

Reflection Essay Handout for First-Year Writing Teachers

Each student portfolio should include a reflection (3-5 pages in length) about the student's learning in the course. The reflective essay should ask the students to respond to the outcomes of the course—both programmatic outcomes below and the outcomes you have developed which are particular to your course. This handout is provided for teachers to adapt to their courses.

Suggested language for prompts to aid students in addressing outcomes:

1. **(Outcome 1)** Describe your portfolio. Walk the reader/viewer through the works it contains. Describe how these projects allowed you to practice writing for an audience in various ways. Make sure to discuss what you learned in those assignments. Also, consider the challenges of writing for different audiences and how you managed those challenges. Describe the genres in your portfolio and how those genres speak to your audiences and situations. How many different genres are you including in your portfolio and why? What did you exclude and why?
2. **(Outcome 3)** Describe your writing process with one of these options.
 - a) Consider describing the changes in one of the projects included in the portfolio from beginning to end. Did you use techniques that your instructor may have mentioned: outlining, word webs, response paragraphs, and blogging? Did informal kinds of writing find their way into the process such as emailing a professor about an idea, sketching out notes on a napkin at a coffee shop, or talking to a friend about your ideas? Ultimately, your writing process includes each step you take from the coffee shop napkin to an outline to a first draft and eventually, a final product.
 - b) Or you might choose to describe your process in compiling the portfolio—the decisions you made and reasons for selection and ordering. How does this process differ or show similarities to your writing process? What do you learn about yourself as a writer from examination of your composing process? What challenges did this compilation present to you?
3. **(Outcome 2)** Think about what you have learned this semester in your development as a critical thinker and reader. What new realizations do you have about yourself as a person engaged in inquiry and scholarship? What projects in particular in your portfolio show your growing abilities to craft an argument, read other's arguments well, and incorporate and challenge ideas from other's writings. Explain choices you made in this project and how that work developed you as a critical thinker and reader.

Reflection Essay Information--*Feel free to use or adapt any of these as fits your class.*

What is a reflective essay?

A reflective essay is a piece of writing that explores or reflects on the improvements or progression you make in a course. In this particular case, the reflective essay should take as its topic your relationship to the writing process. You might ask and answer the following questions:

- Has your process for writing changed over the course of the class?
- Are there new strategies you now employ that you had not previously?
- Are there areas you have identified in your writing process that still need work?
- What part of your exploration of your writing process do you feel has been the most successful?
- What have you learned in your course about writing that you did not know before?

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- What have you learned about yourself as a researcher, as a person who engages in argument, as a person who cares about inquiry?
- What insights have you gained into yourself as a learner?

Your reflective essay will address these kinds of questions in some way and will make use of the artifacts you include in your portfolio as evidence to support your answers to the above questions. A reflective essay does not need to have a specific thesis but should have an organizational framework that takes the reader of your essay through your ideas effectively and clearly.

Writing a Reflective Essay

Because process is such a personal part of writing, in this reflective essay feel free to use first person and write a narrative of your experience, rather than an argumentative essay. This means that you can present your discovery by:

- Telling a story,
- Exploring each piece of your writing process and the role it plays in producing a final product,
- Discussing your failures and how they turned into successes, starting with your successes and then discussing how you intend to improve in other areas needing further developing.

However you choose to structure this reflective essay, it still needs to have a **purpose**. That purpose need not be defined by a thesis but perhaps might have more to do with you *acknowledging what you have learned and what you are still learning*. What is most important is that you engage with your writing process in three ways.

- First, engage with the process of writing some of the artifacts you included in your portfolio
- Second, engage with the process of curating the portfolio as a whole (which pieces you chose, what order you put them in, and how they represent your learning/discovering your writing process over the course of the term).
- Third, consider talking about the different genres or literacies in your final portfolio. How are they different from one another? How did you figure out the genre conventions that were appropriate to each artifact in your portfolio? What skills might you use to identify genres of writing beyond this course?

Because you are talking about the process of writing/composing each artifact *and* the portfolio as a whole, you should think of your portfolio and its artifacts as *texts to be analyzed* (like you would a piece of literature or an article not written by you). **Point to your writing and/or design work to support your assertions.** Use your work in the portfolio to *show* your process and describe how the writing itself demonstrates your learning.

Finally, imagine that the audience of your reflective essay has not read your writing before. You need to teach them about the artifacts themselves and how your writing process directly contributed to the artifact's development and progression toward the final incarnation present in your portfolio.