

Critical Reflection: Stretching Yourself in Response to a Human Rights, Cultural, or Artistic Event – Collaboration with the Writing Center

Assignment Learning Objectives and Outcomes

1. Students will apply the principles of critical and creative thinking to their academic writing and writing process.
2. Students will engage with the UConn Writing Center directly through a group tutoring session.
3. Students will reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in their writing with a Writing Center Tutor and their peers.
4. Students will recognize and practice the academic process of peer review and revision.
5. Students will practice writing as an academic means for critical, ethical engagement with our diverse, globalized society

Critical Reflection Assignment Details

Background

One of the most significant differences between high school and college is the university's expectation that students engage in academic discourse. As opposed to merely taking in information and accepting it as fact, students must now think critically about the information they receive and learn to ethically contribute their own voice to the ongoing academic conversation. Academic writing is a key to engaging in academic discourse across disciplines. Beyond college, these skills are vital for professionals in all fields because they enable graduates to better communicate and innovate in our diverse, globalized world.

Prompt

For this multi-part assignment, you are required to stretch yourself by attending an approved human rights, cultural, or artistic event on campus that is of interest to you. You will then engage in the academic conversation by writing and revising a brief essay summarizing as well as critically reflecting on the event. The focus of this reflection should be on the writer's analysis and interpretation that answers the question, "so what?" Because revision and peer review are vital elements to this process, you will visit the University Writing Center with a group before revising and submitting your final draft. Be creative, and have fun!

Steps for Success

1. Attend an event approved by your instructor. Arrive at the event early, and do not leave until the entire event (including question & answer time) is over. Take notes before, during, and after the event.
 - Before the event starts, take notes on your expectations for the event based on what you already know about the event, on the audience gathering around you, and on your related experiences.
 - During the event, take thorough notes, especially on ideas, artistic pieces, etc. that most interests you. Also write down at least one or two striking direct quotations to use in your essay.

- Immediately after the event, take several more notes on your reactions. If you're stuck, look to the Guidelines for Successful Reflections for ideas about how to react. It is important to get some of your reactions down immediately even though they might change as you draft and revise your essay.
2. Draft your essay, keeping in mind the guidelines for successful summaries and reflections (attached). As you write, assume an audience of fellow students, your instructor, and other UConn community members. Don't assume that your readers attended the event, but do assume that they are curious about it and especially about your personal and intellectual response to it. A full draft (2-3 pages) is due on _____.
 3. In a **group of 2-4 students** from your class, make a single appointment for the Writing Center. To make the appointment, go to <writingcenter.uconn.edu>. Only one of you needs to make the appointment. But you all need to create Writing Center profiles. Whoever makes the appointment should include his/her partner's name(s) in the "notes" section of the on-line Writing Center appointment form. If you do not sign up with partners the Writing Center will assign you to a group with other FYE students from across campus.
 4. Go to your Writing Center appointment with your partner(s). Please arrive on time. Bring your draft, your notes, and the guidelines for success. Also be prepared to discuss what you would like to improve in the essay. You will have a collaborative 45-minute session with your partner(s) and a tutor. Be attentive, contribute to the discussion, and take notes on their feedback. The tutor will also ask you if you would like a **tutor note** sent to your instructor. Say "yes"! This is how you will get credit for the Writing Center portion of the assignment.
 5. After the Writing Center visit, revise your draft. When you submit your final, revised draft also include the rough draft you brought to the Writing Center and a copy of the tutor note email. The final draft is due on _____.

Guidelines for Successful Reflections

1. Success in Summary: A successful summary will run no more than one page. The best summaries will be both thorough and concise.
 - The default organizational mode for summaries may be chronological ("this happened...then that happened...then that happened") but good summaries are usually organized hierarchically: they lead with the *most important* information (which may not be what came first) and they usually explain the *purpose* of the event, not just its content.
 - Given the one-page constraint, your summary cannot cover every detail, so you'll need to select the *most significant information* (purpose, theme, sponsor, key people and happenings) and the *most telling details* (key images, quotes, or moments).
2. Success in Reflection: A successful critical reflection will run longer than one page but not more than three. It should do more than register your gut reaction to the

event; it should perform analysis, make relevant connections, and/or help readers interpret the event in a way that goes beyond the obvious. The reflection may include initial reactions (“I loved it”/“I was bored”/“It disturbed me”) but should also feature independent and original analysis.

- Good analysis moves readers from the *known* to the *new*. It does more than rehearse what reasonable observers could figure out for themselves; it helps them see perspectives, implications, reactions, or connections that they otherwise might not have recognized.
 - Analysis can explore the *why* and *how* behind your emotional and intellectual responses. It can perform interpretation (“what really seems to be going on here is...”); it can involve making connections between your perspective and that of the speaker, between this event and others, or between this event and related issues. It can hinge on asking thoughtful questions, and it can mean articulating the not-so-obvious *assumptions* or *implications* of the speaker’s perspective. It might even involve reconsidering the event in a wider or different context. It need not do *all* these things, but these prompts offer several possible starting points for insightful analysis.
 - You should inform readers how, if at all, the talk influenced your thinking, and whether or not it moved you to get further involved in the issue discussed or with the sponsoring organization.
3. Success in Style: The best papers will be written in a prose style that is controlled, engaging, and economical—perhaps even eloquent. Sentence structures will be complex and varied; transitions will be fluid; words will be chosen carefully. Monotonous, stiff, passive or wordy prose—even if grammatically correct—will mark weaker stylistic performances.
 4. Success in Editing: The best papers will be carefully edited. They will not risk annoying readers with faulty grammar, usage, and punctuation. They will also meet typical academic formatting standards (double-spaced, 1” margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, page numbers).
 5. Success in Titles: They will be specific and engaging. The title should feature the name of the event and invite readers into your reflections (i.e., “The Rwanda Photo Exhibit at the Benton Museum: Shocking Viewers to Inspire Compassion”).
 5. Success in Writing Center Visits: A successful visit will involve attentive students who make revisions based on their discussions during the session.
 6. Success in Revision: Successful revising will be demonstrated by significant improvement from one draft to the next. Improvements will be made at a global (argument, organization, etc.) as well as local (wording, grammar, etc.) level.

University of Connecticut
First Year Programs and Learning Communities
Writing Standards Rubric

Description of Competency Expectations	Outstanding (A Range)	Good (B Range)	Needs Improvement (C Range)	Unsatisfactory (D or F)
Event Participation (25%): The paper should be written about an approved human rights, cultural, or artistic event on campus that occurred on or before the deadline.	The student's paper meets or exceeds the expectations for the competency.	NA, unless an extension for less credit is negotiated with the instructor.	NA, unless an extension for less credit is negotiated with the instructor.	The event is not appropriate for the assignment.
Writing Center Revision (25%): The student's final assignment should include all necessary revision elements: 1) a rough draft, 2) a tutor note, and 3) a final draft that shows meaningful content revisions based on tutor feedback, not just copy editing.	The student's paper meets or exceeds the expectations for the competency.	The final assignment includes all necessary revision elements; however, it shows limited revision based on tutor feedback.	The final includes all necessary revision elements; however, it shows minimal revision or merely copy editing.	The student's final assignment does not include all necessary revision elements.
Coherent Summary (15%): The paper's summary should be thorough and concise, taking up no more than one page. It should include only meaningful details. And it explains not only the content of the event, but also the purpose.	The student's paper meets or exceeds the expectations for the competency.	The summary is no more than one page, but it does not explain both the content and purpose of the event.	The summary is vague, too long, or filled with unnecessary details.	The paper does not summarize the event.
Critical Reflection (20%): The paper's critical reflection should take up more than one page but not more than three pages. It consists of original analysis that makes relevant connections, and/or help readers interpret the event in a way that goes beyond the obvious. It answers the question "so what?" by interpreting implications, reactions, or connections that they otherwise might not have recognized.	The student's paper meets or exceeds the expectations for the competency.	The critical reflection is 1.5-3 pages of original analysis; however, it does not fully answer the question "so what?"	The paper's critical reflection is either too short or doesn't go much beyond registering a gut reaction to the event.	The paper does not include sustained critical reflection.
Logical Organization (10%): The paper should illustrate a clear progression of thought. It should include basic elements of academic writing such as a body, an introduction, transitions, and a conclusion. And the organization of the paper should successfully reflect the writer's goals.	The student's paper meets or exceeds the expectations for the competency.	The paper has the elements of an academic paper; however, it lacks some transitions or contains gaps in illogical sequence.	The paper lacks some of the basic structural elements of writing.	The paper is sloppy and disconnected, lacking any clear order.
<p>Style, Grammar Fluency, and Mechanics (5%): The writing should be clear, engaging, and contain no major spelling or grammatical errors. It should include a creative title. And it should meet typical academic formatting standards (double-spaced, 1" margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, page numbers).</p> <p><i>Note to Instructors: Students for whom English is not their first language may be graded on growth.</i></p>	The student's paper meets or exceeds the expectations for the competency.	The paper generally fulfills the competency, with only a couple of minor errors.	The writing has some strong sections, but there are numerous errors in the writing or formatting.	<p>The paper has numerous errors, and it lacks proper formatting.</p> <p><i>Note: Plagiarized papers will receive zero.</i></p>

