

Explore Other Genres: Reflections

In the majority of this textbook, 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** is a written or spoken response to a reading, listening, or other learning experience that usually expresses what you personally thought of the concepts from that source or experience. When reflecting, you think back on something. The specific way you reflect on something may vary by what you focus on, the connections or conclusions you draw, or the ways you can think to apply the concepts from the source or experience. See Guiding Questions below for some of the ways you might reflect on a concept.

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 (your teacher or teaching assistant) is able to quickly identify three important things 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 reflection outcomes (learning goals) 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. This prepares you to get the most out of class time. The professor may prepare for the class by reading reflections in advance to anticipate questions. It can also save you time as a student by preparing you with ready-made comments and questions instead of losing time in class while you try to figure out what it is you don't understand and/or agree with and how to say that to the teacher. In other words, the professor prepares by reading the reflections. Students prepare by making questions etc. before class and are ready to ask in class.

As a last note about the purpose of reflections, there may be times when the assignment asks for **self-reflection**. This is a reflection where the student thinks about themselves rather than reading or listening to a source. In this type of reflection, the purposes are different from the three described above. Mostly your teacher wants to encourage reflection as a learning tool for you. The act of reflecting itself can help you to realize things about yourself and your learning. When reading self-reflection responses, your teacher will be looking to see that you answered the prompt and met the

word count requirement. An example of a self-reflective prompt would be "How have you grown academically this semester?". If any self-reflection prompt seems too personal for you to answer, discuss the assignment and your concerns with your professor to find a solution. Most self-reflection questions should be more neutral though. For self-reflection assignments, use the activity for introspection and write something meaningful.

Prewriting

Before you begin writing your reflection, you can 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.

Examples

Personal, but academic:

"After reading this chapter, I realized that my previous understanding of this idea didn't account for alternative viewpoints. I think that the variety of perspectives is interesting."

Personal, but too informal:

"Bro, I just read the chapter, and I had known about this idea before, but wow. People think some crazy different things about this topic than I do. Interesting. :)"

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?

SOURCE: <https://edtechbooks.org/-bBZp>

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.

College Tip

While this chapter reviews the genre of reflections generally and gives examples of guiding reflection questions and common word count expectations, reflection requirements will vary by class.

Some teachers will just say "Write a reflection." and leave it to you to determine what type of guiding question to use to write your reflection. Some teachers will give specific prompts for you to reflect on particular aspects of what you learned or guide you to make specific connections etc. They may expect 300-700 words, or they may give a different word limit.

Always check with your teacher or the class syllabus to determine what the specific requirements for reflections in a course are.

Exercises

Exercise 6.35: Evaluate

You are now the teacher. You assigned your students to read this article, "[Oil Removal from US Pipeline Spill to Take Days](#)" (Reuters, 2022). They then needed to write a reflection about 1) what they learned, 2) any connections they made, and 3) any questions they had.

Read the two student reflections below and decided if they read the assignment, made connections, and what questions you, the teacher, would address in the next class.

Student 1:

This news article was about an oil spill in Kansas. It was a really large oil spill, like more than 14,000 barrels of oil. The oil spilled into a creek which is a small river in Kansas. The oil pipeline goes from Canada to the U.S., and it has leaked before. This is the third time the pipeline has had a leak. The Environmental Protection agency of the United States is working to clean up the oil spill. It was a really large oil spill, so it might take a long time to clean up.

The company that owns the pipeline might be responsible for the damages made by the leak. There are U.S. laws, the Clean Water Act and the Oil Pollution act that deal with situations like this. The pipeline also might be closed for a while which could affect storage and pricing. But, the U.S. administration in charge okayed the reopening of the pipeline.

Student 2:

From this article I learned that a crude oil pipeline from Canada to the U.S. has had multiple spills since 2010; the most recent was a spill in Kansas. The oil spill or leak is being cleaned up and may take a while, but due to U.S. laws, the company may be responsible for paying for that. I didn't know about the Clean Water Act or the other laws before, but it is understandable for the company that damaged the area to pay to clean it.

This story reminded me of the large oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. That oil spill happened in an ocean, not in a creek like the spill in Kansas. The ocean spill affected a lot of wildlife and local fishermen. I wonder what the Kansas oil spill's effect on the local wildlife will be and how the local fishers and farmers will be affected. Even though the article said that local farmers were taking precautions, oil spills can have long-term effects. What will be the longterm effects for those farmers and other locals? What could be done to prevent these oil leaks from happening in the future?

Exercise 6.36: Self-Reflection

Write a 100-150 word reflection to answer one of the prompts below. You may choose which prompt to answer.

- What is the most important thing you have learned this semester?
- What was the most difficult thing for you to learn this semester?
- What is one way you have grown as a person since entering school?
- How has what you experienced this semester impacted your future goals?
- What would you say is the best strategy to succeed in this class?
- What has or hasn't been effective for your study this semester?
- Do you want to keep learning about this subject? If so, why? If not, why not?
- How will your current studies affect the people you interact with now or in the future?

Exercise 6.37: Make a KLR Chart

Pretend your professor assigned you this Ted Talk video, "[Do you really need 8 hours of sleep every night?](#)", to watch for class. Make a Know, Learned, Reflect chart to prewrite for a reflection on this topic.

Video:

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? •

Know	Learned	Reflect

Exercise 6.38: Academic Tone

Rewrite the following sentences from reflections to have a more academic tone. How would you write these for a professor or teaching assistant to read them?

1. After watching the video, I gotta say that my opinion is not changed. Not that the video didn't have cool ideas, but I still think that cell phones are better for everyone. They make life easier and just...better. I do think that the way they are made and the marketing could change though. That could fix some of the problems the video pointed out.

2. I think that the author of this chapter had no clue about how some other stuff would change some things about this topic. Like people's money situation, you know. If a person comes from a different socioeconomic situation, then it could change what things they think are most important, so it's not like they don't care about the topic. It's just that they gotta deal with other stuff like rent first, then deal with abstract topics like this after.

3. Supply and demand is all messed up right now, so everything is more expensive. The connection I made with this chapter is actually how expensive housing and building housing is. My parents are redoing part of their home, and it has taken *forever* for them to get materials, and they have had to pay a lot more than normal for things like wood and pipe and stuff. So, there is a lot of demand but little supply because there actually is little supply or because the transportation of the supply is off, so everything costs more.

Exercise 6.39: Limited Space

Write 50 words to reflect on the following Ted Talk video:

["What is the smartest age?"](#)

Exercise 6.40: Complete a Reflection Outline

Complete the outline below for a reflection on this video:

[50 Years Since Humans Set Foot on the Moon](#)

TS: I think that the efforts to return to the moon are helping further the development of technology which may have implications for Earth.

SD1:

SD2:

SD3:

CS: The current missions to the moon both continue work being done by NASA and leads to other groups creating new technology that benefit the moon missions and life here on Earth.

*TS= topic sentence, SD= supporting detail, CS= concluding sentence

Exercise 6.41: Write a Short Reflection

Write a reflection about 1)how the ideas from these two sources interact and 2) what your thoughts on this topic are:

- <https://edtechbooks.org/-LvX>
- <https://youtu.be/QW0ydAMVQ2w>

Your reflection should be 150-200 words (or the word limit your teacher directs)

Exercise 6.42: Revise a Reflection

A student wrote a reflection using the prompt below. Revise the student's reflection to improve it. Rewrite the improved reflection on the lines provided.

Prompt: Read this BYU article by Katie Child, "[Dead trees in Utah forests are a wildfire hazard; BYU researchers found a way to use them as biomass for power plants](#)". Then, write a reflection about comparing the ideas in the article to ideas about the topic you may have had previous to reading. Your reflection should also include any questions you have about this topic.

Reflection Draft:

This article by Katie Child on reusing trees killed by bark beetles as fuel for coal plants connects with a few things I knew as background knowledge before reading, and I have a few questions now about points within this article.

Firstly, some of the ideas from the article were similar to ideas I had previously known. For example, I knew that Utah and many other western states have been experiencing worsening wildfires.

This information about the bark beetles was one of the new things I learned that contrasted my previous knowledge about these topics. I had thought that the increase in wildfires was mostly due to climate change and the megadrought of the western U.S. I didn't know that trees could be used as fuel for coal plants. I guess coal is carbon and trees are carbon so that'll probs work out.

However, using dead trees for coal plant fuel does raise a few issues that I have questions about.

These are the comparisons and questions I have about this article.

Revised Draft:

Exercise 6.43: Write a Longer Reflection

Write a reflection about this source:

["Journalists Sense Turmoil in Their Industry Amid Continued Passion for Their Work"](#) by Pew Research Center

Your reflection should be 500-700 words (or the word limit your teacher directs)

Exercise 6.44: Longer Self-Reflection

Write a reflection to answer one of the prompts below. You may choose which prompt to answer.

- What is the most important thing you have learned this semester?
- What was the most difficult thing for you to learn this semester?
- What is one way you have grown as a person since entering school?
- How has what you experienced this semester impacted your future goals?
- What would you say is the best strategy to succeed in this class?
- What has or hasn't been effective for your study this semester?
- Do you want to keep learning about this subject? If so, why? If not, why not?
- How will your current studies affect the people you interact with now or in the future?

Your reflection should be 500-700 words (or the word limit your teacher directs)

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