

# Reflective Essay

## INTRODUCTION

Engaging opening

Background information and introduction of subject

Hint at subject's significance

## BODY

First anecdote

### Learning from Lisa

"Are you crazy?" I asked. "Our yearbook is going down in flames, and you don't even look worried!"

No, my friend Lisa didn't look the least bit worried. Lisa never looked worried, or even really concerned, even when things were falling apart all around us—which is what, it seemed to me, was happening at the moment. For as long as I've known her, Lisa has always seemed serene and confident, like someone who had all the answers to life's little pop quizzes, no matter how dire the circumstances.

This time, I thought the circumstances were dire indeed. You see, Lisa and I worked on the high school yearbook, as we had ever since we were ninth graders. It was our senior year, and we were finally running the show. After years of taking orders from more experienced staff members, we were finally calling all the shots, and we each would be managing our own staff for our own section of the yearbook. There was just one little problem.

Aside from Lisa and myself, nobody else on our staff had ever worked on the yearbook. They were good people, but none of them knew anything about putting together a yearbook, and some of them seemed afraid to try. Our head reporter was a painfully shy guy with his glasses taped together. It was hard to imagine him ever working up the courage to ask for directions, let alone ask a tough news question.

## Reflective Essay *continued*

Narrative details

Descriptive detail

Figurative language  
(simile)

Dialogue

Lisa seemed certain that they could be brought up to speed, but it was clear to me that if we were going to put out a decent yearbook, Lisa and I would have to carry the load ourselves.

That was fine with me—at least, it was fine at the beginning of the semester. As the semester dragged on, though, the workload began to get to me. Between my regular schoolwork and my section of the yearbook, I felt like I was working every waking hour. I started having nightmares about being buried under an avalanche of yearbooks, each one filled with misspellings and blurry photographs. By the time Lisa and I met that morning for our editors' meeting, I was tired, haggard, and mean-tempered.

Of course, Lisa showed up looking great, smiling and waving as she wove her way through the restaurant tables like an actor in a perfume commercial. When she got to the table where I was waiting, I kind of lost it. That's when I started questioning Lisa's sanity in a voice a bit too loud and a bit too close to panic. People at other tables cast worried glances at me, but Lisa was calm. "Whoa," she said. "Slow down. The first thing I need to know is what in the world you're talking about."

So, I told her all about my endless hours of work, the horrifying nightmares, everything. She listened sympathetically as I babbled on and on, and when I finished, she patted my arm. "Poor thing," she said. "It sounds like you're not getting any help at all. I've been so lucky! My staff has been great."

## Reflective Essay *continued*

Flashback  
(second anecdote)

Narrative details

Writer's thoughts and  
feelings

Narrative details/  
dialogue

"What?" I asked, incredulous. "I figured your staff would be even worse than mine. After all, I picked mine first."

"Well, they *were* a bit green," Lisa said, smiling at the memory. "That first couple of weeks was a little rough. I had to explain everything to them. I mean *everything*."

Suddenly, I flashed back to the fall of our freshman year, and to the first time I learned the importance of listening to Lisa. The yearbook editor had given me the first assignment of my yearbook career; all I had to do was ask our principal, Ms. Daniels, a few basic questions about her job and write it up as a half-page feature. This would have been a simple assignment for any experienced reporter, but I was a rookie and I was terrified. The day before the interview, Lisa must have realized that I was panicking. "I know what will help you," she said. "Let's go shopping. You can get something new to wear to the interview." While we were wandering through the mall, she told me about some interviewing techniques she had learned from her aunt, a reporter for our local newspaper. She also passed along a few stories that her older brother had told her about Ms. Daniels, and suggested several topics Ms. Daniels might be interested in talking about. By the time we left the mall, I was laughing and joking, and the next day the interview went smoothly. I even won an award for that feature.

Throughout our years on the yearbook, Lisa was always there to give me the guidance I needed in a time of crisis, from teaching me

## Reflective Essay *continued*

Flashback  
(third anecdote)

Writer's thoughts and  
feelings

CONCLUSION

Flash-forward (back to  
first anecdote)

Descriptive and  
narrative details

Writer's thoughts and  
feelings about  
significance of subject

typography to coaching me on the best way to ask my parents to loan me the car. Once, during our junior year, she even helped save my grade in European history by patiently teaching me how to find sources for my term paper on the Internet. I had put the paper off until the last minute, and couldn't find the information I needed to prove my thesis. I was sitting gloomily outside the library, convinced I was going to fail, when she found me. Fifteen minutes later, after a few calm, confident instructions from Lisa, I was back inside, tracking down all the sources I needed to finish on time. To this day, I don't know what I would have done without Lisa's help.

Now, as seniors, here Lisa and I were once again as she guided me through another major crisis and taught me to do something new. She helped me put together a weekend crash course in yearbook production for my inexperienced staff and showed me how to help build their confidence in their own abilities. In the end, they did some pretty good work. The shy guy with the taped glasses turned out to be our best writer, and when it was all over, the yearbook sponsor said that this year's edition was one of the best he had ever seen. He thinks we might win the state title.

Whether we win or not doesn't really matter to me, though. What matters is that I learned yet another important lesson from my friend Lisa, and it's a lesson that she's been trying to teach me, through her words and her actions, for years: If you help others become the best people they can be, you benefit as much as they do.

# Reflective Essay

## Definition

In a **reflective essay**, a writer contemplates a significant event or person and reflects on the impact that person or event had on the writer's life. A reflective essay that focuses on a person explores the ways in which the words and actions of that person have taught the writer a valuable lesson.

Many reflective essays use the structure illustrated in the framework below. Print this framework and use it as a guide when you write your own reflective essay.

## Framework

## Directions and Explanations

### Introduction

- Engage readers' attention.
- Supply necessary background information, including an introduction of the subject.
- Hint at the subject's significance.

**Compel readers' attention** Use a vivid anecdote or dramatic dialogue to draw your readers into your essay.

**Introduce your subject** Include a story or a description that introduces your subject to your readers.

**Hint at your subject's significance** Prepare your readers for the focus of your essay by hinting at the subject's significance.



### Body

- Relate first anecdote that conveys subject's significance.
- Relate second anecdote, third anecdote, and so on.

**Bring your subject to life** Tell several anecdotes about your subject. Combine narrative and descriptive details with your own thoughts and feelings to make your subject seem real.

**Include dialogue** Don't just *tell* your readers about what's happening, *show* them by using dialogue that places your readers in the middle of the action.



### Conclusion

- Reflect on why this subject is significant to you—and possibly to your audience.

**Reveal your subject's significance** Explain the subject's significance to you. Then, tell your readers why your feelings about this subject might be significant to them.