

Themes

Changes to reading behavior

Participants reported that using Reflect changed the way they read individual comments. Creating bullet points forced them to identify distinct, individual points within each comment, and separate the thrust of the argument from supporting statements that provided backing and context. They also noted that Reflect summaries made it easier for subsequent readers to critically evaluate the substance of the arguments present in each point.

K - "I tried to identify single coherent thoughts within one or several paragraph and summarize the thought in a single sentence. In the discussions statements often were backed up with context, examples and facts which often made for lengthy comments. What was good with reflect was that it was possible to strip away all the "proofs" of the statement and express the idea in a single sentence, but still having the text that the bullet was derived from highlighted when a user hovered it and thus making it possible for anyone critical of the statement to investigate the reasoning more thoroughly."

K - "Sometimes I wrote a bullet point that I couldn't highlight, and that often meant that the bullet point wasn't all too accurately formulated, and I had to reconsider if I actually had understood what the reader really meant yet. "

E - "It definitely forced me to read more carefully."

Several participants independently noted that Reflect could change the way they themselves, as well as other Discussion participants (such as late-comers) approached discussion threads as a whole.

P - "I found myself scanning the comments first to get an idea what to look for when reading the comments. This was both good and bad."

P - "The audience I thought of was latecomers to the discussion that would be scared to enter the discussion because of the massive amount of text they would have to read through first"

K - "It makes it easier for people to identify which large chunks of text that are worth investing time in. "

Reflect summaries also proved useful for separating "the wheat from the chaff", at both the discussion and comment levels. Good points could be pulled out and highlighted for other readers. This was especially useful for important points that were buried in long comments, or valid points that had been confusingly phrased.

K - "It was most difficult when it was difficult to understand what the commenter wanted to say with his/her comment. And I really think that in these cases the bullets served a purpose in forcing me to really try to understand. When

you force yourself to summarize what you read, it's not possible to just skip a paragraph you don't understand without noticing that you actually didn't understand it. Something I think happens very often otherwise. But which is more important, I don't know. The passages that was easier to summarize maybe were better thought through to begin with and was more valuable in that sense. At the same time as the bullet points were valuable in the sense that they forced you to really try to understand parts you otherwise would have skipped."

Changes to writing behavior

Creating Reflect summaries, and having one's comments summarized by others, caused several of the participants to change the way they wrote comments by becoming more "self-reflective" in their writing.

K - "Yes, indeed. I also think it made me more aware of the value of writing clearly in the first place."

E - "{When someone summarized a comment of mine,} it was also explicit validation that someone understood what I was talking about. On occasion, it was humbling, as people sometimes expressed my point much more concisely."

P - "[When someone summarized a comment of mine] I checked to be certain they had it correct. I also wondered if I possibly could have phrased something more clearly. I found myself editing comments afterwards for style (removing subordinate clauses, difficult punctuation, etc)."

K - "In discussions where it is difficult to formulate yourself well because the concepts are difficult, I think Reflect can offer an insight into if you succeeded in getting your point across."

One participant also commented on the the philosophy behind the process he developed for writing summaries.

E - "My goal was always to highlight the essence of the post, no more, no less. I'd try to do it in a way that captured the tone of the original post. I didn't want to project my own interpretations onto the summary."

Engaging with others

Reflect was also seen as a useful way of engaging directly with unseen others, and for encouraging other participants to engage in fruitful ways with one another. For discussion facilitators, Reflect provided a useful way of letting discussion participants know that they were being heard and understood.

J - "As administrator I wanted to model the use of Reflected bullets -- so I tried to always add a reflection as comments appear."

J - "When I Reflect, I'm doing it with a sense that I want to engage the unseen readers. It's not so very much for the original author -- except to try and let him/her know that someone is reading and responding to his/

her comments."

One participant noted that Reflect would be particularly useful for helping non-native speakers have their voices heard, by allowing others to help them by re-stating their points more clearly or grammatically.

P - "I think that it's particularly important in conversations where some participants are not native English speakers. It allows for a confirmation of the point they're trying to make in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way."

Tracking and Distilling

Participants found that Reflect made it easier to create discussion-level summaries of key considerations and takeaways after the discussion had concluded. Participants also used Reflect summaries as personal aides, for tracking points during the discussion that they themselves wanted to be able to revisit or respond to later.

P - "For me, it's much more valuable when it's difficult: the easy comments didn't get reflect points, in my workflow. I only used them when I was attempting to boil down someone's thoughts."

P - "It's almost like writing a tweet: short, to the point, and provided the necessary info to recreate my thought process later. (Any historical data, etc)."

P - "It tended to be when an author made multiple points in one post that weren't easily apparent from skimming, or when a point was particularly good and I didn't want to lose it."

P - "For me the primary audience is myself, for review purposes. "