

How to Succeed at... REFLECTION PAPERS



Reflection papers allow us to think introspectively on a particular experience and how it helped us grow. Different from a research paper or exegetical paper, a reflection paper does not require a rigorous number of sources, such as books or journal articles. The source of its content comes from within you. So, are you ready to look inward?

Where to Start?

1. Read over the assignment instructions and note particular areas in the book, class lectures, retreat, philosophy, course, etc. on which the professor would like you to reflect.
2. Write in point form your thoughts and reflections on the content.
3. Formulate these ideas into a logical and progressive outline (see back of this sheet for more details).
4. Begin writing!

Some Traps You May Fall into:

- Writing in first person singular (I) and first person plural (we) are acceptable, but be careful not to transition back and forth between these two subjective cases without a logical reason for the change in narration.
- Be careful with being too casual in your prose. A reflection paper is still an academic paper, even though it is about you.

Be Sure to Check the Following Before Submitting the Assignment:

- Formatting, Style, and Citation → Does the paper adhere to your discipline's style (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA)?
- Contractions → Such as "don't" and "isn't" should be "do not" and "is not."
- Colloquial language or slang words → Avoid informal language like "y'all," "gonna," "ain't," "YOLO," and phrases like "You're driving me up the wall!" or "I got nothing."
- Excessive use of intensifiers → "Really, very, so, etc." are rarely needed for emphasis.

And remember...

While a reflection paper is informal in the sense that it is PERSONAL, it is important to remember that this is still an ACADEMIC ASSIGNMENT.

A reflection paper is still a TYPE of paper (like expository, descriptive, persuasive, and narrative), and the TONE of that writing should maintain a high level of academic quality.

Some Items to Consider When Forming a Reflection Paper:

Logical, Progressive Outline

While a reflection paper might almost seem like a “free-style paper,” there still needs to be a formal structure. That structure will inevitably vary based on your experiences, your course, and your assignment prompter, but there are still some outline patterns that you can follow:

Typical Structure	<i>Option A: Themes*</i>	<i>Option B: Chronological</i>	<i>Option C: Hybrid of Themes & Chronological**</i>
Introduction			
Point A	Theme One	Where did I start/ What was I like before?	Where I was before and how it reflects a first theme.
Point B	Theme Two	What was my experience throughout the book/retreat/course?	What my experience was and how that reflects a second theme.
Point C	Theme Three	What is going to change in my life now or in the future?	What is going to change in my life and how that reflects a third theme.
Conclusion			

*Themes could be a particular highlight from the book, retreat, or course.

**Where chronological periods of time are characterized by a particular theme

Content

Undoubtedly, a reflection paper is about you, and who better to be an expert on you than yourself? However, while it is exciting to share your thoughts, stories, and experiences, it is important to **keep the content relevant to the assignment**. You are writing a reflection paper, **not** an autobiography.

Remember to **include a thesis statement**. Even though a reflection paper may not be “arguing” for a particular stance, your paper should still **present a main point or claim** about your thoughts and growth.

A Reflection Paper is Not a Journal Entry

As we reflect on a book, retreat, or course, we may be reminded of praise-worthy moments where God has clearly worked in our lives. This may ignite within us a natural overflow of gratitude and thanksgiving that we want to express in our writing, leading to unprecedented doxological outbursts. It is good to give glory to God, but extended expressions of gratitude can distract from the overall flow of your content. Keep those words of praise to God in a journal and leave the focus of your reflection paper on your **thoughts and experiences**.

