the transformation of a perspective. “Many of our actions are governed by a set of beliefs and values that have been almost unconsciously assimilated from our experiences and environment. To undergo a change in perspective requires us to recognize and change these presumptions.” (p. 374) Teachers should not expect this level of reflection early or often as students are developing reflective skills. Even professionals don’t change what they believe on a weekly basis. Education does cause transformative changes in students more often because early on students don’t have ingrained concepts about a field or knowledge domain. But critical reflection is a process that generally takes place over time. Students start by recognizing their beliefs and accompanying assumptions. Something (new information, new experiences) disrupts that belief system, thereby forcing students to reconstruct or reform it.

Source: [http://www.schoolleadership20.com/forum/topics/four-levels-of-student-reflection?utm\\_source=August+25%2C+2013&utm\\_campaign=Aug+25+2013&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.schoolleadership20.com/forum/topics/four-levels-of-student-reflection?utm_source=August+25%2C+2013&utm_campaign=Aug+25+2013&utm_medium=email)