

Reflective Writing across the Curriculum: What, Why, and How

Monday, April 12, 12 p.m. ([register here](#); [Zoom link here](#))

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Opening/Warnings

BRIEF DISCUSSION (a.k.a. "the question that keeps me up at night"): Can our students identify what they've learned in our classes, and can they tap into that learning in future contexts?

- Tidbits of things students remember and come up here and there, later on.
- Our SLOs say "this is what we'll learn," and then we assess it somehow. We can purposefully end courses to emphasize how learning is carried forward.
- When students go to the next course in a sequence we can see to some extent.
- Students sometimes only really realize several years later what they learned.

MY FEBRUARY PRESENTATION VS. THIS ONE:

- *Exploratory Writing / Writing-to-Learn (last time)*: Big-picture umbrella; any informal writing that helps writers achieve a task

- *Reflective Writing (today)*: A particular kind of exploratory writing that helps writers critically think about work they've done or are doing

Examples: writing in class to focus a discussion vs. submitting an essay along with a reflective letter

Both useful across the curriculum

WARNING: I'M STILL LEARNING



WHAT Reflective Writing Is / Can Be

In General

Metacognition = Reflection

A cycle of metacognitive processes ([Ambrose et al., 2010](#), pp. 192-193):

- "Assess the task at hand, taking into consideration the task's goals and constraints
- Evaluate their own knowledge and skills, identifying strengths and weaknesses
- Plan their approach in a way that accounts for the current situation
- Apply various strategies to enact their plan, monitoring their progress along the way
- Reflect on the degree to which their current approach is working so that they can adjust and restart the cycle as needed"

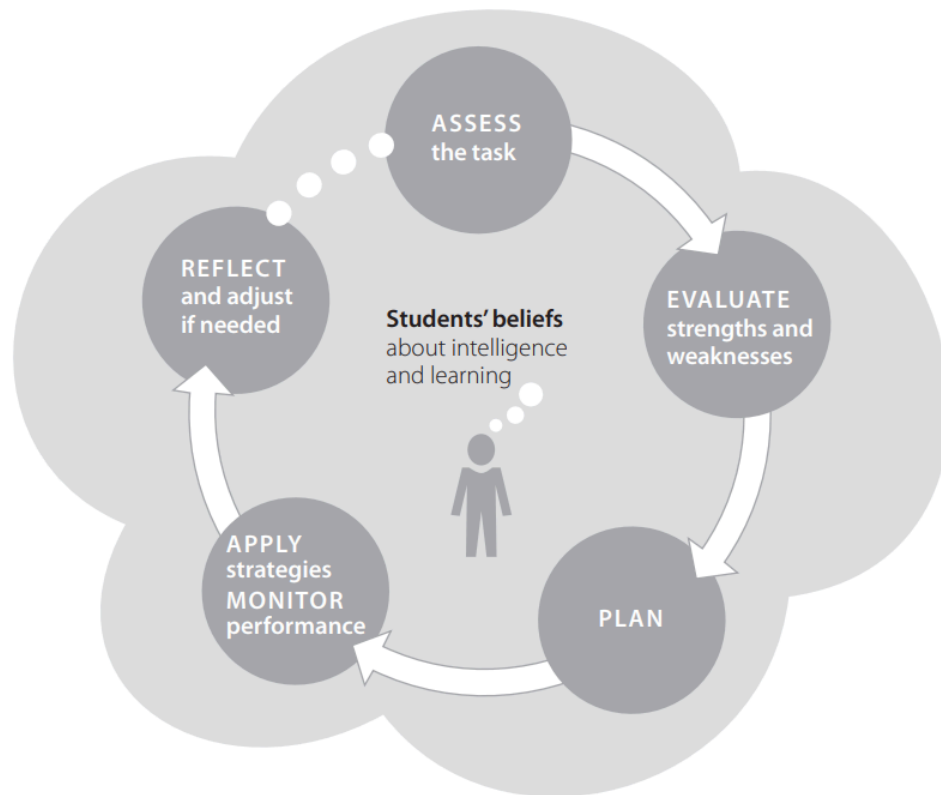


Figure 7.1. Cycle of Self-Directed Learning

Generally, reflection = inward and outward ways learners make their learning and learning processes explicit

Specifically

Common examples:

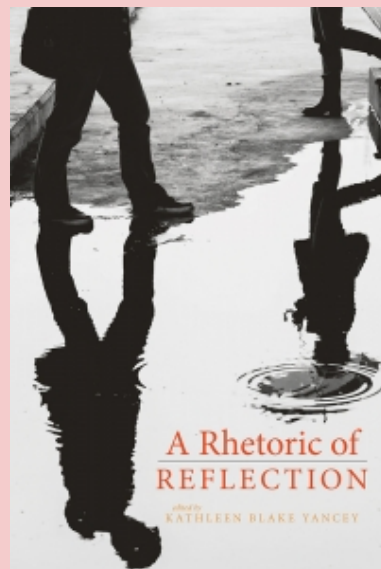
- Reflective letters/essays submitted along with an assignment or in a portfolio
- Journals / process notes
- Explanations of what the learner did and why she did it that way
- Artist's statements



WHY Assign Reflective Writing

Brief/Selective Literature Review

- [Di Stefano et al., 2014](#): Evidence suggests that performance improves when we think about what we've learned, helping us then see "that we have learned (even if not always successfully); how we have learned; and how we might continue to learn" (summary from [Yancey, 2016](#), p. 8).
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)'s results correlate with retention and graduation—and one of their ten "engagement indicators" is "Reflective & Integrative Learning" ([NSSE, n.d.](#)).
- [Taczak & Robertson, 2016](#): Studies suggest that ongoing reflection throughout the semester helps students identify what they've learned and use it in the future.
- [Beaufort, 2016](#): Reflection a key part of writing transfer.



Assessment (but also for its own sake)

It's a part of Writing-Intensive (WI) courses here:

- Must use [Written Communication VALUE Rubric](#) at least once, which strongly suggests assessors using the rubric read reflective writing alongside the writing being assessed.
- All WI courses must include "Regular instruction on the details of the writing processes used to develop strong writing, such as brainstorming/invention, planning/organizing/arranging, embedding research, drafting, sentence-level stylistics, proofreading, and reflecting on one's writing."
- The [WI proposal form](#) asks you to report on this: "Please share ways that the instructor will ask students to reflect on their writing and writing processes. (By 'reflect,' we refer to metacognitive activities—opportunities for students to express the strengths and weaknesses of their writing and the steps they took to produce their writing.)"

An email from Dr. Kristin Ravel to the WAC Board: "... without reflection, students will see their grade on a paper and move on, without assessing their own level of success at assimilation into the discourse of the particular discipline they are writing in (and how to improve in that assimilation, of course). And it gives students time and space to understand the values of the community they are writing for and how to best meet those values."

Let's reflect on our own teaching, too!

[Flash \(2016\)](#) reports that faculty at the University of Minnesota started reflecting on this question: "what specific writing abilities should students in your majors be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate?" (p. 227). Resulted in research on disconnections between faculty wanted and what students thought faculty wanted and improved writing instruction across the curriculum.



How DO YOU or COULD YOU assign reflective writing/composing/making/speaking in your own classes/contexts?

Please briefly share your ideas, while I type them here. (But let's save 5-10 minutes for me to close up!)

- Senior seminar in sciences: do peer review. Doesn't seem reflective on own writing at first, but the author has to answer the questions and thus *reflects* out loud in conversation.
- Performing arts: lots of learning is based on physical knowledge as well as intellectually. Reflective writing helps you focus on skills/techniques/advancing. They journal on choreographic processes, as a path toward their senior seminar (what tools work for them, don't, etc.).
- Latin American history: students can write in response to a single word early on, and then again at the end of the semester, showing them both sheets. They can see how much they've learned in that time.
 - Classics/gender: same thing! Also ask students to tell the class what their thoughts were. (e.g. "What do you think slavery was like in the ancient world?")
- Info lit: Ask them to reflect on how they seek out and gather info--their steps, their feelings. Then show them models to see how they fit in the models.
- Art history: Research/writing assignment, students can do less writing but make up for it with other kinds of "makings"--and the writing then becomes a way for them to reflect on what they researched/learned and how they incorporated it. Explaining the choices they made.
 - 100-level: reflection or response essay: I the student picked this and had this response, and I'm going to reflect on what led me to those choices.
 - In Kyle's professional communication, students wrote Memos of Goals and Choices (building on Jody Shipka's "Statement of Goals and Choices"--google it!)



HOW to Assign Reflective Writing/Composing

More ideas! Fun!

- **Final portfolios:** students revise work they completed earlier and write reflectively about what/why/how they revised
 - VMI added reflective eportfolios when they revised their old gen-ed program ([McDonald, 2016](#))
- **Audio process notes** (Rodrigue, forthcoming): using phone's audio recorder to think through a problem out loud
 - See also [LeVan & King, 2019](#) for a similar pedagogy.
- **Multimodal options** described by [Silver, 2016](#):
 - Use a webcam to record writing-log videos
 - Draw storyboards of the project/problem
 - Use comment tool in word processor to add reflective notes (see also this blog post: [Moore, 2018](#))
- **Service learning courses** ([WAC Clearinghouse, 2006](#)): many kinds of journals and more.
- **"Rhetorical reflections":** students write brief blog posts analyzing an assignment prompt and how they'll respond to it before they actually complete the task ([Jankens, 2019](#)).
- **Emails to their future selves**
- **Detailed example from a tech-writing course** ([Barton & Belant, 2014](#)):
 - 1st day of class: students write about their field or a technical topic to a "a college-educated reader who possesses no specialized knowledge of any technical topics you discuss."
 - Near the end of the course, students reviewed all their writing for the course, were taught to use a rubric that judged the effectiveness of technical writing, and were given their first-day writing back.
 - For extra credit, students applied the rubric to their first-day exercise and wrote about how well they did back then and what they would change now.
- [RHET Sequence—Reflective Writing Resource for Instructors](#) (from Kristin Ravel)
- [Self-Reflection & Labor Tracker Prompt](#) (from Kristin Ravel)

Closing Reminders/Resources

- Find more resources for teaching writing at the ["Teaching Writing" Portal page](#) (RU login required)
 - That's also where you can find the Writing-Intensive Course Proposal Form.
- I can talk to you about your course's specific needs! Just email kstedman@rockford.edu.
- If you're here, I'll contact you to see if you want a free copy of John Bean's [Engaging Ideas](#), 2nd ed.
- Reminder: this document (with all its links) is available to view and comment on at <https://tinyurl.com/ruwritingapr2021>

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