

A student named Henrietta Wantanay (not her real name!) asked me for help in getting started on the reflective essay/diary. Here is what I wrote back to her. It may help you with your work on this if you are similarly vexed, perplexed, and anxious. (BTW, her name is pronounced "*want an A*".)

:) Jim

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Hi Henrietta you indicated that you are worried about the first page of your essay and need some help on it. Here's an easy way to start it and get the ball rolling.

Look at workbook page 4, on that page I give you the facts about Lascaux—purpose, rules, technology. You have to build a story where you start off by introducing yourself as a person of that time (give yourself a primitive-sounding name) as if you are writing a diary having been born into that civilization. **That is who you are and will continue to be all during the essay. Your story is the story of your life and experiences.** But your real goal is to somehow weave those facts from the example USF entry for Lascaux on workbook page 4 into your writing.

Tell us about yourself—your name, where you live, what you eat, and how the hunters in your tribe go after beasts. When they capture and kill one so you all can eat meat, it is something special. You know that when boys become men the elders of the tribe take them down into a hole in the ground where they do special things. You have heard that they make pictures of the animals they have hunted there, to please the animal's spirit and to be able to control them in the future. Describe how they make the pictures (you overheard your older brother, now a man and a hunter, telling his friend). Write about how your brother described the pictures and what the men did with them and how they had to look (the rules). Use this story as a framework on which to "hang" the facts (purpose, rules, and technology) about Lascaux cave art. Write all of this in one page double spaced. That's all the first page has to be.

In continuing your essay, start by saying that you don't know why, but you never seem to age like other people. They get older and eventually die, and they too wonder why they wrinkle and you don't. They get weak, sick, and eventually die but you never do. So you make the best of it, become a mother, and outlive your man and all of your children. And you continue to live on! You finally realize that for some reason you would not age and die, and you accept that. You again take a man,

have more children, and again you outlive everyone. And this happens again and again!

**Getting to the next era/civilization.** You stopped writing the diary for many many (MANY!) years. Don't worry about all the time in between. Finally you start writing it again when you wander into a sandy place looking for new people to be with and you see straight-sided mountains (*pyramids, but don't call them that!*). So—Egypt. Continue your story—meet someone, learn about Egypt and what they built these mountains. Work in the facts on Egyptian tomb art. Don't worry about how you figure out how to communicate with these people. Let's just assume that it takes some time, but you have LOTS of time. **Then you just repeat this kind of thing for each of the remaining 10 civilizations/era that the assignment on workbook page 51.**

**Here's what NOT to do: You are NOT a time traveler backwards in time!** Don't ever write any part of this looking back from modern times. It's not historical and in this writing it's NOT intended that you relate experiences from the vantage point of some later time. Your writing is always "in the moment" like a diary, as you live your life. At the most, you might compare where you are at any given moment with what you have already lived through but you cannot know the future. You don't know anything about "BC" dates or "AD" dates or about the calendar at all (our way of organizing an annual calendar wasn't even invented until fairly modern times). See the feedback I give you on your first page of writing for more hints on how to develop your story and make it interesting.

**You don't write any conclusion to this essay, it's not an essay in the sense of trying to prove anything.** It's all descriptive. You do the conclusions work later, after you have written your essay, when I post the conclusions instructions. You use the forms I supply to do your conclusions work, that is not written at the physical end of your essay. In the conclusions work you use your own essay as an "oral history" to use the facts there to prove or disprove conclusions I give you. See the example of how this works in the conclusions work materials.

I hope this helps you get started on your reflective essay/diary! This writing assignment isn't complicated, it requires imagination but it's not the typical kind of formal academic writing. It's intended to be fun, much more fun than a bunch of extra research on a topic and fussing around with formal fact citation formatting. You get to work on it all during the term; it's best to develop your essay/diary as you go through the eras and civilizations during the term. And the conclusions work, which takes the place of a final exam as kind of a "take home final" on which you get 10 days to work, is a productive way to get students to do the core of critical thinking and demonstrate, in a concise way, that they can do critical thinking!

☺ Jim