
Reflective Writing in Writing Centers

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Statistics

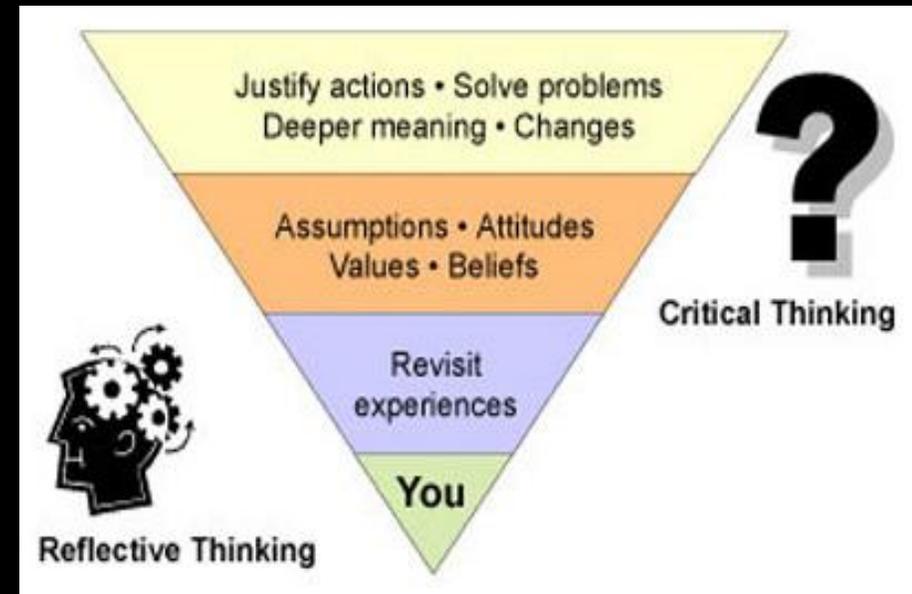
- 75% of lifetime cases of mental health conditions begin by age 24
- 1 in 4 students are diagnosed with mental illness (11% with anxiety; 10% with depression)
- Over eighty percent of college students experience overwhelming stress

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Reflective Writing

“A great deal of your time at university will be spent thinking; thinking about what people have said, what you have read, what you yourself are thinking and how your thinking has changed. It is generally believed that the thinking process involves two aspects: reflective thinking and critical thinking. They are not separate processes; rather, they are closely connected” (Brookfield 1987).

“A form of personal response to experiences, situations, events or new information. A 'processing' phase where thinking and learning take place.”



Benefits of Reflective Writing Workshops (cont.)

1988 study by Dr. James Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser and Glaser

50 healthy undergraduates were assigned to write about either traumatic experiences or superficial topics for four days in a row. Six weeks after the writing sessions, students in the trauma group reported more positive moods and fewer illnesses than those writing about everyday experiences or mundane topics (time management). Improved measures of cellular immune-system function and fewer visits to the student health center for those writing about painful experiences suggested that confronting traumatic experiences was physically beneficial.

American Psychological Association

Benefits of Reflective Writing Workshops (cont.)

Pennebaker followed up in other settings. At the Dallas Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies, he and his colleagues videotaped interviews with more than 60 Holocaust survivors while taking their physiological measurements. Later, they classified each survivor, based on the interview, as a low, midlevel or high "discloser." High and midlevel disclosers were significantly healthier a year after the interviews than the low disclosers.

American Psychological Association

Benefits of Reflective Writing Workshops (cont.)

Another study: 107 asthma and rheumatoid arthritis patients wrote for 20 minutes on each of three consecutive days--71 of them about the most stressful event of their lives and the rest about the emotionally neutral subject of their daily plans.” She concludes the analysis by stating, “Four months after the writing exercise, 70 patients in the stressful-writing group showed improvement on objective, clinical evaluations compared with 37 of the control patients. In addition, those who wrote about stress improved more, and deteriorated less, than controls for both diseases.

American Psychological Association

Writing and Being

Dr. G. Lynn Nelson

- Writing professor
- Young adult writing program advocate
- Native Being - assists Native students; taught composition classes for Native students

Writing and Being (cont.)

- “taking back the gift of language” for those who both struggle and feel self-conscious about the writing process
- Nelson advocates for emphasizing the transformative experience of writing to make students more comfortable; speaking about their own struggles and considering why they respond to situations in a certain way will further their critical thinking, as well as increase their empathy and emotional intelligence
- metacognition (emotional intelligence) also goes a long way in identifying possibly unhelpful coping mechanisms and why they exist while considering alternative ways to deal with the situation in the future

Writing and Being (cont.)

“I reread the letter I wrote to myself a million years ago back in September... Somehow, a big thorn has been extracted by my heart. I don't have all the answers, but I don't have many questions either.

“My writing now allows me to laugh, sing, and cry.

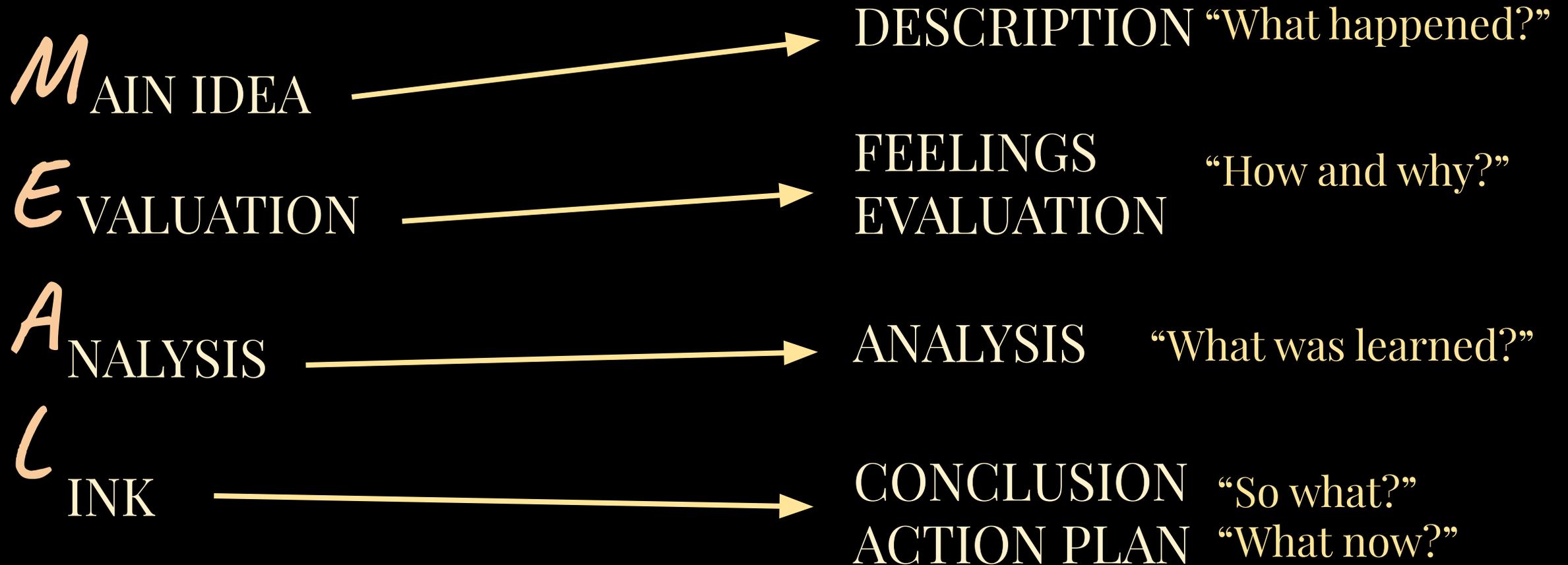
“My spiritual awareness is growing and I'm beginning to feel abundance of some sort... Writing is magic.

“When I reread my letter to myself, the biggest change I noticed was how much more peaceful I feel now. There was some strong anger in my life, and I felt scattered. Now I am feeling so much more focused... I feel like I have befriended myself again.”



Gibbs' Reflective Model

Connecting This to Academic Writing



*“The end of art
is peace.”*

The power of writing can soothe students, and wielding this in a positive, supportive environment could have momentous results. It can also help their analytical skills, which assists their academic writing.

