

Preparing to write a Reflective Exposition (or Hybrid Essay)

An exposition is a piece of writing that explains and conveys information while being reflective requires you to ponder over a matter. Thus, in a reflective exposition, you describe and evaluate your experiences and then explain how you draw lessons from them.

Some examples of reflective exposition questions:

1. Write about an incident you still remember from your early childhood (descriptive). Why do you think it has remained in your mind so clearly? (reflective)
2. Describe an annual event which you enjoy and explain why it is so important to you.
3. What are the lessons in life that are learned away from school and explain why they are important to you.
4. Describe how you celebrated an important family occasion and explain why this event will always remain in your memory.
5. Which person has the greatest influence on your life and explain why this is so.

Complete Exercise A

This exercise helps you get in touch with yourself and prepares you to write reflective expositions. Write down your answers to these questions.

Core Belief, Mindsets, Personality, Behaviours, Values

- Describe yourself in one sentence
- List the top three adjectives that describe your personality
- What is your mission statement in life?
- What do you want to accomplish within the next 5 years?
- What really motivates you? Why?
- What really puts you off? Why?
- What habits and behaviours do you have that affirm you?
- What are your biggest fears? Why?
- What are your values? Values are our deepest beliefs and feelings. Some examples of values: integrity, compassion, courage etc.

The Past, Life Lessons and Experiences

- What have been the most important moments of your life thus far?
- What is it in the past that you need to let go of? Why?
- What achievements are you most proud of? Why?

- What is your favourite childhood memory? Why?
- What are you most disappointed in? Why?

Current Life

- What do you love about yourself and your life?
- What areas of your life are the biggest challenges for you?
- What are your strengths and achievements?

Purpose and Passion, Gifts and Talents, Dreams and Desires

- What do your friends think you are good at? What do they think your talents are?
- What comes easily and effortlessly?
- What are your dreams?
- What would you fight for and why?

Current situation in Key Areas:

- **Home and Family**
 - What is your home like? What values, attitudes and beliefs play a strong role in your household?
 - What are the relationships like with your parents, siblings and other family members?
- **Relationship**
 - What kind of company are you keeping? Who are your friends?
 - Do you have mentors, teachers and friends you can call when you need to?
 - Do you engage in healthy and productive relationships with others?
- **Adventure and Play**
 - How do you spend your free time?
 - What would you like to take up as a hobby or activity in your free time?
 - Are you having fun and enjoying life?

REFLECTIVE EXPOSITION WRITING EXERCISES

Reflective exercises about places and objects

Select ONE option out of the three options given to write.

Describe ONE aspect of the place and associate ONE strong memory experience, lesson learnt, personal values or reasons for something to it.

- Possessions you value and rely on greatly. (computer, your mobile phone, your childhood toy)
- The school you are studying in, your classroom, a spot you hang out with friends, the lessons you undergo.
- A daily scene; in your neighbourhood; in the shopping centre; at a tourist attraction etc..

Reflective exercises about people and relationships

Select ONE option out of the three options given to write.

Describe ONE characteristic/ aspect of the person or the relationship, and associate ONE strong memory experience, lesson learnt, personal values or reasons for something to it.

- When you have to show compassion, or when someone did a kind act for you.
- Your grandparent or someone whom you know who is much older.
- A time when someone offered you advice and what happened after.

Reflective exercises about events

Select ONE option out of the three options given to write.

Describe ONE characteristic/ aspect of the person or the relationship, and associate ONE strong memory experience, lesson learnt, personal values or reasons for something to it.

- A family reunion, or a time when your family got together.
- A school event you participated in or witnessed.
- A fund raising event or charity drive you volunteered in.

As this is supposed to be an exercise, please do not write a complete essay. Keep each paragraph to less than 250 words and be focused.

REFLECTIVE WRITING – SENTENCE STARTERS

As a record of what happened

- The most important event that happened for me was.....
- Thinking back over the day what I valued most was.....
- I am not sure why we.....
- Something funny that happened was....

Insights into what you think and feel about the ideas or issues

- One of the things that surprised me was...
- I am still shocked by.....
- I keep thinking about.....

Thinking about your own learning

- Something I have found out about myself is....
- I know I need to change the way I....
- I learn best when....
- What I have learnt today reminds me about....
- I really admire the way....
- My point of view is....
- When I read over my journal reflections, I am surprised at how my thinking has changed because...
- In the future, I would like to...

REFLECTIVE ESSAY EXEMPLARS

EXEMPLAR 1: Reflective essay about place(s)/experience(s)

Describe your experiences eating in food courts in Singapore. How important are food courts and hawker centres in your life as a teenager in Singapore. (GCE O level 2013)

Have you heard of a saying that goes "Your taste buds have memories of their own"? It is true that we can remember the distinct flavours of food well. Undoubtedly, food forms an integral part of our lives and without food, we will not have the energy to do work. For me, experiences at food courts and hawker centres are very memorable and as a teenager, these places play an important role in my life too! I will be describing experiences in some hawker centres that I like very much -- Tiong Bahru Food Centre, Jurong West Hawker Centre and the Zion Riverside Food Centre.

Firstly, Tiong Bahru Food Centre is no doubt the first place that appears in my mind whenever I think of delectable Singaporean cuisine. From chicken rice, prawn noodles, to "chee kueh", there is a wide array of dishes to choose from, so I cannot help but become spoilt for choice. One of my favourite dishes is "chee kueh". The "kueh" is soft but firm and garnished with a generous layer of savoury and crunchy pickled vegetables. Once I bite in, all the surrounding noise seems to be blocked off and I can feel the contrasting textures between the supple "kueh" and the roughness of the pickled vegetables. Hence Tiong Bahru Food Centre is crucial to me because I can derive plenty of joy from indulging in the local dishes. Not only do the dishes fill my stomach with satisfaction, but they also supplement in my growth as I am still a growing teenager. As food is what I miss the most about Singapore whenever I am overseas, satisfying my cravings at the Tiong Bahru Food Centre constantly reminds me of my Singaporean identity.

Next, the Jurong West food market is just like any ordinary market. It has a noisy and vibrant atmosphere, which displays the passion and warm-heartedness of Singaporeans, just like the tropical climate in Singapore. There is a wet market within the food market itself, so the floor may be wet and slippery, with the air even filled with a pungent and fishy smell. However it still holds a significance to me as I spent most of my childhood here. It is the place where I accompanied my mother to her daily grocery shopping in the wet market, where I had to stand outside the wet market and pinch my nose because of the pungent smell, where I started on my culinary journey through the different flavours of food- salty, sweet, spicy and bitter, just like the flavours of life. Nowadays, as a teenager, it is important to reflect on my childhood occasionally and take things slowly amid my fast-paced and busy lifestyle. The Jurong West Food Centre is truly the place where I can reminisce about the old times I spent in Jurong and with the people here.

Finally, this hawker centre is famous for its "Char Kway Teow". Comparatively, the Zion Riverside Food Centre is relatively small in size. However, especially on weekends, it is packed to the brim with tourists who are interested in Singapore's cuisine and culture. Although the long snaking queues could be off-putting, I gladly join in. Through hearing

some conversations and observing my surroundings, I can understand more about Singaporeans and the tourists to a large extent. I understand how Singaporeans are willing to wait patiently in line just for the sake of good food, such as "Char Kway Teow", and why tourists visit Singapore, mostly due to the credit of our unique culture. This is shown through our dishes such as rojak, which consists of a variety of ingredients: "yu tiao" (fried dough fritters), turnip slices, pineapple slices, all combined by a sweet sauce. The sweet sauce represents what Singaporeans share in common, which is the love for Singapore and the entire dish is integrated like the people of Singapore, who are able to blend well together despite the differences between the many races and religions. Through this, as a teenager, I can have a broader horizon of Singapore, as well as the world, just through being in the Zion Riverside Food Centre.

Therefore, the experiences in the aforementioned three food courts and hawker centres offer so much more than food to me. Apart from pampering my taste buds, they possess memories and dishes that constantly remind me of my Singaporean identity and provide me with a wider horizon of Singapore. Indeed, they supply food for the nourishment of my teenage soul.

EXEMPLAR 2: REFLECTIVE ESSAY ABOUT AN EVENT

Describe a precious memory that matters most to you and **explain** why you will always cherish it.

Each time I hear the word 'precious', the **sequence of events** on that glorious day – 24th November 2012 – immediately rushes to the front of my mind. It was a dreaded day for most of my friends – including me, initially of course – before the life-changing string of events **transpired**. We were collecting our life-defining Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results on that day.

The day before, I could really feel all the **butterflies in my stomach fluttering** in all directions. "This can only go two ways: I could fall on my knees at the sight of my results and look up to God with **despondence**;" I calmed myself before going to bed, "or I could jump up in the air with relief and ecstasy." To prepare for PSLE, I had done everything imaginable: burning the midnight oil for revision; attending an **avalanche** of tuition classes; and sacrificing watching my beloved Chelsea battle for the premiership title on TV. The latter was actually an act I would classify as "against the law" – my law on being faithful to my passion.

On the day itself, I put on my **one-size-too-small** and **battle scarred** school uniform for one last time. To be honest, I felt like a **war veteran**, just that I had yet to find out if I had won the all-important war. After saying my final prayer, my parents – no less worried than I – accompanied me to school.

In school, my classmates and I were too nervous to speak and we just sat on the floor, eagerly awaiting the release of our results. Some of us were shivering; others were forcing a smile or two unsuccessfully. **Ironically**, we **resembled a firing line** waiting to be shot dead by our form teacher. The **impending judgment minutes** came. We got up, struggling as our **jelly-legs** could not quite measure up to the **immensity of the daunting situation**. One by one my classmates **drooped and slouched** after receiving their

results. I could only hear my heart beating like a gigantic drum as my body temperature surged to 1000 degrees or so.

The next thing I knew was my mother frantically chasing after me with my result slip in her hands as I was too dazed to look at my results. Strangely, I saw her taking something out of her pocket. Feeling **agitated** as the suspense was crumbling me, somehow her widest grin had the power to **exterminate my anxiety** and stress straightaway. The words that emanated from her mouth were laced with honey: “Son, congrats! It’s straight A’s!”

I immediately got down on my knees and thanked God. All the **excruciating** hard work for the **gruelling** examination had been well rewarded. What came next was a total shocker. Mother handed me two tickets – an airplane ticket for a trip to London and an FA Cup Final match ticket starring Chelsea! I was so **deliriously** over the moon but fortunately I did not suffocate my mother with my **hugest hug**.

Well, I never knew breaking the law could reap such great rewards

EXEMPLAR 3: REFLECTIVE ESSAY ABOUT A POSSESSION

Describe a possession and explain why it is special to you and your family.

A heart-warming scene remains etched in my memory. It is my grandfather shuffling to his teak cabinet, gingerly pulling out a familiar leather-bound album and nestling snugly in the midst of his six children. Of course, anticipation would drive all of his grandchildren to locate any gap between the shoulders or even scramble over a chair to get a vantage point. Without fail, Grandfather would nostalgically flip to a new page, spot a photograph of one of his children from decades ago and relate the context of that picture in an animated voice, accompanied by a toothless grin.

Every black and white photograph stops time. It freezes precious memories in a capsule. The hundreds of carefully mounted photographs have detailed every phase of life. They documented the magical moments when aunts and uncles were born till the day they graduated and got married. The album is also a prized historical document. It has witnessed the birth and growth of our nation. It captured parts of the Singapore city before old historical buildings were torn down to make way for impressive skyscrapers that form the spectacular city landscapes today. It reminds everyone of a rudimentary way of life that was once full of rustic charm. Many of those scenes have disappeared for good.

I remember Grandfather’s low mellow voice sharing those precious moments with us. He would often burst into cackles of laughter, filling the house with warmth and giggles. Sadly, that experience is short-lived. When I turned fourteen, my beloved grandfather passed on from a heart attack. Abruptly, the storytelling sessions ended.

For many years, that heavy volume of family history was closely guarded and secured. It remained locked in Grandfather’s trusted cabinet until grandmother departed last year. While managing the family heirlooms and assets, a momentous decision surprised my mother. Her deceased parents had actually bequeathed the coveted family album to her!

The memory bank is more valuable to my family than any other inheritance. There is no way for anyone to ascribe a monetary value to it.

On the day when mother handed down the special gift to me for safekeeping, I was visibly moved. I knew then that I was holding an essential piece of our family story. The leather had aged significantly, but it still retained its lustre. I refused to apply chemical polish as it could hasten the decay. Instead, I creatively used another piece of leather that I had cut out from an abandoned sofa and used it to rub natural wax onto the surface of the album. As I rhythmically rubbed the thick natural gel onto the cover and spine, I felt a magical connection. It was surreal to be in direct contact with something that grandfather had put together painstakingly by hand.

The plastic that shielded the photographs from light had turned slightly cloudy but the details still came through. As I gently moved from one page to the next, I realised the artistry of my grandfather. He had framed each shot symmetrically and allowed the correct amount of light to penetrate the camera lens. No picture was overexposed or underexposed. Each image reflected meticulous care taken to find the correct balance and angle to tell a story even decades later. Grandfather had looked into every subject with such amazing details. Truly he had the gift to bring his subjects to life.

I am the new guardian now. Nothing can persuade my family and me to part with the priceless gift until I am able to hand it down to the next generation.

More Exemplars

Question: Write about a time when you caused great disappointment to another person. What did you do about the situation? (GCE O level 2017)

Without fail, Mr Jimmy Koh would be on the tennis court. On Sunny days, he had a trusted visor to shield his beady eyes from the hostile glare of the sun. On rainy days, he had a roller to push the puddles of water off the court surface. For the past twenty years, the legendary coach had tirelessly groomed young tennis stars who represented the leading schools in Singapore. Under his tutelage, the players competed in local and regional competitions. They all knew his motto.

‘You do not play tennis to become a world champion. Tennis won’t feed you. But being competitive in tennis strengthens your mind. It sharpens your judgement.’

That was a profound philosophy for many amateurs who first joined the tennis class. To be part of Mr Koh’s team, the players had to do just as well in class as they did on the court. The coach would not compromise his standards. In fact, he did not condone anyone who did. Yong Jun and many others had dropped out of the team simply because their ego and lackadaisical attitude far superseded their skills.

Precariously, I was next in line.

“If you do not pass your mid year examinations, I will bar you from the upcoming tournament. Our Team cannot have a captain who flops in class.”

Mr Koh’s unwavering tone and steady gaze delivered the poignant message sharply. I had failed five subjects and barely scraped through the other subjects. My frustrated teachers were armed with a list of nasty complaints for my distressed parents. After a hectic school day and training, I barely had the energy to read, least of all, complete all my school assignments.

Mr Koh’s voice lingered in my head. His words resonated with me. “You’ve let your family and your team down. As a captain, you are expected to be a role model on and off the court. Remember. Tennis will not feed you. It grooms you.”

That was a sobering moment. Knowing that I had disappointed my mentor, my heart ached terribly. The selfless man had sacrificed long gruelling hours under the blazing sun to perfect my strokes. He was the inspirational force that propelled me to be a winner on the court. Never once did he give up on me.

With my newfound resolve, I began adhering to a rigorous schedule. It was almost regimental. I started waking up two hours earlier every day to check my homework. Bent on improving my weaker subjects, I set regular consultation meetings with my teachers. After my tennis training every evening, I would head home directly and resist gallivanting with my teammates. Initially, my parents were highly sceptical of me. In no time, my discipline and sincerity moved them.

All this while, Mr Koh had been watching me closely from afar. During an opportune moment, he finally broke his prolonged silence, “Suffer now. Thrive later. That makes you a winner.”

My guardian angel was right. At the end of that semester, I scored four distinctions. For a mediocre student like me, such academic achievements were unprecedented. I led the team to victory that year too. Watching me standing proudly on the pedestal, my mentor teared. Somehow, I knew that I had regained his trust. Sadly, that was the last championship played under his charge. Months later, cancer robbed Mr Koh of his life, leaving many of us heartbroken.

Till now, the wisdom of my cherished coach lives on.

Question: Describe an event you looked forward to which turned out to be disappointing. Explain why you were excited about it and why it did not live up to your expectations. (GCE O level 2018)

As soon as the wedding date was announced, the hustle and bustle formally commenced. With my phone beeping incessantly, all the WhatsApp messages pointed to one certainty. Pow’s wedding would bring together all my cousins who had been residing overseas for the last decade. Marcus and Tristan in Melbourne, Peng Yi in China, Ashwin and Owen in Delhi and Ian in Pakistan would be making this special journey home. For some reason, as soon as they had completed their studies and National Service, all the children of my

four uncles ventured abroad. Upon receiving the news, my brother Pow could not stop beaming. I was exhilarated as well! Incredulously, all our cousins would be reunited, making the occasion even more meaningful.

The wedding preparations left my family exhausted. I had to personally write the names of thousands of guests while my meticulous parents scrutinised the list of hotel venues and painstakingly selected the dishes for the banquet. Mother specially chose a myriad of seasonal flowers to ensure an intricate blend of white, red and pink for the stage.

“The room must be bright and airy to bless the auspicious occasion. Nothing must be in black!” Mother reminded solemnly for the umpteenth time.

On the wedding night, the blissful couple stood out as ecstatic guests applauded to mark their well-rehearsed entry into the banquet hall. Treated like royalty, the bride interlocked her fingers with the bridegroom’s, ready to embrace an exciting future as one entity.

My excitement however was short-lived. Sitting with Tristan, Peng Yi, Owen, Marcus and Ashwin, I was unwittingly sucked into a whirlpool. Those high achievers openly exchanged superlatives, wildly exaggerated observations and enviable salary figures as if they were in the middle of an auction. One by one, they boasted about their achievements, blatantly disregarding the feelings of others. In fact, none of them barely made any concerted effort to greet the bride and groom. Neither did they interact much with other elders, including my parents. Tristan and Peng Yi were busy flaunting the luxury car that they owned overseas while Owen was boasting about the celebrities whom he knew. Marcus and Ashwin were comparing their financial gains boisterously above the din, boasting about the new yacht they owned.

Sadly I felt no sense of warmth or familiarity. That was not what I had imagined. Unknowingly, a bitter chill seeped in, threatening to swallow me. It was as if winter had shown up uninvited. “Are these really my cousins?” I could not help but wonder. I shuddered at the thought, fighting hard to suppress my anguish. My beloved cousins whom I had grown up with flying kites and kicking a deflated soccer under the void deck were no longer the same.

For an hour, my self-absorbed cousins rattled on, not realising that I had faded into oblivion. My childhood companions were now defined by luxuries. The care and warmth that we had shared while growing up in the humble heartland of Potong Pasir estate had vanished. Failing to sense any sincerity, I left that circle quietly with my head bowed in disappointment.