# The Humble Mindset

Becoming aware of belief and emotion while learning something new

RELATING | Humility

## What you will need:

- Up to 20
- Individual, duo's or groups of three
- The more preparation time, the better
- 1.5 - 2 hrs
- Material for exposure (e.g., video or text)

## Related Tools:

Participate as a Pro

## Menu:



"Reflect on your internal reactions to new, controversial or opposing perspectives to cultivate intellectual humility. This will strengthen habits of openness, curiosity and goodwill."

**—Pascal Frank**

## I. Overview

Epistemic Recontextualisation (ER) is a reflective practice that helps become aware of the emotions, beliefs and assumptions that shape how we engage with new or challenging information. It invites us to pause and examine our internal responses before jumping to conclusions — especially when confronted with ideas we disagree with.

The term epistemic refers to how we generate and justify knowledge. Recontextualisation means putting familiar thoughts or reactions in a different context, so we can see them with fresh eyes. Together, ER encourages a shift from automatic reactions to more conscious, constructive perspectives.

This practice draws on the concept of *reflexive knowledge generation* (Frank, 2018): the recognition that our inner states — such as frustration, doubt or enthusiasm — shape what we accept or reject as knowledge (Rudner, 1953). Emotional responses are not suppressed in ER; instead, they are used as gateways to deeper reflection.

In this sense, both reflexive knowledge generation and ER aim to reveal how our internal processes shape our judgments about what is true or false. By applying ER, students can practice intellectual humility and develop habits of openness, curiosity and benevolence — essential attitudes for collaboration and societal learning.

**Learning outcome**

- The student becomes aware of and is able to critically engage with unreflected emotional reactions, beliefs and motivations and approach new or conflicting information with openness and humility

## II. Learning Activity

Students analyse their patterns, emotions and biases when relating to new information, so that they can approach others' perspectives with openness, humility, curiosity and benevolence.

### 1. Reflexive Exposure

10-15 mins

Expose students to a chosen source of information that conveys a provocative or controversial topic. For example, in a sustainability-related course, you could use a short pro-meat documentary claiming consumption isn't harmful to the environment.

Students observe their internal reactions to this controversial content. They should take unfiltered notes on their immediate reactions to the material and write exactly what comes to mind, whether it's disbelief ("That's not true!"), scepticism ("The producer is probably biased"), or curiosity ("I never thought about that"). Remind them that their reactions can express acceptance or refusal of the new information.

Afterwards, students share their notes in small groups, focusing on collecting diverse perspectives to encourage an open and inclusive discussion.

**Tip**: provide students with the Reflexive Exposure table to use in Steps 1, 2 and 3.

### 2. Self-analysis

20 – 30 mins

Explain that this next step helps students reflect on their experiences and connections to the content. Emphasise that the goal is not to judge the validity of their reactions, but to recognise personal beliefs and emotions, and their impact on processing this new information.

Consider sharing a self-analysis example, using the Reflexive Exposure table for inspiration.

The following questions can be helpful:

- What emotions do I feel (anger, frustration, satisfaction, …)?
- How do I relate to the information? Do I accept or refuse the statements made?
- What beliefs do I hold that explain or result in this reaction?

Invite students to exchange and give feedback on their self-analyses in small groups and then finally share with the entire group. This exchange might lead to adaptations or additions to their initial insights.

**Tip**: if students struggled with their self-analysis, this is an opportunity to deepen their insights by learning and exchanging with others.

### 3. Identifying Epistemic Criteria

15 – 20 mins

Epistemic criteria are the standards we use to acquire, justify and evaluate knowledge. Invite students to become aware of the criteria – both conscious and unconscious – they apply when evaluating the truth of new information. Using the Epistemic Virtues and Criteria hand-out, explain briefly what epistemic criteria are, and provide examples:

- **Trustworthiness and/or credibility of the author**: If the author is deemed untrustworthy, their statement is rejected.
- **Personal knowledge and/or experience**: If the argument contradicts what the learner already knows or has learned, it is rejected.

Remind students that the aim is not to judge these criteria, but to explore them openly, regardless of what they personally deem appropriate.

Students discuss their criteria based on their self-analysis. Finally, invite them to share what they identified.

**Tip**: use this sharing to encourage deepening the students' understanding of how they relate to new information. For example, if prior knowledge is identified as a criterion, explore where this knowledge comes from.

### 4. Recontextualisation

30 mins

Students transfer their reactions and epistemic criteria to different contexts (recontextualisation), to identify incongruencies in how they process new information. First individually, and then sharing their insights in pairs or original small groups.

Using the Recontextualisation Strategies hand-out, explain the four recontextualisation strategies that students could be encouraged to apply.

Recontextualisation can be complex, so support students throughout this step. You could provide examples for each of the four recontextualisation strategies.

This might require students to revisit earlier steps to refine insights, as the process is iterative, not linear.

**Tip**: let students experiment with one strategy first. If time permits, they can explore all four strategies. You could assign different strategies to different groups.

### 5. Epistemic Virtues and Societal Change

15 mins

Epistemic virtues are intellectual qualities that foster critical thinking, curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge. Students consider how virtues like openness, curiosity, modesty and benevolence shape their understanding and impact societal transitions.

Facilitate a plenary group discussion on how evaluating information through epistemic virtues affects their interpretations. Encourage them to revisit Step 1 with fresh perspectives:

- How do these virtues change their evaluation of information?

- Can they explore alternative interpretations?
- What new insights emerge?

For example, students may recognise that dismissing information based on personal experience limits openness to different viewpoints, while approaching it with curiosity fosters deeper understanding and dialogue.

**Please note**, assessment can be done either in form of a written assignment, or by applying Epistemic Recontextualisation independently to a specific case and evaluation by one of their peers or the teacher.

## III. Assessment

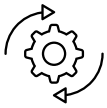
Students can be assessed either in written form of an assignment, or by applying Epistemic Recontextualisation independently to a specific case and evaluation by one of their peers or the teacher.

**Purpose**

Assessment *of* learning (summative assessment) aims to evaluate the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning outcomes.
Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.

**Roles**

Teacher-led assessment, optionally peer assessment



**Characteristics**

Authentic

**Materials**

Assignment and assessment form for written reflection

# Written Reflection Using Epistemic Recontextualisation

The goal of this assignment is to explore how your internal responses — such as emotions, assumptions or prior beliefs — shape how you engage with a complex or controversial piece of information. You will apply the steps of Epistemic Recontextualisation (ER) to reflect critically on your reactions and explore how a change of perspective or context may shift your interpretation.

**Instructions**
Choose a short case, article, video or opinion piece that presents a viewpoint, argument or claim that you find unfamiliar, provocative or difficult to agree with. Write a structured reflection (ca. 1000–1200 words) in which you apply the following ER steps:

**1. Reflexive Exposure**
Briefly describe the material you selected and your immediate internal reactions to it. Be honest and unfiltered — include thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations.

**2. Self-analysis**
Analyse your reaction:

- What beliefs, assumptions or past experiences do you think contributed to this response?
- What emotions or values were triggered?
- What does this tell you about how you relate to this topic?

**3. Identifying Epistemic Criteria**
Identify the standards (epistemic criteria) you used — consciously or unconsciously — to judge the information, for example:

- “I didn’t trust the speaker because they had a commercial agenda”
- “This contradicted what I learned in class.”

**4. Recontextualisation**
Choose at least one recontextualisation strategy and apply it. Describe how viewing the information through a different lens or context changes your interpretation, for example:

- “When I considered this argument from the perspective of someone with a different cultural background than mine, it started to seem more plausible…”

**5. Epistemic Virtues**
Reflect on how practicing epistemic virtues (e.g., curiosity, openness, modesty, benevolence) helped you reframe your thinking, or could help in the future.

## Assessment Form

**Assessment Form – Written Reflection Using Epistemic Recontextualisation**

Student name:

Assessor:

Date:

| Criteria | Level 3: Strong | Level 2: Sufficient | Level 1: Needs Development |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Reflexive Exposure** Describes immediate reactions to the selected material. | Clear and honest description of personal reactions, showing openness and depth. | Adequate description of reactions, but somewhat limited or general. | Superficial or vague description; reactions unclear or missing. |
| **2. Self-analysis** Analyses beliefs, assumptions, and emotions behind the response. | Connects reactions to underlying beliefs and values with insight and nuance. | Identifies beliefs/emotions with some clarity, though reflection may lack depth. | Lacks self-awareness; analysis is absent or shallow. |
| **3. Epistemic Criteria** Identifies personal standards for evaluating knowledge. | Clearly identifies and reflects on relevant epistemic criteria. | Mentions at least one relevant criterion with some explanation. | Criteria are unclear, missing or misunderstood. |
| **4. Recontextualisation** Applies a strategy to shift interpretation. | Effectively applies a strategy and explains how it changes understanding. | Attempts recontextualisation with some reflection on the outcome. | Strategy unclear or missing; no meaningful shift in perspective. |
| **5. Epistemic Virtues** Reflects on the role of virtues like openness and modesty. | Thoughtful reflection on how virtues shaped or could shape interpretation. | Basic mention of virtues with limited connection to learning. | No meaningful engagement with epistemic virtues. |
| **6. Overall Coherence** Clarity, structure and flow of the reflection. | Clear structure, logical flow and accessible writing throughout. | Mostly clear and structured, with minor issues. | Disorganised, hard to follow or lacking in clarity. |

**Comments / Feedback**

Strengths:

Suggestions for improvement:

Overall impression/grade (if applicable):

## IV. Key Advice

Ideally, Epistemic Recontextualisation is introduced and practiced over a longer period or throughout a course, as the self-reflexive approach to processing new information is often unfamiliar to students and it takes time to develop the capacity to notice and interpret internal states while being exposed to new information. There's no fixed duration for each step; more time simply allows for deeper engagement.

Epistemic Recontextualisation is grounded in an embodied inquiry – paying attention to one's inner responses and processes when exposed to new evidence or information. As a teacher, emphasise this to students and explicitly invite them to explore their *felt* experience.

ER does not make claims about the truth or accuracy of the information students encounter. Instead, it focuses on helping them reflect on their internal reactions and processes in response to that information.

The **Reflexive Exposure Table** (Steps 1, 2 and 3), the **Epistemic Virtues and Criteria** (Step 3) and the **Recontextualisation Strategies** hand-out (Step 4) can be downloaded below.

# Reflexive Exposure Table

## Example

| Step 1 | | Step 2 | | | Step 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Quote** | **Spontaneous reaction** | **Emotion** | **Relation to argument** | **Belief** | **Epistemic criterion** |
| "The consumption of green water by cows does not matter" | "It does, because…" | Annoyance, anger, frustration | Refusing the argument | "Industrially holding cows is bad for the environment"<br><br>"The video maker and the people providing the information are not credible"<br><br>"A person who works for the meat industry is not credible"<br><br>"The person is not accurate about the information provided" | Lack of credibility<br><br>Personal background of the other side<br><br>Appearance of the person who makes an argument<br><br>Personal knowledge |
| "Humans do not have to eat food that is grown for animals. The land can be used to grow other crops" | "This is a good argument."<br><br>"He has destroyed the opponent" | Excitement | Accepting the argument | "The land can be used to grow other crops"<br><br>"The person is trustworthy | Personal background / own beliefs<br><br>Trust in the person; personal feeling of right and wrong |

# Reflexive Exposure Table

| Step 1 | | Step 2 | | | Step 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Quote** | **Spontaneous reaction** | **Emotion** | **Relation to argument** | **Belief** | **Epistemic criterion** |
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# Epistemic Virtues

**Epistemic virtues** are character traits — such as curiosity, open-mindedness and humility — that support the pursuit, evaluation and responsible use of knowledge. Beyond facilitating meaningful dialogue, learning and decision-making, these qualities are especially relevant when navigating uncertainty, disagreement and complex societal issues. Reflecting on how such virtues influence our knowledge can help identify more constructive and inclusive pathways for societal change.

These virtues are not rules, but habits of mind that shape how we respond to information and each other.

**Why do epistemic virtues matter?**

- They help us slow down automatic judgments.
- They support collaboration across differences.
- They improve the quality of our reasoning and reflection.
- They are essential for navigating societal transitions.

**Core epistemic virtues with practical meaning**

| Virtue | What it means in practice |
|---|---|
| **Openness** | Willingness to hear unfamiliar views, even when they feel uncomfortable |
| **Curiosity** | Asking questions instead of making assumptions; wanting to understand the “why.” |
| **Modesty** | Recognising that your knowledge is limited or may be wrong. |
| **Benevolence** | Trying to understand others charitably — assuming they have reasons for their views. |

## Everyday examples of epistemic virtues

| Situation | Epistemic response with virtue | Alternative (non-virtuous) response |
|---|---|---|
| You hear a view that contradicts your own. | "Interesting, I wonder what they base that on." (Curiosity) | "That's just wrong." |
| You feel irritated by a controversial video. | "Why do I feel this way?" (Openness + Modesty) | "This is clearly propaganda." |
| You don't know how to respond in a discussion. | "I'm not sure — I'd like to hear more first." (Modesty) | "Whatever, this isn't worth it." |
| Someone expresses a belief you find naive. | "Maybe there's something in their experience I'm missing." (Benevolence) | "They clearly don't understand the topic." |

## Reflective questions

1. Which epistemic virtues come naturally to me?

2. Which do I find more difficult to practice?

3. How would discussions or group work improve if everyone applied these virtues more consciously?

## Understanding Epistemic Criteria

**Epistemic criteria** are the — often implicit — standards we use to assess whether information is trustworthy, relevant or credible. They guide how we evaluate, accept or reject knowledge.

These criteria vary between individuals and contexts and are shaped by education, personal experiences, culture, values and emotions. Becoming aware of your epistemic criteria helps you reflect critically on how you engage with knowledge, not just *what* you believe, but *why*.

**Why are epistemic criteria important?**

- They shape your judgments — often without you realising it.
- They determine how open you are to unfamiliar or conflicting perspectives.
- They influence how you learn, discuss, and collaborate.

**Examples of epistemic criteria, grouped by type**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Source-related criteria** | Authority: "The speaker is an expert in this field." | Credibility: "This website shares factual and well-researched information." | Independence: "This report comes from a neutral organisation, not a lobby group." |
| **2. Content-based criteria** | Consistency with prior knowledge: "This matches what I've learned before." | Logical coherence: "The argument is clear and logically structured." | Empirical evidence: "There are data, statistics, or observations to support it." |
| **3. Experience-based criteria** | Personal experience: "This fits with what I've seen or lived through." | Sensory cues: "The images seem real, not staged or manipulated." | Narrative persuasiveness: "The story feels authentic and emotionally convincing." |
| **4. Contextual or relational criteria** | Perceived intention: "The speaker seems honest and well-meaning." | Emotional resonance: "It feels sincere/manipulative/biased." | Cognitive dissonance: "This challenges my worldview or values." |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **5. Value-based criteria** | Moral alignment: “This conflicts with my ethical beliefs.” | Social legitimacy: “People in my community don’t take this seriously.” | Societal impact: “The consequences of this information seem harmful.” |

**Reflective questions**

1. What criteria do I use to decide whether I trust a piece of information?

2. How do emotions or values influence my judgment?

3. Am I aware that others may use different criteria than I do?

4. How do my criteria affect my openness to new perspectives?

## Recontextualisation Strategies

**Epistemic Recontextualisation** (ER) is a method designed to help make non-rational influences on how we engage with arguments and information more conscious and to use these influences to approach this engagement in a more open, constructive and charitable manner. ER assumes that emotions, motivations, (unreflected) beliefs and situational conditions (such as physical states or external circumstances) unconsciously affect the epistemic evaluation of arguments. ER does not seek to overcome these influences, but to deliberately make them useful for engaging with arguments and information.

The core of this method involves systematically transferring non-rational influences into different contexts or using such contexts as a heuristic to raise awareness of these influences (recontextualisation). Students are invited to think of contexts that contrast the reactions they have observed previously, identifying incongruencies in the way information is rejected or accepted and to deepen insights into their inner states and processes that influence their relationship with new information. The goal is to be able to replace habitual or affective reactions to arguments with new, consciously chosen perspectives (e.g., based on modesty, openness, benevolence, …).

In the following, four different recontextualisation strategies – the polarisation strategy, thematic recontextualisation, self-reference, and dialogic comparison – will be presented and applied to a specific example: a student has watched a movie in which it is argued that beef production does not require large amounts of water. The student has rejected this idea and identified the perceived lack of credibility of the video's author because of their affiliation with the animal-based food industry as the central criterion for their rejection.

**1. Polarisation strategy**
This strategy involves comparing one's reactions to evidence defending the opposite point of view.

The student might inquire into their reactions when engaging with evidence emphasising the negative impact of cows on water. Through this process, the student might find out they are willing to accept such claims, even though the author is affiliated with animal-rights movements.

**2. Thematic recontextualisation**
The same type of statements is reflected in different thematic contexts and one's reactions compared to those prompted in the original context. This approach helps to

reveal possible inconsistencies in the epistemic criteria used across different thematic discussions.

The student might imagine the following contexts: If a politician from a green party makes a statement about climate change, would I question their credibility because of their party affiliation? If an OXFAM employee provides information about social injustice, would I reject the information because of their affiliation with the NGO?

**3. Self-reference**
This strategy aims to reflect one's reactions and criteria in light of one's statements and ways of expressing them.

Self-reference might reveal that the student is active in the Plant-Based-University movement themself. To what extent does it affect their credibility? Should others stop listening to them because of this affiliation?

**4. Dialogical comparison**
Personal reactions, beliefs and epistemic criteria are contrasted in dialogue with those of another person.

Dialogic comparison might reveal that peers do not consider an affiliation with the meat industry relevant for evaluating the quality of the provided information.

## V. References

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