



How to do a structured reflection with your child

An exercise for the end of a semester or school year

Why do a structured reflection?

Reflecting on academic performance builds higher level thinking skills. Self assessment nurtures insight toward where we are versus where we want to be, and guides what actions we choose to bridge the gap. This sets the stage for effective goal setting. Though many kids would rather move on after a disappointment, taking a pause and debriefing can be the difference between making better choices and repeating the same mistakes in an endless loop. As adults, we are often expected to do these exercises in our professional lives, but we don't have to limit it to the adult world.

This guide, based on our own coaching methodology, helps structure this discussion with your child.

How to prepare

The setting: Consider neutral, yet pleasant territory, such as a local coffee shop or frozen yogurt emporium. This should feel positive, not like a court appearance or a visit to the principal's office.

The ground rules: Make it clear that this is not about shame and blame or even basking in glory if it was a great year academically. No punishments or rewards will be handed down during this reflection. All you ask is for a few minutes of calm, honest conversation for both of you.

The format: Put it in writing. This is an important tool to refer to over the next school year. Consider the template below to structure your discussion. Grab some old tests and papers to help jog your child's memory. The discussion can encompass extracurricular activities, as well. Some kids will need prompting to recall events from months ago, or to answer the *why* questions.

How to prompt effectively

In the form of questions: *What was that big school project in November?*

In the form of observation, then a question: *I noticed that you started doing better on spelling tests by the end of the year. Do you remember what you did to change that?*

In the form of examples: copies of homework, projects, papers or tests to trigger recall

Sample reflection

What were the highlights of the school year?	Honorable mention in science fair Math Team competitions Honor roll for 2 trimesters Made the basketball team for the first time!
Pick one highlight and describe what you did to make it successful.	Basketball team: I went to a summer camp that helped me get better, then I kept practicing the drills I learned there until tryouts.
Which were the hardest assignments this year?	To Kill a Mockingbird Essay Science Fair Project
What made those assignments so difficult?	The essay was tough because we had to create a thesis and I wasn't sure about what to write about and how to make it sound good. The science fair project took a really long time and it had an experiment, a paper, and a poster due. I had to redo the experiment because I lost my data sheet.
What would you change about your approach to those tough assignments?	with the essay, meeting with my teacher to get some help would have been a better idea. with the science fair project, I should have planned out the work in chunks and kept a special folder with just science fair stuff in it.
What did you get better at this year?	I definitely got better in math. I got a little better at taking tests.
Why did you improve?	All those math team drills, every week. I liked crushing the competition. For tests, I met with teachers beforehand and also asked questions during the test when I didn't understand a question (even though it felt weird at first to do that).

What skills do you want to improve next year?	I need to learn how to write essays and use the right grammar and formal words.
What can we (your parents) do to help you do well next year?	Help me edit my writing. Help me figure out how to keep track of papers. Tell my sisters to not bug me while I'm doing homework.

Template for your reflection

What were the highlights of the school year?	
Pick one highlight and describe what you did to make it successful.	
Which were the hardest assignments this year?	
What made those assignments so difficult?	
What would you change about your approach to those tough assignments?	
What did you get better at this year?	
Why did you improve?	
What skills do you want to improve next year?	
What can we (your parents) do to help you do well next year?	