

# How to Write a Reflection Essay

1. Do the reading for the week – all of the reading. Write notes on the reading and mark places that peak your interest.
2. Identify a conclusion that is controversial.
  - a. State the conclusion briefly in the first sentence of your essay – you can quote the author but often it will be better to summarize in your own words.
  - b. Cite where you found this conclusion in the reading.
3. Come up with a counterexample or other reason why this conclusion might not follow, claim that the conclusion is unclear, or relate the current reading back to previous readings.
4. State your answer for #3 as your thesis.
  - a. May use the format “Author’s conclusion is problematic because...” or
  - b. “A counterexample to Author’s conclusion is...”
  - c. “Author concludes X but is not clear what she means by X”
  - d. “Author’s conclusion X contradicts/agrees with/expands on Earlier Author’s conclusion Y.”
5. Provide support – two or three items.
  - a. Go back to your notes on the text(s).
  - b. Cite the text(s).
  - c. If counterexample, show how counterexample goes against Author’s conclusion
  - d. If you argue that the conclusion is unclear, come up with two or three ways the author might have meant the conclusion and discuss the implications of that view.
  - e. You may also offer an objection to your view and reply to the objection
6. Conclusion
  - a. Restate your thesis and list your support.

## Example: From readings on abortion

(note that this is an outline – you need to turn in an ESSAY rather than an outline but I recommend doing an outline first)

1. Read all of Thomson, Veatch, Haddad, & English, and Wilkinson
  - a. Lots of highlighting and underlining, I used post-it notes to right down my reaction to several of Thomson's arguments.

### Introduction and Thesis

2. "...a woman surely can defend her life against the threat to it posed by the unborn child, even if doing so involves its death." (Thomson, 4)
  - a. First sentence: *In her essay, "A Defense of Abortion," Jarvis Thomson argues that if a woman's life is threatened by her unborn child, she can protect her own life by having an abortion and ultimately causing the unborn child's death.*
3. *Jarvis Thomson assumes that it is moral to defend one's own life at the cost of someone else's life.*
4. Thesis/Second Sentence: *Jarvis Thomson's conclusion that a woman can protect her life even at the cost of the unborn child is problematic because she assumes that it is moral to defend one's own life at the cost of someone else's life.*

### Support

5. Two items to support #4 (stated briefly here but would include explanation in an essay):
  - a. *You could disagree with Jarvis Thomson and argue that it is never morally permissible to kill someone, no matter what the circumstances.*
  - b. *The unborn child does not "threaten" her life with any malicious intent (unlike someone trying to mug her)*

### Conclusion

6. *Jarvis Thomson's conclusion that a woman can protect her life even at the cost of an unborn child is problematic because she assumes that it is moral to defend one's own life at the cost of someone else's life. Critics could argue that it is never moral to kill someone or even if we do allow people to kill in self-defense, it's usually because the other person means to kill them whereas the unborn child can only kill the mother by accident.*