

## A guide to Reflective Learning and how to do it effectively

Reflective learning can be used in all aspects of life, for both personal and professional development. As a charity run by and for the veterinary profession, we've put together this brief guide on using reflective learning to help you get the most out of your professional development.

### What is reflective learning?

Reflective learning, or reflective practice, is a process of 'learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice'.<sup>1</sup> To put it simply, an individual takes a learning experience that they've had, draws out what they've learned and what parts are important, and considers if and how they will take this learning forward in their personal and/or professional lives.

The process may look something like this:

1. You have a new learning **experience** or reinterpret an existing experience
2. You **review** and **reflect** on that experience
3. You **conclude** whether the experience has led to new ideas or a revision of existing ideas you held
4. You **try out** these new or revised ideas in the real world



*Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, 1984*

For members of the veterinary profession, reflective learning can be useful in many professional situations. For example, you might want to reflect on and evaluate an experience or incident which happened in practice, or you might wish to reflect on and evaluate a CPD course you attended or an article you have read. Reflective learning is a useful tool for breaking down what you've learned and understanding how it can be applied to your professional practice. Indeed, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) have been actively encouraging veterinary professionals to use the principles of reflective learning when recording their CPD (this will be compulsory by January 2022, so best to get some practice in now)!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Finlay, Linda (2008). Reflecting on 'Reflective practice'. Practice-based Professional Learning Paper 52, The Open University.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/lifelong-learning/continuing-professional-development-cpd/>



AWF's annual flagship event, the [Discussion Forum](#), is a day devoted to professional learning and is a form of CPD. Going forward we will be encouraging delegates to apply the principles of reflective learning to their Discussion Forum experiences.

### Who benefits from reflecting learning?

Everyone! Studies have shown that reflecting on learning experiences helps us to:

1. Retain any information we've learned
2. Consolidate the information we've learned
3. Share learning with others more effectively, as we've reviewed and considered the most important information
4. Apply our new learning into daily practice, potentially improving our professional or personal outputs
5. Identify gaps in our knowledge and further opportunities for learning

Your feedback also helps CPD providers understand if they are offering effective and impactful learning experiences and how they can revise their provisions accordingly.

### Reflective learning: questions you might ask yourself to promote reflective practice

1. What did I know/think before about this situation/subject?
2. What did I learn/understand better as a result of this experience?
3. How do I feel about what I just learned?
4. Did anything I just learned surprise me?
5. Is there anything I'll do differently as a result of what I just learned?
6. How will I apply what I learned to my daily practice?
7. Why should I apply what I learned to my daily practice?
8. Has this experience helped me identify any further needs or opportunities for learning?

### Want to find out more about reflective learning?

Here are some links you might find useful:

- [RCVS - How do I reflect?](#)
- [Jill Macdonald – Learning from reflection](#)
- [Samantha Fontaine, The Veterinary Nurse – The role of reflective practice in professional development](#)

We'd like to give a special thanks to Jill Macdonald, veterinary nurse, owner and co-founder of [ONCORE](#) (an online service which provides online CPD to veterinary professionals), for her insight into reflective learning which helped AWF develop this guide.