REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Definition

Reflective essay is a kind of writing that requires the author to inform the reader about his or her attitude, idea or impression regarding a given topic. Alternatively, writing reflective essays is meant to help its author describe how a certain event, person or experience has impacted him or her; or to describe the process of his or her personal growth during an academic course or some other significant experience (this can be a journey, an important class etc). For example, you may be required to write about a person who has had a significant impact on your life or career – it can be your teacher, your parents or your friend. In this case you will be writing to describe this person and explain how he or she has affected you and how your personality changed as a result.

Distinctive Features of a Reflective Essay

Reflecting the author's inner world, relating feelings and emotions pertaining to the described events and experiences are the most important features of a reflective essay. As a matter of fact, the essay has received its name because its main purpose is to reflect the author's personality. Very often this type of essay is mistakenly understood as informative essay and students merely give account of events or experiences. Simple enumeration of facts doesn't make the essay reflective; in order to become one it has to reflect the author's inner world in relation to the described events. Let's take a look at a quick example. Let's imagine you have visited Tibet last summer. In an informative essay you would inform your reader how you prepared, how you got there, what means of transport you used etc. In a reflective essay you would tell your reader how you got interested in going there, what feelings you experienced during your visit and how it affected you as a personality. In the first case you enumerate events one by one; in the second case you share your thoughts and feelings with your reader. This is what makes a reflective essay different from other essay types.

Educational Purpose

This type of essay is normally assigned during high school and college years with the purpose of giving students the opportunity to analyze their own experiences and skills. In this case the object of analysis is students themselves; this essay type allows them to contemplate about things they might have been taking for granted. Another case when this type of essay can be assigned is when there is a need to better understand the personality of the interviewee. Reflective essays are also written while applying for college. High number of college applicants makes competition incredibly tough; as a result college admission officers require prospective students to write such essays – only thus can they pick out best candidates. They are looking at a number of things, including maturity, learning skills as well as the ability to analyze and think critically etc. The need to do reflective writing arises in everyday life too; therefore developing this skill is critical.

Structure

In its basic form a reflective essay will take the common essay structure. It will contain 5 paragraphs, which are the introduction, three body paragraphs and the conclusion. If the requirements of your essay prescribe you to make the essay longer in size, you will have to expand the body of your paper and add more ideas to it. The bottom line is: no matter the length of your essay, it should at all times consist of an introduction, the body and the conclusion. Whenever you need to write a longer piece, work on the body of your paper.

Language and Tone

Reflective essay is supposed to reveal your thoughts, feelings and emotions. It requires your presence in the text of the paper. The use of personal 'I' in this type of paper is ok. You can also use other personal pronouns like 'we', 'you', 'they' etc. This will make your essay more personal. Most other essay types require objectivity and impersonality; however this is not the case. Referencing is not needed in 9 cases out of 10; however some reflective essays will require you to back up your claims by making a reference to a reputable source of information. Be prepared to run a background research to back up your claims and read instructions carefully.
Reflective Essay Assignment
Mr. Geis

Directions:

Write a 5 paragraph reflective essay about something important in your life.
Create a prewriting page on the front of the “idea paper” and a rough draft on the back.
Make sure that you have an introduction and a conclusion paragraph.
Create a rough draft in class. Have the teacher sign off on your paper before leaving class.
Type the final draft: Turn in a hard copy to the teacher and submit it to “turnitin.com”.

Ideas for Reflective Essays

What role has education played in shaping your personality?
Describe any life-altering incident that you have experienced.
How do you view your failures?
The most important piece of advice you’d like to pass on to your juniors is...
How has education helped you in attaining your goals?
Describe the person you hold the highest regard for.
Do you regret any decision you’ve taken in your life?
Have you undergone any experience that has completely changed your outlook?
Should relationships be valued over monetary gains?
Can you honestly call yourself tolerant of other cultures and religions?
Is it fair to rely on first impressions?
What can be done to stop others from taking us for granted?
Describe the importance of being able to say 'no'.
How can you realize your true potential?
What is the biggest motivational factor for you?
How do you push yourself to rise from a series of setbacks?
What is your outlook on peer pressure?
Which book/movie has left an indelible impression on your mind?
Is it possible to detach ourselves from materialistic comforts?
How difficult is it to make the honorable choice?
Can moral values be enforced?
Think of how your lifestyle has an impact on the environment.
What points are to be considered while choosing a career?
What forms the foundation of a long-lasting friendship
As an English major I have learned to appreciate the peaceful, yet exhilarating moment when my mind engages with an author's thoughts on a page. As Toni Morrison says in The Dancing Mind, "[reading is] to experience one's own mind dancing with another's." In my early days as a college student, I wanted to know the "true" meaning of a work or what the author intended, however, I have now realized this would void literature of its most noteworthy complexities. Individual interpretations bring varied insights to a work and it is also interesting to point out messages the author may not have realized s/he included in the piece.

I have always been a thinker, but throughout my coursework, I have greatly sharpened my critical analysis skills. Instead of focusing on proposed meanings or biographical background, I have learned to continuously ask "why" on many different levels. I challenge myself to dig into a text as deeply as possible and unpack every detail to develop a satisfying close read. Also, by reading multiple novels by the same author I have learned to identify different writing styles and make connections that weave texts together; this helped me develop a deeper understanding of the novels. When I look at one of my freshman level novels and see clean pages, I realize that I did not actively read the book. I guess you could say that I have learned to read with a pen, which has drastically taken my writing to a new level because I am able to connect back with my initial insights marked on the page.

Writing had always been one of my strengths, but it was challenging to take that initial step past the high school, five-paragraph essay form that constricted my ideas for so long. Moving past this form, however, has greatly opened my mind. My thoughts are now able to be more complex because I have learned how to sustain a logical argument in an organized manner. My writing has become increasingly more concise and I no longer have room for added "fluff" or "padding." Another improvement is my ability to point out multiple complexities within a text, instead of sticking to one-sided arguments in my papers. Furthermore, learning how to find peer reviewed journal articles and order books through interlibrary loan has significantly widened the scope of my research, which has lead to more scholarly papers with credible references. My writing is so much more interesting than it used to be.

It is difficult to identify gaps in my knowledge as an English major, only because I feel like I have learned so much. I feel that I have largely expanded my literary analysis and writing skills, but I need to be prepared to teach high school students their required literature. I think it would be useful to identify commonly taught novels in our local high schools and study them myself. By studying the required literature and thinking about how to teach it, I will have a sturdy foundation to work from once I am in the classroom.