

As part of the Civilization and Cultures Core Curriculum, students in this course will use an Eportfolio on wordpress.com (through sites.vmi.edu) to organize and publish their assignments/artifacts. Each artifact must be tagged with a brief description of its scope and purpose. At the end of the semester, all students must create a **3-5 page reflective essay**, in which they look back on their work produced, reflecting on the assignments and how those helped them learn best about the target culture.

Learning Outcomes. As part of the Civilization and Cultures Core Curriculum, by the end of the course, students should be able to

- 1) Demonstrate knowledge of characteristic products or practices of the world's communities, civilizations, or cultures.
- 2) Reflect on their learning about a culture or cultures.

Civilizations and Cultures Courses

Writing Prompt for the Reflective Essay

Common Assignment

Write a three- to five-page reflective essay in which you identify some of the significant products or practices of the culture(s) you have studied. To develop and illustrate your focus for the essay, you should discuss the ways in which the activities and assignments you've selected as artifacts have informed and shaped your learning by making specific reference to them. Use the style of documentation (e.g., MLA, APA, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*) suggested by your instructor to clearly document references.

Requirements:

- The reflective essay should develop from a clear, compelling focus that is organized, thoroughly developed with relevant examples drawn from ePortfolio artifacts, cohesively structured, and expressed in clear, carefully edited sentences.
- For the reflective essay, you will draw on artifacts from a rich assemblage of work that you have created over the course of the semester. Though no minimum number of artifacts is required to be placed in the "showcase" ePortfolio and discussed in the reflective essay, you should have a sufficiently large number of completed assignments and activities in the "workspace" ePortfolio so that you may choose from among them to select those that help you advance and develop your thesis most effectively.

- The reflective essay will contribute to your final course grade. (The weight of the assignment will be determined by your instructor but must count a minimum of ten percent in all Civilizations and Cultures courses.) The assignment must be submitted by the last day of classes, which is the Institute's deadline for submission of written work.

Civilizations and Cultures Courses

Instructions for Students: Preparing to Write the Reflective Essay

As a student in a Civilizations and Cultures course, you have been asked to reflect on your learning experiences periodically throughout the semester. The goal of this approach—a theory of reflective learning advanced by 20th century educational philosopher, John Dewey—is to cultivate a habit of mind that enables you to articulate not only *what you know*, but also *how you came to know* it. In this culminating assignment, you are invited to **write a reflective essay that will lead you to contemplate the connections between what you have done (e.g., assignments in the course) and what you have learned—and ultimately how both have influenced you or your thinking about the culture you have studied.**

As you undertake the process of this final reflection, you'll find it helpful to spend some time responding to the questions below which are designed to help you generate and discover a compelling and viable thesis/focus to develop in the reflective essay.

Step 1: As you reflect on the cultural communities you have been studying, take time to generate specific examples in response to each question below. Some might find it useful to make lists, map clusters of ideas, or write short paragraphs.

- What are the various cultural products, practices, and/or perspectives of this community (or communities)?

- What activities and assignments in the course have facilitated your learning about the culture(s)?

Step 2: Once you have generated some ideas in response to the questions above, now identify some of the more salient products or practices of the target culture(s) you have studied. Which products or practices best represent the target culture(s) and why? Your goal is to articulate *what you have come to know* about the culture(s) that you can present as significant in some way.

Step 3: With these products and/or practices in mind, identify the course activities and assignments (that you've collected as artifacts) which have informed and shaped your understanding of the culture(s). Consider their relationship to one another. These are the artifacts that you'll present and analyze as you discuss the process of your learning, or *how you came to understand* the products and practices of the culture you studied.

Step 4: By this point, you should have some sense of the ideas you'd like to present in the essay. After reading the formal writing prompt for the reflective essay assignment, try to express in a nutshell what you want to say in the essay, and why it's worth saying. You could do this by writing down a couple of sentences or by talking with a classmate or your instructor. After you get some feedback to the ideas, you're probably ready to start writing the initial draft of the essay.

Suggested timeline for composing the Reflective Essay (to be completed by the course instructor):

Date: Complete steps 1-4 in "Preparing to Write the Reflective Essay"

Date: Full draft due for response

Date: Revised draft due for response

REVISED REFLECTIVE ESSAY RUBRIC (JAN. 2014)

	UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL COMPONENTS	ANALYSIS OF ePORTFOLIO ARTIFACTS	REFLECTION ON LEARNING
“5” RATING	Advances a complex, insightful thesis/ focus for the essay that demonstrates knowledge of the products/ practices of the target community(ies), civilization(s), or culture(s)	Presents a complex, insightful analysis of a selection of substantive, varied, and revealing artifacts which fully support and develop the essay’s thesis/focus.	Meaningfully reflects on the relationship between <i>what the writer learned</i> about the target culture(s) and <i>how the writer came to learn it</i> through the ePortfolio process
“4” RATING	Advances an effective thesis/ focus for the essay that demonstrates knowledge of the products/ practices of the target community(ies), civilization(s), or culture(s)	Presents an effective analysis of a selection of relevant and varied artifacts which effectively support and develop the essay’s thesis/focus.	Thoughtfully reflects on the relationship between <i>what the writer learned</i> about the target culture(s) and <i>how the writer came to learn it</i> through the ePortfolio process
“3” RATING	Advances a clear thesis/ focus for the essay demonstrates knowledge of the products/ practices of the target community(ies), civilization(s), or culture(s)	Presents a clear analysis of a selection of appropriate and varied artifacts, which loosely support and develop the essay’s thesis/focus.	Adequately reflects on relationship between <i>what the writer learned</i> about the target culture(s) and <i>how the writer came to learn it</i> through the ePortfolio process
“2” RATING	The thesis/ focus for the demonstrates knowledge of the products/ practices of the target community(ies), civilization(s), or culture(s), but may be simplistic or stereotyped in thought.	A weak analysis, which may be attributed to a poor selection of artifacts either in terms of relevance, diversity, or quality.	Describes learning experiences
“1” RATING	Thesis/ focus for the essay does not demonstrates knowledge of the products/ practices of the target community(ies), civilization(s), or culture(s) and is unclear or fails to address the prompt.	Fails to include or discuss artifacts.	Does not discuss relevant learning experiences