

# Developing Study Skills through Structured Reflection

*Using PebblePad to promote and integrate course-wide reflection*

## The aim

Level 4 Criminology students have been required to submit a reflective assessment in semester 2 for a number of years. However, as many of the students have little experience of reflection as a learning process they seldom collected evidence of their learning and development prior to the start of the assessment. The tutor wanted to promote the value of reflection, improve the quality of the students' reflections and encourage them to engage with materials to help develop their study skills.

## Benefits

- Students develop their essential academic skills in a methodical manner
- Structured workbooks result in richer and higher quality reflection
- Students show increased engagement with support materials and their learning

## The approach

The tutor introduced PebblePad as a system to support reflection during induction. This gave the students time to explore the potential of reflection as part of their learning process, and encouraged them to begin gathering evidence to support their reflective assessment from the very start of the course. The students were also introduced to the Study Skills Toolkit (<http://blogs.shu.ac.uk/academicsskills>), a set of resources to assist in developing important academic skills, and a checklist was created to guide the students in when and how they should be reflecting on their development and engaging with the materials in the Toolkit. To further support engagement with the Toolkit and encourage reflection, a feedback matrix was created to highlight areas of the Toolkit that students should focus on when preparing for future assessments.

As a way to encourage on-going reflection, academic skills development and use of PebblePad, activities and assessments within the module were directly linked to materials relevant to the rest of the course. For example, rather than base study skills exercises on general texts, actual course readings were used instead - helping the students see the value and transferability of the skills being developed. Reflection as an academic skill was promoted heavily through a range of activities, including:

- explicitly incorporating reflection on expertise in the discipline's core skills and tools in a portfolio-based assessment;
- using structured pro-forma to support reflection at five defined points in the academic year;
- introducing a year-end capstone reflection activity; and
- encouraging the creation of action plans for personal development at level 5.

These activities were facilitated through the Workbooks feature of PebblePad, which allow forms, based on multiple different templates, to be combined with support materials into a single, coherent resource. This provides a structured, guided way for students to develop both their reflections and their reflective capability, with reflective assessments staged at key points throughout the course to ensure regular engagement in the process. The module contained one formative and two summative assessments, which were workbooks submitted and marked within PebblePad, with the grades made available to students through Blackboard's Grade Centre.

## The outcome

By introducing PebblePad at the outset of the programme, the students were able to develop their reflective capability gradually, and the staged, structured reflection encouraged by the workbooks resulted in students being supported to develop richer evidence of their development. This, combined with an emphasis on incorporating activities that were directly relevant to the rest of the students' studies, resulted in deeper reflection and greater engagement than previously. The combination of PebblePad and the Study Skills Toolkit assisted students in seeing the importance of developing study skills and understanding how structured reflection can help identify areas of weakness and highlight how to make use of feedback from one assessment in other assessments.

While there was some initial reluctance from tutors to the introduction of PebblePad and, particularly, the new or amended processes surrounding its use for reflection, much of this has abated after seeing how it has benefitted the students' learning. Support from the faculty e-learning team was invaluable in ensuring that the early introduction of PebblePad went smoothly for students and tutors. This support included providing advice, technical support, and creating help materials for both groups.

## Profile

**Tutor name:**

Tanya Miles-Berry

**Faculty:**

Development & Society

**Size of cohort:**

Very Large(150+ students)

**Technologies used:**

PebblePad and the Study Skills Toolkit

If you would like your practice captured and shared in a similar case study, please contact Brian Irwin within Quality Enhancement and Student Success.

## Future Development

The module is due to be revalidated shortly and, while no significant development of this approach is foreseen in the interim, increased use of PebblePad is intended for the module after revalidation. Minor changes to the approach in the short term include the use of the PebblePad tools within Blackboard to help manage assessments and other administration.

## Recommendations

The tutor advises anyone interested in this approach to:

- make use of faculty e-learning support
- set up as much in advance as possible
- involve other teaching staff early in the process and keep them engaged