Reflection Piece Template Guide

In another document I explain various *genres* of reflection piece that you might try to write. In this document I will provide advice about how to *structure* your reflection pieces. This template is just a *tool* for inexperienced writers of philosophy. You do *not* have to write your reflection pieces according to the exact instructions that I provide here.

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Reflection pieces and other academic texts often begin with an **introductory paragraph**. There are many ways to structure an introductory paragraph. When your confidence grows, you may decide to try different structures. I will just show you one simple structure. It has only three sentences:

> **(1)** In this reflection piece I will argue that ____ / explore whether ____ / pose the question of ____. **(2)** I will do so in response to the philosophical work of philosopher ____. **(3)** To establish my argument / guide my exploration / articulate my question, I will claim that ____ / consider whether ____.

This introduction format is beneficial because it is *direct* and tells the reader what to *expect* later in the piece. Sentence (1) can be called a **thesis sentence**, since it states what your main goal is for the reflection piece. Sentence (2) can be called a **context sentence**, since it tells the reader what philosophical work your thesis will engage with. Sentence (3) can be called a **guidance sentence**, since it gives the reader knowledge of where the text will lead them.

Notice that this introduction format contains no **filler sentences**. A common example of a filler sentence is: "since the beginning of time, human beings have wondered about the nature of philosophy / the mind / morality / science / ____." I do not like filler sentences, and most of your other professors won't like them either.

Why don't I like filler sentences? Consider the example that I just provided. The sentence is problematic for two reasons. First, it is not true: at the beginning of time we did not yet have a human civilization in which these topics were discussed. Second, and more generally, it would not add any *philosophical value* to your reflection piece *even if it was true*. To add philosophical value, a sentence should be either share your thesis, provide context, provide guidance, or directly contribute to your philosophical arguments / explorations / questions. The filler sentence does not do any of these things: it does not say anything interesting about any philosophical ideas.

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The structure of the rest of your reflection piece will depend on which genre of reflection piece you decide to write. Therefore, I cannot provide one universal piece of advice about what you should write after you finish your introduction paragraph. However, I can provide a small set of options, each suited to a different genre of reflection piece. Once again, please note that there may be many good alternatives that I have not listed below:

Critical/Defensive	Exploratory	Inquisitive
Paragraph 2: provide an argument for *why you believe* your thesis sentence.	**Paragraph 2**: describe a philosophical theme / topic / issue that is *related to* but also *goes beyond* the text that we read in class.	**Paragraph 2**: raise a question about the text that we read in class, and explain the importance of the question.
Paragraph 3: consider one (or multiple) possible *objection* to your argument.	**Paragraph 3**: explain why this theme / topic / issue is important, and perhaps why it unfortunate that the material we read in class does not discuss it.	**Paragraph 3**: demonstrate that the question has not been answered by the text. (For example: quote the portion of the text that caused you to have the question, and explain that no other part of the text answers the question).
Paragraph 4: defend your argument against the objection considered in paragraph 3.	**Paragraph 4**: offer your own theory, or idea, about this new theme / topic / issue.	**Paragraph 4**: suggest a possible answer (or multiple) to the question, and briefly consider whether your answers might need further development (e.g., the answers may be vague, or they may be faced with objections).
Optional Paragraph 5: a brief conclusion paragraph that briefly summarizes the key points from paragraphs 1-4.	**Optional Paragraph 5**: a brief conclusion paragraph that briefly summarizes the key points from paragraphs 1-4.	**Optional Paragraph 5**: a brief conclusion paragraph that briefly summarizes the key points from paragraphs 1-4.

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Before this document ends, I would like to share an example of a reflection piece with you. I have created this example myself, for the purpose of demonstrating some of what I have described above.

To show this example of a reflection piece, I will respond to a **reflection prompt** contained at the end of the PowerPoint slides for our first lecture (you can find the PowerPoint slides on Moodle after the lecture ends). The prompt is: "Is the dialogical nature of the text important to its methodology?" Here is my example of reflection piece from the **critical** genre. It follows the introduction format from above. It also follows the guidance under the 'Critical/Defensive' heading in the table above:

> **Paragraph 1**: In this reflection piece I will argue that **the dialogical nature of the Socratic dialogue "Euthyphro" *is not* important to its methodology**. I will do so in response to the philosophical work of philosopher **Plato, who wrote "Euthyphro", in which Socrates is a character**. To establish my argument I will defend the claim that **Plato could have made his points directly to the reader, rather than expressing them through the interaction between Socrates and Euthyphro**.

Paragraph 2: Here is my defense of the claim that Plato could have made his points directly to the reader, rather than expressing them through the interaction between Socrates and Euthyphro. Socrates confuses Euthyphro by presenting a dilemma to Euthyphro about the nature of piety. Euthyphro gets confused because dilemmas are difficult to solve. However, the point of the text is not that Euthyphro has become confused, nor is the point of the text that Socrates was the one who caused Euthyphro's confusion. Rather, the point is that the nature of piety is difficult to understand, and this can be explained without the use of Socrates or Euthyphro as characters.

Paragraph 3: Somebody might argue against me. They might say that Plato's use of a dialogical format between Socrates and Euthyphro is not *essential* for explaining his philosophical ideas about Piety, but that they are still *useful* for explaining them, because dialogues are fun to read.

Paragraph 4: I agree that dialogues are fun to read, and that when a text is fun to read it is easier for the reader to remember the philosophical ideas in the text. But there are other ways to make a philosophical text fun. A philosophical text can be a traditional essay, or even a reflection piece like this one, while also being fun.

Paragraph 5: In conclusion, I do not believe that the dialogical format of Plato's "Euthyphro" is an important part of its philosophical value. I believe this because the ideas in the text can be explained without dialogue. And even though philosophical dialogues are fun to read, other philosophical texts are fun to read too.

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To conclude this document, let me say two things. First, the reflection piece example that I just provided is not representative of what I (Ben) actually believe. I won't tell you what I actually believe (not yet, at least!). Second, and once again, I encourage you to experiment with different ways of formatting your reflection pieces. The above example is fine, but it is not the only fine way to write!