

## Sample Student Work and Reflections

### **Metacognition in multiple forms:**

Below I have assembled several examples of metacognitive activities students undertook, with explanations and commentary.

#### 1) Written Responses to Instructor Feedback

As an instructor, I want to facilitate my students' capacity to implement strategies for their personal success in the course: how best to memorize things that must be memorized; how best to practice things that need practice; how best to approach a text. There are best practices, and there are also individual preferences. I hope to encourage them to seek the balance between those two that works best for each of them individually. In order to do that, they often need to learn to focus their attention in appropriate ways. Adding the short paragraph in English in which they processed the feedback on their previous Discussion Dirigée Response before working on the next one was intended to do just that. I asked students to write a short paragraph *in English* as a preface to each subsequent response explaining what they would seek to improve in relation to the feedback they received on the previous one. Comparing their stated goals both to my comments and to their actual performance, the metacognitive work significantly affected the content of student work. Sampling from the first and second responses from 2015, of the 14 students, 11 clearly engaged more fully with the content in accordance with my feedback and their processing of it; 1 student made slight progress; one student did not mention content in their metacognitive paragraph, and 1 student did not complete it (he turned in both of the first two responses simultaneously, and late). Most of my comments on their first responses involved asking them to delve more deeply into the text of the article, *citing* it and using it as a jumping off point for their reflections. At the level of grammar, however, students often said they would do things like "avoid careless errors" or "pay more attention to agreement," but they were less successful, even when they focused their attention on a particular pattern of errors. 3 of the 13 students clearly improved in the area they mentioned; 4 slightly improved; 5 did not improve, and 1 did not mention grammar concerns.

Whether or not student performance corresponded exactly with their stated emphasis was not always important—because it also gave them a sense of accountability. If they say "I'm going to pay more attention to subject/verb and adjective/noun agreement" and they *don't*, I can highlight that statement for them so that they recognize it.

The paragraph below was the written reflection of a student who made significant numbers of agreement errors in her first response; she also neglected to cite the text. Thus she wrote the following:

*“For this next current even response I will be more careful and attentive while writing. I will read over my writing and check for grammar errors !!!!!. I will also include more references to the article and make sure to double check my facts. I think that my main problem with this last current events response was that I was careless and did not check over my writing !!!”*

When she received her feedback on the second response, I had highlighted (as above) her reflection paragraph. While she had noticeably improved in content, effectively citing the article as a reference point for her commentary, she still had 14 errors in either subject/verb or adjective/noun agreement (in a 300-word response)! While the reflection paragraph did not seem to impact her linguistic accuracy on this particular assignment, returning it to her allowed her to see how her practices did not correspond to her stated goals. On the following response, she had **zero** errors in agreement.

While asking students to process or to be accountable for the feedback they received was not universally successful, it certainly did not decrease their performance. 7 of 14 students significantly improved between their first and second responses (by more than 2 points). 3 additional students improved their performance by 1-2 points; 2 students received the same grade, and only 1 student received a lower grade. 1 final student handed in both assignments simultaneously (and late), thus I did not count him in these calculations. In 2016, 7/16 students improved their grades more than 2 points; 4 more students improved by 1-2 points; 3 students received the same grade, and 2 students received lower grades (but in both cases those particular students had neglected to write the metacognitive paragraph!)

While metacognition required students to *focus* on areas of improvement, it did not improve their *capacity* to become better proofreaders of their own work. Coding their work, however, helped *me* to see where I could build in more practice of the skills I wanted them to master. In Fall 2016, I continued to have students complete the metacognition exercise, but I also built in occasional proofreading exercises as warm-ups in class. Helping students to practice catching errors in subject-verb and adjective-noun agreement, or other common errors related to the grammar points we are studying, would (in theory) help them to become better independent proofreaders of their own work. I also discovered a website hosted in Canada [www.bonpatron.com](http://www.bonpatron.com) that allows students to enter in a text of up to 150 words and highlights errors for them while asking them guided questions related to the error. Although the program does not catch every error, it helps students to become aware of their own carelessness. It does not correct the student work for them, but asks questions that will guide them to correct the error themselves, just as I would do if they were to come to my office hours. I found myself grateful to be reading student work in which careless errors became increasingly rare.

## 2. Processing Cultural Information by Justifying Creative Choices:

Below follows an example of student metacognition related to their original folk tales. After reading several traditional stories from Haitian and Québécois contexts, the students were asked to write original stories from the perspectives of those cultures. Their assignment description also asked them to provide the following: “In addition to the *conte* in French, you should write up a paragraph that explains *in English* how you believe your story engages with another cultural perspective that you have encountered this semester.” 2015 was the first time that I asked students to write while imagining the perspective of another culture and also the first time I asked them to perform this type of reflection on their creative work. The first time around, the instructions were deliberately fairly vague. I wanted to see how capable students might be of articulating cultural perspectives without too much direction on my part. We had discussed the cultural perspectives revealed by the various folk tales multiple times in class.

While there were some good reflections in 2015, they were often superficial. Students sometimes did nice background research on Québécois history, but their overall comments sometimes remained a little vague. One group asserted that the stories “have some interesting characteristics that make them distinctly different from stories that young Americans grew up with” without providing concrete examples to support that assertion. They described how their story included elements of Canadian culture (like the devil, ice hockey and the moose), but they did not really focus on cultural *perspectives*. They might offer a moral of a story that was particularly American in perspective: “she too can be comfortable with herself and her skills” without *acknowledging* the Americanness of that perspective.

Below is one example from 2015 that, while not perfect in form, better demonstrates the type of metacognition I was looking for:

*“In this story, which is set in Quebec, we decided to mix elements of French-Canadian stories with American stories. The antagonist of this story is a demon, an evil character with its roots in Judeo-Christian religion. The demon, or the devil, is a commonly incorporated character in the French-Canadian stories because the French and French colonists led very religion-centered lives, primarily Catholicism. This speaks to the values of their culture. The American aspect of this story is the ending. The ending is happy and clear, as are most of the stories we read. This highlights the American value of sheltering young children. In our story, the devil is outsmarted by the protagonist, Eva, and she and Felix live happily ever after. This is an ending like one we would read in an American story. Our little twist in this story involves reversing a similarity we found in both French-Canadian and American literature: the saver and the saved. In most stories, the brave, charming man saves the innocent, frail woman, as she is not strong enough to save herself. In our story, however, we chose to make the woman the hero. This is very similar to many modern Disney movies, such as “The Princess and the Frog” and “Brave.” It is an old fashioned plot, a protagonist who beats a villain, but has a modern and comical twist.”*

The students demonstrated an awareness of certain cultural norms both from Québécois culture and their own, and they explained their own intentional adherence to or deviation from those norms. Their story did include cultural markers from Québec, such as maple syrup and the devil character, but they did not make those more superficial markers the center of their reflection. They chose instead to focus on elements of the plot structure and the perspectives and attitudes that the story emphasized.

In 2016, I continued to ask students to prepare this paragraph, but I was more explicit in prompting the reflection. I asked them to talk both about cultural *markers* that they used in their stories as well as about the cultural *perspectives* that are present. I also explicitly asked them how it *felt* to attempt to write a story from the perspective of another culture. One of the best reflections I received in 2016 is here:

*We chose to write from a Haitian perspective for our conte, "Le Roi Dépensier". In writing our story we included elements we've discussed in class that seem to be prevalent throughout the Haitian stories we've read. For example, several of the stories include a reference to a king or authority figure. We chose to make the king one of our main characters to illustrate this connection to Haitian culture. We saw intelligence as highly viewed in the Haitian culture based on the stories we've read in class, so we wanted to incorporate that in our own story. In particular, we liked how Janot was able to use his intellect to convince the king he was indeed correct. We wrote our story to include someone below the king using their smarts to "win". When writing about the king forcing his subjects to provide food just for him, we thought this was a good connection to Haiti's history and timeline. This seemed to touch on slavery in an indirect way by having the kingdom providing food solely for the king's benefits, which may also reflect the people's opinion on authority figures. It was difficult writing a story from a different perspective because we were used to elements in American stories and we wanted to maintain historical accuracy in our Haitian story. We found ourselves searching for typical crops grown in Haiti and learning what unit of measurement was used there. Approaching this assignment from a different point of view definitely made it a challenging task, because we wanted to portray a Haitian culture, not an Americanized culture in our story. In many American stories, or those adapted for American readers, we stray away from anything with too much violence or morbidity. A challenge that we faced was finding the balance between what was appropriate to put into a children's story, and what was not; an example of this being the death of the king and of Toussaint's father. We found those elements to be appropriate, without being too morbid or disturbing. It is, without a doubt, a valuable exercise to look at situations from the perspective of others from different cultures. This can be applied to so many aspects of everyday life. With the current issues of islamophobia, racism, and others in the media and embedded into our societies, it is common to separate ourselves into groups and place more value on certain people. We must be able to look at things through the eyes of people from other cultures if we ever wish to live harmoniously.* (Meghan Aines, Elizabeth McFarland, Kathryn Pierson, and Jordan Vaughn)

In their reflection, the students clearly connected their own story to the cultural elements we studied in class, demonstrated their recognition of American perspectives on storytelling, and *voluntarily* commented both on the challenge and the benefit of attempting to write a story from the perspective of another culture.

### 3. Metacognition in French: The Final Exploratory Essay and Consciousness of a Cultural Lens

As mentioned in my **Reflections** section of this portfolio, students from 2015 were better able to cite the course texts to provide evidence for interpretive claims than students in 2014. Since helping them to do that was a central focus of some of my course revisions, I was very happy to see their progress. Interestingly, however, reading all of the essays in tandem with retrospect, the 2014 students demonstrated more explicitly a newfound awareness of their own cultural lens than the 2015 students (9/19 in 2014 as opposed to 4/14 in 2015). While I was unable to precisely identify a difference in my instruction that accounted for that difference, I was interested in making the assignment more focused on the awareness of the cultural lens than on proving a particular thesis. On the whole, the Exploratory Essays from 2015 seemed more thesis-driven and less exploratory. I wondered if my focus on using citations to justify their claims encouraged the students to adopt a more thesis-driven perspective, even though I did not ever use the word “thesis” in the assignment description or the peer review process. In the final batch of papers from 2016, I asked students to articulate their new knowledge of Haiti and/or Quebec, but also to discuss a specific moment in the course when they were confronted with the reality of their own cultural lens.

<b>Evolving understanding of your own cultural lens.</b>	You clearly describe a specific moment in the course when you recognized that your perspective differs from those of members of the target culture(s). The essay clearly reflects that you better understand the impact that your own cultural perspective has on your thinking in convincing and appropriate terms. 17.5-20 pts	You describe a specific moment in the course when you recognized that your perspective differs from those of member of the target culture(s). You offer a convincing (but perhaps not in-depth) explanation of your understanding of yourself as a cultural being. 15-17.25 pts	You describe a moment of recognition of cultural difference, but you may rely on stereotypes to explain it. You demonstrate no new understanding of yourself as a cultural being, or that understanding is explained in an unconvincing or inappropriate way. 0-14 pts.
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Asking them to ground their evolving understanding of their own cultural perspective in a precise moment of the semester yielded much more precise discussions of their evolving understanding. After discussing the specific moments in which they were confronted with the understanding of their cultural perspectives, several students concluded their exploratory essays with a clear acknowledgement of the existence of their own cultural lenses. For example:

*“Quand je suis arrivée dans ce cours, je me suis attendu à apprendre le vocabulaire et la grammaire française. Je ne m’attendais pas à devenir un meilleur un citoyen du monde. Quand je suis arrivée dans ce cours, je sais j’avais des lunettes. Maintenant, après les contes et les*

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conversations, je peux voir mes lunettes. Je sais que mes lunettes sont dans la forme de Kansas, ma famille me les a données, elles sont la couleur d'arc en ciel et elles sont petites parce que je n'ai pas vu beaucoup du monde. Oui, mes compétences linguistiques françaises amélioré mais, ma compréhension du monde s'est amélioré plus." (Abigail Krump)

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[When I arrived in this class, I expected to learn French vocabulary and grammar. I didn't expect to become a better global citizen. When I arrived in this class, I know I had glasses. Now, after the tales [we read] and the conversations [I had], I can see my glasses. I know that my glasses are in the shape of Kansas, my family gave them to me, they are the color of a rainbow and they're small because I haven't seen a lot of the world. Yes, my linguistic competence improved, but my understanding of the world has improved more.]

*"Les différences entre les valeurs haïtiennes et américaines sont intrigantes parce qu'aux États-Unis, nous apprécions la gentillesse et la moralité le plus, mais dans les contes haïtiens ils apprécient l'intelligence le plus. Je crois que ça vient de l'instabilité du pays et le questionnement de l'autorité que nous n'avons pas aux États-Unis. Haïti a une histoire très longue de dictateurs et de chefs politiques qui ne se soucient pas de leur peuple. Cela a créé un sentiment de méfiance entre les citoyens et le gouvernement. Ces contes reflètent les valeurs différentes que je n'ai jamais considérées, parce que je n'ai jamais fait face à ces problèmes. Ma lentille culturelle est différente de la lentille des Haïtiens parce que nous avons grandi dans les circonstances très différentes. Maintenant je suis consciente de comment les circonstances font que les gens pensent et se comportent en différentes manières."*

[The differences between Haitian and American values are intriguing because in the United States, we appreciate kindness and morality most, but in the Haitian folk tales, they appreciate intelligence the most. I think that that comes from the instability of the country and the questioning of authority that we don't have in the United States. Haiti has a long history of dictators and political leaders that don't take care of their people. This created a sentiment of wariness between the citizens and the government. These folk tales reflect different values that I hadn't considered because I've never faced these problems. My cultural lens is different from the Haitian lens because we have grown up in very different circumstances. Now I am conscious of how circumstances make people think and behave in different ways.]

While different in their approaches, these two students clearly acknowledge their awareness that their circumstances have influenced their way of seeing the world. This type of awareness was one that I was trying to build throughout the course, and it was gratifying to see students articulate it.