

## Reflective Essay Assignment Example #1: The Importance Of Investigating and Truthseeking

### OVERVIEW

One of the primary outcomes of your college education should be to understand the importance of "truthseeking", as well as developing your own practices of ethical decision-making, innovative thinking, and the life-long desire to learn. According to the AACU report "It Takes More Than a Major," 9 of 10 employers surveyed "say it is important that those they hire demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity, intercultural skills, and the capacity for continued new learning." It is also imperative that you see the importance of these skills, not just for your college or professional lives, but for making changes to the world around you. There are plenty of historical examples of investigations and searches for the truth started by one person or a group of people that had a real impact and changed the world.

Your purpose for this assignment will be to **watch** a documentary about the search for truth and justice by a person or group that had an impact on the "real world" and the people (us) who live in it. You then **reflect** on the purpose of the film and its impact on you.

Useful **Rhetorical Strategies** for composing a successful reflection: Beginning and Ending, Guiding Your Reader, Describing, Narrating, Summarizing, Analyzing

### PROCESS

1. Watch one of the following films. \*Note: You may choose a film not on this list, but you must get approval from your instructor before beginning the assignment.

- *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers* (2009)
- *Enron: The Smartest Guys In the Room* (2005)
- *Semper Fi: Always Faithful* (2012)
- *The Thin Blue Line* (1988)
- *The Education of Mohammad Hussein* (2012)
- *How to Survive a Plague* (2012)
- *Frontline: Hand of God* (2007; content warning, sexual assault)
- *Inside Job* (2010)
- *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006)
- *Harlan County, USA* (1973)
- *Hearts and Minds* (1974)
- *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003)
- *The Unknown Known* (2013)
- *Crips and Bloods: Made in America* (2009)
- *Frontline: The Silence* (2011; content warning, sexual assault)
- *Paradise Lost* (1996)

- *Frontline: League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis* (2013)
- *OJ: Made in America* (2016)
- *West of Memphis* (2012)
- *Titicut Follies* (1967)
- *Frontline: Poverty, Politics, and Profit* (2017)
- *Night and Fog* (1955)
- *Frontline: Football High* (2011)
- *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006)
- *Blackfish* (2013)
- *The Hunting Ground* (2015; content warning, sexual assault/violence)
- *Miss Representation* (2011)
- *The Central Park Five* (2012)
- *The Witness* (2016)
- *Deliver Us From Evil* (2006; content warning, sexual assault)
- *Chasing Madoff* (2010)
- *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* (2015)
- *13th* (2016)
- *Frontline: College, Inc.* (2010)
- *Dirty Wars* (2013)
- *Into the Abyss* (2011)
- *The Invisible War* (2012; content warning, sexual assault/violence)
- *The White Helmets* (2016)
- *The Look of Silence* (2015)
- *Lives Worth Living* (2011)
- *Butte, America* (2009)
- *Frontline: United States of Secrets: The US Surveillance Program, Parts 1 and 2* (2014)
- *Cause of Death: Unknown* (2017)
- *The Ivory Game* (2016)
- *Virunga* (2014)
- *Frontline: Second Chance Kids* (2017)
- *Park Avenue: Money, Power, and the American Dream* (2012)
- *Accidental Courtesy* (2017)
- *Dogtown Redemption* (2016)
- *Spies of Mississippi* (2014)
- *The Graduates/Los Graduados* (2013)
- *Detropia* (2013)

(TIP: Films can be found in a variety of places. Many can be found in FSW's library or streaming databases, online, and/or on streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, iTunes, etc.)

2. After you watch the film, you will reflect upon the motivations, methods, conclusions, etc. of the people in the film and/or the filmmaker, and the film's impact on you. First, consider some of the

following questions to help you reflect on the message and subject of the film.

- What situation is the filmmaker and/or subject(s) of the film responding to?
- What do you think is motivating the filmmaker and/or his or her subjects to engage the issue(s) raised by the film?
- What problems or entrenched views are the filmmaker and/or his or her subjects going up against?
- Are there any contradictions or opposing views held by the filmmaker and his/her subjects, or among the subjects of the documentary?
- Are the filmmaker and/or subjects in the film advocating for something?

3. Next, reflect on the film's impact on you, the viewer. Consider some of the following questions to help you formulate your reflection.

- What are some things you thought about while watching this film?
- What connections did you make to things you've read about, watched, or experienced in the past?
- What is your own position on the topic, conflict, problem, or situation presented by the film?
- What emotional impact did the film have on you? Why?
- What impact did the film have on your thinking or future behavior related to the film's topic/subjects?

Please don't try to answer all of the questions above! You should pick a couple that interest you and are related to the film you watched, and use them to get started on your essay.

## **ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA**

- ★ The writer crafts a strong introduction and thesis statement.
- ★ The writer provides a brief summary of the film he or she chose for the assignment.
- ★ The writer has well-developed and logically sequenced body paragraphs.
- ★ The writer has a strong, well-supported conclusion.
- ★ The writer demonstrates his or her understanding and comprehension of the film.
- ★ The writer crafts a reflective essay about the film that demonstrates critical thinking and analysis.
- ★ The writer meets standards for effective communication (clarity, logic, precision, accuracy, significance, and fairness).
- ★ The writer adheres to MLA style.
- ★ The essay is 750-900 words.

## Reflective Essay Assignment Example #2: Encountering Others and Comparing Your Experiences

### OVERVIEW

In order to be a successful writer and critical thinker, you must be able to regularly encounter and respond to the opinions and arguments of others ranging from your fellow students to experts writing academic journal articles. You will need to learn how to digest, reflect, process, and respectfully engage with others in important ongoing conversations. For this assignment, you will read a selection from your textbook, *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*, and reflect upon the similarities and differences between your own views or experiences and those of the author(s). In order to successfully complete this reflection, you will first need to comprehend the author's meaning and contemplate his or her point of view. This means resisting the all-too-human urge to immediately jump in with our own perspective or stance. After you have comprehended and contemplated the author's message, you will then compare his or her views and experiences to your own in your reflective essay.

Your purpose for this assignment will be to **read** a selection from the book and **reflect** on the similarities and differences between your views/experiences and those of the author.

Useful **Rhetorical Strategies** for composing a successful reflection: Beginning and Ending, Guiding Your Reader, Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting, Reading Strategies, Narrating, Describing, and Comparing and Contrasting

### PROCESS

1. First you will read and contemplate a selection from your textbook, *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*. You may choose from the following readings:

- Malcolm X, "Literacy Behind Bars" (p. 640)
- Eleanor J. Nader, "Homeless on Campus" (p. 693)
- Alina Tugend, "Multitasking Can Make You Lose...Um...Focus" (p. 714)
- Grant Penrod, "Anti-Intellectualism: Why We Hate the Smart Kids" (p. 754)
- David Sedaris, "Us and Them" (p. 798)
- Natasha Singer, "On Campus It's One Big Commercial" (p. 837)
- Michael Chabon, "Kids Stuff" (p. 876)
- Joan Didion, "Grief" (p. 932)
- Alison Bechdel, "Fun Home" (p. 955)

Tip: Do not immediately start writing your reflection after you read! Spend some time really digesting the author's message.

2. After you have read and contemplated the piece, you will spend some time reflecting upon the author's meaning. Consider some of the following questions to help you focus on the message/purpose of the text.

- What is the central idea, issue, problem, or situation the author is responding to?
- What do you think is motivating the writer to talk about this particular subject?
- What kinds of things might account for the author's perspective or experiences? (i.e.-geography, age, race, class, gender, upbringing, family structure, education, time period, etc.)
- What stake does the author have in what he or she is writing about?
- What perspective or stance does the author take towards his or her subject matter?

3. Finally, reflect upon your own perspective/experiences, and compare and contrast similarities and/or differences between you and the author of the text. Consider some of the following questions to help you focus on your own perspective and experiences in relationship to the author.

- What are the similarities between your perspective/experience and that of the author?
- What are the differences between your perspective/experience and that of the author?
- What kinds of things might account for your perspective and the similarities and/or differences between it and the author's? (i.e.- geography, age, race, class, gender, upbringing, family structure, education, time period, etc.)
- What stake do you have in what the author is writing about? Is it similar to or different from the author's?
- What *effect* did the author's experiences or perspective have on you?
- What perspective or stance do you take toward the text's subject matter? How is it similar or different from the author's?

Please don't try to answer all of the questions above! You should pick a couple that interest you and use them to get started on your essay.

## **ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA**

- ★ The writer crafts a strong introduction and thesis statement.
- ★ The writer provides a brief summary of the text he or she chose for the assignment.
- ★ The writer has well-developed and logically sequenced body paragraphs.
- ★ The writer has a strong, well-supported conclusion.
- ★ The writer demonstrates his or her understanding and comprehension of the reading.
- ★ The writer crafts a reflective essay about the reading and compares/contrasts his or her own experiences through critical thinking and analysis.
- ★ The writer meets standards for effective communication (clarity, logic, precision, accuracy, significance, and fairness).
- ★ The writer adheres to MLA style.

★ The essay is 750-900 words.

## Reflective Essay Assignment Example #3: Reflecting on Your Educational History

### OVERVIEW

Often in life, it is helpful to understand where you have come from in order to get to where you want to go. In education, your experiences throughout your life from Kindergarten through senior year with teachers, subject matter, other students, and your family shape your perspective, skills, and choices as you enter into higher education. For this assignment, you will reflect on your past educational experiences and choices to think about how you will succeed in the future.

Your purpose for this assignment is to **reflect** upon your past educational experiences and **design** a roadmap for your future success in higher education.

Useful Rhetorical Strategies for composing your reflective essay: Beginning and Ending, Guiding Your Reader, Narrating, Describing, Explaining Processes, and Evaluating

### PROCESS

1. First, answer this question: If you could change **one** thing about your K-12 education, what would it be? Your answer can cover changes to your personal choices, like studying, or a systemic issue, like classroom size.
2. Next, reflect on *why* making this change is important to you. Think about the impact such a change would have had on your past educational experiences.
3. Finally, think about how you create the change you identified in your past as part of your educational future, and how creating that change can help you to succeed. For example, if you chose “I would work smarter, not harder”, identify how you can implement that change to help you succeed in college. Explain how this change will make you more successful.

**OR**

If you chose something more systemic, like “Improve mathematics education”, think about what changes would be needed in higher education to bring it about--such as “Eliminate the requirement for college algebra, and allow students to take math classes that are more effective for their majors.” Explain how this change could help you and other students.

### ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA

- ★ The writer crafts a strong introduction and thesis statement.
- ★ The writer provides a brief summary of the text he or she chose for the assignment.
- ★ The writer has well-developed and logically sequenced body paragraphs.
- ★ The writer has a strong, well-supported conclusion.

- ★ The writer concisely describes and explains the change he or she would make to his or her education.
- ★ The writer thoroughly discusses how making that change could impact his or her success in higher education.
- ★ The writer crafts a reflective essay that demonstrates critical thinking and analysis.
- ★ The writer meets standards for effective communication (clarity, logic, precision, accuracy, significance, and fairness).
- ★ The writer adheres to MLA style.
- ★ The essay is 750-900 words.