

Sample response: Writing about play

This sample response is a reflective essay on female friendships.

The power of female friendship

I've always surrounded myself with females. Ever since I was a little girl, I have been drawn to women. **I seek them out. In class, I sit next to them. Standing on the train, I find comfort in their closeness.** Even now, almost all my friends are women. I don't have anything against other genders, just some unexplainable preoccupation with having sisters.

Much has been written about the health benefits of female friendships. Blogger and wellness writer Kelly Alexander refers to recent studies that have found **'engaging with female friends reduces cortisol levels ... and increases serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter that helps fight depression, lowers stress and creates a general feeling of wellbeing'**. Whether you believe in the scientific validity of this or not, there is something to be said about the emotional value of these connections.

I look around at the women I surround myself with. **They are stubborn and moody, they are flaky and sometimes judgemental. They are deeply flawed and complicated. They are kind and honest (sometimes to a fault). They are self-deprecating and generous.** I see their flaws but happily accept them as they are.

See, these women are whole versions of themselves, not reducible to a sparkly perfect thing. **My friends and I are connected by some shared experience of womanhood, despite how varied this can be.** In many ways, it is through exploring the differences between female experiences that the most illuminating conversations and revelations can occur. It is through allowing the space for open conversation that intimacy is fostered. For Australian psychologist Amanda Gordon, this is especially important. She believes that **'there's huge value in shared experience, and it's likely to become more so'**, particularly as we transition through the years after living in the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we emerge from those two years of lockdown and isolation, the value of human connection has never been more evident. **Throughout lockdown, chatting with my girlfriends online gave me some solace.** We were all alone but together. We leaned on each other and depended on video chats and masked walks to break up the monotony of pandemic daily life.

During the most stressful and difficult times, the support of my girlfriends has remained a constant. I have learned more about cultivating loving and respectful relationships through these friendships than through any other experience in my life. Dolly Alderton said it best: **'Nearly everything I know about love, I've learnt from my long-term friendships with women.'** Nothing has been more true in my life.

Repeats the 'I' to establish the narrative voice.

Introduces a reference to scientific studies, providing evidence for the writer's claim that there are health benefits to female friendships.

Repeats 'they' to emphasise that the writer is talking about her female friends as a collective.

Shorter sentences are used to reassert the narrative voice after the use of quoted material in the previous paragraph; paired ideas ('stubborn and moody', 'flawed and complicated') help to create a rhythmic quality.

Relates the experience of female friendship to a wider audience.

Introduces a second external source as a way of validating the writer's reflection on the health benefits of female friendship.

Reflects on why the writer's friendships with women have been particularly valuable given recent global events, helping to connect their lived reality to a wider audience.

Introduces an external pop-culture source to show that this is an idea that is widely recognised.

When writing this, I asked some of my female friends what they thought of our relationships. One of my friends who wrote back to me shared:

I think the strength and connection between females sometimes goes unrecognised as a powerful bond in its own right. With these women I share my deepest insecurities, I speak frankly and am truly seen.

I recognise a lot of value in sharing myself with my female friends. I have found that there is an openness and candidness with these women that is unparalleled. Being able to both share the everyday stressors of life and laugh over nonsensical jokes with my female friends is paramount to my mental wellbeing. I cherish these women and the friendships they offer me.

Relates the argument back to the writer's circle of friends, and returns the focus to the present, as it was at the beginning (the first paragraph says 'even now ...').

Reiterates the idea introduced at the beginning of the reflective piece: that female friendship offers health benefits.

Reflective commentary

This piece reflects on the benefits of female friendships. It evolved as a response to Tim Winton's article 'About the Boys' as well as the key idea of Writing about play, where 'play' is understood broadly as involving role-playing and collaboration. While Winton reflects on the behaviour of boys he meets in the surf, I have reflected on the experience of having close female friendships. Where Winton discusses the influence of patriarchal values on boys and their relationships to both the self and to others, I have characterised female friendships as defined by intimacy and shared experience. Through exploration of the dynamic between myself and my female friends, I reflect on a sense of deep connection and shared human experience.

While the writing reflects primarily on my own subjective and personal experience of female friendship, I have also referred to the views of other writers and to the findings of recent studies, showing that my ideas are grounded in research and draw on conversations happening in my cultural context.

I have used fairly formal language (e.g. 'much has been written about') to introduce external sources, but this formal style is broken up with the use of non-standard English. I used colloquial language such as 'moody' and 'flaky' to construct a distinct and somewhat confessional narrative voice, which I hoped would create a sense of connection with my readers. By reiterating the 'I' at the start of the piece and then 'they' in a following paragraph, I emphasised the connections between my experience and the experiences and perspectives of other women.

Refers to a mentor text and reflects on how it influenced the writing of this reflective piece; identifies a specific aspect of the Framework idea which is explored in the response.

Evaluates the language and style of the reflection and provides justification for writing choices.

On the surface, moving between external sources and personal reflections could risk seeming random; however, I decided to subtly interweave personal aspects of my experience with more general reflections to highlight connections and draw conclusions. I referenced the writer Dolly Alderton to create a more layered narrative, allowing the reader to connect the central theme (benefits of female friendship) to a wider sociocultural attitude. I have also attempted to ground the reader in the current social landscape by relating the importance of these friendships during the COVID-19 pandemic. By reflecting on why these friendships were important to me during lockdown and isolation, I hoped to engage the reader and encourage them to reflect on their own experience of friendship during this difficult time.

Explains a structural choice and relates it to the central purpose of the reflection.

Explains how the writing has been crafted for a particular purpose.