



## Deepen/ Solidify Student Learning Using Reflection

As you prepare for final exams and for grading major papers, consider your goals. Why are you giving an exam? Why did you assign a major paper? What is it that you want your students to take away from your class?

Course content is important to learn. But testing students' rote memorization of the material does not always result in long-term knowledge. Adding reflection questions to a final exam may prompt students to consider how they will use the information in the future.

### Research Confirms the Value of Reflection

"In a 2014 study from the Harvard Business School, researchers confirmed what many higher ed faculty members know already – reflection matters. The professors conducted three different experiments (with university students and people in the workplace), and the results were consistent. Simply asking test subjects to take a few minutes to reflect resulted in better performance over time – improvements of up to 25%."

Tricia Whenham: <https://www.nureva.com/blog/education/15-ways-to-spark-student-reflection-in-your-classroom>

### What is the Purpose of Reflections?

Reflection is a process where students describe their learning, how it changed and how it might relate to future learning experiences.

Students assess what they know, what they need to know, and how they will bridge that gap.

### What Are the Benefits for Students Who Reflect?

- During the semester, students may narrowly focus on their assignments; using reflections can enable students to think about assignments, the course, and future plans.
- Reflecting can help students learn from what they have done and move forward.
- Reflection can suggest areas to improve on or develop and indicate they are doing well.
- Reflection can guide students to ponder what they are doing and why they are doing it; this process can spark new ideas and ways of thinking.

## When is the Best Time to Assign Reflections?

Reflections can be used in class, attached to major papers, and on the final exam.

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## What Are the Benefits to Instructors Who Assign Reflections?

- Reflections provide evidence of what students think they have learned and of how they believe they will use the material in the future.
- Reflections do not need detailed rubrics for grading—provide a prompt that includes the minimum length. If students meet the requirements, simply give full credit.
- Reflections are not returned to students – so do not make any comments on them.
- Typically, you can skim reflections very quickly, yet get a deeper understanding of students' beliefs about what they have learned.

## How Do I Structure a Prompt for Student Reflection?

Students could begin with reviewing the details of the experience and move toward critical thinking, problem solving, and creating an action plan. Remind students that a reflection is not simply a narrative of their experience – it is an analysis.

**What?** Descriptive: what happened, with whom

**So what?** Shift from descriptive to interpretive: meaning of experience for each participant, feelings involved, lessons learned

**Now what?** Application: seeing the experience's place in the big picture; applying lessons learned/insights gained to new situations; setting future goals, creating an action plan

Ryan, M. (2013). The pedagogical balancing act: Teaching reflection in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(2), 144-155, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.694104>

## Remind Me Again – Why Should I Assign Reflections?

- Easy to grade
- Provide evidence of student learning
- “If students do not relate the issue/incident to their beliefs, experiences or world-view, they can demonstrate discipline knowledge but [may not be able to] reconstruct their learning or practice to incorporate this new knowledge.” Giroux, H. A. (1988). Schooling, popular culture, and a pedagogy of possibility. *Journal of Education*, 170(1), 9-26.

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