

Reflections

In the majority of this text, academic writing relies heavily on summaries and demonstrating a clear understanding of an issue. However, some academic writing you will encounter at the college level will have a different purpose and therefore requires a different approach.

Purpose

A reflection essay is primarily used by professors to hold students accountable for out of class learning. By requiring you to reflect about what you read or listened to as part of your homework, the reader is able to quickly identify three important outcomes from that homework:

- The student is prepared for the class discussion and/or to participate in a learning experience that requires background knowledge.
- The student understands key information and is attempting to integrate this new knowledge.
- The student can identify and explain questions, lack of understanding, or disagreement with the content.

The first of these outcomes is important because many courses will expect you to come to class with foundational knowledge in place so the professor can focus on the more challenging skills of applying, creating, evaluating, or analyzing. By holding you responsible for that initial learning, everyone in the class can take full advantage of the limited face-to-face time.

The second point is important because information does not exist in isolation. All new knowledge should connect to things you previously learned or what you are currently learning in other courses. Finding connections allows you to think more critically about the content and also improves the likelihood that you will retain the knowledge.

Finally, a reflection gives you time to think through your questions or your counterarguments. The professor can either prepare for the course by reading reflections in advance to anticipate questions or it can simply save time by having ready made comments and questions instead of losing time while you try to figure out what it is you don't understand and/or agree with.

Prewriting

Before you can begin writing your reflection, you must first prepare for the learning experience you are going to reflect on. One idea for preparing to write a reflection is using an adapted KWL chart. A typical KWL chart has a column for *know*, *want to know*, and *learned*. These are often used with reading assignments because it encourages students to connect to their background knowledge before learning something new. For this purpose of this assignment, the *want to know* column has been removed and *reflect* has been added. Look at the chart below and the prewriting questions in each column to help you understand what notes you might add there.

Know	Learned	Reflect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you already know about this topic? • What beliefs (if any) do you have connected to this topic? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about the experience stands out to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did what you learn add to and/or change your understanding or opinions? • What questions (if any) do you have after the learning experience?

Writing

As stated previously, a reflection should not be a summary of the material. Rather, the reflection is focused on your feelings, reactions, beliefs, understanding, and other aspects of your experience during the learning process. This is meant to be more personal and subjective than other writing. This means that your reflection will vary from the others that are submitted because it is specific to you.

Although it is personal, it should still be academic in the tone. This should not sound like a social media post or an email with informal language. Remember that this is still an essay that will be reviewed by a professor and/or teaching assistant. So while personal pronouns may occur more frequently, the ideas should be expressed appropriately.

In many cases, a reflection-style essay will include some questions to prompt your writing. However, if the assignment does not include any specific questions to guide your reflection, you can use the example questions below to help you develop your ideas.

General guiding questions for a reflection

- Does the reading, lecture, or experience challenge you socially, culturally, emotionally, or theologically? If so, where and how? Why does it bother you or catch your attention?
- Has the reading, lecture, or experience changed your way of thinking? Did it conflict with beliefs you held previously, and what evidence did it provide you with in order to change your thought process on the topic?
- Does the reading, lecture, or experience leave you with any questions? Were these questions ones you had previously or ones you developed only after finishing?
- Did the author, speaker, or those involved in the experience fail to address any important issues? Could a certain fact or idea have dramatically changed the impact or conclusion of the reading, lecture, or experience?
- How do the issues or ideas brought up in this reading, lecture, or experience mesh with past experiences or readings? Do the ideas contradict or support each other?

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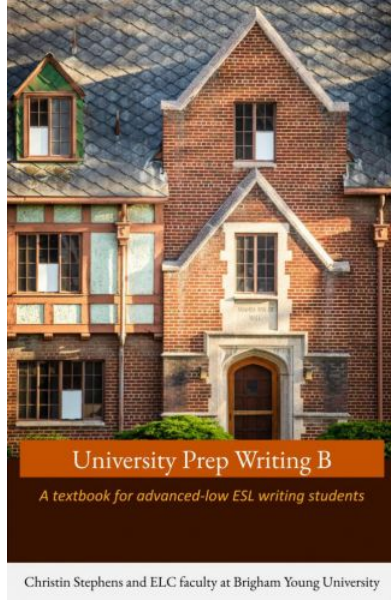
Depending on the length, complexity, and familiarity of the content you are reflecting on, you may have more ideas than you can develop in the limited space given for this assignment. In this case, it is important to carefully choose the ideas that most clearly demonstrate that you completed the work and have considered the implications of that learning.

On the other hand, you may find that your ideas for the reflection are encapsulated in one major idea. This is also appropriate as long as it can be fully developed and fulfill the purpose of the assignment.

Organization

The organization of a reflection paper is generally dictated by the number of points you decide to include. In the case of multiple points of reflection, you may have topic sentences that separate your ideas into three or four paragraphs. If you only have one main idea, your essay may have more of a traditional thesis statement that expresses this overarching theme from the learning experience.

Most reflection essays range from about 300-700 words, which is about 1-2 pages double spaced.



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