

How to write a reflective essay

A reflective essay is a brief piece of writing that asks you to look back at a piece of work you have completed, to consider its strengths and weaknesses, and to think about areas for possible improvement should you ever have a similar task in the future. When you choose a piece of work to include in your school portfolio, you'll need to write a brief reflective essay to accompany that piece when you turn it in. Here's how.

- 1) Describe the piece of work you're writing about.** Write a brief explanation of what the work is, and why you created it. Explain when it was created, for what class and/or teacher, and what the assignment was. Keep in mind that some people who look at your portfolio and work may not have much background knowledge about your particular classes and situation, so be specific and clear.
- 2) Explain what you like and/or dislike about the work you've created.** Explain why you think the piece you've chosen is a good example of your work. Be specific about what makes the work an example of your best work. Quote from the work, or directly identify parts of it that show your best work. Also address areas that you think could be improved, where you think you could have done a better job. Like the strengths, use direct quotations or explicit references to specific parts of the work to show what you're talking about.
- 3) Identify areas that you might improve in similar tasks in the future.** After you've thought about the areas of strength and weakness in your chosen work, spend a bit of time explaining what you might do differently should you ever be faced with a similar task in the future. You might focus on the weaknesses you described above, or you might decide to take a completely different approach that would lead to large changes in the finished work. Whichever direction you take this, be sure to clearly identify what you might change, and to clearly explain how that might make a difference in what you'd ultimately be able to create.

Rubric for Reflective Essay -- Scored

	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)	Missing (0)
Description	Clearly describes situation of work's creation with ample and rich detail	Describes situation of work's creation with some detail	Describes situation of work's creation with little detail	Fails to clearly identify situation of work's creation	Does not address
Strengths (Multiply Score x 2)	Clearly identifies and explains strengths and weaknesses of work with specific and incisive examples from piece	Clearly identifies and explains strengths and weaknesses of work but with uneven or unclear examples from piece	Identifies strengths and weaknesses of work in general terms, or fails to demonstrate or explain why they're chosen	Does not clearly address strengths and weaknesses of selected work	Does not address
Changes	Clearly identifies and explains possible changes to work with awareness of how work would change	Clearly identifies and explains possible changes to work with limited description of how they might change work	Identifies possible changes but fails to explain why or how they might impact work	Does not clearly identify possible changes in selected work	Does not address
Conventions	No mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Very few mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Some mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Many mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Score: / 20

Rubric for Reflective Essay – Unscored Feedback

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Missing
Description	Clearly describes situation of work's creation with ample and rich detail	Describes situation of work's creation with some detail	Describes situation of work's creation with little detail	Fails to clearly identify situation of work's creation	Does not address
Strengths	Clearly identifies and explains strengths and weaknesses of work with specific and incisive examples from piece	Clearly identifies and explains strengths and weaknesses of work but with uneven or unclear examples from piece	Identifies strengths and weaknesses of work in general terms, or fails to demonstrate or explain why they're chosen	Does not clearly address strengths and weaknesses of selected work	Does not address
Changes	Clearly identifies and explains possible changes to work with awareness of how work would change	Clearly identifies and explains possible changes to work with limited description of how they might change work	Identifies possible changes but fails to explain why or how they might impact work	Does not clearly identify possible changes in selected work	Does not address
Conventions	No mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Very few mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Some mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	Many mistakes in spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.	

Sample reflective essay for World History essay.

The piece I've chosen as my best work is a two-page essay from Mr. Knowles' World History class. The assignment was to discuss the importance of a single topic in the time of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Age of Exploration, and I chose to focus on the topic of technology. I wrote the essay during class on the day it was due, but I'd chosen the topic a few days earlier and had already started a rough draft of the Renaissance section before the actual writing day. I think that preparation is what makes the section on the Renaissance better than the other two sections, because it seemed to flow more easily as I wrote it, and I think it reads that way, too. The examples I chose to use really illustrate the point that technology had an impact on almost everyone's life, "from the painter, to the printer, to the person on the street." That phrase is probably my favorite from the whole essay, because it really flows when you read it, and it helps illustrate my point. When I reached the section on the Reformation, though, it gets a little rougher, and I had a hard time keeping the essay moving forward. One reason is I didn't have enough facts to really focus on the technology of that time period, except to talk about the printing press, which I'd already talked about in the previous paragraph, so I really didn't have much to say. I found myself repeating myself and not getting beyond the general points I was trying to make.

I guess if I were to write the essay over again, I'd try to organize it differently so I didn't feel like I was repeating myself or running out of things to say. If I'd organized it around different pieces of technology instead of around the time periods, then I could have talked about the importance of the printing press only once, and shown how it was important in both the Renaissance and the Reformation in one paragraph. Even so, it is a good piece of writing, and I think that, even if I could write it better if I had to do it again, there isn't a whole lot to improve.