

Reflective Writing in OWI: Gaining Self-Knowledge and Building a Community of Care

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2021 OWI Symposium Presenter

By any number of measures, the first semester for newly minted college students is the most critical time for all kinds of adjustments that must occur. Students are the most vulnerable as they learn to navigate all the newness that comes with college. Online learning due to the pandemic created a greater challenge for freshmen. They experience for the first time what it means to be taking college courses online and to be interacting virtually with others on campus. Consequently, most freshmen struggle to experience a sense of belonging, whether it is being in a classroom or being on campus, and thus, struggle with mental health.

The [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) reported:

During the pandemic,

- 56% of young adults (ages 18-24) reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder
- 25% of young adults are more likely to report substance use, compared to 13 % of adults
- 26% of young adults are more likely to report having suicidal thoughts, compared to 11% of adults

The mental health of students and classroom belonging strategies came to the forefront during the pandemic. How can students feel a sense of belonging in an online writing course and the excitement to explore who they are as learners?

A series of reflective writing assignments and exercises through retrospection and introspection can help students to reflect on their literacy development and to discover who they are and their place in a writing classroom. Beyond helping students acquire self-knowledge and awareness of their literacy experiences, reflective writing can assist in building a community of care, thus helping students to develop a sense of belonging as a community of writers.

Reflection toward Self-Knowledge and a Community of Care

- Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing
- Develop understanding of rhetorical situations (exigence, audience, motivation, constraints, etc.)
- Develop Habits of Mind (curiosity, openness, creativity, persistence, etc.)
- Develop courage, confidence, and resilience
- Discover oneself and one's voice
- Develop autonomy and agency
- Develop a personal relationship with writing
- Become an active member of a learning community
- Develop empathy and care for others
- Develop larger goals beyond the course