



Imperial College
London

Imperial Award

Making an impact

Tips for reflective writing

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Introduction

Your journey toward the Imperial Award

The Imperial Award is a formal acknowledgement of personal development in the form of an award.

The Programme is designed as a learning experience, encouraging you to reflect on your activities and experiences, as well as the impact gained from your engagement in co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities.

It provides a framework enhancing interactions with your personal tutor, creating opportunities for purposeful discussions on your personal attributes. By working toward the Award, you will receive personalised feedback on your reflective statements, preparing you for future employment.

The Imperial Award recognises personal achievement and personal development through self-reflection. For more information on the structure of the Imperial Award Programme, as well as the Imperial Award attributes, streams and criteria, please see '[Imperial Award Student Guidance Pack](#)'.

Reflective writing skills

The Imperial Award is your opportunity to develop reflective writing skills, which are essential when writing job and scholarship applications, or in interviews where you are demonstrating your skills, experiences and the impact you have made.

In working toward the Award, you will be asked to produce a reflective statement, demonstrating critical insight into how your activities and experiences have transformed your attitudes and skills in relation to Imperial Award attributes.

The purpose of this resource is to provide you with guidance on reflective writing and some practical tips for self-reflection and producing your reflective statement.

Reflection and reflective writing

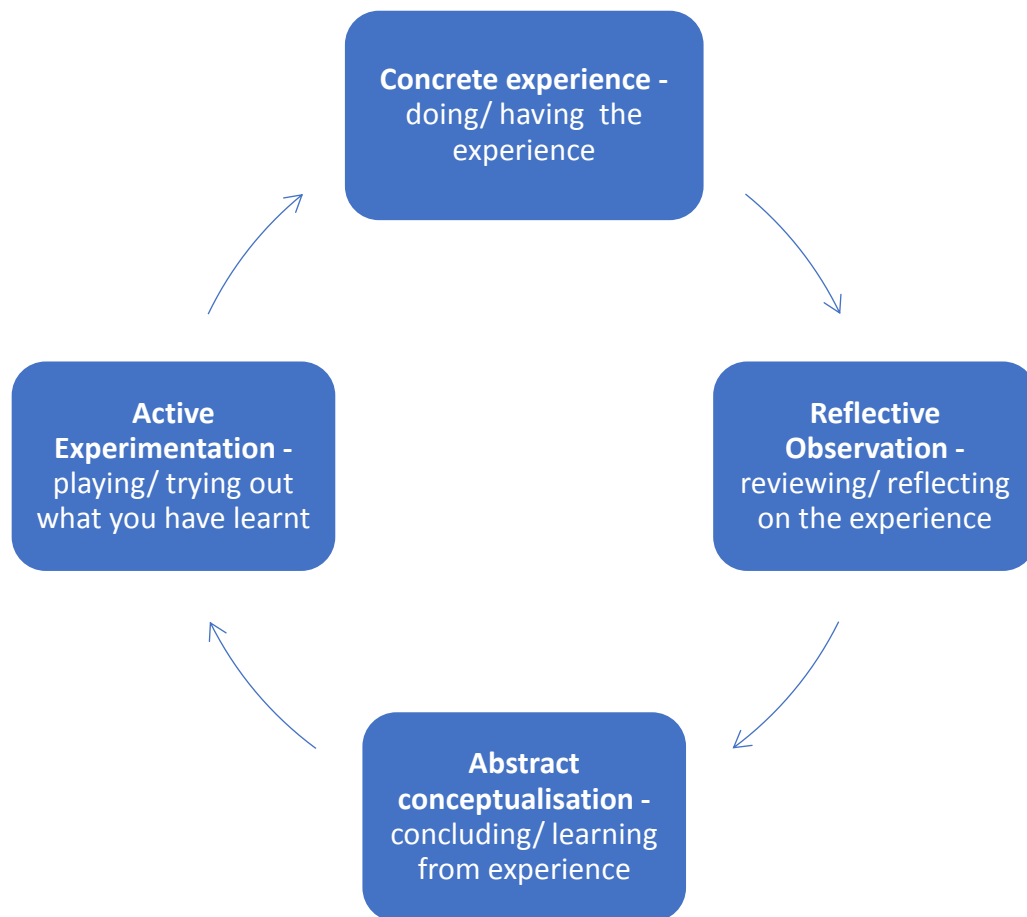
What is reflection?

'It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost.'

It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively.' **Graham Gibbs**

Reflection is a learning activity which means looking at your experiences as if they were a mirror, and seeing your own development.

David Kolb (1984) described a cycle of stages that are undertaken in learning from experience:



Based on Kolbs model, there are four main stages of reflection:

- ▲ Having an experience
- ▲ Looking back at an activity or an experience
- ▲ Analysing or interpreting it from various perspectives
- ▲ Thinking about what you have gained from engaging with it in terms of your personal development.

This is a continual cycle of reflection and learning.

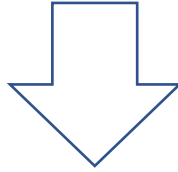
Descriptive and reflective writing

'Reflective writing is the expression on paper/screen of some of the mental processes of reflection.'
Jenny Moon

Jenny Moon developed a framework for reflective writing, which outlines key differences between descriptive and reflective writing:

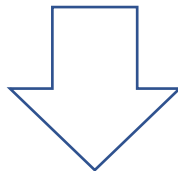
Descriptive writing

It is descriptive and it contains little reflection. It may tell a story but from one point of view at a time and generally one point at a time is made.



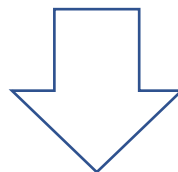
Descriptive writing with elements of reflection

The basic account is descriptive in the manner of description above. There is little addition of ideas from outside the event, reference to alternative viewpoints or attitudes to others, comment and so on. There is recognition of the worth of further exploring but it does not go very far.



Reflective writing (1)

There is description but it is focused with particular aspects emphasised for reflective comment. There may be a sense that the material is being mulled around. The account shows some analysis and there is recognition of the worth of exploring motives or reasons for behaviour.



Reflective writing (2)

Description now only serves the process of reflection, covering the issues for reflection and noting their context. There is clear evidence of standing back from an event and there is mulling over and internal dialogue. The account shows deep reflection, and it incorporates recognition that the frame of reference with which an event is viewed can change.

Your Imperial Award reflective statement should contain elements of reflective writing.

The table below outlines what reflective writing is and is not.

Reflective writing IS :	Reflective writing IS NOT :
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• your response to experiences, opinions, events or new information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• just conveying information, instruction or argument
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a way of thinking to explore your learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pure description, though there may be descriptive elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• making meaning out of your activities and experiences, exploring ‘how did this experience change me?’	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a straightforward decision or judgement (e.g. about whether something is right or wrong, good or bad)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• awareness of your process in solving a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• simple problem-solving
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• analysing how you want to behave differently in some context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a summary of events

Your online portfolio and the mapping tool

Building your portfolio

Once your registration for the Imperial Award is approved, you can access the online portfolio. This practical tool is designed to help you record your activities and experiences and categorise them against the Award attributes. Your portfolio is intended entirely for you, and you can utilise it however you find it works best.

Activities are the positions you hold, things you engage in, or teams you are a part of.

Examples of activities:

- ▲ Summer placement or internship
- ▲ Part-time work
- ▲ Volunteer role with the Union
- ▲ Local or international volunteering
- ▲ Setting up a business or enterprise
- ▲ Being a parent or carer
- ▲ Completing a UROP
- ▲ Presenting research/ projects at a conference/ open day

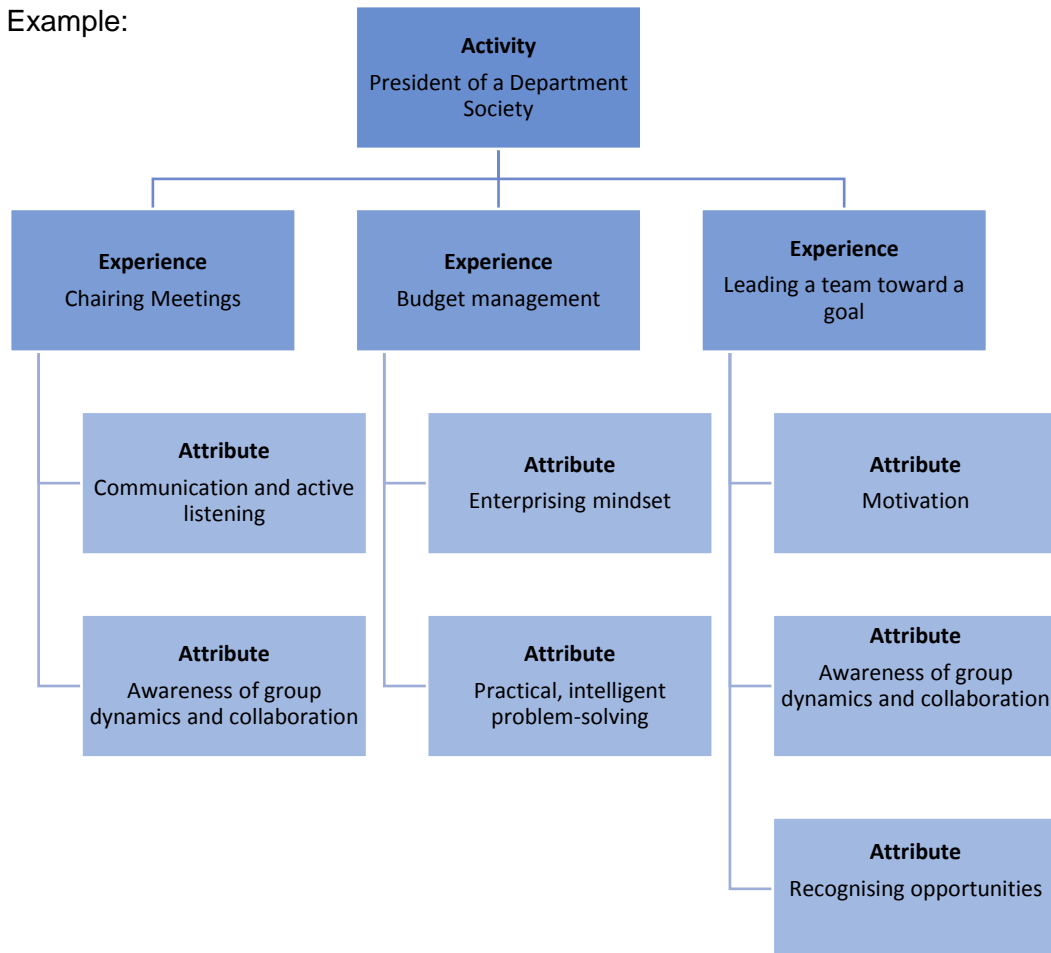
Online portfolio: activity recording

The screenshot shows the 'Imperial Award' online portfolio interface. At the top, there's a dark blue header with 'Imperial College London' on the left and 'Imperial Award' in the center. Below the header is a navigation bar with 'Overview', 'Activities and Experiences' (highlighted in pink), and 'Review'. On the right of the navigation bar, it says 'Joe Student' and 'Log Out'. The main content area is titled 'Activities and Experiences' and has two tabs: 'My Activities' and 'Add New Activity'. The 'Add New Activity' tab is active, showing a form to add a new activity. The form has three main sections: 'Activity Name' with a text input field containing 'Rolls Royce Internship'; 'Category' with a dropdown menu showing 'Part-time Work'; and 'Description' with a rich text editor. The rich text editor has a toolbar with icons for undo, redo, bold, italic, underline, link, unlink, list, and code. The description text area contains the text: 'Summer internship 2016 - this is where I would provide an overview of the placement or the recruitment process'. At the bottom of the form is a blue 'Save Activity' button. The footer of the page is dark grey and contains 'IMPERIAL COLLEGE UNION Best Quadrangle' on the left and 'IMPERIAL AWARD' on the right.

Once you log and describe your activities, you can record your experiences and begin to map them against the twelve Imperial Award attributes listed under the three streams:

- ▲ Independent, open-minded thought
- ▲ Effective team work
- ▲ Self-awareness and active self-management

Example:



Once you click on the overview tab, you will be able to access the matrix listing all your activities mapped against the attributes. This table (your Award matrix), illustrated below, will show you the attributes you are strongest in, denoted by the number of experiences you allocate under each.

Imperial Award - My Imperial Award - Google Chrome

Secure | https://services.union.ic.ac.uk/imperial-award-dev/

Imperial College London

Imperial Award

Overview Activities and Experiences Review Guidance

Bob Student Log Out

My Imperial Award

5 Activities created

9 Experiences recorded

Activities and Experiences	Independent, open minded thought					Effective teamwork					Self awareness and active self management				
	Innovative approach	Creativity	Practical, intelligent problem-solving	Enterprising mindset	Communication and active listening	Motivation	Awareness of group dynamics and collaboration	Strategic mindset	Critical self-analysis/self-evaluation	Social conscience	Recognising opportunities	Global mindset			
Totals	7	1	2	3	1	12	4	4	3	1	9	2	5	1	1
Computing Department Rep	1			1		4	2		2		1		1		
Student consultation on late submissions						2	✓		✓		1		✓		
Student Staff Committee Meetings	1			✓		2	✓		✓						
RAG Events Officer	3		1	2		6	2	2	1	1	4	1	2	1	
Imperial Plus Training	1			✓		4	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓			
RAG Ball						2	✓	✓			2		✓	✓	
Risk assessing jailbreak	2		✓	✓											
Trip to New York						1		1			2		1		1
Visit to the United Nations						1		✓			2		✓		✓
UROP	2	1			1										
Writing UROP Proposal	2	✓			✓										
Volunteer Tutor	1		1			1		1			2	1	1		
Working with marginalised young people											2	✓	✓		

Your personal tutor will be able to see this matrix too, which may aid your discussions about your experiences, evidencing them against the attributes and identifying areas for your further development.

The benefits of the Imperial Award portfolio

Building your portfolio and mapping your experiences against the Imperial Award attributes is an essential part of working toward the Award, and is a key step before submitting your reflective statement.

This process is an opportunity to begin reflecting on how your engagements contribute to your personal development. This will help you produce your reflective statement.

To get the most out of the portfolio building process you should:

- ▲ Think of all your engagements in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, which have contributed to your personal development. This may include volunteering, part-time work, clubs, societies & projects, academia and life events amongst many other things.
- ▲ Record all 'surprise' moments, significant and challenging experiences, which helped you gain new skills and think differently about a situation.
- ▲ Discuss the content of your matrix with your personal tutor, who might be able to help you identify further learning points and links between your experiences and the Imperial Award attributes.
- ▲ Consider attending 'stream workshops', exploring the attributes that fall under a stream in more detail, discussing how to link activities and experiences to Award attributes.
- ▲ Use your portfolio and the matrix as a tool when writing your reflective statement, and as a reference when you fill out job applications or prepare for interview.
- ▲ The Imperial Award consists of three streams, each containing four attributes. Each stream requires you to submit a separate, short reflective statement to demonstrate you meet the criteria for each attribute within that stream. You do not need to submit statements for each stream at the same time.

Setting objectives

You won't necessarily have experiences that align to all attributes. As such, you may wish to set yourself objectives to develop skills and experiences against these attributes.

SMART objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Setting objectives before you take action makes it much easier to measure outcomes and impact. Using SMART objectives can help you plan specific actions, which will enable you to build evidence against Imperial Award attributes. You can use them in your discussion with your personal tutor, when you look at areas for development. Identify specific objectives and think how to measure how you have developed during your activities.

Your reflective statement

Writing your reflective statement

To achieve each Imperial Award stream you need to produce a written reflective statement of no more than 4000 characters per stream, demonstrating how you meet the Imperial Award criteria in relation to each of the four attributes within that stream.

Before you write your statement you should:

- ▲ Explore the impact of your actions (look back at Kolb's learning experience theory), focusing on what you learnt from it. Could things have been improved, or avoided, if you had behaved differently?
- ▲ Analyse any new information, 'surprise' moments or challenging experiences, which helped you grow.
- ▲ Think about how these experiences changed (transformed) you. What were the impacts on you, others and the situation?

When you write your reflective statement:

DO...	DON'T...
Provide good evidence and reflect on how you have applied and developed your skills in relation to each attribute against the Imperial Award criteria.	Overlook providing evidence of reflecting on each of the four attributes within the stream.
Think about what persuades you that you have been transformed by your experiences, and what will persuade your personal tutor and the assessor panel that there has been a transformative impact – either on you, others or the situation you were operating in.	Forget to demonstrate how independent engagement in the activities have transformed you, others or the situation you were operating in.
Demonstrate to the assessor that each of the attributes has been <i>explicitly reflected</i> ¹ upon and has been integrated into a critically considered argument.	Fail to use <i>persuasive arguments</i> ² to demonstrate how you met each Imperial Award criteria in relation to attributes.
Write reflectively.	Write descriptively.

¹*Explicitly reflected upon* - reflected on fully and clearly demonstrated. Your statement should be clear and concise, leaving no room for confusion or doubt that reflects on your learning and draws a conclusion.

²*Persuasive argument* - building a carefully crafted argument that convinces others to act or think differently. Relevant information, data or facts support and evidence your claim.

STARS model

You can use the STARS model when writing your statement, to provide a structure to your reflection.

Writing clearly and concisely is another skill to master in working toward the Award.

Demonstrating each attribute using the STARS model must be brief and to the point, so be careful about how much time you dedicate to each area – reflecting/describing the situation should be the briefest.

Stage	Explanation
Situation/ Task	Description of the situation in which you found yourself or task that needed to be achieved where you had to use this skill/attribute. This must be specific and not generalised. Keep your explanation of the situation/task to an absolute minimum.
Action	Explanation of what you did and how you completed the task, or achieved your goal. What did you do? How did you use this skill/attribute?
Result/ Significance	What was the result or outcome of your actions? What impact did it have on you or others? What did you learn? How did using this skill/attribute benefit the situation? Would you do it the same way again? Reflect on the experience, identifying what you learned and how you developed.

Examples of using the STARS model

The below is intended as guidance on using the STARS model and not an example of 'met' criteria in relation to a reflective statement.

▲ Communication and active listening

As Treasurer of the X Society, my role was to keep a tight rein on a very limited budget and decide collectively with the rest of the committee on expenditure at weekly meetings. In advance of one of our meetings, I became aware that some of the members planned to propose putting on costly fundraising activities and it was my job to challenge them and propose alternative ideas to ensure the budget would last us for the whole year.

To ensure the committee listened to and hopefully accepted my recommendations, I came to the meeting with the relevant budget records and cost schedules for previous fundraising activities so that I could refer to them as evidence to back up my points. Secondly, I made sure that I listened carefully to the ideas proposed so that I could assess and probe their viability in front of the committee, outlining the pros and cons clearly. Although I didn't always share the same views as others, I asked everyone on the committee to express their own opinions so that they felt involved and listened to. I also accepted that some of the costly activities were still good ideas and suggested that they be revisited in six months' time, when more funds might be available in the budget.

By engaging with and listening to others, respecting their views and ensuring I backed up my points clearly and with evidence, I was able to argue my case, build trust and persuade the committee to accept my recommendations.

▲ Motivation

*I was approached about becoming a dance choreographer for the next production (...)
An awareness of group dynamics and collaboration was crucial especially as the dance teams consisted of dancers of varying level and experience. While most dancers are complete beginners, a handful have had prior experience. Early on, I had to observe their skills in order to adapt and simplify my existing choreography to ensure that the final product is realistically attainable.*

Activities I planned were shaped around individual motivations – did they join because they wanted to learn to dance, to improve their dancing, or because of their friends? To keep the experienced dancers motivated despite the simplified choreography, I offered them parts of more challenging choreography in certain sections and occasionally assigning them smaller leadership roles to teach dance techniques within small groups. Some of them were shy at first, but over time they were more comfortable in the role and some of them went to take on choreographer roles for the next production.

Bringing together these different individual traits for the benefit of the group as a whole kept everyone adequately motivated to give their best in the overall performance. I also learned the importance of the team against the individual - that decreasing the technicality of a task to suit a majority of less experienced members is not a negative compromise, as this keeps them from being intimidated which might decrease overall team morale.

Vocabulary aid

The following are just some **suggestions** for expressions and words that might be useful for prompting reflective writing. Using any of these words is not necessary, and should be used as inspiration. Equally, using them will not automatically make you a good reflective writer.

Action verbs	
Achievement	achieved, completed, improved, enhanced, produced, implemented, delivered
Communication	advised, wrote, instructed, presented, edited, chaired meeting, persuaded
Taking initiative	created, designed, established, introduced, developed, set up, initiated
Research	investigated, determined, searched, surveyed, examined, catalogued, classified
Organising and planning	recognised, arranged, budgeted, verified, scheduled, planned, produced
Interpersonal	advised, facilitated, collaborated, proposed, evaluated, consulted, mediated, handled

For me, the (most)	important	event	happened when...
	meaningful	idea	arose from...
	relevant	learning	began after...

I have	developed	my	understanding
	improved		skills in...
	enriched		ability to...

Previously	I	thought...
Initially		noticed...
At the time		felt...

Having	read...	I now	think...
	explored...		realise...
	analysed...		know...
	learned..		feel...

Further support

There are a number of further opportunities to discuss your work toward the Imperial Award and get more information about the Programme:

- ▲ meeting with your **personal tutor** or mentor, who can help you reflect on your activities and experiences, and linking them with the Award attributes.
- ▲ attending Imperial Award **reflective writing workshops** providing practical tips for producing your reflective statement.
- ▲ attending Imperial Award **stream workshops**, focusing on exploring attributes within each stream.
- ▲ more information on reflective writing can be found in the following publications:
 - ▲ Bolton, G. (2010) *Reflective practice: writing and professional development*. London: Sage.
 - ▲ Cottrell, S. (2008) *The Study Skills Handbook*. 3rd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
 - ▲ Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall
 - ▲ Moon, J. (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer
 - ▲ Watton P, Collings J, Moon J. (2001) *Reflective Writing - Guidance Notes for Students*. Exeter: Exeter University.
 - ▲ Williams, K. & Wooliams, M. (2012) *Reflective writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ▲ more information on the structure of the Imperial Award Programme, as well as the attributes, streams and criteria can be found in '[Imperial Award. Student Guidance Pack](#)'.
- ▲ any specific questions or concerns can be raised by email using imperialaward@imperial.ac.uk

References

- ▲ Gibbs, G. Rust, C. Jenkins, A. Jaques, D. 1994, *Developing Students' Transferable Skills*. Oxford Centre for Staff Development.
- ▲ Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall
- ▲ Moon, J. (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer

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