

Academic Reflective Genres

When you reflect in your journal, you are writing just for yourself. Unless your journal is meant for consumption by others, you are writing *only* for yourself. In this case, your writing scenario is not a social situation (even if someone snoops in your desk to find your writing). In this section we focus on genres that allow writers to reflect but that are also intended to be shared with an audience.

Reflective genres allow you to contemplate what you think and why, what you did and why, or what you could do and why. Other times, reflective genres are used to describe and reflect upon challenges. Reflective genres depend upon describing thoughts or actions but also move beyond description to analysis.

What are some of the reflective genres you might encounter in college? Your professor might ask you to write a reflection on your writing process and turn in it alongside a research report, or you might be asked to write a reflection on a field experience for your geology class. You will also encounter reflective genres in the workplace; for example, an organization's employee evaluation and review process might involve having employees write self-evaluations. In public life, reflective speaking is often used in self-help groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous), such as when a participant stands up and tells his story and reflects on his experience. Another example of reflection in a public setting is when a musician is asked by an interviewer to reflect on his or her influences. However, the stand-alone reflection is usually only seen in academia or the workplace.

WRITE

Make a list of all the genres you remember writing in when you were in high school or in your most recent education experience. Which ones did you enjoy the most and why? Which ones did you find most challenging and why? Which ones do you think helped you grow the most as a writer and why?

The audience for reflective genres is usually either a professor (in academic settings) or a supervisor (in workplace settings). Readers want to gain insight into what you did and why. In the case of someone in a self-help group, the audience is other members of the group and possibly a facilitator, who can respond to the reflection in helpful ways.

Reflective genres also respond to a rhetorical situation. For example, if you have to write a reflective essay to accompany a visual argument you created, your purpose might be to help your professor (your audience) understand why you made particular choices in composing the visual and what overall effect you want the visual to have on its audience.

Some typical genres for reflective writing are portfolio cover letters, in which you describe and reflect on items in a portfolio of writing or artwork; progress reports, in which you describe and analyze the progress you've made toward achieving a particular task or outcome; and self-evaluations, in which you discuss some of your successes and challenges on the job.

The following is an example of an Artist's Statement, an assignment we like to give students in our classes that prompts them to discuss and reflect on the composing choices they've made. Shown here is an excerpt. For Michael Kipp's full-length Artist's Statement, see LaunchPad for *The Bedford Book of Genres* (launchpadworks.com).