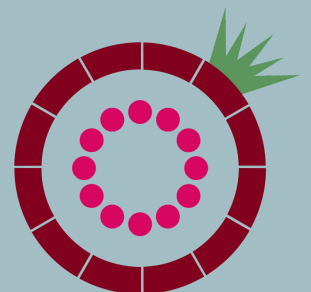


Reflect on Your Year

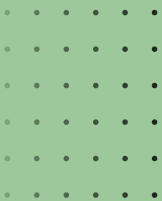
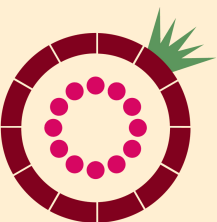
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"Anytime we can listen to our true self and give it the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch."

Parker Palmer



Introduction

2023 is almost over. At this time of the year, it can be tempting to rush through the tasks of December and then tiredly switch into holiday mode. When we return to work in January, there's a tendency to hurry into setting everything up for the new year. It's easy to just charge into 2024 and then realize that we never took the time to review and reflect on 2023. There are many benefits to slowing down, taking time to think, learn, and process before diving straight into the next year.

Reflection is an important habit that facilitates our learning and growth. It helps us understand what is working and what is not, leading us to make adjustments and move in different directions. It enables us to become less bound by rules and more attuned to our individual needs and wants. Reflection allows us to make theories, tips or advice work for us and our context. It helps us uncover our values and ensures our behaviors align with them. Reflection is a key building block of the wisdom and flourishing necessary to lead well in our fast-changing world.

If we want to stretch ourselves to grow, we need to do more than just set goals; we need to reflect on whether we have achieved the goals or not, what obstacles we faced, and the quality of our work. We need to ponder what we need to change or do differently next time. Having a structure or process to follow can be beneficial in assisting us to gain a deeper level of reflection and to avoid the self-judgments that often arise when we review our actions, feelings, and responses.

For this reflection and review process, we are going to follow a five-step process.



Step One



Pause

Reflection requires us to value and prioritize the time and space to carry it out. Set aside at least 90 minutes (preferably 120 minutes) to reflect on your year.

Reflection demands quieting your mind and body, creating an atmosphere that supports deep contemplation. Decide on a comfortable spot away from your usual workspace (the park can be a nice option) without the distractions of other tasks.



Step Two



Choose a process

Decide how you will approach the task of reflection and review. Think about your past experiences with reflection, and consider what has worked well and what has not worked. There is no one correct way to do this task of reflection; it is about what suits you. You might like to consider the following questions.

- Do I prefer visuals or words?
- Do I prefer structure or an unstructured approach?
- Am I methodical or creative?
- What are some ways I have enjoyed reflecting in the past?
- How have I deepened my reflection in the past?

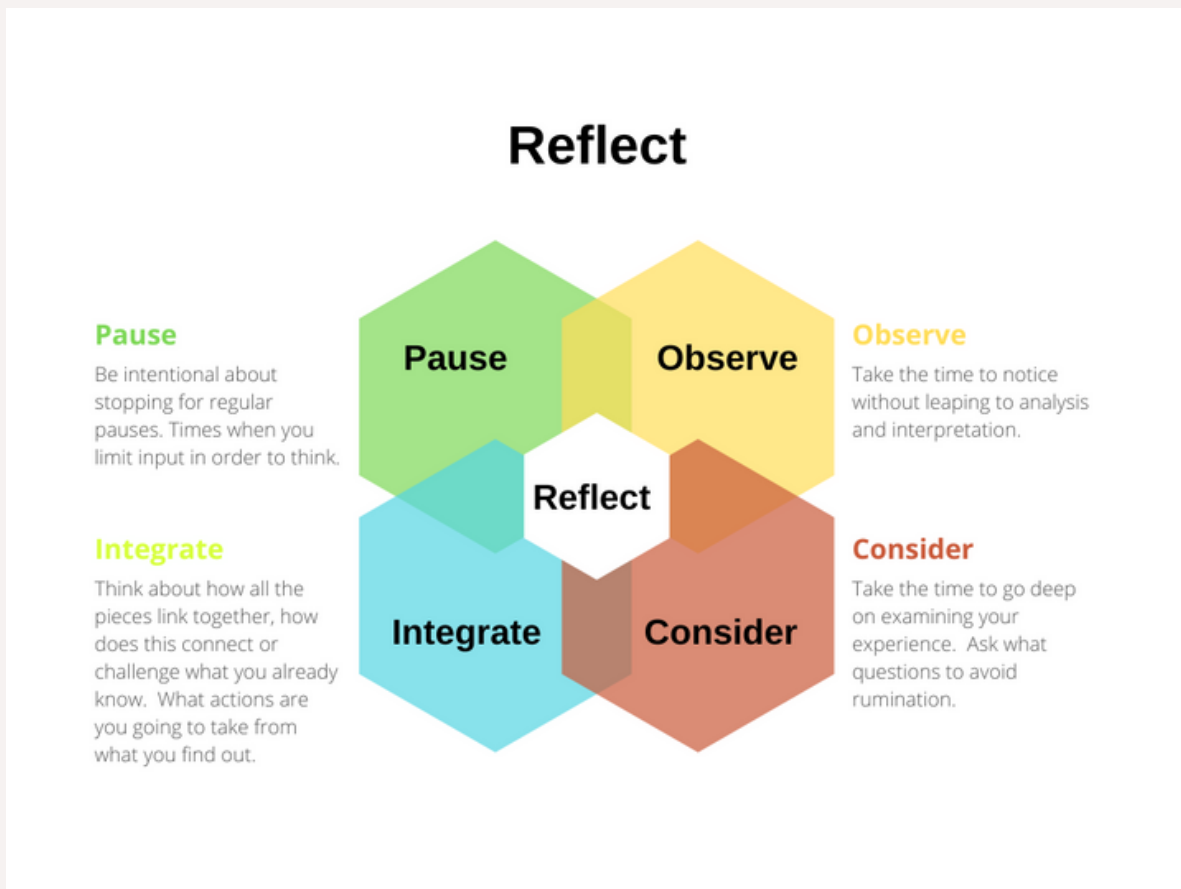
The options are endless; you can use art materials, a nice journal, or a worksheet with a structured set of questions to follow. You may find it best to think on your computer or tablet (just ensure your distractions are limited), or through drawing or free writing. Prepare all the resources you need as you plan your reflection time.



Step Two



A visual of the reflective process



Step Three



Observation

Now you are ready to begin reflecting on your year. Start with observation.

Be very intentional about staying in the observation phase and noting what happened. At this stage don't try and analyze, explore or interpret what happened; just think about what actually occurred. Take your time with this stage (as we can struggle to observe without analysis), focusing on noticing what happened.

Here are some ideas for approaching the observation step.

- Conduct a chronological review, mapping out all the events and experiences or projects that occurred in your year.
- Create a map of your year that depicts mountains (highs), valleys (lows), obstacles and landmarks (use your imagination, and make use of metaphors).
- Explore some themes (e.g., growth, transition, sadness, impact, success, celebrations) or life domains (e.g., work, family, volunteering).
- Make a reverse vision board, using pictures and drawings that illustrate your year.
- Use a mindmap
- Try free writing



Step Four



Consider

Now that you have noted all your key experiences and events for the year it is time to move on to considering or analysing. This involves transitioning from merely noting down what happened to contemplating how we experienced it, what meaning we made of it, and what impact it had on us, or others, or on the outcomes we achieved. Research shows that asking what questions leads to more effective reflection than exploring the question of why. When we consider why something happened the way it did we can get stuck in justifying our actions rather than being open to learning from them.

Sometimes, reviewing and reflecting on what happened and what we did can be challenging, especially after enduring difficult times. Reflection can activate our inner critic and we may become quite judgemental about our actions, responses, or perceived lack of impact. If you find that uncomfortable feelings, like disappointment, shame or guilt arising, or if your inner critic becomes more pronounced, practice kindness towards yourself. Begin by noticing and naming the feelings, and adopt a comforting tone as if you were talking to your best friend. You may find spending some time noticing, being with and journaling through these feelings is an important part of reviewing your year.



Step Five



Integration

In the integration step, we take the time to explore how we are going to respond, change, or act on what we have noticed and considered. This is the transformative step where insights gained through reflection translate into actionable steps for personal and professional development. The aim of reflection is that we learn and grow, that we make space for our feelings and take actions that not only increase our well-being but also empower us to work more effectively. Therefore, the final step of reflection is to think about what we are going to do with our insights—how we will implement positive changes in our approach, interactions, relationships, and goals. By consciously integrating our reflections into actionable plans, and linking them with theories and existing knowledge we strengthen the value of the reflective process, turning insights into tangible improvements and ensuring that we continue to develop. To carry out this step, take another look at all your observations, and considerations, exploring how you want to change, what actions you want to take, what you need, or what you want to find out in response to your reflection.



Questions



Questions

As you reflect on 2023, consider the following questions as prompts to guide your thoughts:

Step One - Pause

- Do I value reflection? Why or why not?
- How will that influence my reflection process?
- When can I set aside a good 2 hours for reflection on my year?
- In what context do I feel least distracted, most comfortable, and most able to reflect?
- When and where will I conduct my reflection?
- What techniques will I use to quiet my mind and body to enable my reflection?

Step Two - Choose a process

- In the past, what has helped me reflect?
- Do I already have a reflective practice that works for me?
- Do I want to prioritize visual reflection, written reflection, or a combination?
- Do I need a systematic approach, or will I let myself freely explore without a formal structure?
- What do the answers to these questions suggest about the process I should follow?

Step Three - Observe

- What were my dreams, visions, hopes, and expectations for the year?
- Who or what was important to me, and how did I act on that?
- What are my values, and how did they guide my actions?
- What really happened? (Interactions, events, experiences).
- What was the sequence of events?
- What are the external or environmental influences on what happened? (e.g., weather, government policy, organizational policy, changes in others)

Questions



Step Three - Observe Cont...

- What was in my control and what was out of my control?
- What were the highs and lows (for myself and my work)?
- What happened in my relationships? (e.g., did I make new friends, have a fight with an old friend, find unexpected support).
- What didn't go as expected?
- What went badly?
- What losses did I experience?
- What obstacles did I overcome?
- What obstacles did I become stuck on?
- Who did I rely on?
- What regrets do I hold about things that happened or didn't happen?
- What mistakes have I made?
- What went well?
- What was my biggest contribution in 2023?

Step Four - Consider

- What will I do if I find reflecting uncomfortable or upsetting?
- What does holding myself compassionately mean to me?
- How can I act on that as I reflect?
- What meaning, or how did I interpret the events and experiences of 2023?
- What did I do? Was it effective?
- What did I not do? What information does that provide?
- What did others do? What did I do in response?
- How did different events relate to each other in time or impact?
- What words or themes may help me make sense of all this?
- What were my feelings about this experience?
- What do I feel now when I think about this experience?
- How do I see and describe my place and role or vocation in the world?
- How have I changed over the year?
- What did I learn from my mistakes, challenges, and successes?

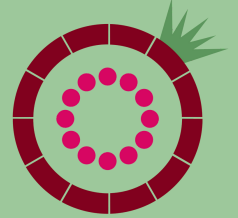
Questions



Step Five - Integrate

- What losses (of people, dreams, ideas, or opportunities) do I need to mourn or grieve?
- What am i clinging onto that I need to let go of?
- What do I need to take with me into 2024?
- What successes do I need to celebrate?
- What other feelings are lingering from my year? What do I need to express those feelings?
- What questions do I still have, that linger in my mind?
- What do I want to change in 2024?
- What am I going to do differently?
- What skills do I need to gain or improve to do that?
- What is most important and meaningful to me now?
- What values do I want to live out in 2024?
- What will this look like?
- What are my hopes and expectations for 2024 ?
- What have I learned that will help me meet those expectations?
- How do all these reflections influence your approach to 2024?
- Who would you like to be by the end of 2024?

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