

ONLINE REFLECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTIONS

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Remember that the threaded discussion will be a powerful, important component of our collective learning in this honors course; it will also figure prominently in your evaluation and grade. Please pay attention to the following guidelines. I look forward to your engagement.

Ground Rules:

1. Each student should contribute a minimum of 16 entries spread *consistently* and *evenly* throughout the semester. *Four holistically graded, unannounced periodic checks* of your online work are meant to help you remain consistently engaged. These assessments are averaged at the end of the semester for one of your course grades. A second course grade is an *overall achievement* assessment, giving you an opportunity to “make up” lost work and earn an excellent grade despite any inconsistencies in the periodic assessments.
2. Each entry should be at least a paragraph’s length, 15-25 lines. My interest is not in counting words or lines but in encouraging development of your ideas. My experience has been that honors students usually exceed the requirements of number and length of entries because they enthusiastically recognize the extraordinary learning that occurs in their threaded discussions.
3. Try to make most entries critical pieces in which you reflect carefully about an idea, issue, text, class discussion, outside reading, related learning in another class—something connected to our class work. Some entries grounded in personal experience or opinions are okay, but the premium is on critically thoughtful pieces that focus on the intellectual content of the course. Even more significant is your critical reflection on learning itself, your self-analysis of not just what you have learned but how, when, why, and what are you doing with your learning.
4. Use specific examples and quotations to enhance your discussions. When quoting texts, practice MLA or APA style to continue good habits of sound, accurate documentation. Personal topics can be useful and helpful, but try to tip the balance toward critical thinking and writing.
5. As much as possible or appropriate, demonstrate your motivation and independent learning by bringing into your discussions references to helpful outside sources. Collaborate with others in finding, analyzing, and evaluating secondary sources that add valuable dimensions to our discussions. If you discover a cogent journal article or chapter in a book or web site, share it!
6. Your entries will be appreciated and evaluated mostly for content, creativity, depth of thought, and critical engagement. Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics are *not* evaluated, though you should strive to communicate in clear, clean prose of which you can be proud. “Why level downward to our dullest perception?” asks H. D. Thoreau. Not a bad philosophy.

7. The online threaded discussion is a medium for challenging, creative, thoughtful reflection and engagement in intellectual growth and genuine learning. Let's respect each other as honors scholars and encourage risk, critical inquiry, diversity of perspectives, tolerance, and acceptance.

8. Finally, be sure to *save your entries to a disk or flash drive or make print copies* as insurance against lost or damaged communications. Let me know if you need help in learning how to copy to disk from internet applications. System crashes, email server failures, power outages, delays or glitches in connecting your computer to college network—these and other woes are not acceptable reasons for not completing your reflective writing requirements. Pencil and paper are amazingly trustworthy technologies!

The Student's Voice

Remember that writing in the asynchronous environment of a threaded discussion will be a powerful, important component of our collective learning in this course; it will also figure prominently in your grade. As I have stated earlier, online reflective writing is a medium for challenging, creative, thoughtful reflection, intellectual growth, and genuine learning.

I will share handouts of compelling, thoughtful entries posted by students. Your entries do not necessarily have to be as long or the same in content or style, but the models offer high standards for creative, collaborative, and critically engaging writing. They are excellent examples.

The Teacher's Voice

Several entries in the samples illustrate the kind of feedback you can expect from me. I try hard to respond to every post, though at times I combine entries and reply collectively to several at once. I may be silent for a while, watching with interest and pride as your conversation grows. Still, I want you to know that I read and value each entry written by each of you. Hopefully, my feedback will encourage you to read, think, and write critically and enthusiastically, to contribute often and meaningfully to our community of learners. Reflective learning at its best!

WHY A LEARNING PORTFOLIO?

Since all of your online writing will be included in your *Learning Portfolio*—along with samples of your formal writing, research, notes, presentation preparations, final project work, and, more importantly, your reflective analysis of your learning throughout the course—I invite you to read my thoughts about the value of reflection and portfolio development at <https://www.ideaedu.org/Research/IDEA-Papers-Series>. The link will give you insights into our assignment in the course, and I hope that you will understand how important reflective learning is in your intellectual growth as a reflective learner, one who goes beyond the “completion agenda” of checking off courses and earning grades, one who truly learns the skills and habits of deep, meaningful, lifelong learning.

Welcome to cyberspace! And welcome to our online reflective writing forum!