

The University of Texas-Pan American
End-of-Course Reflection: Looking Forward / Looking Back
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NOTE: As part of our two-year study, we collected end-of-course reflections written by UTPA students. During this time, most WAW instructors were using a portfolio system, and student responses to the following prompt were included as Portfolio Cover Letters. There were differences in the assignment sheets given by instructors, and depending on the section number, the course goals included in the sheet were changed. However, the collaborative nature of the program and of those using the WAW approach led to modifications from this original assignment written by the WPA and the Basic Writing Coordinator.

Epigraphs? To rip a famous line, “We don’t need no stinking epigraphs.” You are the epigraphs and the epilogues, the alphas and omegas, the beginnings and the endings of what went on in English 1302 (even if it was only for a few weeks). And here, in this final project, is where you will look back at what you’ve done in order to look forward to what you will do as a writer and a reader and human being once we part ways.

FLASHBACK

When we began this semester, we talked about how this class might not be what you’ve typically thought or experienced English classes to be. I wanted to help you think about what writing, researching, and inquiry are—in your lives, in school, and in the weird spaces where both overlap and we learn about ourselves and the world. And I wanted to do this by having you read, write, and think about what other people study and say about you as writing students. This may indeed sound like more than what your typical writing class aspires to do, but for me, it has everything to do with rhetoric, with thinking, writing, and interacting with others through language. Asking questions, reading about what others think, thinking about your own responses to these questions, and discussing the questions with others allows you to enrich your understanding of yourself and the world in which you live. All of this helps give you a sense of perspective, a sense of where you fit in to conversations that have been going on for many years and will continue to go on long after us. I believe doing this work matters to your development as students and to your development as contributing, thinking participants in the world, and so I am proud to have been with you along the way, helping you, sometimes pushing you (and yelling at you), to compose your ideas with language.

WHAT I WANT FROM YOU

I hope these conversations and ideas helped you begin the semester by thinking about who you are as a writer and a language user. I hope you’ve come to see that writing isn’t a set of discrete skills that can be mastered in a single semester and then applied with ease to all future writing situations. Writing (in any medium) is hard because it’s hard, and we all need feedback from others to see where we’re accomplishing what we meant to and where we need to clarify and work through our ideas. I hope you’ve pushed yourself as a writer and a thinker and accomplished something you didn’t know was possible in May. I hope, too, that you have learned something about your own writing through your revisions and that you have come to appreciate the value of revision as a way for us to be as effective as we can be in our communication with others.

At this point in the semester, you’re in the middle (I hope!) of trying to get everything wrapped up—for this class and maybe for others—and because of that, you probably haven’t had much time for reflection. Perhaps reading through the description above of what we’ve done so far represents the first time you’ve thought about all the considerable work you’ve done as a whole and not as individual pieces that have to be finished by a certain deadline. What I’m hoping you’re able to do now is begin to put all these pieces together, to try to think about what you’ve done from a “big picture” perspective. I want you to begin to think about what you’ve learned, what the challenges have been, and how you’ve dealt with those challenges. For many, it may take months or years—long after the course evaluations—to realize the full effects of what you’ve learned.

To begin this process of reflection, which I imagine will continue well past the time when your English 1302 portfolio is due, I want you to write a cover letter for your portfolio. In this letter, which should be addressed to me, I want you to tell your story of English 1302 by reading and considering the course goals for the class.

As a reminder, here are the course goals for English 1302:

- see research as a process of sustained inquiry into a question that matters to them
- develop a research question from a broader topic or issue
- learn a process for doing research that can be adapted from discipline to discipline and adapted as information technologies change over time
- learn how to find, analyze, evaluate, and use appropriate sources for their research, including primary and secondary sources
- learn strategies for reading scholarly texts
- learn how to summarize complex arguments
- think critically about their positions in the context of a larger ongoing conversation about the issues they are investigating
- understand the complexities of arguments
- learn how to make a claim based on their research and their own ideas and support that claim with evidence
- learn how to integrate and document information from sources into their own work meaningfully and correctly and to recognize that different disciplines have different conventions in this regard

This list represents all that you were intended to learn over the course of five weeks. To tell me your story, you will need to study the work you've done for the class—your in-class and homework assignments and your writing projects (the Researched Response in particular). *Where did you begin? What did you already know? Where have you ended up? What happened along the way? What do you see there?* Here are some other questions that might help you find a way to organize what you've learned:

- What do you know about yourself as a writer now that you didn't know before? What strategies have you learned to use to make your writing more effective?
- What were the important questions for you to figure out this semester?
- Where do you see glimmers of understanding? What do you still need to work out (about who you are as a writer, researcher, question asker) in your mind? Where do you see yourself not being able to say/do what you wanted to?
- What have you learned about composing, about rhetoric, about revision, about yourself?
- What were the things that helped you learn?
- What were the challenges you faced this semester? How did you deal with those challenges?
- What do you still want to know more about?

Your primary audience for this will be me since I will be using it as a guide to your portfolio. Your **letter** will offer me a way of reading the work of your portfolio, and by extension the work of the class (and first-year writing in general), and should help me understand what you've learned from reflecting on your work in the class and from putting the portfolio together.

As I've mentioned in class, you can't really complete this assignment until you've wrapped up Writing 4, which is where much of the learning in this class takes place. I won't put a page limit on this assignment, but you should aim

for at least 3 very tight, revised pages (and you can always do more). These cover letters will play an extremely important part in my evaluation of your portfolio (as you've indicated in your evaluation rubrics that we've designed) as they will show me what you've learned and what you'll be able to carry with you once your time in our class is over. Please, however, do not think of this assignment as an opportunity to beg for a grade or as a request for you to flatter me. I want to know what the class has enabled you to do/think, and I am really excited about reading your reflections. They're often my favorite part of the semester. It has been a pleasure working with you; don't be strangers (even if I can't remember your name, I'll know your face).