Reflection Essays

How to write your first paper
with thanks to
Writing: A Guide to College and Beyond
4 Keys to Reflections

- Tell a Good Story
- Let the Details Convey the Significance
- Be Honest
- Focus on the Little Things

WRITE THESE DOWN!
What Makes a Good Reflection?

1. Choose a good topic by brainstorming/listing.
2. Engage Readers at the Beginning.
3. Write with a Personal Voice
4. Introduce a Complication
5. Provide Concrete Details
6. Use Dialogue when possible
7. Identify a Central Theme
8. Come to a New Understanding

WRITE THESE DOWN!
Process for Reflection Paper

1. Choose a topic (your best/clearest memory of when you knew you wanted to be a _______)
2. Ideas and Text. (“How to Write an I-Search Paper” from my web site)
3. Write a Draft (several is even better)
5. Revise, Revise, Revise (Content)
6. Edit and Proofread (The Final Draft)
6. Submitted Version (Along with all your process)

REMEMBER YOU MUST TURN IN EVIDENCE OF YOUR PROCESS TO GET A GRADE!
Resistance to Process

At this point, you may be saying to yourself:

- I don’t do process.
- I don’t understand why process would make my papers better.
- I like to write when the mood hits me.
- I can’t write like everyone else.
- I am too inhibited by process.
- I do better without process, staying up late the night before the paper is due, Red Bull coursing through my veins.
Reasons for Process

- Prevents procrastination. (Research shows that you DON’T write your best when you wait.)
- Creates the best Product (When you follow a process, the end result is usually much much better.)
- Provides a consistent approach (Writing when the mood hits you, creates an uneven end result.)
- Fits a busy schedule (Many of you don’t have time to waste and need to work in short bursts.)
- Prevents writer’s block (You may feel overwhelmed when you get a writing assignment and not know where to start. Process helps you start and finish.)
Look at the assignment sheet.

Determine which memory best fits the task.

Does the memory come back to you clearly?

Is it more than a year old so you have had some time to reflect?

Can you recall specific, vivid details?

Can you ask others who were there to help you remember details about the place, the people, the activity???

Will you have 1-2 typed, double-spaced pages worth of material for the essay?
Brainstorming

Notice the value of good pre-writing:
- it can save you from re-writing.
- it helps you generate material.
- it helps you anticipate your audience’s needs.

NO details are insignificant at this point. Write down everything you remember using the 5 senses: seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, and hearing.
- Don’t worry if you are unfamiliar with these. We will practice them in a minute.
Description exercises

(IF YOU CANNOT THINK OF AN EVENT YET, DESCRIBE A FAMILIAR PLACE. FOLLOW THE PROCESS LISTED BELOW.)

Describe the PLACE where your event occurs. Write down all the senses first: see, smell, taste, touch and hear.

Turn those details into sentences.

Turn those sentences into a paragraph.

Revise that paragraph, top to bottom.

Share that paragraph with the person next to you.

Make comments under the person’s paragraph on the same sheet of paper.

Write down whatever might help the person make the paragraph better. Can you SEE the PLACE clearly? Explain.

Did the writer use all five senses? Let them know.
Describe a Person

(IF YOU CANNOT THINK OF AN PERSON YET, DESCRIBE A FRIEND WHO IS NOT IN CLASS. FOLLOW THE SAME PROCESS LISTED BELOW AS WE DID LAST TIME.)

Choose SOMEONE from your story you wish to tell in your Reflection Essay.

Describe that person from head to toe using the same sense imagery as before: see, smell, taste, touch and hear. (This can be tricky!!)

Turn those details into sentences.

Turn those sentences into a paragraph.

Revise that paragraph, top to bottom.

Share that paragraph with the person next to you.

Make comments under the person’s paragraph on the same sheet of paper.

Write down whatever might help the person make the paragraph better. Can you SEE the PERSON clearly? Explain why/why not.
(IF YOU CANNOT THINK OF AN EVENT YET, DESCRIBE AN OBJECT NOT IN THE CLASS. FOLLOW THE SAME PROCESS LISTED BELOW AS WE DID LAST TIME.)

Choose an **OBJECT** from your story you wish to tell in your Reflection Essay.

Describe that **OBJECT** from top to bottom using the same sense imagery as before: see, smell, taste, touch and hear. (This can be tricky!!)

Turn those details into sentences.

Turn those sentences into a paragraph.

Revise that paragraph, top to bottom.

Share that paragraph with the person next to you.

Make comments under the person’s paragraph on the same sheet of paper.

Write down whatever might help the person make the paragraph better. Can you SEE the **OBJECT** clearly? Explain why or why not.
Design the structure of the essay.

Plan which parts will be the *introduction*,

which parts will be the *body paragraphs*, and

which parts will be the *conclusion*.

Anticipate the need for structure for your own reflective essay.

Tell the story, perhaps **not** in chronological order.

Make your readers feel *as if* they are there with you.

Answer the questions from the assignment sheet.

The conclusion might be the best place for the answers.
When it is time for peer-critiquing, bring your best possible draft, **perhaps a second or third draft**, to class to share with your group.

Make sure the draft is your best effort.

Focus first on content and then on other areas.

Go to the Writing Center for help. (BH 1003)

See me during office hours, if you need help.
Peer-critiquing

Plan to take 30-40 minutes to write a good critique.  
(Critique Directions on the next slide.)

Give your best honest feedback to the other students and expect the same from them.

In one class period then, you will strive for two complete critiques. Two opinions allow you to compare the advice and make a decision.

One should be of someone’s essay in your group.

One should be of someone’s essay outside your group.
Peer Critique Process for REFLECTION Assignment

NOTE: Use your own paper to answer the questions below AFTER you have read the draft twice. Be sure to put your name on your critique as the critiquer and return it to the author. Answers that are shorter than the questions below, such as yes or no answers, will only earn an “F” for you on your critique grade. Write as much as you can, as legibly as you can, in the time allotted for the critiques.

Writers: Be sure to return these critiques as part of your process when you turn in your essay.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING 2 QUESTIONS AFTER YOU READ THE FIRST PARAGRAPH OR TWO OF THE PAPER.

1. Does the first paragraph grab your attention? If not, explain why not. If so, explain why. Tell them what would grab your attention even more.

2. Is there a clear thesis which lets you know where the paper is headed? If not, explain why and give suggestions. If yes, explain why and try to make it even better.

FOR QUESTIONS 3 & 4, YOU MUST ADDRESS EACH BODY PARAGRAPH.

3. Do the body paragraphs support and develop the thesis? If not, explain why and help them make it better. If so, explain how and why.

4. Is each body paragraph developed enough? Point out any that are too short or underdeveloped so that the writer can know how to make them better. Give suggestions for any paragraph that doesn’t seem just right.

FOR QUESTIONS 5 & 6, BE SURE TO RE-READ THE CONCLUSION.

5. Does the conclusion reiterate the thesis, not re-state it word for word? If not, explain how they could re-phrase it. If yes, explain why.

6. Does the conclusion wrap up the essay and end on a satisfying note? If not, explain why and give suggestions. If so, explain why.

7. Make any final comments or suggestions for the student.
For each point raised in the critiquer’s comments, you should respond to that feedback either agreeing with or disagreeing with the suggestions and stating what you will do.

These responses count as part of your overall grade so take your time and consider the feedback so that you make thoughtful comments.

(See sample of critique and response on the next slide.)
Sample Peer Critique

Peer critique for Joe by Tom

1. The first paragraph didn’t grab my attention very much. I like how you described the place where the event happened, but I just don’t understand why I should be interested in the topic. I think if you used part of your conclusion or another paragraph where it was really vivid, it would help grab my attention.

2. I can’t see a clear thesis in the beginning of your paper. Perhaps you are still working on it? Again the conclusion seems to make the strongest statement and maybe that is OK for a reflective paper. You could always ask someone in the Writing Center.

3. AND SO ON AND SO ON!

4.

5.

6.

7.

Sample Response to a Critique

Response to Tom’s Critique

1. Thanks for your feedback, Tom. I think I will move some of my conclusion to the front of my paper and not save the best for last. If I didn’t grab your attention, then I might not grab Mr. McGinn’s attention and that might hurt my paper grade.

2. Thanks again Tom, but I have to disagree here. I think my thesis is in the right place, right up front, but I will ask Mr. McGinn or someone in the Writing Center if it is OK to put the thesis in the conclusion.

3. RESPOND TO EACH PART OF EACH PIECE OF FEEDBACK. REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE GRADED, TOO!

4. AND SO ON AND SO ON!

5.

6.

7.
Revising

- Take all the advice from your peer-critiques and see where they agree and disagree.
- IF they both agree that something is unclear, be sure to make changes that will help your audience understand your point.
- IF they disagree or you disagree with their advice, seek a third opinion at the Writing Center.
- See me during office hours if you are confused about where to go next.
Editing

- Look at **paragraph** length.
  - (variety is best)
- Look at **sentence** length.
  - (alternate short and long sentences)
- Look at **word** use.
  - (are the words clear and concise?)
- Look at **style**.
  - (does it fit the assignment?)
- Look at **tone**.
  - (is it appropriate to the assignment?)
Proofreading

- Read aloud.
- Read sloooooooooooooooooooooowly.
- READ BACKWARDS, SENTENCE BY SENTENCE.
- Check the following areas: GUMP
  - GRAMMAR
  - USAGE
  - MECHANICS
  - PUNCUTATION
MLA stands for Modern Language Association.

Samples of the format are on my web site. Be sure to print them out so that you can see the proper format.

MLA paper format APPEARANCE means:

- one-inch margins,
- a four-part heading in the upper LEFT of the first page,
- your name and page number in the upper RIGHT of each page,
- doubled-spaced text all through the essay, and
- a standard font size, usually ten or twelve point.
Turning in Your Paper

- **TOP** – the Final Draft of your essay in MLA Format.
- *(see next slide)*
- **Next** – the Revised/Edited/Proofread Draft(s).
- **Next** – the Responses to the Peer Critiques.
- **Next** – The Peer Critiques.
- **Next** – The Rough Drafts, numbered if more than one.
- **BOTTOM** – The Pre-writing from activities in class and any done outside out of class.

*(Keep any homework notes or Journal entries not relevant to the paper.)*