A Guide to the CLEAR WIL reflection process

Reflection in Education

The notion of reflection in learning is not a new one, but rather, it can be traced to Aristotle's discussions of practical judgement and moral action in his Ethics. In modern times the most influential figure has been that of John Dewey. Dewey (1933) identified reflective activity as a kind of experiential process that leads to learning. This activity involves the perception of relationships, and connections between the parts of an experience. Dewey believed that it was this kind of activity that enabled effective problem-solving to take place and that it improved the effectiveness of learning. He explained reflection on experience to be a kind of learning loop, continually feeding back and forth between the experience and the relationships being inferred.

Provincially, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has underscored the value of reflection to assist students in thinking critically about their work experiences by contemplating the influence an experience has on their life; to generate an awareness of the origins and importance of particular learning experiences; and to create new meanings regarding previous experiences.

Reflection in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

Reflection is widely recognized as a key component of work-integrated learning, facilitating knowledge transformation, and fostering deeper understanding. It is not a superficial process of introspection. Rather, it is an evidence-based, integrative, analytical, capacity-building process that serves to generate, deepen, critique, and document learning. The ability to reflect on one's practice when confronted by a novel, unusual, or complex situation distinguishes expert practitioners from novices (Schön, 1983). Moreover, reflection is a learned skill. Many students are unfamiliar with the process and benefit from guidance to help them derive meaning from an experience. Without this support, reflections may be limited to descriptive accounts of an experience or "venting of feelings" (Ash & Clayton, 2009).

The Centre for WIL conducted a survey of 17 common reflective models used across a diversity of sectors (e.g. education, business, healthcare, etc.) and identified a weakness in the ability of the models to make transparent the process of reflection. While valuable as conceptual tools in their respective sectors, the examined models fell short when it came to mobilizing reflection for the learner. To harness the potential of reflection to support the development of valuable life skills including decision making, goalsetting, problem-solving and the ability to integrate multiple concepts as well as to deepen understanding of oneself and one's identity, a guided reflective process was needed to purposefully move students from basic, descriptive observation to critical reflection with a view to maximizing learning.

To fill this gap, the **CLEAR WIL reflection process** was developed to support deep, multifaceted, impactful reflection in support of lifelong learning. It focuses on the transformation of direct experience into knowledge, emphasizing the role of experience in learning in the tradition of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984).
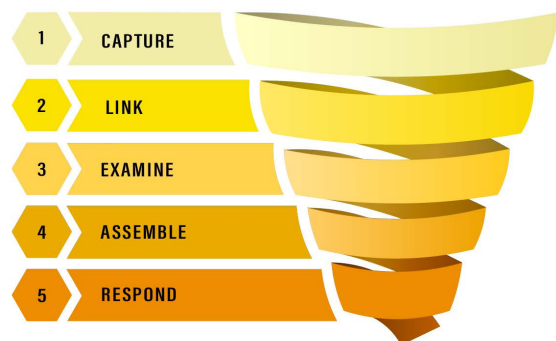

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The CLEAR WIL reflection process

The key elements of reflection in WIL are presented in this visual of the process. Each stage serves a specific function in the reflection process culminating in a reconstruction of the original experience which incorporates new perspectives and considerations and leads to an expanded understanding. The ultimate stage situates the experience within the broader continuum of life experiences and the interconnectedness of self to community to help guide future action.

Meaningful and, thereby, consequential reflection requires individual effort and commitment as well as an actionable guiding structure (such as the CLEAR process) to extract valuable learning from experience. The following pages expand on the five stages of the CLEAR WIL reflection process and offer some suggested prompts for each stage of the Baseline WIL Model.

Reflection is a continuous, iterative process according to Schön (1983); therefore, to best support students learning, it is important that reflection take place before, during, and after an experience.
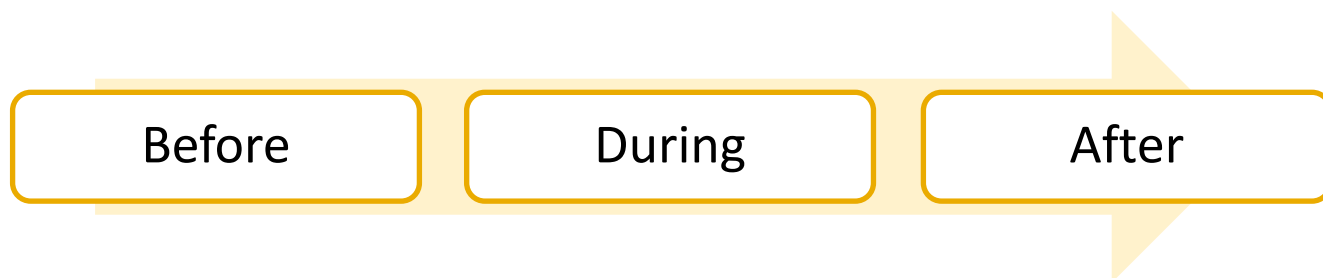
Before

The pre-WIL reflection serves to prepare the student for their WIL experience by focusing their attention on their expectations, perceptions, assumptions, existing knowledge, and understanding prior to the WIL experience. This pre-WIL reflection can function as a point of comparison or baseline against which students can compare their perceptions during and after the experience.

During

Reflection during an experience supports the student in explicitly considering the tacit knowledge and skills they are using to navigate the experience and draws their attention to significant elements of the experience (either internal or external). Reflection during a WIL experience prompts the student to compare their expectations to the reality of the situation in order to solve emergent problems. Further, this reflection serves as a tool for managing the vast array of inputs and coping with the affective responses that are generated.

After

The post-WIL reflection requires the student to reexamine and evaluate the changes in their perceptions, assumptions, knowledge, and understanding in light of the full experience. Comparing this reflection to those that occurred before or during the experience is particularly impactful and supports rich analysis. A critical examination of the experience including their own reactions, behaviours, and approaches in retrospect should be undertaken. Additionally, the student should consider how they would approach future experiences in light of their learnings.

Using the WIL reflection process

Reflection is intentional, goal-directed, critical and complex wherein both feelings and cognition are closely interrelated and interactive. The various prompts offered in the expanded **CLEAR WIL reflection process** table below are intended to surface information arising out of both the affective and cognitive domains. As an active process of exploration and discovery, reflection can lead to unexpected outcomes. Progression through the five stages of the **CLEAR WIL reflection process** is intended to help identify, make sense-of and action on learning in a systematic way. Negative feelings, particularly about oneself, can form barriers towards learning. They can distort perceptions, lead to false interpretations of events, and can undermine the will to persist. Positive feelings and emotions can greatly enhance the learning process. They can keep the learner on the task and can provide a stimulus for new learning. The affective dimension needs be explored as part of the reflective process in order to acknowledge and manage its role in learning.

The sequential progression of the **CLEAR WIL reflection process** also helps to counter the tendency to jump to conclusions (perceived solutions) without adequately examining a situation to

uncover what really is/went on. If the perceived solution (premature conclusion) does not work, it is easy to conclude that reflection is not very helpful when in fact, what occurred was not reflection and what is needed, is a deeper awareness of the essence of the situation/experience. This can only be reached through a more systematic detailed approach. By intentionally engaging with each stage of the **CLEAR WIL reflection process**, students are supported in their critical thinking. Much like a mathematical proof, if steps are omitted it is challenging to identify where the process went astray, and assumptions were made.

Reflection may lead to a solution of a problem or resolution of doubt or discomfort, but it may equal lead to the generation of more questions and less clarity. Both are value outcomes, perhaps the latter even more than the former.

The application of the WIL reflective process will differ across the three stages of the Baseline WIL Model. For example, for the 'before' stage in the Baseline WIL Model the Capture step in the WIL reflective process, the learner may be encouraged to cast their memory back to specific experience(s) or to explore life experiences more broadly to help inform their goal setting (ultimately articulated in the Respond step) for the upcoming WIL experience. Scoping of prompts for this 'before' stage will be critical to help capture tangible, useable information.

Similarly, the application of the Link step will differ across the three stages of the Baseline WIL Model with the 'before' stage strongly drawing on experience to point forward in a defined direction while the 'after' stage will emphasize the identification of links for the extraction of maximal information for the immediately past experience.

The expanded **CLEAR WIL reflection process** table below, offers some prompts in each of the five **CLEAR WIL reflection process** steps for each of the three stages of the Baseline WIL Model:

Capture

The first step in the process requires an examination of the experience under consideration to define its scope, and to uncover and identify all aspects of the experience with no filter for perceived importance. This examination should include - observations, feelings, and thoughts. The Capture stage is heavily reliant on the cultivation of self-awareness and the development of observation skills to inform consideration of "What happened?" to the fullest extent possible. Below are some questions to aid this process at each stage of the Baseline WIL Model:

WIL Stage	Capture: Prompts
Before	- What past experience(s) do you identify as relevant to your upcoming WIL experience? - In what context did this/these experience(s) occur? - Who was present? Who was involved? Who wasn't involved? - What was the focus of the experience? What was the output of the experience? - When did the experience begin? When did the experience end? - How did you feel before, during and after the experience? - What were you thinking about before, during and after the experience? - Where did the experience take place? - What did you say? What did you do? What didn't you say? What didn't you do? - Which of the details did you find easy to recall? Which ones are a challenge?
During	- Who was present? Who was involved? Who wasn't involved? - What was the focus of the experience? What was the output of the experience? - When did the experience begin? When did the experience end? - How did you feel entering into the experience? How did you feel during the experience? How did you feel leaving the experience? - What were you thinking about going into the experience? What were you thinking about during the experience? What were you thinking about leaving the experience? - Where did the experience take place? - What did you say? What did you do? What didn't you say? What didn't you do?
After	- Who was present? Who was involved? Who wasn't involved? - What was the focus of the experience? What was the output of the experience? - When did the experience begin? When did the experience end? - How did you feel entering into the experience? How did you feel during the experience? How did you feel leaving the experience? - What were you thinking about going into the experience? What were you thinking about during the experience? What were you thinking about leaving the experience? - Where did the experience take place? - What did you say? What did you do? What didn't you say? What didn't you do?

Link

The second step of the process focuses on identifying connections. How are the various aspects identified in the **Capture** stage linked to one another? And what connections are there between the current experience and past experiences? In order to surface these relational elements, the following questions may be use at each stage of the Baseline WIL Model:

WIL Stage	Link: Prompts
Before	• What connection do you see between the past experience(s) you identified and your upcoming WIL experience? • How do you see the context being similar? Different? • How does/do the past experience(s) connect to your values? What needs does/do they highlight? • What strengths or gaps in knowledge, skills, and/or abilities are you able to identify from these past experience(s)?
During	• What led up to this WIL moment? • Have you seen something like this before? • Does this remind you of concepts/theories you have studied or past academic learning? • What connections do you notice between people, processes, locations, etc.? • What types of relationships did you notice between the people involved in the experience? • What might be the possible consequence of this WIL moment? • Is there a pattern?
After	• What led up to this experience? • Have you seen something like this before? • Does this remind you of concepts/theories you have studied or past academic learning? • What connections do you notice between people, processes, locations, etc.? • What types of relationships did you notice between the people involved in the experience? • What might be the possible consequence of this experience? • Is there a pattern?

Examine

The third step is about seeking to make sense of why an experience unfolded as it did; how actions or inactions influenced the experience direction – both desired and undesired. The following

questions can be used to examine your reasoning through the lens of your discipline and the expectations of your profession at each stage of the Baseline WIL Model:

WIL Stage	Examine: Prompts
Before	• When thinking about past experiences that took place in a similar context (workplace setting, organizational structure, etc.), what behaviours did you exhibit? Why do you think you did so? • When thinking about past experiences that took place in a similar context (workplace setting, organizational structure, etc.), what behaviours did others exhibit? Why do you think you did so? • Considering the strengths in knowledge, skills, and/or abilities are you able to identify from these past experience(s), how were you able to make use of these strengths? What conditions allowed for this to happen? • Considering the gaps in knowledge, skills, and/or abilities are you able to identify from these past experience(s), where you able to navigate this challenge? If so, how? What conditions allowed for this to happen? • For the connections you identified to your values in the past experience(s), how did you demonstrate your values? What conditions allowed for you to do so? If there was misalignment with your values in your past experiences, what lead to that misalignment? Why do you think that happened? • What made it easy to recall details from past experiences? What made it challenging?
During	• What prompted people to behave the way they did? How do you come to this interpretation? Might your perception differ from others'? • How might feelings have influenced their decision-making? How might feelings have influenced your interpretation? • Considering your collective observations (C) and identified connections (L), what reasons could account for why the experience happened as it did? • How might you explain the pattern of actions and inactions?
After	• What prompted people to behave the way they did? How do you come to this interpretation? Might your perception differ from others'? • How might feelings have influenced their decision-making? How might feelings have influenced your interpretation? • Considering your collective observations (C) and identified connections (L), what reasons could account for why the experience happened as it did? • How might you explain the pattern of actions and inactions?

Assemble

The fourth step centres on reassembling the experience in light of the observations, thoughts, feelings, connections, and interpretations that have surfaced in the preceding steps. The following questions can be used to guide the incorporation of new perspectives and considerations to form a fuller understanding of the experience and to tie this reconstruction to its outcomes and to professional expectations at each stage of the Baseline WIL Model:

WIL Stage	Assemble: Prompts
Before	• In light of the behaviours, you exhibited during past experiences and the reason(s) behind them, which behaviours can you identify as supporting your upcoming experience goals? Which ones align with expectations in your profession? Which ones do not? • In light of the behaviours others exhibited during past experiences and the reason(s) behind them, how might you modify your own response(s) to help you achieve your own upcoming experience goals? How have the behaviour of other shaped your understanding of expectations in your profession? • Given the strengths in knowledge, skills, and/or abilities you identified from past experience(s) and your use of them, how did this contribute to the accomplishment of the goals you had set for yourself? What professional expectations are you confident in? • Given the gaps in knowledge, skills, and/or abilities you identified from past experience(s), and your management of them, how did this detract from the accomplishment of the goals you had set for yourself? What professional expectations do you lack confidence in? • What role do you see your values playing in accomplishing the goals you had set for yourself in these past experiences?
During	• What aspect(s) of the experience was(were) successful? What aspect(s) of the experience was(were) unsuccessful? How does the unfolding of the experience account for this success (or lack of success)? Are you able to identify a defining moment? • What would you change to modify the outcome? Why? • What contributed to your learning and growth in this experience? How? • What is the plan to ensure you repeat successes? What steps, behaviors, and thinking will you continue to implement?

| After	• What aspect(s) of the experience was(were) successful? What aspect(s) of the experience was(were) unsuccessful? How does the unfolding of the experience account for this success (or lack of success)? Are you able to identify a defining moment? • What would you change to modify the outcome? Why? • What contributed to your learning and growth in this experience? How? • What is the plan to ensure you repeat successes? What steps, behaviors, and thinking will you continue to implement?

Respond

The ultimate step focuses on situating the analysis of the experience under consideration within personal values and membership in the broader community and considers the relationship of this analysis to career and life goals. To mobilize this thinking, the following prompts can be used at each stage of the Baseline WIL Model.

WIL Stage	Respond: Prompts
Before	• In light of the past experiences you have considered and the conditions that allowed for you to align your personal values to your role as well as those that did not, did this confirm your personal values or give you pause for thought? How might you seek to clarify your thinking about those values that past experiences brought into question? • If there was misalignment with your values in your past experience(s), what might you adjust in your own behaviour/thinking in future experiences to bring your values into alignment while still honouring contextual factors? • What changes to your career or life goals did your consideration of past experiences highlight? What adjustments to your behaviour/thinking will you need to consider to achieve these revised goals? • How does your approach to achieving your goals and sustaining your values impact on others? How are you contributing to your professional community (implicitly, explicitly, formally or informally)?
During	• How does this experience (and your role in it) relate to your career and life goals? Your personal values? Your membership in the community at large? • What is your commitment to future action? Will you need to develop new skills, establish different habits, or collect more information before deciding? • What impact do your plans have on others? What does this mean for your future? • Is your plan feasible? How do you know?

After	- How does this experience (and your role in it) relate to your career and life goals? Your personal values? Your membership in the community at large? - What is your commitment to future action? Will you need to develop new skills, establish different habits, or collect more information before deciding? - What impact do your plans have on others? What does this mean for your future? - Is your plan feasible? How do you know?

Another Way to Conceptualize the CLEAR WIL reflection process

The overarching goal of the **CLEAR WIL reflection process** (critical, self-reflection) is to support students in learning through their experiences in order to make better decisions next time, so that they do not mindlessly repeat non-productive behaviours, but rather identify, useful productive behaviours. All experiences are different, so it is important to identify the similarities and be able to translate them into different contexts. At a very basic level, reflection is about pattern recognition and control – repeating those patterns that are successful and understanding under what conditions they are successful. For many learners, relating this approach to research can be helpful. We can consider the CLEAR reflection process as a series of steps related to data (information) – from collection, through processing to understanding. The image below helps to illustrate this data cycle, and the table provides the legend for how CLEAR maps on to this way of thinking about reflection.
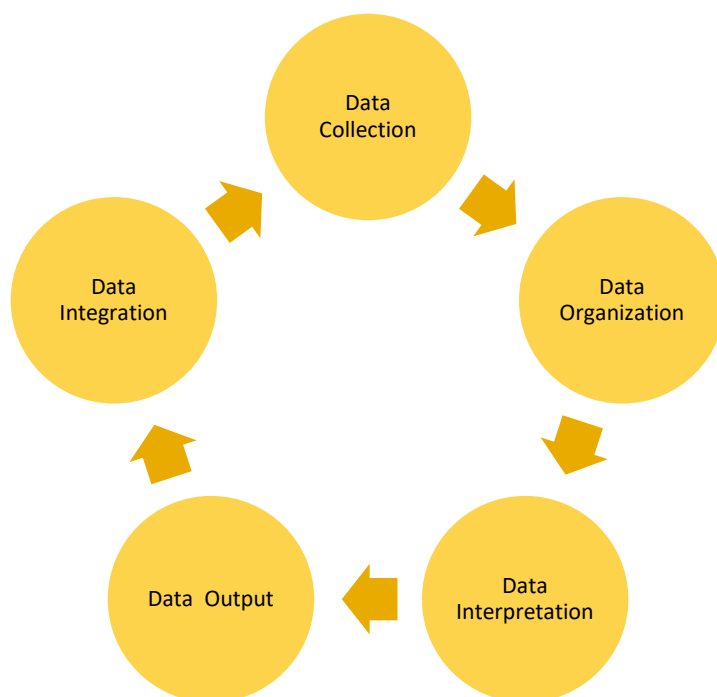
Capture	Collect Data
Link	Organize Data
Examine	Interpret Data
Assemble	Output Data
Respond	Integrate Data

Reflective Wrapping

Reflection is the key tool used within WIL to bring forward personalized learnings. It is this aspect of any experience (WIL or otherwise) that has the most potential to contribute to an individual's growth and to establish life-long learning practices that will support that growth in an ongoing fashion.

Reflection in support of life-long learning is an iterative process, connecting experiences one to the other, and continuing to build on past learning. This type of reflective wrapping cultivates responsiveness to changes in context and personal values and needs. The critical self-reflection described in this guide is a defined way of thinking that requires practice.