

## Writing your Reflective Essay on Research Strategies

Writing a reflective essay on the research process is an opportunity for you to think back on what you have learned, to recognize your achievements and to identify the challenges that you faced. The essay is your opportunity to describe your **research strategy, process, and what you learned from it**, and the essay will be the primary tool that the Committee uses to make its selection. Your essay should be 500 to 750 words.

- Use the reflective essay to communicate specifics about your improved understanding and use of library services, resources, and collections as they applied to your paper or project.
- Explain what advancements you see in your library research and what skills, techniques or strategies you have learned.

You can organize your essay as you like, keeping in mind that the Jury considers how the essays address the four points listed below. Some prompting questions follow each point that may help you reflect on the process that you followed in your research. **They are not intended to be answered directly, but to be included in your essay as appropriate.**

1. Consider the **process**: how you crafted your thesis, selected your search tools, developed search techniques, and chose which Library collections to explore.
  - How did you think about and refine your preliminary research topic? Reflect on the process of adapting your interests into the scope of the paper, and how you may have modified your topic given the time you had available for research and writing, the required length of the paper, and the nature of the information you found.
  - What specific strategies did you develop for finding relevant information? Which discoveries did you make by chance and which through planned search strategies?
  - What specific library search tools did you use and why?
2. Consider your **sources**: the types and formats that you chose, how deeply or widely you explored your topic area, how you evaluated and selected materials, and how carefully you cited what you selected.
  - Did you have trouble finding some types or formats of information and if so, how did you overcome this challenge?
  - Did your assumptions about what information would be available change throughout the research process?
  - Did you have some reasons for not selecting specific resources, even though they appeared promising?
  - What did you learn about finding information on your topic or in your discipline? Was it necessary to move outside your discipline to find sufficient sources?
3. Pulling it all together: how you used these sources to support your **thesis** and what original ideas stemmed from the synthesis of your research.
  - How much did the sources you used provide support for your thesis?
  - How did you balance the evidence that you found?

4. What you **learned**: how your understanding of library research changed and how you have grown as an independent researcher.
  - What did you learn about your own research process and style?
  - What expertise have you gained as a researcher?
  - What do you still need to learn?
  - What would you change about your process if you had another chance?

#### **Selection Criteria**

Submissions will be judged based on how well they demonstrate the following:

1. sophistication, originality, or unusual depth or breadth in the **use of library collections**, including, but not limited to, printed resources, databases, primary sources, and materials in all media;
2. exceptional ability to locate, select, evaluate, and synthesize library resources and to use them in the creation of a project in any media that shows **originality** and/or has the potential to lead to original research in the future; and
3. evidence of significant personal **learning** and the development of a habit of research and inquiry that shows the likelihood of persisting in the future.