

Mighty Microreflection

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So far, Insitu's series on reflection has discussed the value of reflection and its place in online learning. Next up are examples of activities that take less than 1 minute to do and can improve knowledge transfer and retention. We call these short but impactful activities *microreflections*.

So what do we mean by microreflection?

Micro, from the Latin word for "small." Reflection, derived from the Latin words for "back" and "to bend." A microreflection is a small act one can take to think inwards – literally, bending your thoughts back.

MICROREFLECTION

Reflecting on the roots of the word microreflection? That's a microreflection in itself! Even a small exercise can lead to observations and understanding. Accessing that clarity in manageable steps is what microreflection is all about.

When you think about it, microreflection seems pretty approachable, doesn't it? (Yes, that was a microreflection as well.)

Here are some ways of encouraging learners to engage in microreflection, by nudging them along with small reflections in the flow of learning.

Likes and reactions

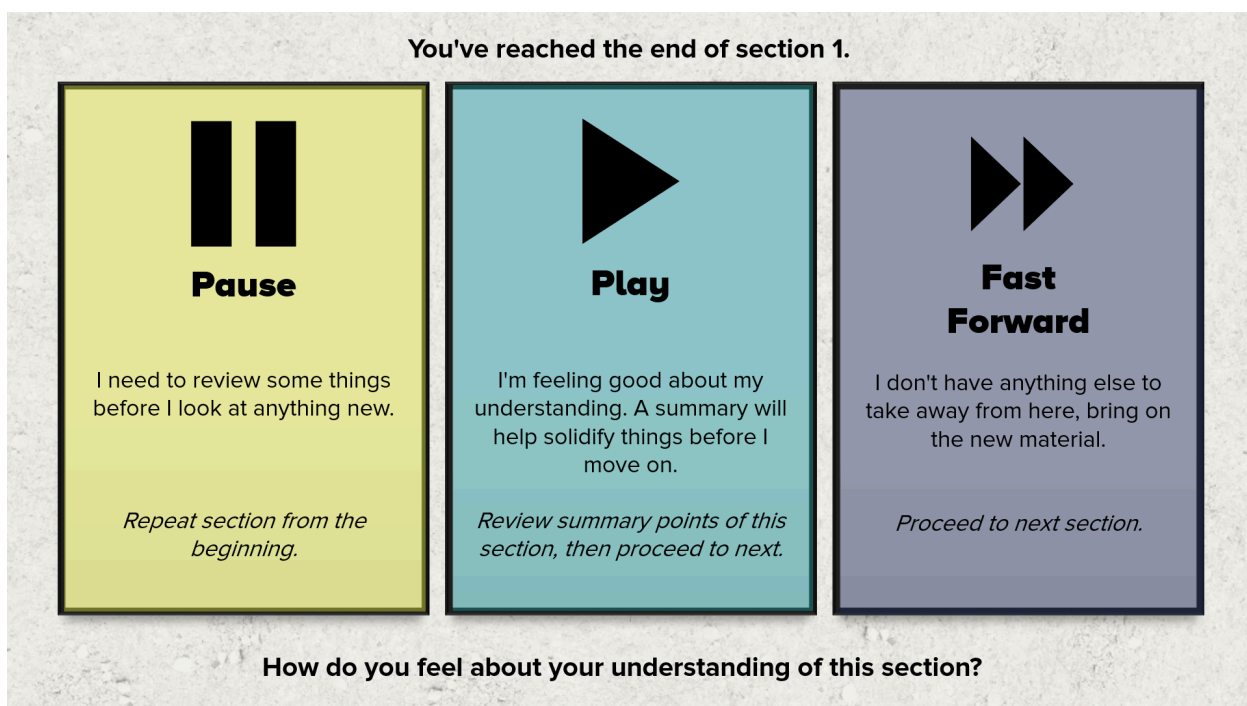
To *like* in the social media definition of the word is to react positively to a piece of content. This can be symbolised by any number of icons – thumbs up, hearts, stars, etc.

Yes, microreflection can be as micro as a single emoji. Symbols for reacting to content are an accessible, universal language. A 'like' can mean agreement, enjoyment, acknowledgement, or support for the content poster. But the ubiquitous thumbs-up isn't the only form of reaction.

Consider using reactions as checkpoints in your learning design to let the learner reflect on their understanding. Let's say you work in an engineering company, and your learner has just finished off one section of your module on hazard analysis. Perhaps you have a couple

multiple choice questions (MCQs) quizzing the learner's recall of a technique or term that was introduced. The learner passes the MCQs with flying colours. Great! Time to march on to the next section, right?

Those questions they got right may have tested if the learner was paying attention to the module, but they likely haven't tested *if* and *how* the learner has integrated that knowledge. But what design *can* do is add a microreflection to ask how comfortable the learner is with the concepts that were just covered, and if they want to review the content again before proceeding to the next section.



Reaction checkpoints for microreflection

Checklists

Do you use a checklist when you go grocery shopping? It's helpful to see everything in one place, right?

Scratch that. Seeing everything in one place isn't always helpful.

Since 1970, the number of cereal varieties in the US doubled over 30 years to reach 340 kinds in 1998 and in the years after that, the variety of cereal has exploded to over [4,000 kinds](#).

This is a classic example of **overchoice**.



Too much choice? ([Image source](#))

Alvin Toffler, futurist & businessman, noted that “overchoice takes place when the advantages of diversity and individualisation are cancelled by the complexity of the buyer’s decision-making process.”

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– Alvin Toffler, futurist and businessman, 1970

Information overload was another phrase popularised by Toffler in 1970, and it’s only increased with the digital age. As of 2022, there’s [2.5 quintillion bytes](#) of data created every day.

Even though you will have designed the most streamlined learning possible, there will still be a lot for learners to take on board. Microreflection in the form of a checklist of suggestions can help control [cognitive overload and attention span](#).

Improving Your Practice

Based on what you've learned here, which of the following steps will you take to improve your practice? Start with ones that you know you can action.

☐

Blocking focus time into calendar

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Teamwork-building session

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Daily meditation

☐

Visual break every 20 minutes of screen time

Checklist for microreflection

A checklist provides a pause point during a piece of learning to reflect on what has just been presented. Along with reflecting back, the learner can also be asked to think ahead about how they can apply what they've encountered.

Make sure to only present a few suggestions. Having the learner select between them strikes a balance where choice feels empowering rather than overwhelming.

Confidence sliders

How many times have you had a course test your knowledge on the subject it taught? Probably almost always. But they always ask *what* you know, and not *how well* you know it.

Feeling confident in your knowledge can be overlooked during training, but it's a key part of learning.



An autoclave uses high-pressurised steam to sterilise equipment. ([Image source](#))

Imagine you find yourself using the hospital's very large, very expensive autoclave for the first time without supervision. You've watched your mentor and trained enough that you were trusted to do this task on your own now. You put in your plethora of pipette tips, set the heat and time, and step out of the autoclave room feeling accomplished.

Not a minute later, the ground starts to shake under your feet. Good gracious, did you explode the machine?! That can't be possible, surely there would be some sort of failsafe — oh, turns out it was actually a light earthquake (no harm done, fortunately). What timing!

A true story from yours truly. I would have said I felt fairly confident in the work I did, although that was definitely put to the test. A goal of learning should be to feel assured in applying what you know. Though feeling confident doesn't mean you should dismiss the possibility of making mistakes, either.

On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about explaining our company's health and safety procedures to a peer?

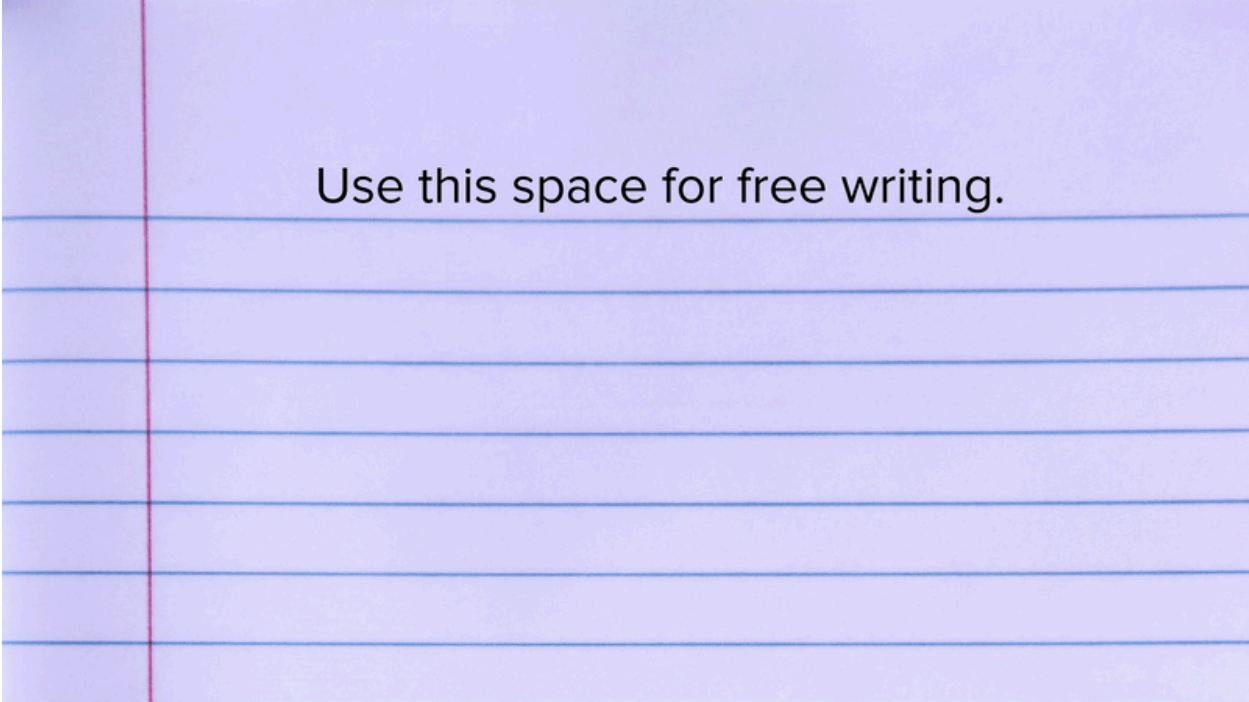


Slider for microreflection

A confidence slider is an opportunity for learners to reflect on a dimension of their understanding that they're not often asked. Taking less than a minute to consider makes this question a microreflection.

Gauging your confidence is as simple as asking the following. What resources could help bolster your understanding? And if you're feeling confident, what specifically has helped you feel self-assured?

Whether it be likes, reactions, checklists, or sliders, it takes just a short time for microreflections to have a big impact.



Use this space for free writing.

Free writing reflection

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