

Sample Reflection: "Threads of Sunshine" Essay Student Letter

Yadira Maldonado
Las Cruces, NM 88001
575-123-4567
ymaldo123@my.epcc.edu
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Professor Kelli Wood
9570 Gateway Blvd. North
El Paso, TX 79924

Dear Professor Wood:

Writing about my strawberry-shortcake t-shirt was both easier and harder than I expected. Easier because the memory is so vivid in my mind, but harder because I had to figure out how to write about something traumatic in a way that showed hope rather than just sadness.

What Went Well: I think my descriptive writing really improved. In my first draft, I just wrote "we got in a car accident," but during revision, I worked hard to help readers feel that moment with me. Details like waking up "laying on the stick shift with my face under the radio" and the dust and silence helped create the scene. I also liked how I compared the excitement of the beginning with the darkness of the accident and then the small light of finding the t-shirt.

The prewriting exercises helped me understand what the shirt really means. At first, I thought it was just about surviving the accident, but through Prewriting 3, I realized it's more about finding hope in difficult situations. The quote "There is a light at the end of the tunnel" became really important to my essay because it captures what the shirt means to me in all kinds of tough times, not just that one day.

I feel good about how I organized the essay too. Starting with the present-day reflection, then going back to tell the story, and ending by connecting it to how I still use the shirt today felt like it flowed and kept readers interested.

What Was Challenging: The hardest part was deciding how much detail to include about the accident. I wanted people to understand how scary it was, but I didn't want the whole essay to be about the trauma. I worried that if I made it too intense, readers

would focus on the accident instead of what I learned from it. I ended up cutting out some of the hospital details because they were making the essay too dark.

I also struggled with the ending. I wanted to show that the shirt still helps me today, but my first few attempts sounded kind of cheesy or fake. It was hard to write about something so personal without sounding like I was trying too hard to make it meaningful.

Another challenge was making sure readers could understand why a t-shirt from a traumatic day would be comforting rather than a bad reminder. I had to work to explain how it represents the good that came from something terrible.

What Helped Me Work Through Difficulties: Our peer workshop was really helpful. When Sarah read my draft, she said she could feel my emotions but wanted to understand more about why the shirt makes me feel better now. That feedback helped me realize I needed to be more specific about how I actually use it—like when I'm stressed about school or other problems, not just thinking about the accident.

Reading the sample essays in class also helped me see different ways to end personal essays. The one about the grandmother's ring showed me how to connect a specific object to bigger life lessons without being too obvious about it.

I also used Grammarly to help me catch some awkward sentences, especially when I was trying to describe my feelings. Sometimes when I write about emotional stuff, my sentences get really long and confusing, so the grammar checker helped me break them down.

Plans for Improvement: For the next essay, I want to work on making my thesis clearer earlier in the essay. Looking back, I think readers might not understand what my main point is until pretty late in the essay. I want to practice giving readers a better roadmap at the beginning.

I also want to get better at showing rather than telling. I did okay with the accident scene, but in other parts I just told readers things like "I felt sad" instead of describing what sadness looked like or felt like in my body.

For practical stuff, I'm going to start my drafts earlier. I waited until three days before it was due to really start writing, and that stressed me out. If I start earlier, I can take

breaks between drafting and revising, which I think will help me see my writing more clearly.

One specific thing I'll do differently is read my introduction and conclusion out loud to someone else before I turn in the essay. I think that would help me catch places where my meaning isn't clear or where I'm trying too hard to sound profound.

I learned a lot about myself as a writer through this assignment. I discovered that I'm good at descriptive writing when I really focus on it, but I need to work on connecting my descriptions to my main point more clearly. I also learned that writing about personal experiences requires just as much revision as any other kind of writing—maybe even more because it's easy to assume readers will understand things that are obvious to me.

Thank you for encouraging us to write about objects that really matter to us. It made the assignment feel more meaningful than just another paper to write.

Best regards,
Yadira Maldonado

AI Disclosure: I didn't use any AI tools for this reflection.

Rubric Feedback for Yadira's Reflection

Criteria	Performance Level & Description	Explanation
Depth of Self-Analysis	Emerging (B): Shows good understanding of writing process with some analytical depth; reflects meaningfully on experience	Yadira demonstrates solid understanding of her writing challenges and successes. She recognizes the complexity of writing about trauma while maintaining hope, and understands the revision process. Could push deeper into analyzing WHY certain techniques worked.
Specific Examples & Details	Emerging (B): Generally uses specific examples to support reflections; adequate detail about writing experience	Provides good specific examples (peer feedback from Sarah, using Grammarly, cutting hospital details) that support her reflections. Examples are relevant and help readers understand her process, though she could include more detail about her revision decisions.
Honest Self-Assessment	Advanced (A): Thoughtfully identifies both strengths and areas for improvement; realistic and balanced assessment	Shows mature honesty about both strengths (descriptive writing, organization) and genuine challenges (thesis clarity, showing vs. telling). Her self-assessment feels realistic and demonstrates growth mindset rather than false modesty or overconfidence.
Actionable Planning	Emerging (B): Sets appropriate goals with some specific steps; plans are generally realistic and connected to reflection	Sets realistic goals clearly connected to identified challenges (earlier drafting, clearer thesis, reading aloud). Plans are specific and actionable, though she could elaborate on HOW she'll implement some strategies (like "making thesis clearer").
Clear Communication	Emerging (B): Generally well-organized with clear communication; meets length and format requirements	Well-organized letter format with clear sections and logical flow. Communication is clear and appropriate for the assignment. Some sentences could be more concise, but overall effectively communicates her insights and meets requirements.
Authentic Voice & AI Disclosure	Advanced (A): Maintains authentic personal voice throughout; appropriate and honest disclosure of AI assistance used	Voice feels genuinely personal and conversational while remaining appropriate for academic context. Shows personality while maintaining focus on learning. Clear, honest disclosure about not using AI tools.

Overall Grade Range: B+ to A- - This reflection shows solid metacognitive thinking with good self-awareness and realistic planning. Stronger analytical depth and more detailed examples could push it into the A range consistently.