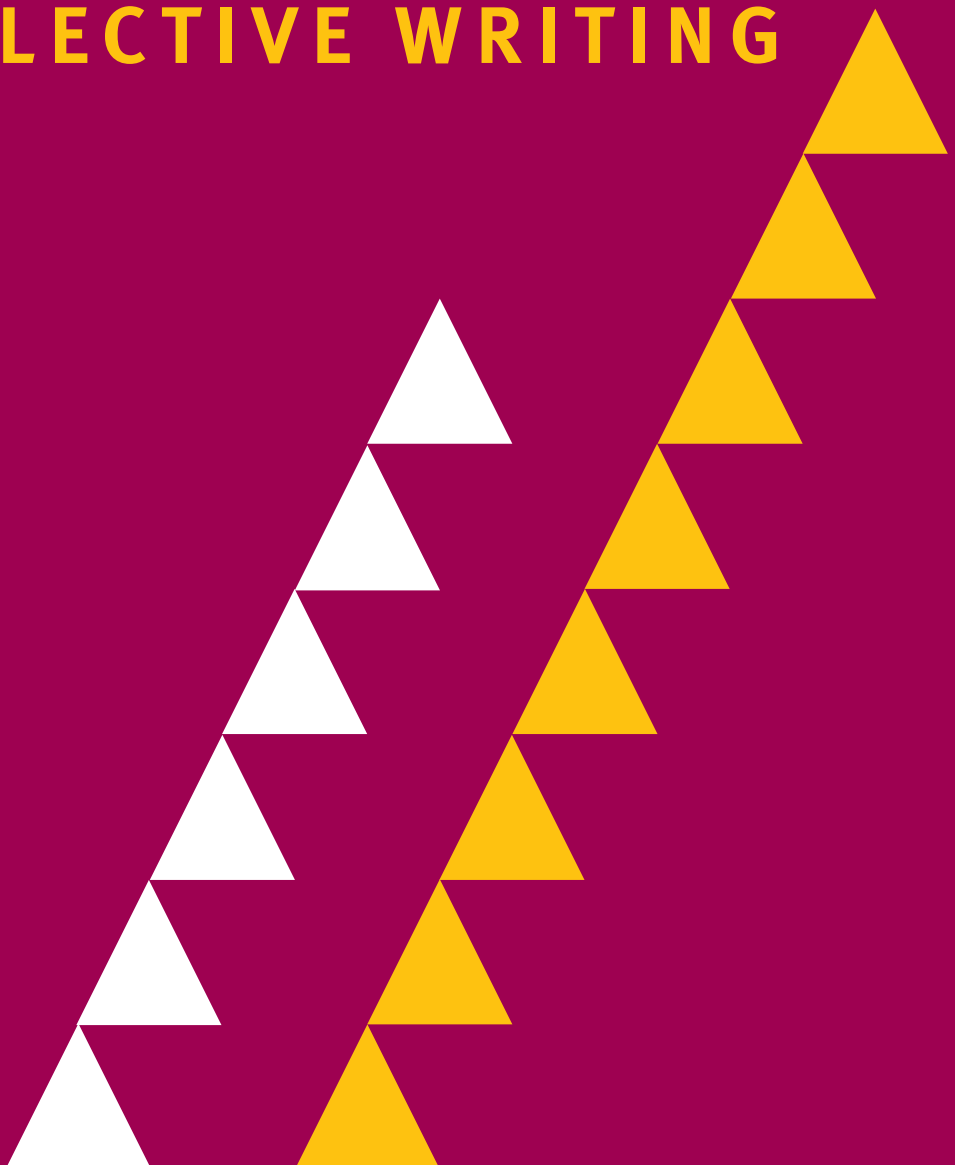


Imperial College
London



**IMPERIAL
AWARD SCHEME
REFLECTION &
REFLECTIVE WRITING**



This guidance on self-reflection and reflective writing will help you to obtain the Imperial Award. It contains practical tips for thinking reflectively about how your experiences have transformed you, and how to produce your short reflective statement.

Each stream of the Imperial Award requires you to write a short reflective statement (an argument), to make your claim that you have developed all four attributes in that stream. This involves critically examining how your experiences, gained from your activities, have led to your own personal development and transformation. To prepare your statement(s), you will need to recall your activities, discuss your experiences, reflect upon how they caused you to gain the attributes and then write-up your claim in light of the Award criteria.

Reflection

WHAT IS REFLECTION?

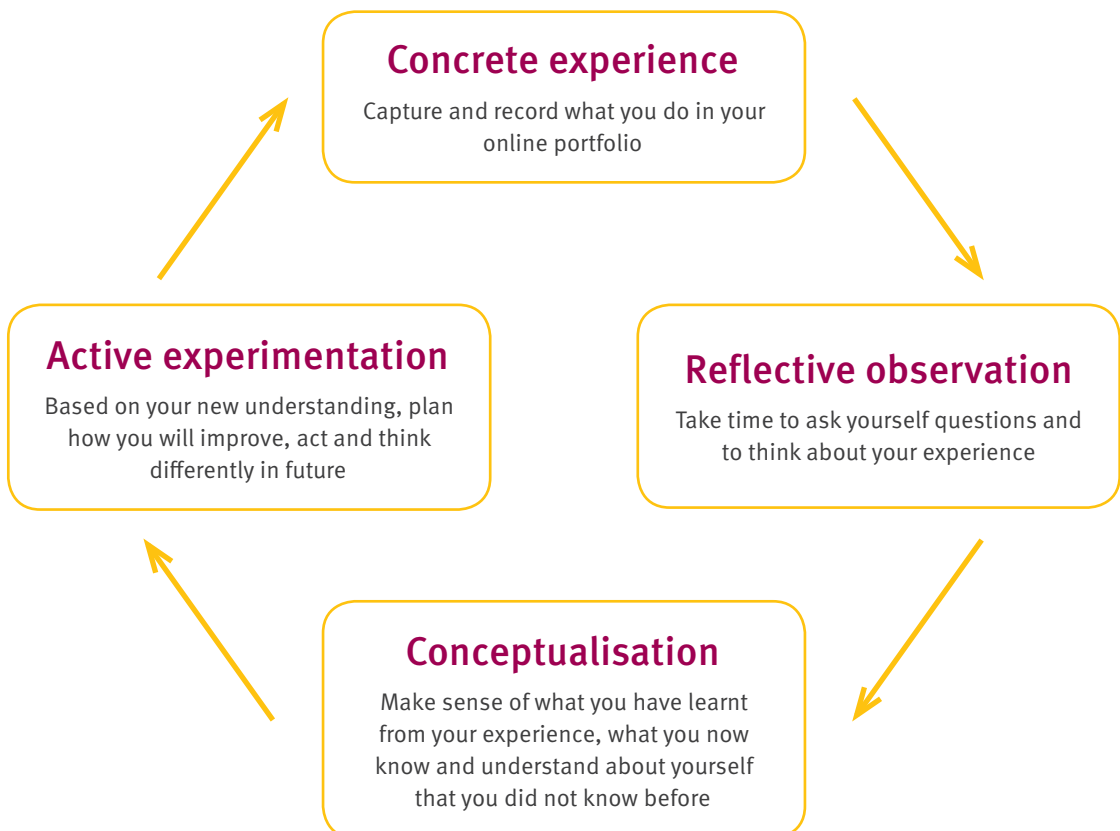
Reflection is the personal learning activity requiring you to look at your own experiences as if they were in a mirror, to see your own development.

Reflecting requires you to understand not only what you do well but also to be critical of yourself; it is a continuous analytical cycle enabling proactive transformation ▲

KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

David Kolb (1984) described this cycle of stages undertaken when learning-from-experience. Based on Kolb's model, there are four main stages of learning.

This diagram shows a continual cycle of experiences, reflection and learning. Attributes developed from one experience, can be used in future iterations of the cycle:



“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 tools

The first time you try self-reflection you will probably find it odd, as you will need to be critical of your personal assumptions and actions. The scientific method relies on objective analysis (facts), however reflection also relies upon subjective analysis (your own thoughts and feelings).

We have provided you with self-interview questions to help you start to think reflectively, the outcome will form the scaffolding for your reflective statement(s).

These self-interview questions help you with your reflection. Combine this with the reflective writing tools shown later in this guide.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

To make the most of them, you will need to set aside some time to think about the answers to these questions. Spend at least five minutes per question but take more time if needed. There are no 'correct answers'; the questions are designed for you to interpret based on your own experiences and to help you articulate how they have transformed you.

Reflection involves looking beneath the surface of your own actions, questioning your own assumptions. These questions can help you move beyond description, into reflection.

SELF-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PRIMARY QUESTION	FURTHER REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Looking at my activities, what experiences have I gained and in what context/background? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Group or individual; one-off, series or continuous; habitual, automatic or ordinary; thoughtful or intensely analytical; urgent; wanted or unwanted; planned or unplanned; low or high-profile; local, national or international; feel-good, feel-bad or feel-ok?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ How did I carry out the activity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ How did I learn and handle the practicalities? How did I cultivate the experience and how do I feel about it now? Did training help me? Did I review or reflect during the activity? Did the implementation change or develop as I gained more experience and why?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Why did I do it or why do I still do it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ How and why has my thinking changed or developed as I gained the experience(s)? What do I wish I had known at the start that I know now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ What do I believe are the most significant impacts of my activities on others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Who has been impacted and how? Are the impacts as expected or a surprise? How do I feel about them? Why do I rate these impacts as significant?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ When I think of the impact of my experiences on my own development, which specific experiences or events changed me and how did they change (transform) me? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ What dilemma or challenge changed my assumptions, changed my thinking or my practice? Why did this cause a change? How did I change? When did I realise that change was involved; at the time of the experience, afterwards when looking back at the experience or now? How will this transform my future activities?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ When I look at the Imperial Award attributes, which ones match the transformative impacts I identified above? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Which attributes do I strongly match? Which attributes do I almost match? Which attribute did I assume I matched but now realise that I lack evidence of developing? Which attributes do I want to gain? How could I gain them? How do I think this would transform or develop me?

Reflective writing

Your short reflective statement requires reflective writing; you must go beyond description.

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 making an assertion
<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 (Process, solution, impact) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ simple problem-solving (solution only)
<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

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 — ONE

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 — TWO

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.

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

Your online portfolio

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 not assessed, is private and you can utilise it however you find it works best.

ACTIVITY RECORDING

Activities are the positions you hold, things you engage in, being useful in a team.

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

MAPPING

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 teamwork



**Self-awareness and
active self-management**

THE MATRIX OVERVIEW

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. 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.

imperialcollegeunion.org/imperial-award

ACTIVITY RECORDING

EXPERIENCES

MAPPING ATTRIBUTES

THE MATRIX OVERVIEW

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	26	6	7	8	5	25	8	7	7	3	18	3	7	5	3
Community Connections volunteer	1	1				2	1	1			2	1	1	1	
Volunteering with GoodGym	1	✓				2	✓	✓			2	✓	✓	✓	
Computing Department Rep	2	1	1			5	2	1	2		2	1	1	1	
Student consultation on late submissions						2	✓	✓			1	✓			
Student Staff Committee Meetings	1		✓			2	✓	✓			1	✓			
A New experience	1	✓				1	✓	✓			1	✓			
Events Officer - RCC Dance Company	2	1	1			3	1	1	1		1			1	
Events Officer - RCC Dance Company	2	✓	✓			3	✓	✓			1	✓			

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 experiences 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 experiences 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 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 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 claim and demonstrate that you meet the criteria for each attribute within that stream. You can submit statements at different times; each stream is separately assessed.

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 4,000 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 have already started reflecting upon your experiences in relation to the attributes in that stream. The portfolio, matrix and reflection questions are designed to help you reflect.

When you write your reflective statement:

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do use all of the analytical reflective tools to reflect deeply, before you start writing-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do not write your statement without reflecting on the impact of your experiences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do use your matrix tool to select your best evidence for each attribute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do not try to squeeze in a mention of every activity and experience. Be selective.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do write using “I”, “me”, “my”, “mine”, keeping your focus transformative impacts of your experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do not use assertions in lieu of argument. If in doubt, talk to your personal tutor, attend an Award writing workshop, discuss with peers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do explicitly address each attribute in the stream, arguing in support of your claim, with experiences as evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do not list achievements (successful results) instead of experiences (processes and transformations).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do weave a coherent statement for the whole stream. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do not stretch thin evidence to cover all attributes. Better to seek further, deeper experiences, if time permits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do write reflectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Do not write descriptively

THE SCART MODEL – A TOOL FOR REFLECTIVE WRITING

You can use the SCART model to think about the different components required in your reflective writing. You must write clearly and concisely, remember that the Imperial Award is not about the volume of your activities, it recognises personal development and transformation.

SITUATION/CONTEXT

Briefly set the scene, explain how and why the situation arose, what needed to be achieved, and the context of your claim that you have developed the attributes.

- ▲ This scene-setting must be specific and not generalised
- ▲ Keep your explanation of the situation/task/context to an absolute minimum

ACTION

A brief explanation of what you did and how you achieved (or missed) your goal or handled the situation.

- ▲ Explain what you did or what you experienced
- ▲ Highlight the aspects relevant to the attribute(s) by using key-nouns, key-verbs and key-ideas from the attribute

REFLECTION

Evidence that you have thought about what you have experienced, why it matters and that you understand what you did well, what you could improve and how it has affected your priorities, assumptions or viewpoint.

- ▲ Show understanding of the impact of your actions on others
- ▲ Use the reflection tool to generate evidence about your experiences and select small examples directly relevant to the attributes you claim to have

TRANSFORMATION

You must evidence (argue persuasively) that, as a result of your reflection, you understand the transformative impact of your experiences in helping you to develop the attributes, enabling you to perform differently in the future.

- ▲ Address attributes explicitly
- ▲ Explain how you know, personally, that your experiences have changed you
- ▲ Look carefully at the Award criteria to see what does/does not work as evidence

EXAMPLE REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

To help you understand what reflective writing looks like we have created a fictional Imperial Award stream called Effective Presentation, and invented an example statement by an imaginary student called 'Sam', with comments from an assessor.

FICTIONAL STREAM: EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Imperial graduates will take impressive technical qualifications into the workforce, to have impact on society, knowledge and the future. To operate at a level befitting the quality of their qualifications, graduates need to be able to communicate with impact, achieving more than the mere transmission of data but communicating at a deeper level to shape the response to the communication. Great responsibility comes with the ability to persuade others, and this stream recognises attributes which enable proficient communication (what and how) and societal responsibility (what and why).

FICTIONAL ATTRIBUTES:

1. Awareness of audience needs: Effective presenters are audience-focused instead of information-centric, and consider the audience's context including why the audience is present, the range of audience wants/needs/priorities, and their range of likely responses. Critically, effective presenters know what impact they wish to have on the audience beyond the presentation.
2. Uses effective presentation tools: effective presenters do not merely display information but explain it, using strategies tailored to their audience. Strategies and tools can include rhetoric, argument/counterargument, evidence and also visual, verbal, aural, digital or other modes of delivery. An effective tool helps the presenter have their intended impact on the audience.
3. Ethically responsible: a presenter makes choices about what to present and what to omit, and how to present and how not to present. In these choices, the presenter must be careful to ensure the honesty and integrity of communication, whether controversial or not in its content.
4. Persuader mindset: an effective presenter seeks to have an impact (an effect) on the audience. A persuader mindset is required for a presenter to be able to identify what the effect should be and how to achieve it, and how to follow-up on an effective presentation.

FICTIONAL SHORT REFLECTIVE STATEMENT: SAM'S STATEMENT

My experience on the ICU Toilets-for-Us Project (T4Us: a sanitation project for rural India), made me rethink my approach to presentations and changed my practice. My claim to have the attributes of an Effective Presenter is evidenced by 3 key experiences which transformed my presentations strategy, impacting different audiences and me.

Looking back, despite often presenting coursework, my three most transformative experiences as a presenter have been (1) as media officer for the T4Us project, (2) getting T4Us communications coaching and (3) talking to my personal tutor about this Award stream. As media officer, I needed my presentations to start changing people's minds; the training gave me know-how; but my reflective discussion with my PT truly helped me to shift my student focus from 'information' towards 'presentation', changing my strategy.

With my tutor, I debated the differences between teaching, presenting, proving, and information-dumping when we discussed "Persuader mindset" (attribute (d)). I realised that I'd never needed a "persuader mindset" when presenting coursework to teachers who already knew the topic. I'd merely collected relevant information, and won marks for information-gathering. The teachers were changing me with feedback, not me persuading them.

In contrast, I definitely need a persuader mindset when I explain the Toilets-for-Us project to other people, to convert students into volunteers, potential funders into sponsors; and the public into supporters who realise that people are dying from cholera and suffering social harm in places without sanitation systems. My training increased my audience awareness (attribute (a)) and so now each audience gets a tailored presentation, instead of one fact-filled standard presentation. I believe that audiences talking to me after a presentation is evidence that I met their needs and persuaded them about our project's potential. We now have an existing sponsor who increased their funding and we doubled our volunteer force from 5 to 11, a good impact from my shift from talker to persuader and my discussions with audiences are deeper now.

ASSESSOR'S NOTES: WHAT MAKES THIS REFLECTIVE

Sam focuses on claiming to possess the attributes and how Sam's experience is evidence. Keywords include: rethink, claim, attributes, transformed, impacts and change.

Sam has prioritised reflective (analytical) thinking over description of details.

Sam explicitly addresses the attribute and shows reflection upon the dilemma of whether Sam's experiences as a presenter have always involved the attributes. To deal with the dilemma, Sam uses a counter-example and then valid examples. Sam shows a shift in Sam's own basic assumptions, which cannot happen without reflection. Sam uses descriptive detail mostly to illustrate the transformation and avoids too much detail about the T4Us story.

My transformation into someone who “uses effective presentation tools” for attribute (b), occurred during T4Us communications training. Tough feedback from the trainer changed me from someone who loved powerpoint and pictures, into someone who now relies more on ‘conversation’ with my audience. I use rhetorical questions as hooks, I build up arguments using data instead of just showing data for the audience to interpret. I have pushed background knowledge to the background and brought forward my main points. I acknowledge, instead of hiding, any problems (the counter-arguments against our project) to show my audience that I anticipate their concerns. This impresses funders in particular, as it shows transparency on issues such as ‘westerners imposing solutions on India’ or our tiny project scale, which are the biggest counter-arguments we face and were issues I needed to address.

In my discussion with my Personal Tutor, we really debated what the Imperial Award attribute of being “ethically responsible” would truly mean for my T4Us project. I thought it meant “do not plagiarise” but he thought it was wider. When I showed him my new presentation of T4Us, his reaction to those counter-arguments was that it hit the ethical issues head-on. Do we cause harm when 10 homes access get deep-pit toilets but we do not reach the neighbours 2km down the road? Are our claims grounded on facts, opinions or hopes? Do we make it clear to the audience? This is an aspect that I had not truly considered before looking at Imperial Award, so I am still developing my understanding but I am now consciously aware of trying to be ethically responsible as a presenter and not a ‘glib salesman’. I now make clarity about our tough issues the key to my ethical presenting.

The communications training and the process of reflecting on what I do as a presenter has shifted my entire approach and I am now more ambitious for my presentation’s impact. I no longer give the entire history of the project, I shifted my focus to the audience, my priority to the impacts of the presentation and I use more varied tools because my presentations are about persuading people to act. Although it would be nice to earn the Imperial Award, the real impact of my transformation into an effective presenter will be when I revisit the Indian village this summer, to see the impact of having persuaded more people to give more help, money and support to challenge this real-life problem and see the solution happen ▲

Character count: 3,895 (no spaces)

Sam highlights transformation, using a before and after technique, with phrases like ‘from someone who loved...into someone who now...’.

This is rich in details, but they are always reflecting on Sam’s progress into someone with the IA attributes.

Sam makes explicit the approach taken to reflection: Sam illustrates how debate and discussion with another person (Tutor) introduced Sam to new ways of looking at their own practice as a T4Us communicator and gives a specific example of change resulting from that new insight.

Sam finishes by pulling together the stream’s themes (persuasion; audience; effective tools) and reminds us of Sam’s know-why, know-what and know-how. Transformative impact of Sam’s experiences remains the dominant focus of Sam’s claim to possess the attributes.

Reflective sentence generator

Use this simple sentence-generator to change from scientific-objective writing to reflective-contemplative writing.

It acts as a starting-point, combine it with your own individual experiences and reflection. Assembling and selecting key-verbs, key-nouns and key-thoughts will help you write reflectively, not descriptively.

For me, the (most)	important meaningful relevant	event idea learning	happened when... arose from... began after...
I have	developed improved enriched	my	understanding skills in... ability to...
Previously, Initially, At the time,	I	thought... felt... noticed...	
Having	read... explored... analysed... learned...	I now	think... realise... know... feel...

Achievement	}	achieved, completed, improved, enhanced, produced, implemented, delivered, closed-out, finalised.
Communication	}	advised, wrote, instructed, presented, edited, chaired meeting, persuaded, pitched, reviewed, listened, adjudicated, claimed, justified, negotiated, reported, professed, acclaimed, counter-argued.
Taking initiative	}	created, designed, established, introduced, developed, set up, initiated, instigated, re-started, re-designed, convened, proposed, pitched, re-examined, re-evaluated.
Research	}	investigated, determined, searched, surveyed, examined, catalogued, classified, reviewed, published, wrote-up, analysed, compared, presented, queried, hypothesised.
Organising and planning	}	recognised, arranged, budgeted, verified, scheduled, planned, produced, checked, recast, replenished, delegated, devolved, involved, re-organised, accounted, reported.
Interpersonal	}	advised, facilitated, collaborated, proposed, evaluated, consulted, mediated, handled, negotiated, welcomed, hosted, consoled, cheered, commiserated, celebrated, diversified, recognised, acknowledged, introduced.

Glossary of terms

Activities	Actions taken separate from your degree, which have a personal developmental impact on you.
Attributes	Listed in the Imperial Award Framework. Four attributes make up a stream of attributes.
Co-curricular	Learning/project/developmental activity, which is not inside your degree but is closely related. Examples: studying a language with Imperial's CLCC; extending a project beyond your degree into independent research/development; implementing an idea initially developed as a classroom exercise; and so on....
Criteria	Assessor's guide as to what to look for in your statement per attribute and your guide of what you will need to ensure is included in your submissions. See Imperial Award Framework.
Departmental liaison officer	The academic/administrative lead on Imperial Award in a department.
Description	Listing of factual detail. Listing what, when, where, who, how much but not 'significance' for you/others.
Evaluation	An examination of complex issues requiring high-level cognitive skills that is more focused and detailed than a review, providing a solution, conclusion or recommendation.
Experience	One activity may give you many experiences: volunteering on a project to design a device to assist a disabled person might require creativity for the design, enterprising mind-set to fund the prototype, motivational/leadership skills to keep volunteers engaged communication and active listening to respond to feedback from the end user. Experiences give you evidence of the attributes required for a stream.
Extra-curricular	Activity wholly outside of your degree, for example: choir, non-professional work, clubs/societies, life events.
Focus group	A group of participants brought together to arrive at a consensus (focus), providing evaluation data.
Impact	The difference it makes to self, others, or a situation.

Imperial Award team	The staff looking after the Imperial Award scheme, drawn from academic, admin and Imperial College Union staff.
Life events	Life throws difficulties in our paths, forcing us to respond and transforming us in the process. e.g. a student whose parent is diagnosed with chronic disease must balance competing, compelling demands on time/energy.
Mapping	The action of looking for the intersections/overlaps between the attributes you are trying to demonstrate and your evidence (the experiences gained from your activities): usually done with a matrix (or table).
Matrix	A table where your list of experiences (rows) can be plotted against the columns of attributes. Diagnostic tool.
Measurement	Finding indicators of qualitative or quantitative impact; having a way to gauge impact.
Other activities	A catch-all category, in case we missed something.
Part-time work	Any type: does not have to be professional or degree-related.
Personal development	Personal as opposed to purely academic or professional development, across all attributes.
Portfolio	Bringing all your experiences together in one folio (document); an <i>aide-mémoire</i> .
Reflection	Looking back on your experiences; sifting for significant moments, transformative of the way you think and act.
Streams	The 12 attributes are grouped in three streams: four attributes per stream. See Imperial Award Framework.
Transformation	Change which is likely to be irreversible, a process of expanding consciousness become critically aware of old and new self-views.
Volunteering	Social, community, educational, health, engineering, environmental: all volunteering can transform you.

Notes

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