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## Reflective Writers

I want to help students grow into more reflective writers. While I cannot teach them every lesson, reflective writing is key to their development as life-long writers and achieving the goals of self-regulation and self-efficacy in writers. Reflection links self-efficacy and self-regulation and encourages students to engage with their writing on a deeper level and to take responsibility for their growth and development as writers. Once a writer begins thinking about her writing not as a one-size-fits-all proposition but as a process influenced by rhetorical context then she is truly on the path to become a writer. Reflective writers think about their own writing and the choices they have made and can make as well as the consequences of those choices. Once engaged in reflection, then writers can continue their growth and development long after they leave my classroom.

## In Action

Reflection in my online undergraduate writing classroom incorporates four tools or sets of tasks: journals, tweets, class discussion, and literacy narratives. The process begins with journals. I give specific prompts that ask students to think about their past, present, and future writing habits and experiences. Then I ask my students to distill each journal entry into a Tweet which is sent to our class Twitter feed. I have two reasons for this. First, I want them to delve deep beneath the surface of the journal entry to pull out the most important message or lesson. I also want them to see how that important message fits into the larger world and the experiences of other writers using Twitter hashtags to connect their thoughts with writers from around the globe. We then take those ideas and conversational threads to our class discussion board where we can expand and comment more cohesively on what we started in Twitter. Finally, I use literacy narrative to channel this conversation back to the individual writer. The literacy narrative assignment spans the length of the semester and first directs the writer to study the events and lessons that shaped them as a writer and then draw together the lessons learned and challenges faced over the course of the semester.

With my graduate students, reflection focuses more on journals and class discussion then culminates in a final portfolio. As with my undergraduates, journal reflections focus on past experience as well as current lessons. However, these class discussions are more focused on writing research and how their personal experience and new knowledge can direct their own research and theory building as well as their pedagogy. As practicing teachers, my graduate students are engaged in the process of becoming writers and studying that process so they can become better writing teachers as a result. In this class, class discussion is key to helping students work through their understanding of these new experiences and knowledge as well as the implications for their own classrooms. Students deliver a final reflection portfolio at the end of the follow-up year which includes not only their reflections but examples of lesson plans, assignments, student work, and their own writing and research to illustrate their understanding and application of the growth they experienced as writers, teachers, and researchers.

## How It Works

I have found that tying reflection to their past, present, and future communication experiences has inspired my students to think more deeply about their writing and reach more thoughtful conclusions than before. Similarly, class discussion of the lessons that spring from this reflection also means that students realize they are not alone with their struggles and challenges which leads to more open discussion about these challenges and thinking about these struggles in ways many students refused to do before. Also, the class discussions mix in enough thoughtful discussion to inspire some students to delve deeper than they originally intended. Like Peter Elbow, Kathleen Yancey, and others I believe that these types of metacognitive activities make students better writers and are part of the writing process of successful writers. My experience as a writing teacher has confirmed this belief and so has my research which has linked increases in writing confidence to writers who set goals and engage in purposeful introspection about their writing.