

Self-Assessment Reflective Essay Checklist

Use this checklist to review your reflective essay before submission. Check each box to ensure you haven't missed key elements.

Content & Depth (The Most Important Section)

Analysis vs. Description Balance - [] Less than 40% of my essay describes what happened - [] More than 60% of my essay analyzes what it means - [] I explain WHY things matter, not just WHAT happened - [] I've avoided excessive storytelling without reflection

Insight Quality - [] My thesis states a specific lesson or insight (not generic) - [] I explain HOW my thinking changed, not just that it changed - [] My insights go beyond obvious observations - [] I've identified specific before/after differences in my behavior or beliefs

Personal Growth - [] I clearly show how I've changed or grown - [] I provide specific evidence of this transformation - [] I explain what I'll do differently in the future - [] I acknowledge ongoing learning (not claiming perfection)

Honesty & Vulnerability - [] I admit mistakes or failures honestly - [] I include uncomfortable emotions or thoughts - [] I avoid making myself sound artificially impressive - [] My reflection feels authentic, not manufactured

Structure & Organization

Introduction - [] Opens with a hook (vivid moment, question, or striking detail) - [] Provides brief context about the experience - [] Includes a clear thesis statement - [] Introduction is under 150 words

Body Paragraphs - [] Each paragraph has a clear focus/topic sentence - [] Paragraphs include: description + reflection + analysis - [] I use transitions to connect ideas smoothly - [] Each paragraph advances my thesis - [] Body makes up 70-80% of total essay length

Conclusion - [] Restates main insight in fresh language (not copy-paste) - [] Summarizes key growth briefly - [] Projects forward—explains future impact - [] Provides satisfying closure - [] Conclusion is 100-150 words

Writing Quality

Specificity - [] I use concrete details (names, moments, dialogue) - [] I avoid vague statements like "it was a good experience" - [] I include sensory details

when describing scenes - [] My examples are specific, not generic

Language & Style - [] I use first person (“I”) throughout - [] I employ reflective language (“I realized,” “Looking back,” “This revealed”) - [] I avoid overly formal or stiff academic language - [] My tone is thoughtful and introspective

Clarity - [] Every sentence has a clear purpose - [] I avoid unnecessary repetition - [] My ideas flow logically from one to the next - [] A reader unfamiliar with the experience can follow along

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Check that you HAVEN’T done these: - [] Written a narrative essay (all story, no analysis) - [] Used generic insights (“teamwork is important”) - [] Focused only on positive aspects (ignored challenges/failures) - [] Included too many different experiences (stayed focused on one) - [] Written in third person or passive voice - [] Made claims without supporting evidence - [] Ended abruptly without real conclusion - [] Introduced new information in the conclusion

Technical Requirements

Formatting - [] Meets required word count/page length - [] Follows assignment formatting guidelines (font, spacing, margins) - [] Includes required components (if specified by instructor)

Grammar & Mechanics - [] Proofread for spelling errors - [] Checked for grammar mistakes - [] Verified punctuation is correct - [] Ensured consistent verb tense (usually past for events, present for insights)

Citations (if applicable) - [] Cited any outside sources properly - [] Connected personal experience to course concepts (if required) - [] Formatted references correctly

Final Quality Check

Read Your Essay Aloud - [] Read entire essay out loud to catch awkward phrasing - [] Confirmed it sounds natural and authentic - [] Checked that it flows smoothly

The Highlighter Test - [] Highlighted every sentence that analyzes or reflects (not describes) - [] At least 60% of essay is highlighted - [] If less, revised to add more analysis

The “So What?” Test - [] Asked “so what?” after each major point - [] Explained significance, not just facts - [] Ensured every paragraph answers why it matters

The Stranger Test - [] Someone unfamiliar with the experience could understand it - [] The lesson/insight is clear without additional explanation - [] The growth is evident and specific

Scoring Guide

25/25 checks: Your essay is excellent—ready to submit!

20-24 checks: Strong essay with minor improvements needed

15-19 checks: Good foundation but needs significant revision

Below 15 checks: Major revisions required before submission

Before You Submit

- Saved file **with** correct naming convention
- Double-checked submission requirements
- Submitted **to** correct platform/location
- Met the deadline

Final question: Am I proud of this work? Does it represent my genuine learning and growth?

If yes—submit it. If no—revise until you can answer yes.

Pro Tip: Return to this checklist during revision, not just at the end. Use it to catch issues early rather than after your essay is “finished.”