

# Assignment Genres: Writing Reflection Papers and Journals

Your first writing step is to make sure you understand the assignment.

## Read the prompt and ask yourself:

<b>Why was this assigned?</b>	Professors design assignments with specific learning objectives in mind. Does your professor intend for you to learn how to write a literature review, a research proposal, or a policy memo? Is your task to demonstrate your understanding of a concept, or to practice critiquing a theory?
<b>What am I being asked to do?</b>	<p>Most prompts contain key verbs, or action words, that help you determine the main tasks. The <a href="#">University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</a> divides these words into three categories: <i>information</i>, <i>relation</i>, and <i>interpretation</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Information words</b> ask you to demonstrate your knowledge about a subject. Examples include define, describe, explain, illustrate, summarize, trace, and research.</li><li>• <b>Relation words</b> ask you to show connections between ideas. Compare, contrast, apply, cause, and relate fall into this category.</li><li>• <b>Interpretation words</b> ask for you to defend your own argument, thesis, or idea. These words include assess, prove, justify, evaluate, respond, support, synthesize, analyze, and argue.</li></ul>
<b>What evidence is required?</b>	Some assignments, like a reflective memo, may not require any formal evidence. More often, though, assignments will ask you to draw on outside research or other types of evidence.

## About reflection papers

Reflective journals or memos are usually the least formal writing assignments. They are often reflections on your field experiences or observations, or reactions to course readings. Journals are an opportunity for you to examine, in writing, what you are learning, and for your teaching team to see some of that learning as well. Take the example below:

*Learner Autobiography: Write a short description of your own identity as a learner, drawing on the readings and materials from this week to facilitate your analysis (3-5 pages, double spaced). Where are you from? Where have you lived? Who have you lived*

*with? Are there other social details that you consider important? What was your educational experience like? How did family, educators, and other adults communicate to you about learning and school? Do you remember particular instances when your learning ability or your sense of yourself as a scholar was called into question, or when it was praised? How did school fit into your identity? The above questions may help guide your planning, but you do not need to answer them all. You may also address any other elements of your learner identity development as you see fit.*

## Reading the prompt

<b>Format</b>	Reflective journals are usually short, but often assigned in a series, such as a few pages once a week for each of 8 weeks of observations or reading. Because you'll likely be asked to relate your personal experiences to course content, writing in the first person (e.g., "I believe," "I experience") is standard practice.
<b>Evidence</b>	Often, reflective journals require no outside research or references. Citations are still required for any sources, like class readings or discussions, that you mention.
<b>Audience</b>	The teaching team is usually the audience, as they want to assess how you are thinking about and approaching the material.
<b>Purpose</b>	The key action word here is "describe," an informational word that asks you to demonstrate your knowledge – in this case, an experiential knowledge about your own identity. A second purpose is relational, as you will need to compare, contrast, or apply class materials to your experience.

