

Applying Reflective Frameworks to Environmental Law teaching and assessment practice-new rubrics

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**We respectfully acknowledge the Kaurna,
Boandik, and Barngarla First Nations
Peoples and their Elders past and present,
who are the Traditional Owners of the
lands that are home to our campuses
across Adelaide and South Australia.**

01

**What skills does a competent
REFLECTIVE environmental lawyer
need to comply with Australian
Standards and cope with the polycrisis?**

REFLECTION:

Respond to systemic challenges: Strengthen the capacity of legal professionals and the profession to respond to historic, current, and evolving disorienting and disruptive challenges facing democratic societies and the legal profession—captured by the term “polycrisis” and the United Nations 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goal 16.3 on equal access to justice and the rule of law.

Reflective inquiry and practice can deepen understanding of these systemic challenges and enhance the ability to respond authentically and effectively.

Michele Leering and Judith Macnamara mentioned this on day 1

Aust legal education Standards

(Version 1.3, 2020) by the Council of Australian Law Deans

TLO	Outcome
TLO1	Knowledge
TLO2	Ethics and Professional Responsibility UNDERSTAND LAWYERS RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS, COURTS, JUSTICE AND SOCIETY
TLO3	Thinking Skills ANALYSE LEGAL ISSUES CRITICALLY
TLO4	Research Skills
TLO5	Communication and Collaboration
TLO6	Self-Management Includes REFLECT ON THEIR LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE

THE MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER AND ALL LAWYERS 2025

Personal values and character traits – including ethics and integrity, a growth mindset, professional humility, and resilience. • Interpersonal skills – communication skills, emotional intelligence, relationship-building and people skills, and collaboration. • Technical legal skills – grounding in legal doctrine, legal research and writing, the ability to synthesise complex concepts and explain them simply, and forensic judgement. • Business of law skills – client relationships, commerciality, digital literacy and AI-awareness.

The **Centre for the Future of the Legal Profession** at **UNSW Law & Justice** has just published a new report: 'New skills for new suits: Preparing new lawyers for practice' based on discussions with participants from leading law firms, the bar, legal regulators, academics and current law students. The discussions sought to identify and analyse critical issues in the new lawyer journey, and devise strategies to develop graduate skills, and explore skills development.

Environmental law 2019 course learning objectives

- 1. Identify key environmental issues** at the national, state, and local level.
- 2. Demonstrate knowledge of key principles** of national and state law relating to environmental protection.
- 3. Describe State and Federal powers, responsibilities, and institutions** in Australian Environmental Law.
- 4. Analyse relationships between environmental laws** across multiple sectors and jurisdictions (local, state, and national).
- 5. Apply legislation, regulations, and case law** to provide advice on environmental problems. **Demonstrate basic proficiency in using the online Planning and Design Code**

Environmental law-Roadmap module 1 and part module 2

REFLECTION

3 Aug - 7 Aug	1	1.1 What is 'environment' and environmental law and human rights environmental defenders.	Topic 1 - Issues for Further Clarification	
10 Aug - 14 Aug	1	2.1 Principles of international environmental law (e.g., public participation, precautionary principle, ESD etc). environment in war	Topic 2 - Issues for Further Clarification	
17 Aug - 21 Aug	1	Federal/constitutional issues	Topic 3 - Issues for Further Clarification	
24 Aug - 28 Aug	Extension Week			
31 Aug - 4 Sep	2	Planning Law	Topic 4 - Issues for Further Clarification	Quiz (due Aug 31st 11:59PM) 5% (10 Questions)
7 Sep - 11 Sep	2	Planning Law	Topic 5 - Issues for Further Clarification	

HAS A
REFLECTION
QUESTION

Roadmap modules 2 and 3

REFLECTION

21 Sep – 25 Sep	3	Pollution Laws	Topic 7 - Issues for Further Clarification	ASSESSMENT 2 REFLECTION ASPECT ON South aust laws
28 Sep – 9 Oct	Mid-semester break			
12 Oct – 16 Oct	Extension Week			
19 Oct – 23 Oct	3	Commonwealth EPBC Act	Topic 8 - Issues for Further Clarification	
26 Oct – 30 Oct	3	Bio Diversity and Native vegetation Law	Topic 9 - Issues for Further Clarification	ASSESSMENT 3 REFLECTION ASPECT ON South aust laws AND OVERALL RELFECTION
2 Nov – 6 Nov	3	Litigation	Topic 10 - Issues for Further Clarification	
9 Nov – 13	Extension Week			

Reflection is central to effective law teaching because it helps students move beyond knowing rules to understanding how legal reasoning operates in context.

In environmental law, where disputes are fact-rich, values-laden and shaped by science, policy and community perspectives, reflective learning supports a more nuanced professional identity.

Michelle Leering

Essential for the TLOS and the Growth mindset and CLOs

After three years of work on reflection in legal education, the author has completely revised the course, assessments and rubrics.

The new course integrates four reflective practices from Kolb, Burton and McNamara, Leering and the lessons from McKay et.al published papers.

The new course strengthens the integration of critical reflection and practical skills and enhances alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment and importantly revised the rubrics to assess these.

The new course incorporates an assessment of a detailed case study of a data centre, requiring application of several Australian environmental laws. The teaching method teaches students to actively analyse, question, and reconsider beliefs, knowledge, and experiences—especially legal doctrines and practices—by examining their underlying assumptions, perspectives, and consequences. The methods used will be presented and after delivery semester 2, these methods/ rubrics will be evaluated.

Results from McKay works on peer review, presentation skills and study tour:

- **Deep reflection was exhibited when students were given reflective articles to read**
- **Students needed to be reminded to reflect every week**
- **Teacher must model reflective practice**

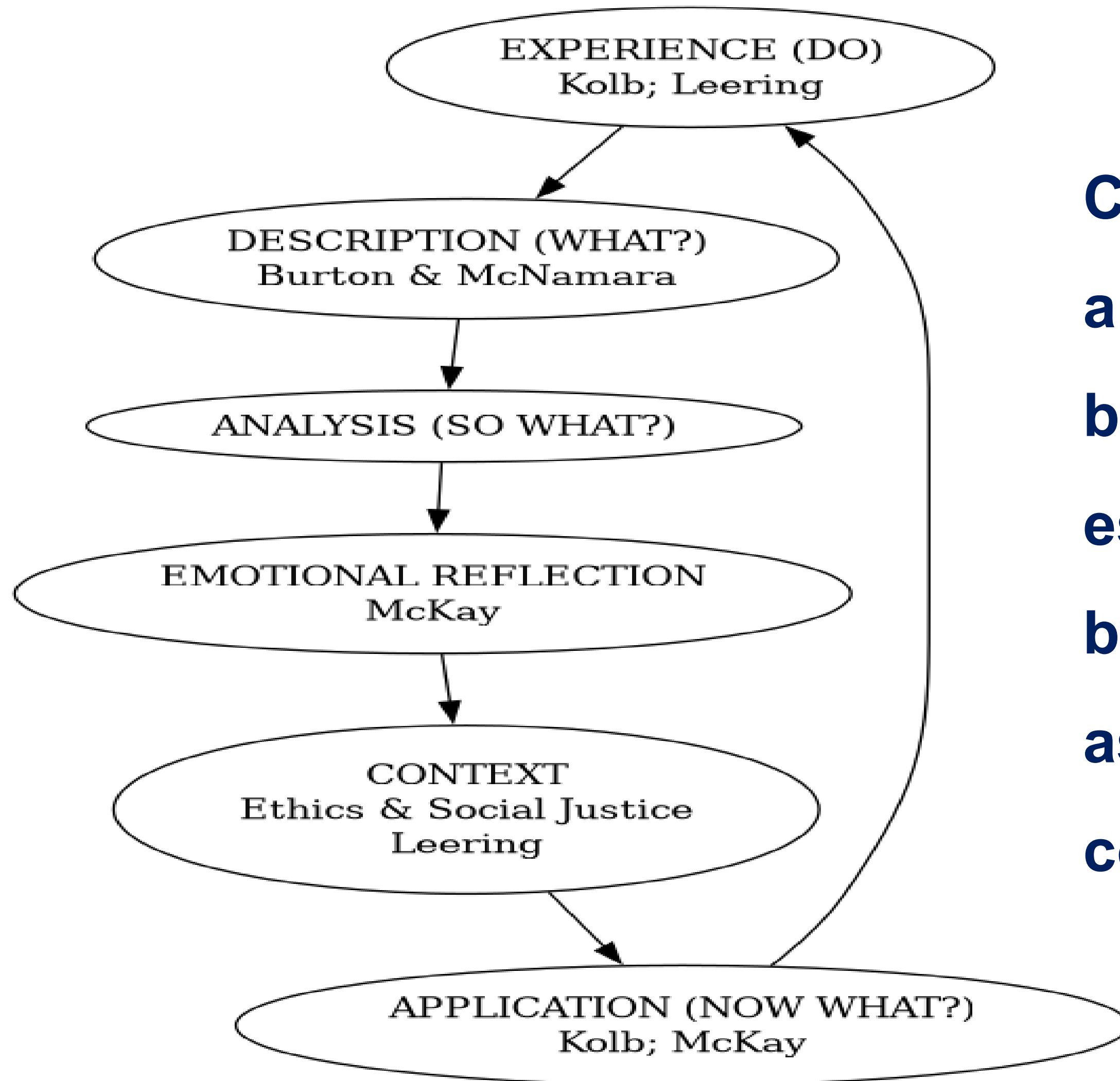
03

Reflection is an integrative meta competency

**Transformative reflections promote action to
restore justice**

Reflective practice design for Laws 2019 Environmental law

Critical reflection is the process of actively analysing, questioning, and reconsidering beliefs, knowledge, and experiences—especially legal doctrines and practices—by examining their underlying assumptions, perspectives, and consequences.



Promoting reflection by environmental law students on the wicked problems in this area of law is one pathway to create climate conscious lawyers, as defined by Justice Preston.

This presentation presents a process to create enhanced reflection.

The paper goes through the embedding process, the pedagogy used from week 1 in workshops, the questions asked and the method that the two-way interactions will be encouraged.

The slides used in week 1 will be presented

Burton and McNamara draw upon David Kolb's experiential learning cycle to define reflection as generating self-awareness, validating actions, and creating plans based on experiences.

In a law context, this requires students to move beyond simply recounting facts and instead critically examine their own assumptions, legal knowledge, and problem-solving processes.

PEDAGOGICAL METHODS PROMOTING REFLECTION:

Role modelling
Discussion boards

GROUP WORKSHOPS
Weekly newsletter
Self awareness exercises
Self assessment exercises
Reflective questioning
Reflective assignments
Contemplative practice
Feedback practices

Manner of conducting classes
After lectures to promote anonymous reflections

Two- way interaction weekly
Summary
Quiz has a question on reflection

In workshops
rubrics

Rubrics and more

Short reflective piece after every week lecture and workshop:

Short reflective submission (5–7 minutes)

150 words max on the site after each lecture

- Must include:

- one insight
- one professional application
- one concrete action

This keeps it **focused and assessable** (and avoids vague reflections).

Modelling by teacher

To embed reflection I will make it routine, brief and connected to authentic legal tasks.

I will model reflection by “thinking aloud” through uncertainty in a case, acknowledging how policy commitments and evidentiary limits shape legal arguments.

Reflection in case study

The reflection will be graded. Criteria will reward depth of analysis rather than personal disclosure.

Aspects of the rubric include:

- clarity in describing the experience or task;**
- identification of assumptions and alternative viewpoints; integration of legal sources and relevant theory (such as regulatory design, environmental justice or risk);**
- and articulation of specific next steps for learning or practice.**

Social impacts questions:

Who is affected by this legal issue, and how?

Are there barriers to justice in this case (e.g., cost, language, inequality)?

How can I contribute to a fairer outcome?

Did I consider broader social impacts beyond the legal rules?

Case study reflection questions:

What did I learn from this experience?

What challenges did I face, and how did I respond?

How has this experience changed my understanding of lawyering?

How will I apply this learning in future situations?

Critical reflection for case study assessments:

5. Critical Reflection (20%)

Ethical Awareness & Professional Judgment

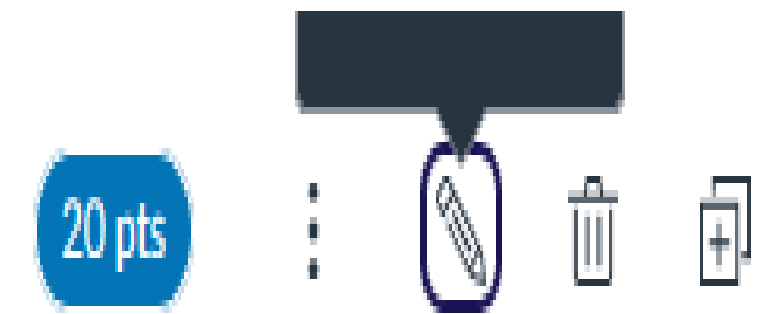
Social & Environmental Context

Reflexivity (Self-awareness)

Future Application & Insight

(CLO3)

> Rating Scale: 5





RUBRICS for Case Study

PASS:

For a Pass level descriptor, you could rephrase it in a more developmental and student-centred way:

- **Identifies ways in which learning may be applied in future academic, professional, or personal contexts, with emerging consideration of realistic and achievable next steps.**

Or, if you would like something slightly more concise:

- **Describes potential applications of learning to future contexts and demonstrates developing awareness of realistic opportunities for further growth and practice.**

Or, in a reflective-law-education style (I'm guessing here 😊):

- **Highlights how learning could inform future legal study or practice, identifying achievable areas for continued development and application**

CREDIT:

For a Credit level descriptor, you could frame it positively as:

- **Explains how learning can be applied in future academic, professional, or legal contexts, providing relevant examples and some detail about realistic next steps for development.**

Or:

- **Identifies and discusses meaningful opportunities to apply learning in future contexts, demonstrating growing insight into personal and professional development.**

Or:

- **Demonstrates consideration of how learning may inform future legal study or practice, outlining practical and achievable ways to build on current knowledge and skills.**

These formulations encourage students to move beyond simply identifying future applications by adding relevant examples, practical detail, and reflection on their ongoing development.

DISTINCTION:

- **Demonstrates thoughtful insight into how learning can be applied in future academic, professional, or legal contexts, identifying practical and well-considered strategies for ongoing development.**

Or:

- **Provides clear and practical insights drawn from reflection, showing how learning can be meaningfully applied to future legal study, professional practice, and personal growth.**

Or, if you want to emphasise a stronger reflective dimension:

- **Critically considers the implications of learning for future contexts and articulates realistic, purposeful approaches for applying and further developing knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities.**

HIGH DISTINCTION:

- **Demonstrates sophisticated insight into the significance of learning and articulates clear, strategic, and achievable approaches for applying this learning to future legal study, professional practice, and ongoing professional development.**

Or:

- **Integrates reflection and forward planning to identify meaningful and actionable ways to apply learning in future legal contexts, demonstrating a strong commitment to continuous growth and professional capability.**

Or, for a more concise rubric style:

- **Provides insightful and well-developed reflection that clearly connects learning to future legal practice, identifying strategic and realistic actions for continued development and impact.**

Rubric

- **Core Assessment Criteria:** To evaluate reflective skills objectively, structure your rubric around four distinct criteria: []
- **Description and Context (10–20%):** How accurately the student identifies and summarizes the legal experience, event, or problem.
- **Critical Analysis and Synthesis:** How deeply the student examines their assumptions, identifies gaps in their legal knowledge, and links the experience to legal theory or professional ethics. []
- **Self-Awareness and Evaluation:** How effectively the student recognizes their own emotional responses, biases, strengths, and weaknesses during the legal task. []
- **Future Action Planning:** The clarity and feasibility of the student's plan to modify their future legal practice, study habits, or professional behaviour.

PLANS:

Evaluate all pedagogical techniques used while teaching:

- 1) The quiz and reflection slides**
- 2) the rubrics after the case study data centre and 2 SA laws**
- 3) the rubrics after the application of 4 laws to data centre problem**

Outcomes:

Paper for the Reflection series

- 1) on the quiz and reflection lecture**
- 2) on the anon posts**
- 3) on the modelling in the workshops and**
- 4) on the rubrics**

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