

## Writing Handout E-17

### Reflection Essay Guidelines

## Understanding Reflection & Structuring a Reflection Essay

One of the most common types of writing is reflective writing. **Reflective writing** is a piece of writing for academic, professional, or personal purposes, in which you **describe** and **analyze** to show **what you have learned**. The process of writing itself will also help you learn from the reflection. Reflective essays describe and analyze a topic, event, or experience. This type of writing requires that the writer open up about thoughts and emotions. The purpose of reflection is to provide insight and discussion on the impactful topic, event, or experience. The aim is to strike a balance between personal perspective and critical academic thinking.

When structuring a reflective essay, remember the following:

- **Demonstrate personal experience** in the writing; write with a clear line of thought while describing your personal experience. The reader must understand the context before you go on to offer any analysis.
- **Be detailed in the description.** Stay away from vague ideas and concepts, so you can deepen your reflection and analysis.
- **Be honest in your feelings;** the best reflective essays are a product of honesty. The ability to be open allows you to contemplate the topic/experience/event and examine the consequences and reactions with greater precision. Compelling reflective essays sound genuine and appeal to the reader.
- **Evaluate and analyze; do not simply summarize.** While you do need to describe and summarize content, you are expected to evaluate and analyze your thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Evaluation involves judging significance and/or merit while analysis is about interpreting meaning.
- **Include examples to illustrate your point of view.** Use examples from the source of your topic, event, or experience to demonstrate your views and allow the reader to relate to your writing.
- **Close with the outcome of your reflection.** What have you learned? Why is it important?
- Lastly, **while a reflective essay might be a personal account, it is still academic writing.** You should maintain a formal and professional tone, stay away from slangs, avoid contractions (can't, won't, shouldn't, etc.) and abide by the general grammar and sentence formation rules. As you are reflecting on your experiences, write in first-person (I, me, us, we, our, etc.).

\*In the sample essay following, *transitions are italicized*, and the **main ideas are bolded**. **The thesis statement is bolded and underlined**. The notations are made noticeable to help identify important, organizational aspects of the essay. In an actual essay, these items would not be marked.

\*Continue to Page 2 for the sample essay.

**Title:**

Do not underline, italicize, or boldface your own title. Note how the title complements topic.

Freshman English: No So Bad After All

**Introduction:**

Interesting and relevant details lead into and open the reflection. The thesis statement is bold and underlined in this example. Do not bold or underline yours.

Beginning my freshman English course, I was expecting a boring class where I would have to learn grammar rules and read a ton. In the past, English had been one of my least favorite subjects, and I always wanted to just “get it done” and move on to more exciting subjects. On day one, my professor told the class, “You will leave this class with a whole new perspective on English.” I did not agree, but I knew I had to pass the course. Over the next few months, I realized my professor was right. Slowly but surely, I became a skilled writer and started to appreciate my readings in a new way. **Upon reflection, my freshman English class offered a newfound appreciation for writing and reading while also strengthening my natural abilities.**

**Body paragraphs:**

Note specific examples that support the topic. Also, notice how body paragraphs offer insight on reactions and feelings.

**One of the first, and most difficult, lessons I learned was to accept criticism.** During week one of the class, we were assigned a personal essay about a meaningful experience. We had to write the essay in class and then split up into pairs for peer review of our writing. In the past, I never enjoyed working with others as I am introverted. However, I felt right away that my partner was supportive and friendly. As we made our way through each other’s papers, I listened to my classmate remark on some of my writing flaws, such as fragments, misused commas, and ideas that weren’t flowing. At first, I was uncomfortable with the critique, but soon I became more receptive as my partner offered techniques and editing notes for improving my writing. I realized that I could work to improve my areas of weakness, and slowly, I began to appreciate the objective view from my classmate. I also learned how to offer comments to help my peer improve her own writing. We worked together to strengthen our skills, and I found that the peer review allowed us to feel comfortable with our own proofreading and revision skills before our first formal assignment. Overall, I found the experience beneficial because I learned how to be open, be receptive, and be honest with others.

**Transition words:**

Note italicized words that develop ideas within and between essay points.

**In addition, I never realized the importance of grammar in my writing.** My professor had a way of making the grammar instruction fun with games, engaging videos, and interactive exercises during class. I found that I could learn the rules of proper punctuation and sentence structure with ease once I took the time to really listen and practice applying the skills in my writing. We worked on our own essays and our peers as proofreaders, and our professor would show us examples of writing samples from previous students’ work. I found that I really enjoyed seeing examples of former students’ writing and relating to those students. I now appreciate how grammar makes a difference in meaning, and I can write more clearly. I recall the day in class when my professor told us, “Bad grammar reflects you. If you write and speak incorrectly, you will be judged.” I have never forgotten her advice, and I bring it with me into all my writing, both academic and personal.

**Next, my freshman English course allowed me to realize that I already have natural abilities in my own writing.** After listening to the professor teach about strong writing, I noticed that I am excellent at including descriptive details into my writing. I can bring my writing to life for the reader. I know how to use sensory words when needed, and I am competent at offering enough detail to prove a point. Listening to the professor talk about offering relevant and interesting content proved to me that I already have these skills, and I can build upon them to create even more vivid details. My ability to write expressively and creatively is a strength I brought into the course, and I have come out of the class appreciating my abilities, knowing I have gained skills to improve them even more.

**Conclusion:**

Brings the reflection to a natural end. Supports the lessons learned. Closes the topic by coming back around to introductory ideas and thesis.

*\*Remember to include a Works Cited page if necessary, listing all sources used for reference in your paper. Follow all formatting requirements for your assignment.*

**Note to students:** This essay is a sample to illustrate format. Course instructors have copies. Duplication or near duplication would be regarded as plagiarism.

→ *Finally*, in closing I have really enjoyed the readings in the course. I found by reading authors' works, I could observe strong writing in action. I enjoyed most of the pieces, and even the ones I did not like so much I learned to appreciate. Each piece offered an opportunity to gain knowledge and practice identifying the writing techniques I was learning in class. Overall, my freshman English course taught me to be patient with myself, to accept my strengths and improve my weaknesses, and to appreciate the basics of grammar. My professor was right; I did leave with a new appreciation for English, writing, and reading. Furthermore, I left class an improved reader and writer. And I passed! What more could I ask for?

~Christin R. Hunter