

CYC: CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION TIPS



Reflective Writing in CYC

When CYC students are asked to engage in “critical self-reflection,” this may require one of two different reflective approaches (or sometimes both because the two are often conjoined).

The first involves contemplating a recent activity, exercise, or practical experience. For example, perhaps the class engaged in a role-playing assignment in which students practiced their counseling skills with their peers. The written requirements for this assignment might ask students to reflect on what went well during these sessions, what they found difficult, and what they would like to work on for the next session.

The second encourages students to “locate” themselves as subjects within the broader context of societal power relations. This type of reflection might involve discussing lived experiences; analyzing social interactions; commenting on relationships of domination, authority, and inequality; and more. This dimension of critical self-reflection generally invites students to consider their own social locations for the purpose of increasing students’ self-awareness, as well as fostering their ability to understand others’ perspectives.

In both approaches (although, again, they often go together), students should link their insights back to the specifics of their assignment. Students should also try to situate their reflections in conversation with their readings (for example, do the readings converge with, or diverge from, their own experiences?). Making connections across readings and self-reflections (even by critiquing a reading) can create a more nuanced discussion.

Two Tips for Reflective Writing



The process of reflective writing can be quite trying. These reflections may have significant personal and emotional effects; students might find themselves contemplating sensitive issues, and locating themselves in the context of these issues. Moreover, because students are frequently asked to engage in critical self-reflection for many of their assignments they might begin to feel something like “self-reflection burn out”—so what can they do confront these challenges?

One tip is to relate reflections *back to course and assignment intentions*. Go back over the assignment instructions, paying close attention to the purpose(s) of the assignment (which may be implicit or explicit). Also, return to the course syllabus and consider the goals and outcomes of the course. Here, in the assignment and course details, students will find hints regarding how to vary their reflections for each assignment by using course content and themes as a guide for their contemplation and analysis.

A second tip regarding self-reflection is that, in general, *the more specific your reflections, the better*. Generic statements are rarely particularly interesting or insightful. As mentioned above, students can increase the nuance and sophistication of their reflective analyses by making *connections* across insights and experiences, course readings and themes, and potentially, independent research (depending on the assignment). Additionally, students should *provide examples whenever possible* because these will probably enhance their reflections, whether the examples come from a video recording session or from past experiences.



*This handout was created by the CAC, not the CYC department;
if in doubt, follow your professor’s instructions rather than this handout.*