

# Examples of Reflecting

Excerpt from senior essay	Comments on elements of reflection
<p><b>Explaining/ Active Listening</b></p> <p>This conviction eventually led me, <u>as a sophomore</u>, to graft another branch into my academic career by <u>adding a minor in international studies</u>. Pursuing the <u>six required honors classes for the Flory Fellows honors program</u>, I took classes <u>in world politics and global identities</u>. <b>Many of the themes we discussed resonated with my high school experiences as a policy debater and reminded me why I love current events and global affairs.</b> I enjoyed my classes in the history and political science departments, and I was <u>preparing to study abroad in New Zealand that fall</u>. I was drawn to broader global questions, so I took a blue slip to the registrar's office and <u>added another minor</u>. <u>My advisor was skeptical</u> about the wisdom of diversifying to that extent. However, <u>when I demonstrated that I would be able to finish my English major on time</u>, he agreed to sign the forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underlined phrases and clauses contain important details that convey student's experience to the reader.</li> <li>• For the most part, this passage describes the writer's course of action but does not say <i>why</i> she did what she did.</li> <li>• The sentence in bold font hints at exploration (alluding to previously held views) and integration of curricular and co-curricular experiences, but does not develop elements of exploration or integration.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Exploring/ Perspective Taking</b></p> <p>When I arrived at Bridgewater in the fall of 2005, I <u>did not have a solid grasp</u> upon the college's philosophy of "developing the whole student." Admittedly, <u>my goals for my stay at Bridgewater were primarily academic</u>: <b>I would keep my grades up, get into veterinary school, and leave with a nice expensive sheet of paper bearing the school's name and seal.</b> Whatever else occurred during that time would be a minor detail within my <u>naive grand scheme</u>. In fact, when I first learned about the school's liberal arts philosophy of education, <u>my initial reaction was that of skepticism</u>. I viewed my <u>general education requirements with a degree of exasperation and impatience</u>, and <u>wondered</u> why the school required so many. I could understand why a Biology major must have a grounding in English and an exposure to history, but <u>I couldn't grasp the whole concept of why I needed to take classes in Global Diversity or Fine Arts</u>. It seemed like a waste of time—here I was, a <u>gung-ho pre-veterinary student ready to blaze her way through the Biology department</u>, and yet Bridgewater insisted upon these <u>seemingly silly little detours</u> in the name of "developing the whole person."</p>	<p>Most reflective writing combines the actions indicated in the verbs <i>explain</i>, <i>explore</i>, <i>analyze</i>, and <i>synthesize</i>. In contrast to the first paragraph, this paragraph focuses on exploring preconceptions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underlined phrases and clauses indicate student's preconceptions prior to the experience.</li> <li>• The sentence beginning "I would keep my grades up," emphasized in bold font, includes explanatory details within this predominantly exploratory passage.</li> </ul>
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**Analyzing/ Public Reasoning (with a move into synthesizing at the end of the passage)**

Another limitation of choosing our own identity is that people make their choices not based on themselves as much as it is based on what is socially acceptable. People may think they are making free choices, but they do so in accordance with their class, gender, religious belief, ethnicity and many more factors. Mathews does believe that we can pick and choose from a cultural supermarket to form our identities, but we are still influenced by other factors when making these decisions. However, Mathews does not believe there is absolutely no room for individual choices. Although our freedom to make choices is limited, it cannot be denied.

I do agree with Mathews' argument that our identities come from the cultural supermarket. As an American, I do have the ability to access and research basically every different culture or country there is. I have the freewill to decide what type of food I want to have for dinner, what movies I watch and clothes I wear. I understand that these decisions are also based on what is socially acceptable. I might want to break away from the way I was raised but those lessons and memories will always have an impact on my choices. Who I am today is not just based on what I decided to become, or how I want to live but also constructed by society.

**When I make decisions in the future I will be aware, as I am now, that I am not making them alone. There are always influences from society. With that in mind, I feel that I will be able to make better decisions, whether or not I go against the grain of what is acceptable. I am aware and awareness is knowledge.**

The first paragraph and about half of the second paragraph are examples of analyzing, followed by *synthesizing* as the student links the topic under discussion with his decisions in the past and his decisions in the future.

- Underlined sentences break down the concept the student is reflecting on into various aspects.
- Note that the analysis might be considered to contain elements of explanation. The significant difference in *analysis* is that analysis divides an idea into components and looks at how those components work together in the larger, unifying idea.
- The sentences emphasized with bold font show where the student begins to link the concept with his own previous ideas and to indicate how the concept will influence his thinking in the future.

**Synthesizing/ Self-authorship**

I came to college expecting to receive work, work, and more work. Well, I did receive the work, but I have also received so much more above and beyond assignments. I have gotten the opportunity to grow to be more than who I came to college as. At the beginning of my freshman fall semester in PDP we kept a time log of all of our activities for one week. I look back now and realize that I spent a startling amount of time doing coursework and not nearly enough time sleeping. As Hara Estroff Marano says in the article *Night Life*, “The biggest sleep robber of all...is work.” I found this to be inescapably true my freshman year. I worked more and more and slept less and less. Now, rather surprisingly, with my extra activities I find that I come back energized and able to work more efficiently and quickly. Instead of jeopardizing my ability or time to work, these activities have benefited me immensely.

In developing into the person that I wish to become, I have also discovered another beneficial practice: stop fighting myself. In the past I would push myself too hard to get the grade, and as a result I lost part of who I was. I was only a student, nothing more. Now I have come to realize that I am much more than a simple college senior. I am a musician, actor, dancer, athlete, sister, daughter, neighbor, and friend. In my goal for my last semester at Bridgewater, I hope to continue to remember these other definitions of myself. In yielding to this, I have accepted that while I might not be the best in everything, it is this “everything” that defines who I am. Annie Dillard articulates this sentiment very well in her essay, *Living Like Weasels*:

We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—even of silence—by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple ways, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. This is yielding, not fighting...I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you.

I believe that I have found my one necessity. My compulsion, that irresistible impulse to act, is driven by the urge to understand, the drive to become better, and the will to see it through. My high school self acted under the assumed necessity of top grades. I have now come to accept a B in a difficult chemistry class or complex physics test because I have come to understand that these grades do not determine who I am. Only I can do that.

For the most part, the writer is synthesizing in this passage. You will note that she moves back and forth between her ideas as a first-year student and her ideas as a senior.