

## Self-assessment of work during the semester

### 1. Why self-assessment?

Here is one way to look at it. When I look at your work, I am trying to figure out two things about your learning. First, I am trying to figure out what you are doing well and what less well as you try to learn in this class; this is in order to give you the best help and advice I can, so you can do better. Second, I am trying to determine your true level of skill on the overall course goals, in order to give a sense of what grade you're heading for at the end of the semester.

But in trying to make these two judgments, I only have a limited amount of evidence in front of me—the performance you gave in your speech or the paper you wrote. This isn't enough for me really to judge what you are learning. It'd be like a doctor making a diagnosis just from giving tests, as opposed to actually talking to the patient.

Your self-assessment can give me vital information that will allow me to make sound judgments about your learning. You alone can tell me what's going on with your work, at least in your view.

Sometimes, your view will persuade me—I'll be able to see your work in a better light. Great!

Sometimes, though, your view won't persuade me—I'll disagree with it. For example, you may think you're doing something really well that I think you are doing quite badly—Yikes! But even in this case, it is very useful that we both find out about this disagreement, and try to work it out—before the end of the semester!

And in any case: *I have never given anyone bad feedback or a lower grade because of something I read in your self-assessment.* If you haven't prepared, it will be obvious to me in your work, and I will give you feedback accordingly. If your self-assessment tells me you haven't prepared, then you'll get the same overall assessment from me, and we'll talk about how to get you back on track.

You might want to think about it this way. When you get a teacher's feedback on your work, you sometimes disagree, and go to talk to the teacher with what's called a "grade complaint." During that complaint, you present your point of view, and try to explain why the work is good or bad. What I'm asking you to do is to talk about this BEFORE it's necessary to complain. That will be a lot more pleasant for both of us, right?

Or you might want to think about it this way. Fundamentally, the most important thing in this or any course is *your learning*. Further, the only person who is really able to assess your learning is *you*. In this sense, your self-assessment is much more important than any feedback or grade I can give. After you leave this class, you won't have my help. If you're going to continue to argue well, and learn how to argue better, you're going to have to do it on your own. Your going to have to depend on *self-assessment*.

## 2. What to include in a self-assessment?

Tell me things I don't know—things I can't see just by looking at your work. Tell me about the *process* you used to produce the work, and tell me your judgment of the *product*. For example:

- Successes you think you achieved: what they are, why they happened.
- Mistakes you think you made: what they are, why they happened, how you should have done it.
- Things you wanted to do, but didn't, and why.
- Problems that you encountered in doing the work, and what you tried to do to resolve them.
- If you did the work as a group, you may want to briefly assess the main contributions of each member. Don't get into a lot of complaining, though!—We'll use a different method for dealing with group problems.
- In a formal self-assessment, if it would help me understand your work, you might include drafts, research records or other documentation of your work process.

## 3. What is a good self-assessment?

A good self assessment is *honest, detailed* and *relevant*.

It is *honest*—it says what you think, not what you think I want to hear.

It is *detailed*—it refers to specific aspects of your work, not making just general statements.

It is *relevant*—it refers to the work that you're doing, and the standards that are going to be used to assess it.

## 4. A final plea.

One semester, on the final course evaluations about two-thirds of the students commented on the self-assessments. A little more than half said they were one of the top three things in the course. A little less than half said they were useless. I think it largely depends on your attitude whether you're going to get something out of self-assessing or not. If you blow off this assignment, you won't get much out of it and you'll think it's just busy work. But if you take it seriously, you can learn a lot. Make your choice wisely!