

Introduction to Embodied Reflection Prompts:

Helping Students Identify and Integrate
Hidden Learning

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Includes sample before/after
reflection questions



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Developing embodied reflection prompts: Helping Students Identify and Integrate Hidden Learning (Level 1)

I. Key Concepts

Embodied Knowledge refers to the unconscious insights, experiences, assumptions, expectations, skills, etc. people gain through their life experiences but are generally not aware they possess. This essential but hidden knowledge exists outside of our conscious awareness. It not only drives our perceptions, intuitions, preferences, decisions, and actions, it is also where most deep learning occurs. The problem is most people don't know how to connect with or "read" this knowledge, which means they often don't realize when they are learning, what they are learning, or how they can use new insights and skills in other contexts.

Integrative Knowledge and Learning involves students identifying embodied insights and connecting those to the academic knowledge (disciplinary concepts, tools, frameworks, methods, etc.) they are learning in their courses. As a result, they develop the skills needed for integrative and lifelong learning: able to identify when and how they are learning; knowing how to "unpack" important moments to discover key insights; and able to facilitate awareness of learning in others.

Embodied questions prompt people to provide a detailed description of a learning moment or life experience that typically remains unconscious. A well-crafted series of embodied questions push peoples' hidden knowledge to the surface, where it can then be identified and understood.

II. Method: Using Embodied Questions for Reflection and Integrative Learning

This process requires students be given time at the end of a class, project, exercise, assignment, etc. to identify and connect their insights and experiences. Although any opportunity to integrate learning is helpful, in order to develop the habits of mind needed to become effective lifelong learners, students need to encounter these kinds of questions on a consistent basis.

The most basic level of integrative learning involves 3 kinds of embodied questions:

1. **Retrieving** – First, students must be prompted to identify specific experiences that were enlivening, energizing or memorable (these can be emotionally positive, negative or neutral). Although these moments usually happen unconsciously, when identified and reflected upon, they reveal how, when, and where "real" learning happens. Examples include:
 - a. What was an insight or a-ha moment you had from today's _____ (class, assignment, project, exercise, simulation, etc.)?
 - b. What was a moment when you felt challenged or frustrated during _____?
 - c. What was a moment from today that stood out to you or caught your attention?
 - d. What were 3 concepts, tools, assignments, experiences, etc. from the class that have really stood out to you or grabbed your attention in some way?
2. **Unpacking** – Next, students must connect their initial enlivening or memorable moments to some other insight, action or decision in order to see *why* it occurred. Deep learning

typically happens when something new or unexpected occurs that captures our attention, or when something happens that disrupts our unconscious assumptions, expectations, values or norms in some way. Unpacking questions (based on a-c above) include:

- a. Why did this a-ha moment occur? (Did it make you aware of something new or disrupt some assumption or expectation?)
 - b. What was the nature of the challenge or frustration you experienced and what specific steps did you take to resolve it?
 - c. Why did these particular concepts, tools, etc. capture your attention?
- 3. Applying** – After identifying memorable moments and why they occurred, students must be prompted to think about how they will use their insights from these moments in the future. Having to think, write or talk about a future scenario in a detailed way activates their imaginative capacities, which makes them much more likely to remember and value what they've learned in the future. Even when students struggle with this step (which is often the case), it greatly increases their capacity to transfer their knowledge and learning to new contexts and situations in the future. Examples of application questions include:
- a. Identify at least two ways you will apply the insights from your learning experience to other classes or your life outside of school.
 - b. What are two ways you can apply what you've learned from this _____ to specific challenges you might encounter in the future? Be specific.

III. Example: mid/end of semester integrative reflection exercise*

Describe 3 "a-ha" moments from this class. For each moment, describe the following:

- a. What was the a-ha moment and the context in which it occurred?
- b. Why did it occur? How did the a-ha moment relate to your previous assumptions, experiences, beliefs, etc.?
- c. Describe at least two ways you will apply insights from this a-ha moment to your decisions and actions after this class.

Once you've written answers to a-c above, share your responses with two classmates.

IV. Levels of integration

Students' capacity to remember, integrate and apply their learning will depend a great deal on the level of integration described below, and how often they are supported in integrating:

1. Level 1: Students reflect on embodied questions on their own, write down their thoughts, and then hand it in to the instructor who reads it.
2. Level 2: Students reflect on their own, write something down, share their insights in teams or small groups and then hand in their insights to their instructor.
3. Level 3: All of level 2 is combined into a whole group discussion before they are asked to revise their reflections and turn in their final written responses.

Each progressive level requires more time, but leads to much deeper learning.

**Instead of 3 a-ha moments, this exercise could focus on 3 challenging moments.*

V. Examples of Disembodied and Embodied Reflection Prompts

A. An Assignment on Mental Illness

Before (disembodied prompt)

Write a 1-2 page reflection on what you've learned from this assignment. Make sure to reflect on the readings, the speakers who came to class, and any other material you found interesting.

After (a series of embodied questions and prompts)

Identify 3 challenging or memorable experiences from [*describe the assignment related to mental illness*]. For each moment, answer the questions below. You must give each experience a name (see example) and then describe the details of each moment/experience using the prompts below. Your entire reflection should be at least 1-2 pages long and include an image or picture that captures your learning.

Name the moment: [ex: Listening to an Iraq war vet describe her struggles with PTSD]

1. **Describe the context** – Where were you when the moment occurred (in a workshop, reading an article, having a conversation with someone, etc.) and what were you trying to do or learn at that time?
2. **Unpack how moment/experience unfolded** – Why did the challenging moment or memorable experience occur? For instance, did you read or hear something that challenged your assumptions or beliefs in some way, or made you think about yourself or someone you know differently? Describe why you felt challenged or engaged, and what changed or shifted within you as a result.
3. **Integrate your insights** – Describe two ways you can connect your insights from this experience to other readings, materials or activities from this class or others.
4. **Apply your insights** - How do the insights you've gained from this experience motivate you to perceive, act, or interact with others differently? Describe at least two situations you are likely to encounter in the future where you can apply what you've learned from this experience to your life. *Be specific*

B. Attending a Conference, Uplifting Others, and Growing Professionally

Before (disembodied prompt)

After attending [name of conference], how do you feel this conference aided in your professional development? What did this conference present to you and how can you use it to uplift the University of Central Oklahoma? What did this conference present to you and how can you use it to uplift your own personal agenda?

After Embodied Questions: (a series of embodied questions and prompts)

Identify 2-3 challenging or memorable moments from [name of conference]. For each moment, answer the questions below. You must give each experience a name (see example) and then describe the details of each moment/experience using the prompts below. Your entire reflection should be at least 1-2 pages long and include an image or picture that captures your learning.

Name the moment: [example: learning how other schools deal with racism on campus]

1. **Describe the context** – Where were you when the moment occurred (in a lecture, workshop, conversation with another person, etc.), who were you with, and what were you trying to learn or do at the time?
2. **Unpack the experience** – Why did this moment or experience occur? For instance, did it challenge some of your existing assumptions or beliefs, and/or motivate you to think about something in a new way? Describe in detail why this experience challenged you or captured your attention and what shifted or changed in you as a result.
3. **Uplift others** - Describe two specific ways you can apply what you've learned from this experience to uplifting others at UCO and/or being of service to others in one or more of your communities.
4. **Develop professionally** – Describe two ways you can apply insights from this experience to your development as a professional. What do you see yourself being able to see or do differently in the future as a result of this experience?

C. A Sustainability Assignment

Before (disembodied prompt)

Explain how your perspective has changed in regards to ewaste due to the activities you participated in during class (discussions, videos, infographic, etc.)? (Describe the information that impacted you and how your perspective changed.)

After (a series of embodied questions and prompts)

Identify 2-3 moments or experiences from this assignment where you either felt challenged in some way, or something really grabbed your attention. For each moment, answer the questions below. You must give each experience a name (see example) and then describe the details of each moment/experience using the prompts below. Your entire reflection should be at least 1-2 pages long and include an image or picture that captures your learning.

Name of experience: [example: reading article on how ewaste is destroying the planet]

1. **Describe the context** - Describe where you were, and what was happening at the time (attending a lecture, doing a course readings, speaking with a classmate, etc..). Make sure to describe what you were trying to learn or do at the time.
2. **Unpack the insight** - Describe why the experience challenge you or grabbed your attention in some way. For instance, did you hear or read something that challenged an existing assumption or belief, or made you to think about something in a new way? Were you upset or confused by something you heard or read? Describe why the experience challenged you or captured your attention, and then what changed or shifted within you as a result.
3. **Apply your learning** - As a result of the insights gained from this experience, describe two specific ways in which your thoughts, decisions and actions have changed outside of this class. Describe two things you see yourself doing differently in the future as a result of this experience.

D. Service learning: Identifying Strengths and Gaps in Skills

Before (disembodied prompt)

Provide a 1-2 page reflection paper on your experience with [name of organization and learning experience]-. This should include pre-event, during the event, and post-event. Include items where you were strong as well as areas you can improve.

After

Identify 3 challenging moments or memorable experiences from your work with [name of service learning or action-based learning experience]. Identify moments before, during and after your work with [name of school or organization]. For each moment, answer the questions below. You must give each experience a name (see example) and then describe the details of each moment/experience using the prompts below. Your entire reflection should be at least 1-2 pages long and include an image or picture that captures your learning.

Name of Learning Moment: [example: teaching kids about micro aggressions]

1. **Describe the context** – Where were you when the moment occurred (in a lecture, workshop, conversation with another person, etc.), who were you with, and what were you trying to learn or do at the time?
2. **Unpack the experience** – Why did this moment or experience occur? For instance, did it challenge one or more of your existing assumptions or beliefs, or prompt you to think about something in a new way? Describe in detail why this experience challenged you or captured your attention and what shifted or changed in you as a result.
3. **Uplift others** - Describe two specific ways you can apply what you've learned from this experience to uplifting others at UCO and/or being of service to others in one or more of your communities.
4. **Develop professionally** – Describe two ways you can apply insights from this experience to your development as a professional. What do you see yourself being able to see or do differently in the future as a result of this experience?

VI.A Sample Response to an Embodied Reflection

A weekly reflection from a Generative Coaching Course

Overview

I took this course because I wanted to learn how to interact with people better. So far I've been working on becoming more curious and really trying to listen more closely and "unpack" things people say in order to understand what they mean. While I'm comfortable asking embodied to a friend, it is more difficult for me to be curious with my boss or another coworker. I want to learn how to slow down, ask embodied questions in different situations, and become a better listener.

Skills and Insights Gained

My first a-ha moment last week was learning the concepts of "inner" time and "outer" time. I have a lot of situations in my life where I'm not fully present, which creates a sense of outer time (a feeling of being out of time). It made me think about meetings where I or someone else has a phone out, is surfing the internet or distracted by other things. This really takes away from the moment at hand. The idea of creating "a relational field that will allow for listening and change" and learning to create "inner" time (a sense that there is enough time to listen and be present), seemed like a very powerful idea. As technology and social media make their way into my life more and more, I'm less and less able to create inner time.



The second "ah-ha" moment came when I was at work on Monday after our first class. About half way through the day, I realized that I hadn't been using generative (deep) listening even though I had several opportunities to do so. I had fallen right back into my problem solving listening mode. This was evident in how I interacted with my manager. I needed her help finishing a proposal by the end of the day. She had identified several things I should think about in the morning, but rather than listening to her and asking questions, I decided to just follow our template. As a result, I failed to really understand the issues she raised. I made a decision without understanding the problem. We had to redo a lot of things later in the day, which wasted a lot of time. This made me realize that it is was going to take practice and effort to break my old habits. **A few embodied questions earlier in the day would have saved both of us hours of work!**

My third "a-ha" moment happened on Wednesday when I was working with some other students on a group project. The more I unpacked their comments "When you say it was a success what does that mean to you?", the more I realized we REALLY did not understand each other and we were not on the same page. With the help of some embodied questions, I was able to bring all of our different assumptions out and then we could actually have some progress.

Moving Forward

Before this class, I described myself as a good listener but now I realize that I actually hear very little. I'm too caught up in my own thoughts. My plan is to continue practicing being more curious in all areas of my life. I'm also preparing for some job interviews this week and my plan is to role-play with a friend so that I can practice generative listening and asking embodied questions. I want the people interviewing me to tell me their stories too. So far this class is not only taught me the danger in making assumptions about people, but also given me some tools to ask them questions and learn about them in a non-intimidating way.