

8 Reflections

A successful reflection challenges readers to learn something about themselves.

Chapter Overview

- ▶ Writing reflections
(see p. 69)
- ▶ What makes a good reflection?
(see p. 70)
- ▶ How to read reflections
(see p. 72)
- ▶ How to write a reflection
(see p. 88)
- ▶ Projects
(see p. 104)

Writing Reflections

When we reflect, we consider an idea or experience in order to come to a greater understanding of its significance. Reflecting is a way of understanding ourselves. By connecting memories of the past with our knowledge of the present, we learn about who we were and who we have become.

Reflections can explore deeply emotional issues like family relationships, personal failings, and dramatic crises. The goal of a reflection, however, should not be simply to vent pent-up emotions or to expose secrets (although when done well, these techniques can be effective). Instead, a reflection should allow readers to share with the writer a discovery of significance.

Keys to reflections

TELL A GOOD STORY

Readers have to be interested in your story to gain its insights. Often reflections keep readers' interest by presenting a conflict or a difficult decision that must be resolved.

LET THE DETAILS CONVEY THE SIGNIFICANCE

Select details carefully to communicate meaning. Identify people by more than how they look. Think about mannerisms, gestures, and habits to suggest their character.

BE HONEST

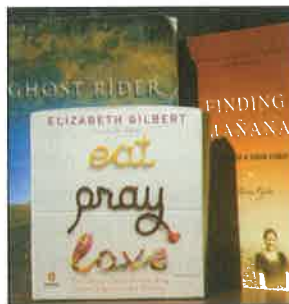
Telling the truth about your thoughts and actions can build a strong connection with your readers.

FOCUS ON THE LITTLE THINGS

A reflection doesn't have to teach big lessons about life. Small moments such as what makes you happy can be as rewarding for readers as great events.

Reflective writing in the world

Memoirs reflect on personal memories and life experiences. People write memoirs for many reasons, but successful memoirs explore questions about personal experience and invite readers also to reflect on those experiences and probe their deeper significance. Recent memoirs that combine self-discovery and travel, such as Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* and Frances Mayes's *Under the Tuscan Sun*, have stayed at the top of best-seller lists for many months.



Other genres of reflective writing

- **Narratives** tell stories about other people as well as the writer's life and offer unique perspectives.
- **Personal statements** are required for many scholarship applications and for admission to graduate and professional schools.
- **Blogs** reflect on events of the day, books, films, music, and popular culture.



Watch the Animation on [Writing Memoirs](http://mycomplab.com) at mycomplab.com

What Makes a Good Reflection?

1

What makes a good reflection?

Listing is one method to identify possible topics for reflections. You might list people, events, places, and objects that have been important in your life. When you finish, look back over your list and check the items that seem especially vivid to you.

Think about how interesting your topic will be to your potential readers. Your greatest moment in sports or the time you met your current partner may be peak experiences for you, but how engrossing with they be for your readers?

2

Engage readers at the beginning

Get your readers' attention with your title and first sentences.

I still remember the day he was born. It was early April and Papa came into the kitchen with a smile on his face. He said we had a baby brother.

—Sue Kunitonomi Embrey (see page 74)

3

Write with a personal voice

Reflections should not sound like they were written by a committee. Your reflection should convey your personality.

But the cholos loved me. San Mateo Boulevard . . . remember it well. Jack in the Box on one corner, me on a splintered wooden bench with a Three Musketeers bar, tight shorts, a hot summer sun, and those catcalls and woof-woofs like slaps. I was 12.

—Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez (see page 78)

4

Introduce a complication

A conflict or a tension usually motivates a reflection. While the complication is often between people, it can involve objects and ideas.

5

Provide concrete details

Details make reflections come alive. Don't limit details to what you can see. Include sounds, smells, textures, physical actions, and tastes where possible.

Stacy and I pushed through hundreds of leg lifts on her bedroom floor, an open *Seventeen* magazine as a tiny table for our lemon water, and the sound of cicadas grinding away in the tree outside.

—Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez (see page 78)

6

Use dialogue when possible

People come to life when you let them talk.

We were talking about the price of new and used furniture and I heard myself saying this: "Not waste money that way."

—Amy Tan (see page 81)

7

Identify a central theme

Sometimes a central theme is at the heart of a reflection such as Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez's reflection on her hips. In other cases the theme is implied but still provides a center for the reflection.

8

Come to a new understanding

Effective conclusions invite readers to reflect further. Ending by inviting readers to think about what they have just read is usually better than trying to sum up with a moral lesson.



Reflections about visuals

The Kodak Brownie, introduced in 1900, popularized snapshot photography and allowed families to construct their own histories in the family album. Kodak urged consumers to “celebrate moments of your life.” Photographs indeed freeze moments in the past, documenting that the camera was present at a precisely datable time.

But photographs also take on lives of their own much like our memories of the past, where seemingly insignificant conversations and events from years ago keep popping into our heads. Photographs show us people we have known as adults when they were children and remind us that they too were once young. We imagine people, including ourselves, at times in the past by reflecting on photographs.



Two girls in a park near Union Station, Washington, D.C. (1943).



WRITE NOW

Reflecting on photographs

1. Look at personal photographs on *Flickr*, *Photobucket*, *Picasa*, *Yahoo! Photos*, or another Web hosting service and find a set of images that stick with you.
2. Select three or four photographs of people by one photographer that appear to be taken within an hour or a few hours. Make a list of people in each photograph. What can you infer about them by the way they are dressed and what they are doing? Where were the photographs taken? What do you associate with the place?
3. Write a narrative about what you think was going on when the pictures were taken. What was the relationship of the people in the photographs with the photographer? What might they have been thinking at the time? Why were they in this particular place? Why were the photographs taken?



How to Read Reflections

▼ BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

These notes are in response to "Some Lines for a Younger Brother . . ."; the reading begins on page 74.

What kind of text is it?

*The text is a reflective essay that appeared first in *Gidra*, a magazine published in Los Angeles from 1969 to 1974.*

Who wrote it?

Sue Kunitonomi Embrey became a spokesperson for thousands of Japanese Americans who were imprisoned during the anti-Japanese hysteria at the beginning of World War II.

Who is the intended audience?

Gidra was a newsmagazine aimed at the Asian American community in southern California.

▼ READ THE TEXT AT LEAST TWICE AND MAKE NOTES

What is the focus of the reflection?

"The title and first paragraph announce that the focus of the reflection is Embrey's younger brother Tets.

What did the writer learn or understand differently from the reflection?

Embrey came to terms with painful memories of being interned in the Manzanar concentration camp and losing her brother after the war.

Where does the writer include details and dialogue?

Details and dialogue show the evolving relationship between Embrey and her younger brother.

How would you characterize the style?

The style is informal and personal. The writer conveys her feelings about the loss of her brother.

How is it organized?

This map shows the organization of "Some Lines for a Younger Brother . . .", which begins on the following page.

Introductory paragraphs

Paragraphs 1–3

Embrey sets the scene by describing the day her younger brother was born. She describes her family of eight children and her father's occupation, ending the section with his early death.

Complication

Paragraphs 4–6

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the family lost their business and possessions and were sent to the Manzanar Relocation Camp.

Effects

Paragraphs 7–17

Growing up in a concentration camp disillusioned Embrey's younger brother Tets. The family was scattered during the war. When the family was partially reunited after the war, Tets could not readjust. He joined the Army to escape.

Resolution

Paragraphs 18–19

The resolution is tragic. Tets came home from the Korean War in a coffin.

Conclusion

Paragraphs 20–22

Embrey returns the Manzanar Relocation Camp in 1969. The visit brings back memories of Tets as a 12-year-old and brings a sense of closure.

Some Lines for a Younger Brother . . .

Sue Kunitonomi Embrey



Sue Kunitonomi Embrey (1923–2006) was born in Los Angeles. Instead of starting college in 1942, she was forced to move to the Manzanar Relocation Center in Inyo County, California, with other Japanese Americans. She spent the years during World War II in the concentration camp. After the war most of the people who were interned did not want to talk about the experience, but Embrey became an activist and made a pilgrimage in 1969 to remember what happened at Manzanar. She eventually was successful in getting Manzanar declared a national historic site. "Some Lines for a Younger Brother . . ." was published in *Gidra* in 1970.

Some Lines for a Younger Brother . . .

1 I still remember the day he was born. It was early April and Papa came into the kitchen with a smile on his face. He said we had a baby brother. In the months to follow, we were busy carrying and cuddling the brother who was many years younger than the rest of us. When he cried from hunger and Mama was busy, one of us would run into the bedroom and rock the bed or pick him up and quiet him.

2 We were a family of five sons and three daughters. Money was scarce. My father ran a moving and transfer business in L'il Tokyo, the Japanese community in the shadow of City Hall in Los Angeles, but people had little money to pay him. He came home with boxes of books bartered for his services, and we spent many hours curled up in a corner reading some popular fiction story.

3 Tets, as we called him, was eight years old when Papa was killed in an automobile accident a week before Christmas. Tets cried because he could not give his dad the present he had made at school. The bullies would beat him up now that he had no father, he said.

4 Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese when Tets was in elementary school. Rumors of sabotage couldn't be separated from the facts. Soon there was a clamor on the West Coast for wholesale

Introduction:

Embrey begins with her earliest memory of her brother, making it clear that he will be the focus of her reflection.

Complication:

Outside events are fitted into the family's personal chronology. Embrey shows vividly the impact of the decision to intern Japanese Americans.

evacuation of all Japanese into inland camps. The democratic process was lost in hysteria. The grocery store which we had purchased only a year before was sold at a loss. All the furniture we couldn't sell, the plants my mother had tenderly cared for, our small personal treasures went to a neighborhood junk dealer. Tears came when we saw the truck being loaded.

5 On the first Sunday in May, 1942, Manzanar Relocation Center became our war-time home. Before breakfast, we walked around the dry, dusty land, to get acquainted with the landscape. The sun sparkled against the Sierra Nevada mountains to the west. The brown Inyo hills were high-rising barriers, more formidable than the barbed wire which was soon to enclose us. As we wondered how the pioneers had crossed over the Sierras, someone asked, "How long do we have to stay here?" and someone quoted from the military instructions, "For the duration of the war, and six months thereafter." Six months are forever, and forever is a long, long time.

6 Some order became evident within a few months after the fear, confusion and shock of transplantation from the big city to the arid land of Manzanar. Catholic nuns, who had joined the evacuees, found empty barracks and started a school. The War Relocation Authority recruited teachers from the "outside." Many of them were Quakers with a real desire to serve their fellow man.

7 When I asked Tets what he was studying, he shrugged his shoulders. There were no chairs, no desks, no supplies, he said. "What's the use of studying American history when we're behind barbed wires?" he asked. I tried to tell him that it would matter some day, but I was not sure any more. "Someday," I said, "the government would realize it had made a mistake and would try to correct it." His eyes were narrow against the noon sun, his whole body positioned badly to the right as he looked at me and said, "You 'da kind? I lose fight." The colloquial speech was everywhere among the second generation. "Da kind" categorically placed me among those who argued for and defended American democracy. The second expression was used constantly, but it meant different things to different people.

Details:

Details about the relocation camp reinforce the sense of isolation and hopelessness it evokes.

Dialogue:

Embrey uses dialogue to recount a significant conversation she had with her brother, one that she has remembered for many years.

8 "Try walking out that gate," he added. "See if they don't shoot you in the back." With that, he walked away.

9 The rest of us managed to get out of confinement—to Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin. Three brothers entered the United States Army. Tets was left with his aging mother and he was to spend almost three years behind barbed wires.

10 By 1948 when the family was partially reunited and settled in Los Angeles, Tets was in high school, or we thought he was. One day a school counselor came to the door. He reported that Tets had not been in school for several weeks and that he had been missing school sporadically for several months. He saw the shock on our faces. We had been too busy working to be suspicious.

11 "I'm looking for a job," Tets said, when confronted.

12 "But you can't find a job without a high school diploma," I protested.

13 "So I found out," he answered. "Learning to say 'isn't' instead of 'ain't' doesn't get you a job. They want us to have experience to land a job, but how can we get experience if we can't get a job?"

14 I asked him what he was going to do.

15 "I'm going to join the Army," was his reply.

16 Day in and day out, this was his argument. "I'm going to join the Army when I'm eighteen. You won't have me around to bother you and I'll be doing some traveling. I'm tired of holding up the buildings in L'il Tokyo. There's nothing to do and no place to go where I can be with my friends."

17 He was sure that wars were over for a while and there would be no danger. He signed up one day and was gone the next. He came home on furlough, husky and tanned, a lot taller and more confident than when he had left. He had been in training camp in Louisiana and had seen much of the country. Before he left, he broke the news to us that he had signed up for another three years so he wouldn't have to serve in the reserves. He was transferred to the West Coast and we saw him often when he hitch-hiked home on weekends. One day he phoned collect from San Jose. He was being shipped out to Japan and it would probably be a year before he would be back.

Effects:

Again, Embrey uses dialogue to show viewers a turning point in her brother's life. As in the internment camp, this argument centers on whether he should go to school, but it is clear there are deeper issues at play for Embrey and for Tets.

18 His hitch was almost over when the Korean War broke out. Soon after his 22nd birthday, he wrote that he hoped to be home for Christmas. He explained that he had not been sleeping well lately since some veterans had been brought into his barracks. They had nightmares and they screamed in the night. The stories of war they told could not be shut out of his mind. There was a rumor going around that his company might be going over to replace the first groups. He hoped his timetable for discharge would not change. He was worried and that was why he had not written.

19 Tets came home before Christmas. He came home in a flag-draped coffin, with one of his buddies as a military escort. The funeral at the Koyasan Buddhist Church was impressive. There was a change of guards every few minutes. Their soft-spoken order mixed with the solemn chants. The curling incense smoke made hazy halos of the young faces who came mourning a dead friend.

20 On December 27, 1969, I joined several hundred young people who made a day-long pilgrimage to the Manzanar cemetery. While I helped clean out the sagebrush and manzanilla, pulled tumbleweeds out of my boots, I was interrupted many times to recall facts and figures for the NBC and CBS television crews who were there to record the event.

21 Mt. Williamson's peak crested somewhere in the grey clouds that drew menacingly closer as the hours passed. Soon there was no sun. No seven-mile shadow lay across Owens Valley.

22 Dedication services ended that freezing, windswept and emotional day. I looked beyond the crowd and the monument. Out of the painful memories my mind dusted out of the past, I saw again the blurred impressions of the barbed-wire fence, the sentry towers and the tar-papered barracks. For a moment I saw again the 12-year-old boy with his head cocked, his shoulders sagging, his eyes fighting to keep open in the sun, while the long and lonely desert stretched out behind him.

Resolution:

Embrey uses vivid detail to re-create her dead brother's funeral.

Conclusion:

Embrey ends with an almost wistful recollection of her brother.

MY HIPS, MY CADERAS

MY FATHER IS CUBAN, with dark hair, a cleft in his chin, and feet that can dance the Guaguanco.

My mother is white and American, as blue-eyed as they come.

My voluptuous/big hips are both Cuban and American. And neither. Just like me. As I shift different halves of my soul daily to match whichever cultural backdrop I happen to face, I also carefully prepare myself for how differently my womanly/fat hips will be treated in my two realities.

It all started 15 years ago, when my hips bloomed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I was born. I went from being a track club twig—mistaken more than once for a boy—to being a splendidly curving thing that Chicano men with their bandanas down low whistled at as they drove by in their low-riders. White boys in my middle school thought I suddenly had a fat ass, and had no problem saying so.

But the cholos loved me. San Mateo Boulevard . . . remember it well. Jack in the Box on one corner, me on a splintered wooden bench with a Three Musketeers bar, tight shorts, a hot summer sun, and those catcalls and woof-woofs like slaps. I was 12.

My best friend Stacy and I set out dieting right away that summer, to lose our new hips so boys from the heights, like the nearly albino Tom Fairfield with the orange soccer socks, would like us. In those days, I was too naïve to know that dismissing the Chicano guys from the valley and taking French instead of Spanish in middle school were leftovers of colonialism. Taking Spanish still had the stigma of shame, like it would make you a dirty wetback. So Stacy and I pushed through hundreds of leg lifts on her bedroom floor, an open *Seventeen* magazine as a tiny table for our lemon water, and the sound of cicadas grinding away in the tree outside.

In Spanish, the word for hip is *caderas*—a broad term used to denote everything a real woman carries from her waist to her thighs, all the way around. Belly, butt, it's all part of your *caderas*. And *caderas* are a magical sphere of womanhood. In the lyrics of Merengue and Salsa, *caderas* are to be shaken, caressed, admired and exalted. The bigger, the better. In Spanish, you eat your rice and beans and sometimes your *chicharrones* because you fear your *caderas* will disappear.

In my work as a Latin music critic for a Boston newspaper, I frequent nightclubs with wood-paneled walls and Christmas lights flashing all year long. I wear short rubber skirts and tall shoes. There, I swing my round hips like a metronome. I become fierce. I strut. In the red disco lights, my hips absolutely torture men. I can see it on their faces.

"*Mujeron!*" they exclaim as I shimmy past. Much woman. They click their tongues, buy me drinks. They ask me to dance, and I often say "no," because I can. And these men suffer. Ironically, this makes the feminist in me very happy. In these places, my *mujeron's* hips get more nods than they might at a pony farm.

In English, your hips are those pesky things on the sides of your hipbones. They don't "*menear*," as they do in Spanish; they "jiggle." In English, hips are something women try to be rid of. Hips are why women bruise themselves in the name of lipsuction.

My mother's people hate my hips. They diet. My aunt smokes so she won't eat. And in the gym where I teach step aerobics—a habit I took up in the days when I identified more with my mother's than my father's people—I sometimes hear the suburban anorexics whisper in the front row: "My God, would you look at those hips." Sometimes they walk out of the room even before I have begun teaching, as if hips were contagious. In these situations, I am sad. I drive home and examine my hips in the mirror, hit them for being so imprudent, and like great big ears on the side of my body. Sometimes I fast for days. Sometimes I make myself puke up rice and beans. Usually I get over it, but it always comes back.

Sociologists will tell you that in cultures where women are valued for traditional roles of mother and caregiver, hips are in, and that in cultures where those roles have been broken down and women try to be like men were in traditional societies—i.e., have jobs—hips are out.

So when I want to be loved for my body, I am a Latina. But most Latino men will not love my mind as they do my body, because I am an Americanized professional. Indeed, they will feel threatened, and will soon lose interest in hips that want to "*andar por la calle como un hombre*" (carry themselves like a man).

When I want to be loved for my mind, I flock to liberal intellectuals, usually whites. They listen to my writings and nod . . . and then suggest I use skim milk instead of cream. These men love my fire and passion—words they always use to describe a Latina—but they are embarrassed by my hips. They want me to wear looser pants.

In some ways I am lucky to be able to move between two worlds. At least my hips get acknowledged as beautiful. I can't say the same for a lot of my bulimic friends, who don't have a second set of standards to turn to. But still, I dream of the day when bicultural Latinas will set the standards for beauty and success, when our voluptuous *caderas* won't bar us from getting through those narrow American doors.

Mother Tongue

Amy Tan



Amy Tan is well known for novels that concern the bonds between Chinese American mothers and daughters. She has introduced a rich world of Chinese myth and history to a global audience, but her themes of love and forgiveness are universal. Tan began writing fiction along with playing the piano to curb her workaholic tendencies, but with the publication of *The Joy Luck Club* in 1989, her talent as a writer became widely celebrated. She reflects on her career in this essay.

Return to these questions after you have finished reading.

Analyzing the Reading

1. How did Tan's attitude toward her mother's use of language change over the years? Use evidence from the text to support your statements.
2. Tan writes about value judgments based on language. How does Tan account for these judgments?
3. Why was Tan's awareness of different Englishes important to her development as a writer?
4. Tan says that an insight she had as a beginning writer was to imagine a reader. Why was imagining a reader so important?

Exploring Ideas and Issues

Linguists describe going back and forth between different languages, or between varieties of one language, as *code-switching*. Tan tells how she goes back and forth between standard English and her home dialect in her own speaking and writing. Code-switching used to be considered nonstandard usage, but more recently linguists consider code-switching a natural product of language use. Just as we dress differently for more formal and less formal occasions, so too we adjust our language depending on the situation.

Indeed, we all code switch constantly. New digital technologies have led to new forms of code-switching, especially in media such as Twitter, that force extreme brevity. Without giving it much conscious thought, we adjust our language to the medium we're using as well as to who will be reading our message and what we are trying to accomplish.

1. Tan says, "Recently I was made aware of all of the different Englishes I do use." What different Englishes, or other languages, do you use? List each and explain the different contexts and

relationships in which you use them. Write an essay in which you compare two different "languages" (either styles of English or English and another language) that you use. Give examples of when, where, and how you use them.

2. You may have grown up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood or a neighborhood with little diversity. Either way, you were aware of prevailing attitudes and beliefs about race and ethnicity as you grew older. Write an essay describing one positive and one negative belief you encountered and the reasons people had for holding these beliefs. Include examples from the experiences of people you know.
3. Do you think being a "good" American depends on speaking English? Can people have an American identity without being able to speak English? Write a short essay in which you answer yes or no to these questions. Include examples of specific people you have known to support your view.

MOTHER TONGUE

I am not a scholar of English or literature. I cannot give you much more than personal opinions on the English language and its variations in this country or others. I am a writer. And by that definition, I am someone who has always loved language. I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language—the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth. Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all—all the Englishes I grew up with.

Recently, I was made keenly aware of the different Englishes I do use. I was giving a talk to a large group of people, the same talk I had already given to half a dozen other groups. The nature of the talk was about my writing, my life, and my book, *The Joy Luck Club*. The talk was going along well enough, until I remembered one major difference that made the whole talk sound wrong. My mother was in the room. And it was perhaps the first time she had heard me give a lengthy speech, using the kind of English I have never used with her. I was saying things like, “The intersection of memory upon imagination” and “There is an aspect of my fiction that relates to thus-and-thus”—a speech filled with carefully wrought grammatical phrases, burdened, it suddenly seemed to me, with nominalized forms, past perfect tenses, conditional phrases, all the forms of standard English that I had learned in school and through books, the forms of English I did not use at home with my mother.

Just last week, I was walking down the street with my mother, and I again found myself conscious of the English I was using, the English I do use with her. We were talking about the price of new and used furniture and I heard myself saying this: “Not waste money that way.” My husband was with us as well, and he didn’t notice any switch in my English. And then I realized why. It’s because over the twenty years we’ve been together I’ve often used that same kind of English with him, and sometimes he even uses it with me. It has become our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk, the language I grew up with.

So you'll have some idea of what this family talk I heard sounds like, I'll quote what my mother said during a recent conversation which I videotaped and then transcribed. During this conversation, my mother was talking about a political gangster in Shanghai who had the same last name as her family's, Du, and how the gangster in his early years wanted to be adopted by her family, which was rich by comparison. Later, the gangster became more powerful, far richer than my mother's family, and one day showed up at my mother's wedding to pay his respects. Here's what she said in part:

Du-Yusong having business like fruit stand. Like off the street kind. He is Du like Du Zong—but not Tsung-ming Island people. The local people call putong, the river east side, he belong to that side local people. That man want to ask Du Zong father take him in like become own family. Du Zong father wasn't look down on him, but didn't take seriously, until that man big like become a mafia. Now important person, very hard to inviting him. Chinese way, came only to show respect, don't stay for dinner. Respect for making big celebration, he shows up. Mean gives lots of respect. Chinese custom. Chinese social life that way. If too important won't have to stay too long. He come to my wedding. I didn't see, I heard it. I gone to boy's side, they have YMCA dinner. Chinese age I was nineteen.

You should know that my mother's expressive command of English belies how much she actually understands. She reads the *Forbes* report, listens to *Wall Street Week*, converses daily with her stockbroker, reads all of Shirley MacLaine's books with ease—all kinds of things I can't begin to understand. Yet some of my friends tell me they understand 50 percent of what my mother says. Some say they understand 80 to 90 percent. Some say they understand none of it, as if she were speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world.

Lately, I've been giving more thought to the kind of English my mother speaks. Like others, I have described it to people as "broken" or "fractured" English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can

think of no way to describe it other than "broken," as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I've heard other terms used, "limited English," for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people's perceptions of the limited English speaker.

I know this for a fact, because when I was growing up, my mother's "limited" English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty of empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.

My mother had long realized the limitations of her English as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on the phone to pretend I was she. In this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her. One time it was a call to her stockbroker in New York. She had cashed out her small portfolio and it just so happened we were going to go to New York the next week, our very first trip outside California. I had to get on the phone and say in an adolescent voice that was not very convincing, "This is Mrs. Tan."

And my mother was standing in the back whispering loudly, "Why he don't send me check, already two weeks late. So mad he lie to me, losing me money."

And then I said in perfect English, "Yes, I'm getting rather concerned. You had agreed to send the check two weeks ago, but it hasn't arrived."

Then she began to talk more loudly. "What he want, I come to New York tell him front of his boss, you cheating me?" And I was trying to calm her down, make her be quiet, while telling the stockbroker, "I can't tolerate any more excuses. If I don't receive the check immediately, I am going to have to speak to your manager when I'm in New York next week." And sure enough, the following week there we were in front of this astonished stockbroker, and I was sitting there red-faced and quiet, and my mother, the real Mrs. Tan, was shouting at his boss in her impeccable broken English.

We used a similar routine just five days ago, for a situation that was far less humorous. My mother had gone to the hospital for an appointment, to find out about a benign brain tumor a CAT scan had revealed a month ago. She said she had spoken very good English, her best English, no mistakes. Still, she said, the hospital did not apologize when they said they had lost the CAT scan and she had come for nothing. She said they did not seem to have any sympathy when she told them she was anxious to know the exact diagnosis, since her husband and son had both died of brain tumors. She said they would not give her any more information until the next time and she would have to make another appointment for that. So she said she would not leave until the doctor called her daughter. She wouldn't budge. And when the doctor finally called her daughter, me, who spoke in perfect English—lo and behold—we had assurances the CAT scan would be found, promises that a conference call on Monday would be held, and apologies for any suffering my mother had gone through for a most regrettable mistake.

I think my mother's English almost had an effect on limiting my possibilities in life as well. Sociologists and linguists probably will tell you that a person's developing language skills are more influenced by peers. But I do think that the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child. And I believe that it affected my results on achievement tests, IQ tests, and the SAT. While my English skills were never judged as poor, compared to math, English could not be considered my strong suit. In grade school I did moderately well, getting perhaps B's, sometimes B-pluses, in English and scoring perhaps in the sixtieth or seventieth percentile on achievement tests. But those scores were not good enough to override the opinion that my true abilities lay in math and science, because in those areas I achieved A's and scored in the ninetieth percentile or higher.

This was understandable. Math is precise; there is only one correct answer. Whereas, for me at least, the answers on English tests were always a judgment call, a matter of opinion and personal experience. Those tests were constructed around items like fill-in-the-blank sentence completion, such as, "Even though Tom was _____, Mary thought he was _____." And the correct

answer always seemed to be the most bland combinations of thoughts, for example, "Even though Tom was shy, Mary thought he was charming," with the grammatical structure "even though" limiting the correct answer to some sort of semantic opposites, so you wouldn't get answers like, "Even though Tom was foolish, Mary thought he was ridiculous." Well, according to my mother, there were very few limitations as to what Tom could have been and what Mary might have thought of him. So I never did well on tests like that.

The same was true with word analogies, pairs of words in which you were supposed to find some sort of logical, semantic relationship—for example, "*Sunset* is to *nightfall* as _____ is to _____." And here you would be presented with a list of four possible pairs, one of which showed the same kind of relationship: *red* is to *stoplight*, *bus* is to *arrival*, *chills* is to *fever*, *yawn* is to *boring*. Well, I could never think that way. I knew what the tests were asking, but I could not block out of my mind the images already created by the first pair, "*sunset* is to *nightfall*"—and I would see a burst of colors against a darkening sky, the moon rising, the lowering of a curtain of stars. And all the other pairs of words—red, bus, stoplight, boring—just threw up a mass of confusing images, making it impossible for me to sort out something as logical as saying: "A sunset precedes nightfall" is the same as "a chill precedes a fever." The only way I would have gotten that answer right would have been to imagine an associative situation, for example, my being disobedient and staying out past sunset, catching a chill at night, which turns into feverish pneumonia as punishment, which indeed did happen to me.

I have been thinking about all this lately, about my mother's English, about achievement tests. Because lately I've been asked, as a writer, why there are not more Asian Americans represented in American literature. Why are there few Asian Americans enrolled in creative writing programs? Why do so many Chinese students go into engineering? Well, these are broad sociological questions I can't begin to answer. But I have noticed in surveys—in fact, just last week—that Asian students, as a whole, always do significantly better on math achievement tests than in English. And this makes me think that there are other Asian-American students whose

English spoken in the home might also be described as “broken” or “limited.” And perhaps they also have teachers who are steering them away from writing and into math and science, which is what happened to me.

Fortunately, I happen to be rebellious in nature and enjoy the challenge of disproving assumptions made about me. I became an English major my first year in college, after being enrolled as pre-med. I started writing nonfiction as a freelancer the week after I was told by my former boss that writing was my worst skill and I should hone my talents toward account management.

But it wasn't until 1985 that I finally began to write fiction. And at first I wrote using what I thought to be wittily crafted sentences, sentences that would finally prove I had mastery over the English language. Here's an example from the first draft of a story that later made its way into *The Joy Luck Club*, but without this line: “That was my mental quandary in its nascent state.” A terrible line, which I can barely pronounce.

Fortunately, for reasons I won't get into today, I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind—and in fact she did read my early drafts—I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as “simple”; the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as “broken”; my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as “watered down”; and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.

Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: “So easy to read.”

How to Write a Reflection

These steps for the process of writing a reflection may not progress as neatly as this chart might suggest. Writing is not an assembly-line process. Writing about a remembered event, place, or person is, in itself, a powerful way to reflect. Be open to uncovering insights and understanding more broadly the significance.

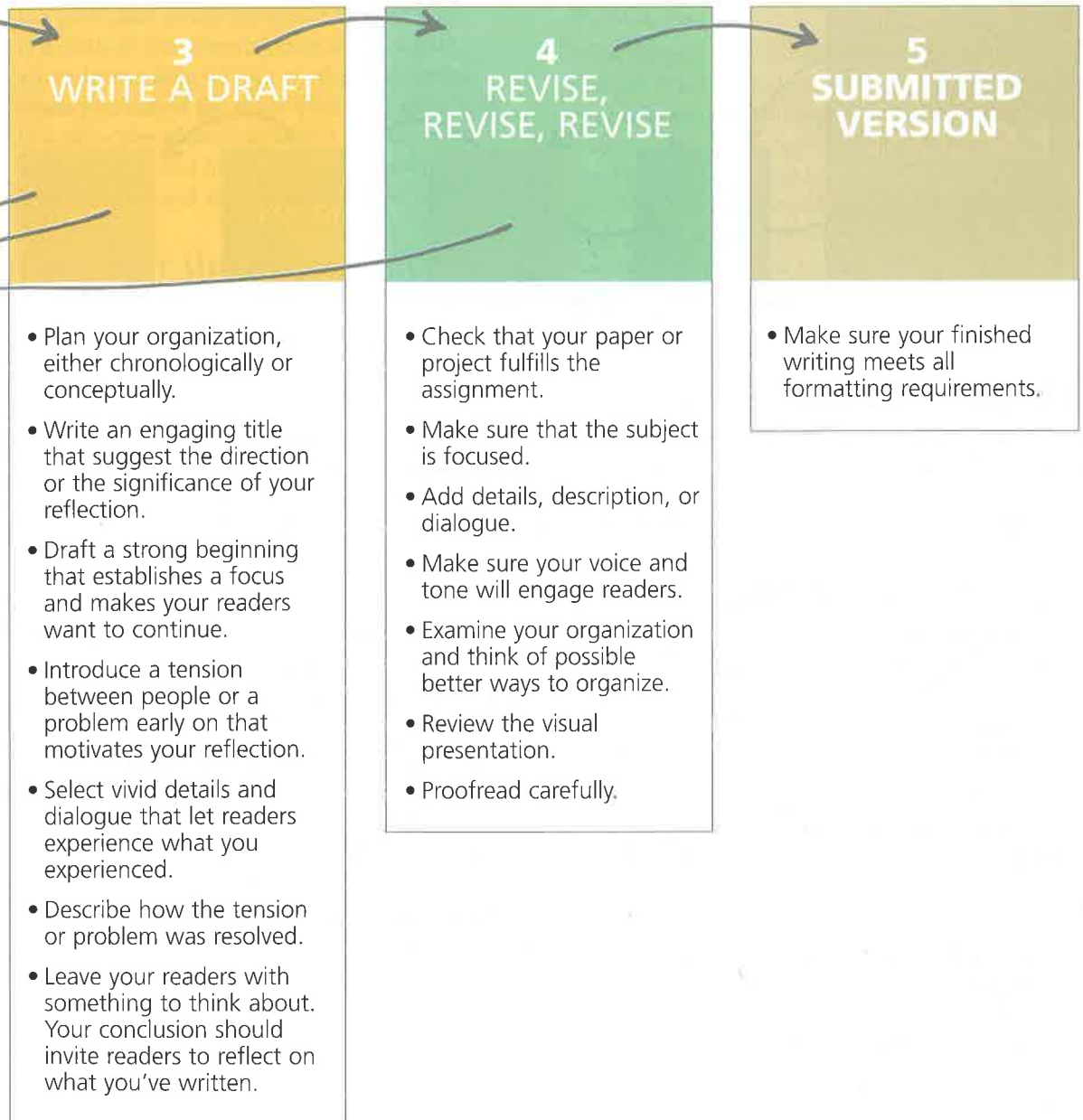
1 CHOOSE A SUBJECT

- Analyze the assignment.
- Explore possible topics. Make lists of memories connected with your family, work, school, friends, and travels.
- Examine your lists for what might interest readers.
- Consider why this person, place, event, or object is significant to you.

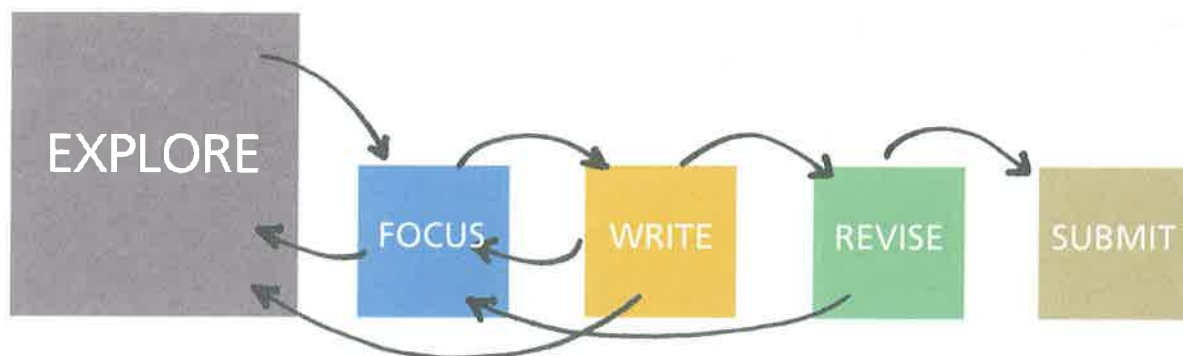
2 DEVELOP IDEAS AND TEXT

- Describe the scene in as much detail as you can remember with visual details, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings.
- Tell the story of what happened, capturing actions with active verbs.
- Make people come alive. Recreate conversations that reveal character. Record gestures and other details that make people unique.
- Think about the context. What was happening at the time for you and the larger community?
- Relate your experience to the experiences of others.





1: Choose a Subject



Analyze the assignment

Read your assignment slowly and carefully. Look for key words like *reflection*, *memoir*, or *personal narrative*, which signal a reflective essay. Identify any information about the length specified, date due, formatting, and other requirements. You can attend to this information later. At this point you want to give your attention to your topic and the focus of your reflection.

Explore possible topics

The challenge is to find a topic that will be interesting to your readers, presents a complication that must be resolved, and offers you the opportunity to reflect on the person, event, or experience.

Start by making lists.

- Your childhood: What do you remember most vividly from your childhood? What scared you as a child? When were the happiest times you can remember?
- Your family: What memories stand out about your parents? your brothers and sisters? your grandparents and other relatives? family vacations and other family experiences? How has your perspective on your family changed over time?
- Your work experience: What was your first job? Did you ever have a great boss or a horrible boss? What important learning experiences did you have while working?
- Your school experience: What school memories stand out? Did a particular teacher have a strong influence on you?
- Your friends and social relationships: What stands out among memories of your friends? about people you have dated? about your experiences on social networks?

Remember places and objects

Is a particular place important to you? Why is it critical? For example how did you gain an understanding of your mother's attitudes when you visited the place where she grew up? Is a particular object important to you, such as something that belonged to your great-grandmother and was passed down to you?

Consider the importance in your life

Ask yourself: Why is this person, event, place, or object significant to me? Think about why the person, place, event, or object seems more important today than it did in your initial experience. Think about how the person, place, event, or object changed you as a person.

Analyze your potential readers

What do your readers likely know about your subject? What might your readers gain from reading your reflection? What might you need to tell your readers about the background? For example, Amy Tan (see page 83) provides more background about her Chinese American mother than Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez (see page 78) does about her mother. Tan examines how her mother's use of language became important to Tan as a writer whereas Valdes-Rodriguez's focus is on how different cultures have different conceptions of beauty.

WRITE NOW

Explore memories

- Select one of the items that you have checked on your lists.
- Write nonstop for five minutes to explore the event, situation, place, or object. What was your initial reaction? Who else was there? Did you share your reaction at the time?
- Write nonstop for five minutes to explore your current perspective. How did an experience change you? Why do you remember this person, event, place, or object so well? Looking back, what do you see now that you didn't recognize at the time?
- Stop and read what you have written. Do you see possibilities for writing at length about this person, event, or situation? If you do, then begin generating more content. If the idea seems limited, try writing nonstop about another person, event, place, or object.

Writer at work

Janine Carter received the following assignment in her Introduction to Archeology class. She made notes on her assignment sheet as the class discussed the assignment.

Archeology 201 Reflection on an Artifact

We have read about and discussed artifacts at great length in this unit—how and where they are found, what they indicate about human cultures, and what they mean to archeologists. But not all artifacts are found in museums. Almost any human-made object can be considered an artifact, because it contains information about its makers. Archeologists study artifacts because they teach us about people we do not know, and because they teach us things about ourselves.

For your first paper, I would like you to find an artifact in your daily life. This might be a family heirloom with a great deal of personal meaning, or it might be something you have no emotional attachment to at all, like a soda can or a discarded newspaper. Write a 4–6 page essay reflecting upon your artifact. Describe it in as much detail as you can. Consider what its construction tells you about its maker. Why was it made? When? By whom? What clues does the artifact contain about its own history?

*Use
lots of
detail*

"Think like a detective"

Spend some time considering what the artifact means to you. What is your relationship to the person who created the artifact? What can you construct about the culture and conditions in which it was created? What sorts of things can you not figure out about it?

Writing Process

Bring in a good draft of your essay on **October 3rd**. We will discuss them in class so you can revise carefully before you turn your essay in on **October 10**.

Two weeks for first draft

One week for revision

Grading

I will look for the following qualities in your essay: detailed description, logical deduction, and an interesting account of the artifact's significance or meaning.

Then Janine made a list of possible objects to write about.

HEIRLOOMS/EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

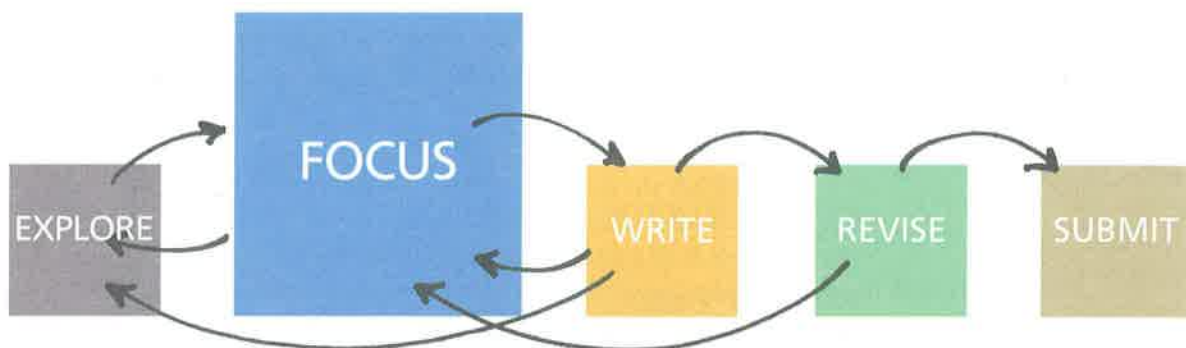
- Aunt Marie's tulip quilt—shows my connection to a long line of quilters
- ~~Sea shells from Girl Scout camp~~—NOT MAN-MADE
- Bracelet from graduation
- Terry's photo
- Stuffed elephant—shows how much I have grown up. Where was it made?
- ✓ • Garage sale quilt—don't know much about this; could guess a lot though.
- Diploma

LESS IMPORTANT OBJECTS

- Cereal box—ingredients show lack of nutrition. Pictures show how kids are bombarded with cartoons and colorful images. Expiration date and other clues to where it was made.
- Desk in dorm room—Must have been used by dozens of people like me (?)
- Old calendar
- Old cookbook
- Old cell phone—Could talk about how fast technology is changing. Do I have one?



2: Develop Ideas and Text



Writing a draft will be much easier if you generate ideas and text in advance. Having some material to work from will help you to plan your organization.

Set the scene

Describe the setting of your reflection in as much detail as you can remember. Write down all the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings you associate with your topic. If the subject of your reflection is a photograph or an object, write a detailed description of it.

Describe what happened

Tell the story of what happened in as much detail as you can remember. Capture the action with active verbs (*giggled, whistled, devoured, sauntered, witnessed*).

Make people come alive

Use dialogue to let readers hear people talk, which reveals much about character. Recreate a conversation between key people in your reflection. Also, record the little mannerisms, gestures, clothing, and personal habits that distinguish people. Don't forget to make yourself come alive. If you are reflecting on an incident from your childhood, how old were you? What do you remember about yourself at that age?

Consider the larger context

Write about what else was going on at the time, both with the immediate people involved and in the larger culture. How does your memory compare with similar experiences you have read or heard about from others? Does your memory connect to larger trends going on at the time?

Think about the significance

Write about the meaning the person, place, event, or object has for you today. The fact that you find the topic memorable means there is something you can share with others. What do you notice, as you reflect, that other people might not notice? This is the "added value" that will make your reflection more than a mere description or memory.

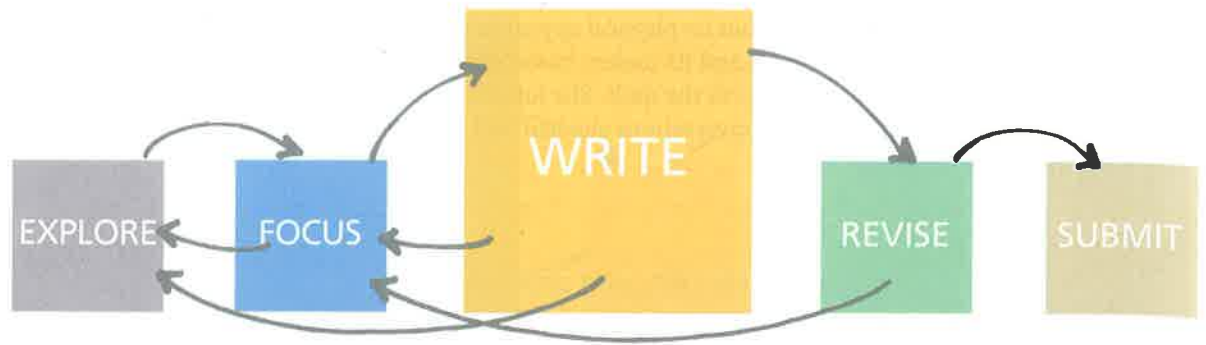
Writer at work

Janine Carter sat down with her garage-sale quilt and a pen and paper. She observed it carefully and made a list of detailed observations about its physical appearance. Then, she added her conclusions and guesses about the quilt, its history, and its maker, based on these clues.

Janine thought about her relationship to the quilt. She jotted down, in no particular order, what she remembered about buying the quilt, conversations she had had with her grandmother about quilting, and ideas that occurred to her.

- *Unbleached muslin, pink calico, coral calico*
- *Most stitching is white thread and quilting is pink thread*
 - *All these materials are very cheap*
- *Nine-patch plus a 5-patch alternating throughout; binding is plain muslin*
 - *I do not know the name of this pattern. Looks a little like Churn Dash.*
- *Batting is coming through in many areas*
- *Lots of stains, even some paint*
 - *Has been used a lot and has been used for unintended purposes—discarded?*
- *Large muslin patches are cut on bias*
 - *Means the person knew what she was doing and planned ahead*
- *Quilting is in nested L-blocks. Is there a name for that?*
- *1372 patches (approx.) Small squares are 1-1/2 inches*
- *Quilting is about 5 stitches/inch on average, 1" apart. Over 100 yards total.*
- *The two colors clash and are not mixed together; one runs out and the other starts. Why?*
 - *New quilter? Poor planning? To make it bigger? Unforeseen accident?*
 - *Grandma would have had a fit if I ever made a quilt this ugly. So why did I buy it?*

3: Write a Draft



Plan your organization

Consider how to tell your story. Embrey (see page 74) and Valdes-Rodriguez (see page 78) narrate events in chronological order. Tan (see page 83) focuses on a central idea and organize according to different aspects of that idea.

Write an engaging title

Your title should suggest the direction or the significance of your reflection.

Draft a strong beginning

You might start by describing the setting of your reflection. You might narrate the central event, which you will expand and reflect on later. Or you might give critical background.

Introduce a complication early on

The complication is a tension or problem that motivates the reflection. Embrey's family is relocated to a concentration camp. Sedaris and his sisters are locked out of their house by their drunken mother. Both writers describe the immediate reactions of the people involved.

Select vivid details and dialogue

Let your readers experience what you experienced. Small details can say a great deal. Likewise, dialogue reveals the character of people in your reflection.

Describe how the complication was resolved

How did the people involved resolve the complication? Sometimes the resolution is the solution to a practical problem like getting locked out, and in other cases the resolution is coming to terms with an idea.

Leave your readers with something to think about

Your conclusion should invite readers to reflect on what you've written. Tan ends with her mother's appreciation of her writing. Valdes-Rodriguez expands her reflection to challenge prevailing ideals of female beauty.



Writer at work

Janine Carter tried several organizational patterns for her essay. Because she knew so little about the quilt's history, she did not feel chronological organization would be a good strategy. However, as she worked through her draft she realized that readers would appreciate a firsthand account of her purchase of the quilt. She decided to include this story near the beginning of her essay, after describing the quilt. She organized the rest of her essay around the questions that occurred to her as she considered the quilt's appearance. As she worked, she referred back to her assignment frequently to make sure she was fulfilling all its terms. She decided to cut one section, about the names of various quilt patterns, because it was too general and distracted from the main focus of her essay. Here is the original outline Janine began working from, along with revisions she made.

I. Intro—describe quilt with detail

< tell story of "Miracle" salesman

II. Cheap material and clashing colors—poor person, or some other reason?

III. Bias-cut material indicates experienced quilter

~~IV. Names and meanings of quilt patterns.~~

V. Number of patches, stitching: this information means more to quilters than to average people. Explain.

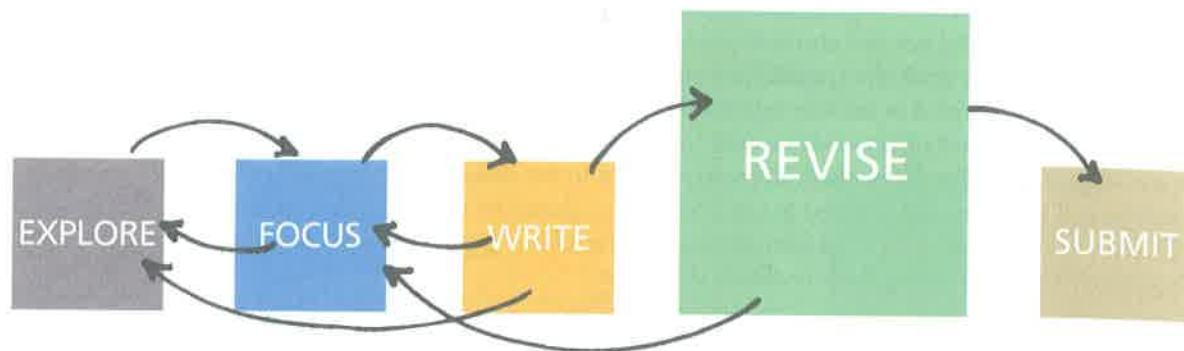
VI. Quilting's meaning for women (cultural use). Tell Grandma's story about the work on the farm.

VII. My relationship with the quilt

< contrast w/how much I know about quilts in our family

< add more detail here, and talk about quilt's probable history

4: Revise, Revise, Revise



Skilled writers know that the secret to writing well is rewriting. Even the best writers often have to revise several times to get the result they want. You also must have effective strategies for revising if you're going to be successful. The biggest trap you can fall into is starting off with correcting errors. Leave the small stuff for last.

Does your paper or project meet the assignment?

- Look again at the assignment for specific guidelines, including length, format, and amount of research. Does your work meet these guidelines?

Is the subject focused?

- Will readers find your subject early on?
- Is the significance evident?

Can you add dialogue, description, and other details?

- Can you make events and memories from the past more concrete?

Is your tone engaging?

- Will readers sympathize and identify with you, or will they find your tone too negative, angry, or intensely personal?
- Does your tone fit your topic? Some intensely personal topics may not be suited to humorous treatment.

Is your organization effective?

- Are links between concepts and ideas clear?
- Are there any places where you find abrupt shifts or gaps?
- Are there sections or paragraphs that could be rearranged to make your draft more effective?

Is the writing project visually effective?

- Is the font attractive and readable?
- Are the headings and visuals effective?
- If you have included an image associated with your reflection, where should it be placed for maximum impact?

Save the editing for last.

- When you have finished revising, edit and proofread carefully.

A peer review guide is on page 54.

Writer at work

Janine Carter was not satisfied with her opening paragraph, or her title. After talking to a consultant at her campus writing center, she worked on ending her opening paragraph with a surprising twist that would engage readers. She also realized that she could draw out the concept of “miracles” from within her essay to tie together the beginning and end. Here are the first drafts of Janine’s opening and concluding paragraphs, with her notes.

My Mystery Quilt

This is so boring!

[introduction]

Too obvious. That's sort of the point of the assignment, looking for clues.

The quilt folded at the foot of my bed is a mystery. It is made of cotton: plain muslin and two patterns of calico, with a cotton batt inside, sewn by hand with careful stitches. Some of its thread is white and some is pink. It is frayed around the edges, so someone has obviously used it. But unlike quilts in my own family, this quilt was not handed down as a cherished heirloom. I rescued it from a garage sale and have tried to “piece together” its history.

Consultant says puns are usually a bad idea—especially in opening.

[conclusion]

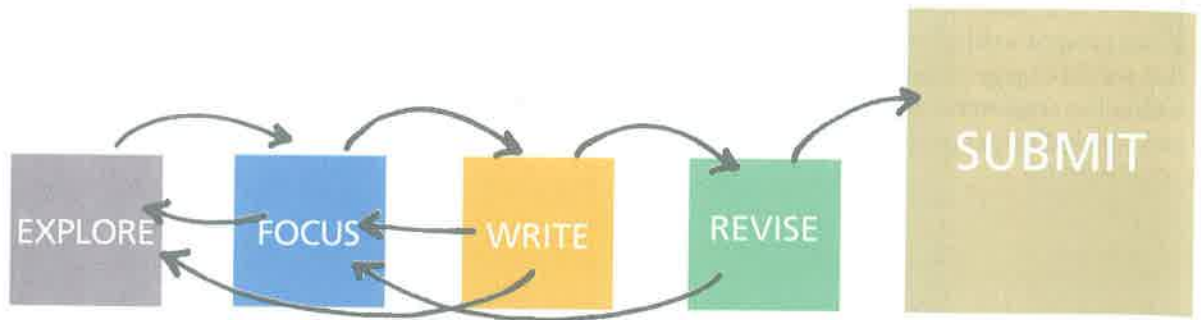
When I am cold at night I pull the quilt up over my knees and think about the stranger who made it, wondering who she was, who her loved ones were, whether she was happy. Her quilt gives me warmth, and I give her thanks. There is a bond between us because of this quilt.

*This is boring/obvious.
Can I make it more special?*



Watch the Animation on Opening Paragraphs at mycomplab.com

5: Submitted Version



Janine Carter
 Dr. Shapiro
 Archeology 201
 10 October 2011

Carter 1

The Miracle Quilt

The quilt folded at the foot of my bed has a long history. It is made of cotton: plain muslin and two patterns of calico, with a cotton batt inside, sewn by hand with careful stitches. Some of its thread is white and some is pink. It is frayed around the edges and has obviously lived a long, useful life. It is steeped in memories. Unfortunately, I don't know what any of them are.

I found the quilt at a city-wide garage sale. At the end of the auditorium, taking up half of the bleachers, was a vendor's booth called "Miracles by the Pound." The gentleman who ran the booth went around buying up vintage fabrics in bad condition. He would dump huge piles of them on the bleachers for people to pick through. When you had found what you wanted, he would weigh it on a scale and tell you how much it cost. Everything was five dollars per pound. As he weighed your purchase, he would call out the price so everyone at the garage sale could hear what a good deal you were getting. My quilt weighed three pounds. "Fifteen dollar miracle!" the vendor sang out as I opened my purse.

My quilt had already been dug out of the pile and discarded by another woman at the garage sale, who had two or three other vintage quilts in her arms. She told me



Fig. 1. Detail of the miracle quilt.

she bought old, damaged quilts and cut them up to make sofa pillows. My quilt didn't interest her because it wasn't in very good shape, and the blocks were the wrong size for the pillow forms she used. I come from a family of quilters, so when I saw the quilt I felt it needed a good home. I didn't like the idea of someone using it to wrap around furniture in a moving van, or even cutting it up for pillows. I took it home and washed it, and put it on my bed, and took a good look at it.

The quilt was probably made by someone poor, or at least very frugal, I decided. The muslin, which provides the background, is the cheapest unbleached kind. Even the binding around the edges, which in most quilts is a bright, contrasting color, is plain muslin. Whoever pieced the quilt—and it was almost certainly a woman, because quilting has always been women's work—started out using a coral-toned calico. But before she finished, she ran out and had to switch to a rose-colored calico. The effect is jarring, as the colors do not complement each other. The coral marches two-thirds of the way across the quilt, and then stumbles into rose. I do not know why the quiltmaker did not work the two colors evenly throughout the quilt; this is what my own grandmother taught me to do when I didn't have enough of one color.

Perhaps she was inexperienced; perhaps this was her first quilt, or perhaps she hadn't intended to make the quilt as large as it is. The coral would have been sufficient to cover a single bed; maybe, I think to myself, someone proposed to her while she was making it, and she ended up enlarging it to fit a double bed after she got married.

But there are other clues that suggest experience and planning. The octagon-shaped patches of muslin that center the five-patch blocks are cut so that the lines of quilting cross them on the bias—that is, diagonally across the up-and-down and side-to-side warp and woof threads of the fabric. Fabric is more flexible on the bias (this, my grandmother once explained to me, is why clothing cut on the bias fits and looks better, and is more expensive). A needle slips in and out between the threads more easily, so a quilter is wise to arrange pieces so as to maximize bias quilting. The quilting itself (that is the stitching through all the layers of the quilt) is respectable enough, about five stitches per inch. No fancy 12-stitch-per-inch quilting like you would see in a showpiece quilt, but quite firm and straight, in neat pink rows spaced an inch apart. The quilting pattern is in L-shaped blocks, which I have never seen before. There must be over one hundred yards of quilting all together; the length of a football field, taken one stitch at a time.

The quilt's pattern looks like a variation of wagon tracks, but it uses an octagonal block like a "churn-dash" pattern that sets it apart from a more straightforward Irish chain. Nine-patch and five-patch blocks alternate across it. By my count it contains 1,372 separate pieces, all cut, sewn, and quilted by hand. The nine-patch blocks use 1-1/2-inch patches. These may seem like insignificant details to most people, but to quilters they are important. They tell you how much work went into the quilt. The first nine-patch quilt I made with my grandmother contained a grand total of 675 patches, and I thought it would take forever to sew it (even using a sewing machine!). I remember asking my grandmother how she ever made her more complicated quilts: the flower garden with its thousands of tiny hexagons; the Dutchman's puzzle that was so mesmerizing you could hardly stop your eyes from running over it, trying to pick out the "real" pattern. "Doesn't quilting drive you crazy sometimes?" I asked her. She thought that was pretty funny. "Quilting was how we used to keep from going crazy," she told me.

When she first married my grandfather and moved to a farm in the Brazos River bottom over sixty years ago, there was no television and no neighbors for miles.

Carter 4

In the spring, rain would turn the roads to thick clay mud and no one could get off their property for days at a time. Quilting was the way women dealt with the isolation. "That is what the pioneer women did too," she told me. Stuck out alone on the prairies and in the mountains, they kept their sanity by cutting and arranging hundreds of pieces of cloth in different patterns, methodically assembling quilts to bring some order into their own bleak lives.

"It looks like hard work to you now," my grandmother explained, "but for us it was like a vacation. So much of women's work was never done, but you could sit down after dinner in the evening and finish a quilt block and feel like you had done something that would last. You might have spent the whole day dirtying and washing the same set of dishes three times, feeding the same chickens and milking the same cows twice, and you knew you'd have to get up in the morning and do the same things all over again, from top to bottom. But quilt blocks added up to something. Nobody was going to take your finished quilt block and sit down at the breakfast table and pick it apart, and expect you to sew it back together again before lunch. It was done, and it stayed done. There wasn't much else you could say that about, on a farm."

In my family, quilts are heirlooms and are handed down with stories about who made them, who owned them, what they were used for, and what events they had been part of. Some were wedding presents, others were made for relatives when they were first born. I don't know the stories that go with my miracle quilt. It has had a hard life; that is easy to see. Most of the binding has frayed off and there are some spots where the quilt has holes worn straight through it—top, batting, and backing. There are stains that suggest coffee or tea or perhaps medicines from a sickbed spilled on it. There are some spots of dried paint. Evidently at some point it was used as a drop-cloth. But at least, I tell myself, it has found a home with someone who appreciates the work that went into it, and can guess at some of its history.

When I am cold at night I pull the quilt up over my knees and think about the stranger who made it, wondering who she was, who her loved ones were, whether she was happy. Her quilt gives me warmth, and I give her thanks. Though we will never meet, or even know each other's identity, there is a bond between us because of this quilt. And so it seems that the man who sold me this quilt was right: it is a sort of miracle.

Projects

Reflections focus on people, places, events, and things—past and present—that have significance in the writer's life.

Family photograph

Family photographs and cherished objects can be subjects for reflection. Try carefully observing (or picturing in your mind) an object or photograph that has special meaning for you. Write down all the details you can. What memories does each observation evoke? Do you find that different aspects of the photograph make you feel different ways?

Choose as a topic something that is significant to you, and which you can recall with a reasonable amount of detail. But also consider how interesting this topic will be to others. Will an audience want to share in your experience?

Write a reflective essay about that photograph. What does the photograph convey that other similar snapshots do not? What does it hide or not show? What does it say about your family?

Reflection on the past

List people, events, or places that have been significant in your life or in some way changed you. Many reflections focus on a conflict of some kind and how it was resolved. Look back over your list and check the items that seem especially vivid to you.

Take a few minutes to write first about the person, event, or place as you remember it, and then write about how you regard it today. What was your initial reaction? Did your initial reaction change over time? Why do you feel differently now?

Think about the significance of the person, event, or place in your life. What details best convey that significance? If conversations were involved, remember what was said and create dialogue.

Organize your essay around the focus. Start fast to engage your readers. If there is a conflict in your reflection, get it up front.

Show the significance through describing, vivid details, and dialogue. Make the characters and the places come to life.

PEARSON
mycomplab

For support in learning this chapter's content, follow this path in mycomplab:

► **Resources** ► **Writing** ► **The Writing Process** ► **Planning**

Review the Instruction and Multimedia resources, then complete the Exercises and click on Gradebook to measure your progress.

Literacy narrative

Think about a childhood memory of reading or writing that remains especially vivid. The memory may be of a particular book you read, of something you wrote, or a teacher who was important in teaching you to read or write. Or think of a more recent experience of reading and writing. What have you written lately that was especially difficult? Or especially rewarding? List as many possibilities as you can think of.

Look over the items on the list and pick one that remains significant to you. Begin writing by describing the experience in as much detail as you can remember. Describe who was involved and recall what was said. Describe the setting of the experience: where exactly were you and what difference did it make? Remember key passages from what you either read or wrote. How did you understand the experience at the time? How do you understand it now? What makes it special?

Review what you have written and consider how to shape your raw material into an engaging essay. You may want to narrate the experience in the order it happened; you may want to start in the middle of the experience and give the background later; or you may want to start in the present as you look back. Above all, start fast. Somewhere along the way, you will need to convey why the experience was significant for you, but avoid the temptation to end with a moral. Don't forget to include a title that makes your readers want to read your literacy narrative.

Personal blog

Read blogs on sites such as blogger.com (click on the BLOGS OF NOTE link). You'll find that personal blogs take on a wide range of subject matter from thoughts about life in general to reflections on specific subjects like art, films, fashion, education, music, and family. Many blogs are multimedia including vlogs (video blogs), sketchblogs (portfolios of sketches), and photoblogs (photographic records of daily life).

Decide on a general subject matter for your blog. The most interesting blogs come from writers who spend much time thinking about that subject, perhaps to the point of obsession. Write about what you love. If you have strong dedication to a particular subject, likely you can get others interested.

Write your blog with your readers in mind. Write with a personal voice that engages your readers. Make your blog fun to read. Use paragraphs and pay attention to the little things. Error-filled writing is not enjoyable to read, no matter how fresh the content.

Encourage your readers to respond. Web hosting sites allow you to have a comment section so that readers can interact with you.

Publish your blog on a Web hosting site or a site at your school. Commit to a schedule of posting blog entries with regular frequency such as once a week.

