Additions and Replacements for the *Kentucky Writing Handbook*

February 2007

Grades 4, 7 and 12

Reflection—the careful consideration and serious contemplation of past events for the purpose of evaluating or making sense of those past events.

Literacy--In a narrow sense, **literacy is the ability of a student to use and understand language through reading and writing**. However, the concept of literacy may also be defined very broadly. **Literacy is the ability of a student to use language to communicate with others—through reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing and through the use of the combination of these skills.**

Instructional Issues Q & A: Reflective Writing for the Kentucky Writing Portfolio

Q: What is the purpose of the reflective entry in the portfolio?

A: The purpose of the reflective entry is for students to **analyze their growth as writers through the lens of literacy**. In a narrow sense, literacy is the ability of a student to use and understand language through reading and writing. However, the concept of literacy may also be defined very broadly. It is the ability of a student to use language to communicate with others—through reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing, inquiring, etc. as per the diagram on page 11 of the *Kentucky Writing Handbook*. Students who are able to make connections between writing development and literacy experiences are more likely to meet the "authentic (and insightful) focused purpose" called for in the writing criteria from the *Kentucky Writing Scoring Rubric*.

A piece of writing that does not make strong literacy connections would not (for that reason alone) render the portfolio incomplete. However, such a piece, most likely, does not meet the writing criteria under purpose, audience and idea development as strongly as a piece in which the student has made those connections.

Q: If a student's reflective entry does not refer to reading, will the portfolio be considered "incomplete"?

A: The portfolio would not be considered incomplete for that reason alone. The better literacy connection(s) a student makes, however, the more likely he or she is to approach the "authentic (and insightful) focused purpose" called for on the rubric. Literacy may be defined more broadly than reading and writing if the student so chooses. See first question above.

Q: Is it appropriate in the reflective entry for a student to refer to all the pieces in his/her portfolio?

A: While referencing all the portfolio entries would not make a portfolio incomplete for that reason alone, it is **unlikely** that a student needs to reference each piece in his/her portfolio to analyze growth in writing through literacy. It may be more appropriate for students to reference a very limited number of entries (perhaps one if the focus in writing and literacy development has to do with that piece). It is also possible that students do not reference *any* particular piece in the portfolio at all. See *Kentucky Writing Handbook*, Chapter 11, Reflective Writing.

Q: Can a poem be included as the reflective piece?

A: No. A poem would not be an appropriate piece to include in this reflective category. While good poetry is certainly reflective, poetry is considered a literary genre, fulfills a literary purpose, and fits into the literary category.

The reflective entry in the portfolio is intended to be a transactive entry. It asks that students analyze growth in writing through literacy for **the transactive purpose** of informing an audience.

Examples may be found on page 81 of the *Kentucky Writing Handbook*, Part 1: Writing Development.

Q: How can I help students improve their reflective thinking and writing?

A: The key to good reflection is critical thinking. Therefore, regular practice helping students consider the literacy connection is necessary to build those reflective skills.

An excellent way for teachers to assist students with reflective thinking and writing is to **incorporate the use of the working folder into instruction.** The working folders are not intended to be stored away for the student to never see it. Students who are able to see their growth in writing over time through the pieces included in the working folder are much more likely to be able to reflect on their growth as writers. Regular practice reflecting on learning will help students to be able to think more analytically and reflectively (in any content area). Therefore, students who regularly work at reflection will be better able to show those skills in the writing assessment portfolio.

Q: I've had a problem with the reflective pieces from the past being "cookie cutter"—all of the pieces sound alike. How can I help the students develop reflective writing that is not "cookie cutter"?

A: First, no two reflective pieces should sound alike if the student is actually analyzing his/her **individual** growth in writing through literacy. Teachers may consider the reflective entry to be very much like other entries in the portfolio—students may all have the same or similar purposes in writing (analyze growth in writing through literacy); however, each student may focus the piece in a unique way. Consider the personal piece included in the portfolio. All students are analyzing the significance of an event or relationship, etc. However, they may all focus on something completely different. It is the difference in focus that makes the piece unique to the writer.

To help avoid "cookie cutter" pieces, teachers should help students brainstorm their own literacy experiences and help them focus the piece given the audience the student selects. Teachers should **avoid** having students list and refer to each piece in the portfolio. Likewise, teachers should avoid using a "checklist" of items to include in a reflective entry. Teachers should avoid having students all write in the same form, the same way. There is little ownership in that. We wouldn't expect the personal entries of two students to be alike; similarly, we would not expect two reflective entries to be alike. Each student's literacy experience is different.