Use what you have learned about reflection and the writer's journey to complete this assignment.

Think about your journey as a writer.

Introduce yourself and your goals for college.  How does writing fit into your college curriculum?  
Begin by describing your ideas about writing and the writing process before the course.  
Discuss what you learned about writing and the research process during your experience here.    
Then explain how you’re writing and researching process will work for you as you continue in college and in the workforce.

This essay is to be at least one full page in length following the standard formatting guidelines below:

Formatting Guidelines:

1. Font is to be Times New Roman 12 point

2. The essay should be double spaced

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Taking Stock

For some people, making a traditional outline during the pre-writing stage works well. It helps them structure their ideas in an easy-to-identify pattern, and that helps them concentrate more on the actual writing when they start the drafting process.

Although they will likely augment portions of their pre-drafting outline as they go along, the initial more rigid structure offered by an outline is helpful to them. For these writers, incorporating outlining into their writing process makes sense.

For other writers, however, creating this type of outline isn’t helpful until they are actually much closer to the revision stage.

These writers use outlines to help them develop a solid structure after they have written most of the first draft. Each writer has to figure out what tools work best for him or her and when to use those tools along the way.

Reflection

Part of becoming an effective writer and critical thinker is pausing from time to time to reflect on what you have done so far, what has and has not worked for you, and how you want to continue to grow in the future. Without this step, the techniques and skills you have practiced this semester will only get you so far. If you don’t evaluate how these tools work for you, you’ll end up incorporating practices into your process that don’t best meet your own style and needs as a writer.

Reflecting on your process not only helps you develop practices that work best for you, it also teaches you about how you work as a thinker. Do you tend to approach ideas using a cause-and-effect framework? Can you easily see how one idea or event leads to another? Is it comforting to be able to identify clear patterns when you encounter new experiences or ideas? Do you often visualize how an argument is laid out as you encounter or create it? If so, you’ll likely find that incorporating tools that provide significant structure work best for you throughout your writing process. Do you tend to visualize arguments in a more webbed way, with each concept relating in a variety of ways to multiple other concepts? If so, trying to adhere to a strict structure at the beginning of your process will likely make you feel like you are arbitrarily shutting down possibilities that could lead to a great essay. For this kind of thinker, it is often more productive to maintain a certain amount of openness and flexibility throughout much of their process. Patterns and structure will still develop, but they are likely to do so later in the drafting and revision stages.

Reflection is an empowering tool. It fosters a deeper understanding of self that allows you to take a more active role in determining how you learn and communicate. It also increases confidence as mistakes and frustrations are framed in terms of what does and does not work for you as an individual. Even a disappointing or downright negative writing experience can be used to strengthen your knowledge of yourself and help you develop a process that works best for you.

What Does Your Thinking Process Look Like?

Some writers think in a linear way, recognizing causal links at an early stage and moving directly from one idea to the next.

Other writers conceptualize ideas in a non-linear way, seeing multiple connections that move in various directions.

My own attention to process began when I became too frustrated and overwhelmed by the process that had been imposed on me. At that point, I had to stop and reflect simply because I would otherwise not have been able to complete all of the tasks I needed to finish. That is not the best way to come to your own process. If I had been able to think of writing as an individualized process earlier, I would have enjoyed writing much more, and I would have been better prepared to write more effectively.

Now that you have had the chance to try multiple techniques, think about how they impacted both your experiences as a writer and the effectiveness of your writing. Continue to try new techniques, and realize that as you develop your writing process and encounter new types of writing situations, your process will likely change. Being a writer is a lifelong practice.

Allowing yourself to engage with it in this way means allowing yourself the freedom and flexibility to make mistakes, try new things, and develop as a communicator and a thinker.

Making It Work for You

Taking the time to reflect on your process opens the way for you to implement changes within that process. Making reflection a regular practice allows you to notice which techniques work best in which situations. Most writers would love to be able to work without a deadline. They could use their ideal process, taking as much time as they need to slowly move through each step and rework their writing until it is exactly how they want it. This, however, is rarely a real-world condition.

Instead, deadlines, expectations, distractions, and other commitments limit the time, energy, and attention writers can devote to any specific task. That means that they need to be able to identify not only practices that work best for them in an ideal environment, but also practices that work in real-world situations.

Some factors that impact your process you can control and others you cannot. Knowing which parts of the process are most important for you can help you determine how and when to prioritize your needs as a writer. For example, Adhira has learned that it is during the revision stage that her writing really takes shape. She has identified the techniques that work best for her during this stage, and now she needs to decide what kind of situation best allows her to practice these techniques. Because she knows that revision is one of the most crucial stages for her, she determines that she needs to devote extra time, energy, and attention to this stage. She can use these observations about her process to navigate situations that are less than ideal. For example, Adhira has two young children who need a great deal of her time and can be very distracting when she tries to write.

Her instructor has assigned an analytical essay, and the deadline is quickly approaching. She has had to put in extra hours at her job over the past week, so she has less time than usual to devote to this assignment. Adhira doesn’t have the time or the energy to incorporate all of her best techniques into her writing process for this essay. She needs a plan. Based on her needs and her situation, Adhira decides to cut some of the pre-writing techniques that don’t work as well for her. She doesn’t cut this step entirely, but she decides to spend significantly less time on it than usual. She also decides that during this stage, she can handle a little distraction, so she accomplishes her pre-writing while her children are at home and require some of her attention. On the other hand, she doesn’t want to cut time from her revision process, and she wants to be able to really focus when she completes that step. She sets aside a few hours to work on revision and decides to tackle this step at her college’s library where she’ll encounter few distractions.

Your limitations may not be the same as Adhira’s, but we all have situations that require us to make decisions about how best to accomplish our tasks. Adhira’s choices offer one example of how someone might choose to negotiate a less-than-ideal situation. She was able to make those decisions because she has reflected on her process and knows what she needs as a writer. She has also reflected on her situation, which allows her to develop a realistic picture of how she can implement her process for this particular assignment. She takes control of the aspects of her situation when she can and works around other components of the situation that are out of her control.

Learning how to best implement your writing process is a process in itself. Pay attention to how other successful writers manage limitations. Talk to other members of your writing community to get ideas about ways you can navigate your time, energy, and attention limitations. If at any time you feel it is impossible to navigate these limitations, speak with your instructor right away. Instructors have a lot of experience making decisions about how to work within deadline and other restrictions.

Connecting with an Audience

Becky has spent all year working on her first book, a work on psychology for the general public. She finally turns in the draft to her editor with a sigh of relief. A month later, her editor returns the draft with the following note:

Wonderful insights and data here, but will readers be able to connect with your voice?

Revisiting her draft, Becky sees that she’s used a lot of jargon and forgotten to explain key terms, creating a reading experience that her intended audience might find frustrating.

When you work so hard on developing your talents and skills as a writer, it can be easy to lose sight of why we write in the first place. Writing is, above all, communication. As we’ve seen throughout this course, getting your point across to a reader isn’t just about what you’re saying; it’s also about how you say it. At this point, you’ve explored a variety of different essay types, each with its own conventions that govern everything from style to presentation. It’s important to remember that these conventions don’t exist in a vacuum—they exist so that the writer can communicate her point to the reader more effectively.

Approaching Your Audience

Every reader approaches your writing within a rhetorical situation. Imagine you pick up a medical journal and start reading an article about a serious condition in which the author begins with an off-color joke. You’d most likely be more than a little put off and less likely to read the rest of the article. On the other hand, if you went to a comedy show that began with a lengthy description of medical testing, you’d probably be pretty likely to leave—or at least be seriously annoyed. While these are extreme examples, they do illustrate how what the reader expects to find colors his view of what the writer has presented on the page. Respecting the rhetorical situation in which your reader encounters your work is a way of communicating respect for your reader.

In the same vein, knowing and applying the conventions of a particular essay form (effectively understanding the logos of the rhetorical situation) helps you build authority in your reader’s eyes (ethos), when you remain mindful of the rhetorical triangle. It shows the reader that you respect her views and expectations (pathos), and that you’re willing to work with these expectations to accomplish your goal. Whether you’re writing to persuade, illustrate, analyze, convince, or something else altogether, using the right conventions for the specific rhetorical situation is the first step to achieving this goal.

As the examples of the medical journal and the comedian demonstrate, appropriateness is a big factor in connecting with your audience. But other factors that we’ve examined also change the relationship that you create with your reader. As you write, you may now be considering some of the following issues:

• Where and how will my readers encounter this writing?

• What kind of language is appropriate? Formal? Informal? Strong? Slang?

• What would be the most appropriate way to approach authorship in terms of pronouns? Do I want to create a closer relationship with my audience (using I, you, we), or a more formal separation (one, he, she, they)?

• What kinds of connotations do I want my words to carry? Should I use more positive or more negative language?

Your responses to these types of questions contribute in a larger sense to the construction of your writerly voice. While voice is, to some extent, composed of stylistic choices, it also depends on more global strategies.

During his presidential campaigns, Barack Obama became well-known for his rhetorical style. But what does this mean?

Examining Obama’s speeches, we can see that he makes distinctive choices to appeal to his audience (pathos), from his use of short, catchy statements (logos) to his sharing of meaningful anecdotes to prove his point (ethos). He takes the conventions of the political speech and makes them his own through his choice of appeals and devices, as well as his word choice in crafting them. In doing so, Obama’s most effective speeches anticipated his audience’s need to hear a unique voice at a particular moment in history.

Similarly, you may ask yourself the following questions as you pre-write or revise your work.

• What kind of appeals do I want to make to my audience? What decisions should I make about approaches to logos, pathos, and ethos for this specific situation?

• Which rhetorical devices would be appropriate and effective in this context?

• Do I want to use counterarguments? If so, how?

All of these techniques both depend on and influence the writer’s awareness of his audience. What does the audience expect?

What does the audience believe? What is the audience open to hearing—and if they’re not open to the author’s point of view, what appeals might the author use to help them listen? By thinking about whom you’re writing for—whom you’re communicating to—you’ll be better able to achieve your own goals as you connect with your audience.

As you move forward in your writing career, you’ll find that, by taking a thoughtful approach to your subject, you are not only working within a particular rhetorical situation, but also creating a new one for your readers. As they finish reading your essays, they will have reason to reflect upon what you’ve written and how you used rhetorical tools and techniques in your composition to convince, persuade, argue, and achieve your goals. In doing so, you’ll find yourself engaging in part of a larger conversation about the tools of composition and how to use them to your best advantage.

The Writer’s Journey

Because writing is about communicating with an audience, it’s a skill that we continue to develop over a lifetime. Just as with a physical goal like staying in shape, becoming an effective communicator isn’t something that you achieve and no longer have to worry about. In the long term, you wouldn’t expect to stay fit for the rest of your life by going to the gym for a few months; similarly, you’ll continue to communicate effectively only by reflecting on, evaluating, and adapting your writing skills as you move forward in your writing career.

Reflection on your progress as a writer consists of two general steps. The first step is reflecting upon the importance writing has for you. This will help you take note of the kinds of writing that might be most beneficial for you to improve in, as well as the kinds of writing to which you might instinctively be more drawn. Consider:

• What role does writing play in your education?

• What role do you envision writing playing in your career?

• With which aspects of your writing courses have you felt most and least connected?

• What did you hope to accomplish at the beginning of the course?

• What are your current goals as a writer?

• How have you grown as a writer during this course?

• What were your weaker areas as a writer when you began the course? What about now?

• What were your stronger areas as a writer when you began the course? What about now?

Sometimes, it can be difficult to acknowledge our own accomplishments, but it’s important to give yourself credit for the progress you’ve made. Not only will this inspire you to keep working, but it will also show you areas in which you should reinforce your skills and continue to practice to achieve mastery.

The second step in reflecting upon your progress as a writer is to evaluate practical concerns. This set of questions might include:

• What resources were most helpful to me? How did I find them?

• How did my schedule or lack thereof help or hinder me?

• What writing techniques did I learn that were easier for me to implement? Which came less naturally?

• How do I feel about the organization of my writing? What kind of progress did I make in this area?

• How do I feel about my research? What kind of progress did I make in this area?

• How do I feel about crafting an argument? What kind of progress did I make in this area?

• How do I feel about my use of language? What kind of progress did I make in this area?

• How do I feel about style and usage? What kind of progress did I make in this area? How intuitive do I find different styles (MLA, Chicago, APA)?

Self-Descriptive Vocabulary

We’re not often asked to write about our own journeys of discovery in particular disciplines, so sometimes it can be difficult to know how to start. As you reflect and evaluate your progress and goals for the future of your writing life, you may find looking over some of the following vocabulary to be helpful (though there are many other terms that you can use to describe your journey!)

In the future

Planning for the Future

Having reflected upon and evaluated your goals and growth as a writer, the next step is to assess your strengths and weaknesses and create an action plan going forward. These plans will be as varied as you and your classmates are, but you might take into consideration some of the following factors:

• Vocabulary

• Sentence structure

• Paragraph composition

• Essay organization

• Audience connections

• Types of writing

• Rhetorical situation

• Rhetorical approach

• Research methods

• Professional standards of writing

No matter your field of study, your age, or your experience with writing to this point, you can always build on your writing skills as you move forward. As you do so, you may be surprised to see how writing is related to other aspects of your life—professional and personal, and how small changes in how you write can lead to larger changes in your effectiveness as a communicator.