

The Reflective Essay: its Outline and Types

15th Lecture

The Reflective Essay

A reflective essay is an exercise in contemplation on any given subject. It tests your ability to think and describe, to order your ideas and to draw on your experience, imagination, and general knowledge.

Types:

(a) *Descriptive-reflective* These usually take the form of one-word titles. When writing you should draw conclusions from what you describe. 'Gardening,' for instance, is a title of this sort. Here you would not only be expected to describe gardening but to express your views on it.

(b) *Abstract* These again may take the form of one-word titles when they refer to abstract qualities (i.e. 'Truth'). Very often, however, the title appears as a phrase beginning with the word 'On' (e.g. 'On having to work'). In subjects of this kind, purely descriptive writing is of secondary importance. Your ability to reason rather than to describe, your own feelings and views about the subject take first place.

Avoid making trite observations like 'Every time I think about walls' or 'We see walls everywhere' or 'Walls are very useful' etc. Another thing to avoid is what might be called the 'pseudo-historical' approach. This consists in giving the 'history' of the subject from the earliest times to the present.

4. TREATMENT Two distinct processes are involved in essay-writing: analysis and synthesis. In the first instance, you break down the subject (analysis) and then put it together again (synthesis) so that it forms a *complete whole*. Nothing irrelevant must be included. Your essay should have unity to the extent that if any single part were excluded it would spoil the effect of the whole. Like a painting or a piece of music, an essay is a *composition*. When complete, it should not be possible to add or subtract anything.

Transitions from one paragraph to another should be smooth. A paragraph may often warn the reader of the approach of a new thought or refer to an idea that has already been considered. Each paragraph should be developed properly: a sentence or two is not enough. From the point of view of the reader, a paragraph is a logical break which allows him to collect his thoughts, as much as it is a physical break which permits him to rest his eyes.

(a) *Introduction* This is the most important paragraph in the essay as it is here that you make clear to the reader your interpretation of the subject. An introduction is, in effect, an essay in miniature, for you should touch briefly on some of the main aspects of the subject. In other words, your introduction should lead the reader to expect certain things.

(b) *Development* In this part of the essay you should take up the points that were hinted at in the introduction. Each main point must be developed fully in a single paragraph and all the paragraphs should be related to each other in some way. Avoid 'listing', that is, beginning paragraphs with phrases like 'The first thing we must consider ...', 'The second point ...' etc. Your essay should be well-constructed, but your plan should not 'come through' your work. The fact that you have planned your essay should on no account be obvious to the reader.

(c) *Conclusion* This should in some way relate to the introduction and so round the essay off. Do not end abruptly. At the same time, avoid clumsy phrases like, 'To sum up ...' or 'Thus we see ...' etc.

5. DEVICES: *Description, Illustration, Contrast.*

(a) *Description* This will form an important part of your essays as in 'descriptive-reflective' topics (as the title implies) and even occasionally in 'abstract' ones, your comments will be based largely on what you describe. You may draw on your experience when dealing with subjects that are familiar to you (say, 'Photography') or on your imagination and general knowledge when writing about less familiar topics (say, 'Mirages').

(b) *Illustration* Do not make comments without being able to prove them by giving examples. Illustration is especially important when you are dealing with 'abstract' topics. If, for instance, you are writing about a subject like 'Fear', good examples will make your meaning immediately clear to the reader.

(c) *Contrast* This gives variety to your writing and makes what you have to say more interesting. If in one paragraph you have given one view of a subject, it is often wise to deal with a completely opposite view in the

Showing Violence in Movies



A number of scientific studies have reported that watching violence can make children more aggressive. According to the research, two kinds of programs and movies encourage aggressive behavior in young children more than others: (1) realistic violent action programs and movies and (2) violent cartoons.

One disturbing conclusion is that the effects of violent viewing last for many years. One study showed that children who watched violent TV

programs when they were 8 years old were more likely to behave aggressively at age 18. Furthermore, as adults they were more likely to be convicted of violent crimes, such as child abuse and murder.

Studies have also demonstrated that watching violent movies and TV shows can affect children's attitudes towards violence in the world around them. Children who watch a lot of violence become less sensitive to it in the real world. If children find violence normal, they may accept more violence in society or even commit violent acts themselves.

Very often, characters in movies and on television who commit violent crimes are not sorry for their actions and don't face consequences

or punishment. When children see fictional characters like these, they learn that doing bad things is OK. For children, who are growing and developing, this is a bad message.

So what can we do? With young children, we have the power to control the TV programs and movies they watch, so we can protect them from seeing any violence at all. However, with older children it's impossible to completely prevent their exposure to violence. But we can try to limit the number of hours they spend watching it. And when children have seen a violent film or TV show, it's important to discuss it with them, to help them understand that violence is not a normal part of life.