

## Reflective Essay Example

Four years of English classes at Berry College total thirty-six credit hours. Now I am asked to compose this reflective essay to answer the question: How does “36” translate into writing development? My development as a writer has followed a natural progression. Initially, my writing always took a very safe route. I only tackled topics I comprehended fully. Through my time at Berry, I have been challenged to write about things I did not understand. Sitting down to write an assignment began to take much longer. I could not sit down with an idea and compose freely. Progressively, I would begin an assignment and draft something shallow, but the initial composition triggered thoughts that would develop after I shut my computer down for the night. Revelations would occur in the moments between sleep and awake, between rinse and repeat, between stir and heat. Some of these mind-blowing thoughts would slip away before I could jot them down; others began foundational pieces of my work. Overall, Berry’s English department has been not only a venue for me to grow and develop as a writer, but it has also been a supplier of endless food for thought and frustration, but, many times, joy.

It might be relevant to explain that my first English professor at Berry was Dr. Troy Gregory in a class dedicated to the study of literature of carnival and rebellion. Half way through the semester, Gregory asked students to compose an attack on him (p.51). We were challenged to criticize as many aspects of his character as possible in a personal address. This task was difficult in the beginning, but it was not for lack of material. There is plenty to say about Gregory, but this is not the kind of writing with which I was familiar. This assignment forced me out of the safe comfortable shell I had wrote in through high school. The personal attack started the movement, but Dr. Gregory required us to continue the momentum and write about topics I had never

considered. Reading “Midsummer Night’s Dream” was a completely different experience with Dr. Gregory. I was enlightened to the fact that, to quote Dr. Dasher, “all literature is about sex and death.” The entire course culminated in the paper “The Autonomous Woman” after I was advised to watch *Dangerous Beauty*. The movie follows the scandalous life of a courtesan who values the power and education her position lends, but desires a monogamous relationship with her courtly lover. It is a rebellious movie in many aspects, to say the least. In my final paper, I synthesized the movie and all of the course’s reading material. Though I have always been a thorough synthesizer, “The Autonomous Woman” turbulently connects all the pieces we read. It is not smooth, but the various connections, somewhat ineffectively articulated, demonstrate the passion found in relating so many interesting texts. This paper was the first of many at Berry that, when I got into the passionate heat of writing, I wished I had more time to devote to my work. Had I the chance to resubmit the paper, it may have had a clearer flow. One paper I was given the opportunity and drive to improve was an analysis of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (p.38) in Dr. Dasher’s class. This paper I expanded and enhanced into a presentation, complete with prezi, for the student symposium of 2014. These assignments I credit with opening my mind and breaking me out of thinking within a safe conservative bubble of thought.

Through the next couple classes I grew in my skills to communicate the connections in my mind into more eloquently composed sentences, paragraphs, and papers. Then, in English 240, the class lived up to its name. In the “Introduction to Literary Studies,” I learned of the different approaches to analyzing literature. Jumping into many of the perspectives is impossible. Dr. Trolander’s assignment (p.16) to understand literature through a psychological perspective taught me the extensive research required in this type of writing. Significant research must be performed in the specific field while also relating back to the literature. The literature review (p.7) I conducted for Dr. Whelan’s 240 class is the start for any good paper. After diving into the

literature on a text in a specific field, one can begin to construct their own analysis and subsequent claim. From this assignment, I learned the time-consuming bookwork it takes to truly build a foundation of understanding behind one's thesis and supports. As the student coming out of Dr. Gregory's rebellious class, I was provided with the literature other researchers and writers have done before and my new wild streak called all of it into question. The authoritative voice of a published researcher no longer held 100% in my mind. In my work, I began to question others' ideas and pose alternative ones rather than simply restating the conclusions to which they had arrived. My writing became more than it had been before – more than the safe affirmation of another's thoughts simply with a personal eloquence added. I took chances and made statements I could not fully support, but I felt they were true.

Although this portion of my writing development is not the most impressive, it was an important part of the writing I would later come to produce. I understood my theories were not well supported. However, I still yearned to write out of the safe zone. Understanding the writing process through Dr. Diller's Principles of Writing Pedagogy gave me the permission to use writing for what I had always needed and had recently begun to do. I began to use writing to discover my own thoughts and to piece together parts of my own theories that I was initially been unable to articulate. Using writing to discover was an amazing tool. Too many times in high school I was under the impression that good ideas would come from knowledge and thought, but that they did not require writing to be sorted out. In college, professors explained this, but I was too set in my way to understand exactly what they were encouraging me to do. Finally driven to the process facing abstract ideas, I could no longer get by in writing the simple ideas that first came to me. Dr. Tenger's assignment (p.28) to synthesize three texts from widely different times and places is a prime example of when I used writing to discover. Beginning the paper, I had no clear direction. I started with an outline that identified thin similarities and worked from there. In

assignments like this, writing became more than a way to publish and present knowledge; for me it has become a manner in which to process and gain new knowledge. In this way I find writing more useful for the individual.

Often, however, writing is not meant for the liberation of an individual mind, but it is meant to be shared with others for their benefit as well. The track my mind follows when writing to discover is nowhere near what a member of the audience would need in order to follow points logically. Today, I write to discover then rewrite to present. Although my plans for the future are to be a teacher, the skill to clearly articulate personal logic in a way others can understand is extremely important. Dr. Diller's teaching portfolio assignment (p.53) required me to consider my concept of the classroom from my students' perspective. Not only did this help me create a document I can use in my job search, it also helped me to write to discover and clarify my own thoughts in regards to how I would conduct my classroom. Additionally, I hope to get my Masters in the Art of Teaching and my Specialists degree. The course work for these degrees will require much writing and I will be able to use the foundation Berry has given me to move forward in my career. Lastly, I plan to engage in Educational Leadership through professional organizations and professional development initiatives. I plan to read and apply research in my classroom, but I would also like to contribute to the field as well by publishing my own work.

Overall, these four years have been a journey in so many ways. I have grown as a person, as a think, and also as a writer. Berry has truly inspired me to be a lifelong learner. For me, as an English major from our department, to be a lifelong learner would not be complete without the reading to encounter new information and ideas and also the writing in which to engage, muddle through, digest, and recreate everything in my own understanding.