

Self-awareness: personal growth is the first step for employability

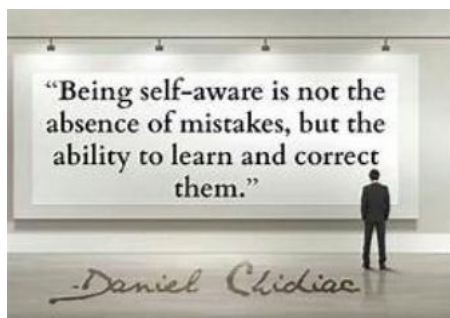
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Self-awareness? Isn't that just knowing your strengths and weaknesses and CVs?

I initially thought so too, until I realised it was much more than that. Self-awareness is the foundation of personal growth and development. It involves exploring your values, actions, emotions and motivations, so you can learn and improve over time.

It is not about being perfect or overly critical of yourself. Instead, it is about recognising who you are now and identifying how you can grow.



What is Self-Awareness and it's role?

Self-awareness is the ability to understand your thoughts, feelings, and actions, and how they affect both you and others. It helps you recognise patterns in how you respond to challenges, work in teams, and manage pressure. It often shows up in moments of reflection, such as: 'Now I understand why I reacted that way' or 'I didn't realise how my body language or tone affected others'

Self-discovery is closely linked to self-awareness. It involves asking yourself what matters to you, what motivates you, and what kind of future you want to work toward. Once you begin to understand these aspects of yourself, it becomes easier to make decisions that align with your goals, academically, personally, and professionally. Regular self-reflection strengthens self-awareness, supports well-being, and helps you grow with intention.

Why Self Awareness Matters

Many students focus solely on gaining experience, but overlook the importance of understanding how they work, learn, and interact with others. Without self-awareness,

it is difficult to identify areas for improvement or explain your strengths convincingly to employers.

Imagine a demanding week at university: deadlines are approaching, group work feels unbalanced, and stress begins to build. You may feel frustrated, overwhelmed, or disengaged, which can affect communication and teamwork. When these feelings are ignored or bottled up, pressure increases, and performance suffers.

Self-awareness allows you to pause and acknowledge how you are feeling, “I’m exhausted” or “I’m stressed”, and take constructive action. This might involve asking for support, adjusting your approach, or reflecting on how to communicate more effectively. These are the same skills employers value in the workplace.



Six ways students can build self-awareness:

1. [Reflect Regularly](#)

After assignments, presentations, exams, or group work, ask yourself: What went well? What was challenging? What would I do differently next time? Reflection turns experience into learning.

2. Ask for Feedback

Feedback from tutors, peers, or supervisors can highlight strengths and areas for development you may not notice yourself. You can also use structured tools such as:

- Personality Tests – Tools such as [Myers-Briggs \(MBTI\)](#) and the [Big Five Questionnaire](#) help you understand personality traits, work style and the most suitable career route.
- Reflective journaling – Writing down your thoughts and feelings about your work and tasks can help identify patterns, issues and areas for improvement.
- [Skills audits](#) – Looking back on past experiences and decisions helps you learn from mistakes and identify areas to grow.

You can also book one-to-one support through the [University of Westminster Careers and Employability Service](#).

3. Pay attention to emotions

Stress and uncertainty are normal, especially when you lack work experience. Talking openly with friends, family, or support services can help you process emotions and think more clearly.

4. Set Goals

Creating realistic, [SMART goals](#) (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timebound) can help you focus on self-improvement. Setting weekly achievable goals aligns with values and reduces risk.

5. Notice your habits

Become aware of when you procrastinate, when you feel most focused, and what drains your energy. Small changes, taking breaks, staying hydrated, and moving regularly can significantly improve productivity and well-being.

6. Step outside your comfort zone

Trying new activities, [joining a society](#), [volunteering](#), and learning a [new skill](#) help you adapt, build confidence, and discover what you enjoy. New experiences help you discover what you enjoy, what works best for you, and what does not, helping you grow and understand yourself better.

The benefits of self-discovery and reflection

Self-discovery and reflection can have several benefits, including:

- Better decision-making aligned with personal values and goals
- Improved communication and stronger relationships
- Reduced stress through early recognition of challenges
- Greater confidence when articulating skills, strengths, and potential to employers

Self-discovery and reflection are crucial steps towards self-awareness, personal development, and long-term growth.

Final thoughts:



Self-awareness is not about overthinking every decision or being too hard on yourself. It is about understanding yourself well enough to grow with purpose.

You don't need to have everything figured out; you just need to be willing to reflect and learn.