

Guiding Ideas for Reflection Papers



Reflection/reaction papers should be analytical and use a **guiding idea** and specific examples. Without a guiding idea, papers can seem unfocused, vague, and dull. Expectations for reaction papers might differ greatly, so always pay close attention to the prompt. Teachers may ask you to:

- Analyze the readings
- Analyze your own experiences or views
- OR a combination of both

Include a Guiding Idea:

A Thesis Statement is a **claim** that your argument/evidence will support in a research paper. For a Reflection Essay, you might not need to support a claim, but you should still **preview the content** of your paper with a **Guiding Idea**, a sentence near the beginning that mentions your **central idea** or **main point**.

Your guiding idea might describe:

1. How a reading or class discussion lead to a personal realization, deepened your understanding, or changed your perspective on a topic.
2. How a reading or topic covered in class has practical applications.
3. How a concept from class can be used to analyze a text, film, or situation.

Use Questions as Tools to Get Started & Develop a Guiding Idea:

Your teacher might give you question(s) to answer. Your answer can be your guiding idea. If your teacher hasn't given you a question, you can come up with your own question. Try using the ones below.

Analyzing the reading(s)

Ask yourself: How does the reading connect to specific ideas you have discussed in class?

- Were the author's ideas consistent with what others have found?
- Do the author's idea challenge or complicate what came before?
- What does this author emphasize that others miss? What does this author ignore that others emphasize?

Analyzing your own views

Ask yourself: What appealed to you? Why did an idea resonate with you?

- Why did one idea/reading/concept stand out to you? Was anything surprising to you?
- Do you have any personal experience that is relevant to the issue?
- Did the author describe something you already knew or felt but hadn't been able to articulate clearly? What did you like about the way the author described something?

Ask yourself: Why did you feel resistance to a certain idea or theory?

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the main sides of the issue, as you see it?
- Were there some important ideas that the author left out?
- Did the author make any claims or observations that you disagree with? What evidence could you provide to support your opinion?

Ask yourself: Has your own perspective changed?

- How, specifically, does your current perspective differ from what you thought before?
- Can you point to any specific moment/event/discussion/idea that contributed to changing your way of thinking?
- Analyze your previously held views: Where did your views come from? Family? Cultural messages around you? Media?

Reflection Papers Continued: Tips



Tip #1: Ask your Teachers for Clarification:

You might want to ask your teachers about their expectations for content, tone, and referencing sources.

Content and tone:

- Is it okay to use “I” language (“I”/“me”) when describing my beliefs? What about when contrasting my opinion with the ideas of others?
- Is it okay for me to include personal stories to illustrate my opinion or as evidence?

Referring to sources and readings:

- How many readings from the course material should I mention?
- Do I need to include in-text citations for readings? (Even if they’re readings from the syllabus?) If so, what format should they be in? APA?
- Do I need to include a References/Works Cited section? If so, what format should it be in? APA?

Tip #2: Be Specific and Limit Generalizations:

[Advice from Gina Bell:] Avoid vague impressions about a reading/issue as a whole; instead base everything you say on **something specific**, such as a quote, concept, or argument: refer to the specific details.

Generalization: Meditation is an important practice with many therapeutic applications.

Something specific: Some patients might be resistant to trying meditation because of the misconception that they need special training to meditate.

Guiding Idea Examples:

Example: Reading “Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers” has made me more aware of how our bodies pay the price for our negative thoughts which trigger our flight or fight response.

- This guiding idea focuses on how a class reading deepened understanding of a concept.

Example: The chapter gave me advice that will help me use visual media and cater to a variety of learning styles in my upcoming 4th grade classroom takeover.

- This guiding idea is about how a reading or topic covered in class has practical applications.

Example: I used to think that mindfulness was useful for managing stress, but after reading the article I now realize that mindfulness can also help elementary school teachers create a communal classroom environment and manage behavioral issues.

- This guiding idea is about how a reading or topic covered in class has practical applications.

Example: In most movies I have seen with a character that has a mental illness, the artistic nature of the film tends to soften the rawness that comes along with mental illness. Unless the film is a documentary, this is almost always going to happen. It must be very difficult to align what the director and writer wants to do, and at the same time portray the exact symptoms of a mental illness.

~Natalie Alderson, AUSB peer writing tutor

- This guiding idea uses a concept from class to analyze a film.