

Reflective writing, similar to journaling, is a highly personal type of writing in which the writer analyzes and shares his/her thoughts on a personal encounter with a text, an idea, or a real or imagined personal experience. Reflective writing often combines other rhetorical modes such as narration, description, and analysis. In the process of writing a reflection, a writer seeks to make meaning of an experience by revisiting it, often noting the emotions connected with it, the lessons learned, and the implications for his/her life.

Reflective writing can be beneficial for anyone, as it fosters self-awareness and helps people learn and grow from their experiences. It is often used in service learning classes (Students learn by serving others.), and in clinical training for healthcare, social work, and other helping professions. Through reflection on experiences, a writer becomes both more aware of self and more attuned to the needs and feelings of others.

### **Planning a Reflective Essay**

- Writing is a tool for reflection, and often reflections arise as the writer writes. It is helpful, therefore, to do a significant amount of freewriting before creating an outline for a reflective essay. Other types of brainstorming may also be helpful. Reflection takes time. Give yourself this time.
- Write down as many details as you can remember about the experience, in vivid, descriptive language.
- Ask yourself questions about your feelings and thoughts about the experience, and write down these reflections. Questions might include the following: How did I feel about this at the time? How do I feel about it now? What did I do and what do I wish I would have done or said? What did I learn from the experience? What do I still need to learn? How has this changed me? How has this affected my life?
- When you feel you have sufficient material on paper, begin the process of organizing it for a reader.

### **Organizing a Reflective Essay**

- Check with instructor about requirements for the assignment. Reflective essays don't always follow a standard structure of introduction with thesis, three supporting points, and conclusion. Reflections can be written in a variety of ways, and often your content will dictate the format.
- Possible organizational structures (there may be others)
  - A description or narrative about an experience, followed by reflections on its significance and outcome

- An explanation of something you have learned or come to believe, followed by a description and analysis of the experiences that have taught you this

### **Examples of Reflective Writing**

See the Online Writing Center's "WINK: An Online Journal" to read well-written examples of reflective writing by Western Technical College students.

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