

Appendix A: Youth Empowerment Letter Assignment Guidelines

PURPOSE

The purpose of this assignment is to practice critical reflection regarding the concepts discussed in class. Each student will write a reflective essay in the form of a letter. In preparation for this epistolary essay, the student will examine his/her/zir experiences in life. The student then writes about those experiences, exploring how he/she/ze has changed, developed, or grown from those experiences to offer advice to a young person in their life (past, present, or future).

This assignment grants each student the opportunity to reflect on the content of this course and how it relates to their (personal, political, professional, or educational) experiences working toward youth empowerment. Deep thinking and honesty with your intersecting identities and ideological beliefs will deepen your understanding of social justice and the role of social workers. Each student is expected to read their letter out loud on the last day of class.

The assignment is intended to develop and refine the following:

- Personal reflection and self-awareness
- Recognition and articulation of personal values and life experiences that may guide practice
- Critical and analytical thinking
- Effective organization and presentation of information
- Effective communication skills
- Writing in a clear and concise manner

You can find tips for writing a reflective essay at: <https://www.oxbridgeessays.com/blog/complete-guide-to-writing-a-reflective-essay/>

How to format a letter: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/personal_correspondence/personal_letters.html

TASKS

Determine your audience (who will your letter be addressed to?). You may write to:

- A child or young person in your life (past, present, or future)
- Youth in general
- Your past self as a child or adolescent
- Take time to reflect on the course content
- Determine the topic/focus of your letter
- Plan, draft, and compose the reflections
- 2-page max. essay
- Format as a personal letter (APA format not required)
- 12-inch Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, double-spaced

- Proofread and edit a completed draft
- Submit your narrative
- Oral presentation
- Practice reading/presentation
- 5-minute presentation of the letter in class

GRADING CRITERIA (100 POINTS TOTAL)

You will be graded on the level of critical self-reflection that you convey in the letter.

- **Evidence of honest, critical self-reflection and self-awareness (50 points):** The letter may reflect what you learned from the course (i.e., readings, class discussions) or the group project (including all aspects of the planning, design, and implementation of the workshop), but it is not mandatory. Instead, you should write an honest reflection on a topic related to youth empowerment and social justice. Do NOT write a summary of the class content. An exemplary letter will demonstrate creativity, synthesis of ideas, in-depth reflections, and evidence of original thought on the topic. Main points should be well developed and reveal a high degree of critical thinking.
- **Writing style and organization/clarity/grammar (30 points):** The letter essay must meet all assignment requirements and evidence attention to detail; all margins, spacing, and indentations are correct; the essay is neat and correctly assembled. An exemplary essay is free of distracting spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors; absent of fragments, comma splices, and run-ons.
- **Oral presentation style (20 points):** During the final session, students will read the letter in class. Students will be graded on the delivery of the presentation. Students should consider how vocal dynamics support content, as well as body language such as eye contact, gesture, and posture. Students who supplement the reading with creative expressions (photo, music, video, exhibits, etc.) will get an extra point. The presentation may include a general introduction, brief discussion of the positionality/standpoint used to write the reflection, and the reading of the letter. Thus, the oral presentation can be organized to include, but is not limited to the:
 - General introduction: What is the main topic/focus of your letter?
 - Discussion of positionality/standpoint: What lens did you use to reflect and write on the selected topic? What social identities shaped this lens?
 - Reading: Oral presentation of the letter

Access more book resources at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org/books/counterstory-pedagogy.