

# Writing Self Evaluations

Originally from this URL:

[http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/mediaworks/0405/Spring/PDF/Self\\_Eval\\_Guideline.pdf](http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/mediaworks/0405/Spring/PDF/Self_Eval_Guideline.pdf)

based on a document by Richard Alexander in Spring 2005.

Updated 2 December 2013 by Paul Pham, for Computer Science Foundations (CSF)

Note that self-evaluations are no longer required as part of your transcript. However, I am requiring it to get credit in the Puzzle-Solving Workshop and Programming threads of CSF. It must be submitted using the new online system at <http://my.evergreen.edu> by Friday, 12/13, by 5pm, before your evaluation conferences during Week 11. Unfortunately, this system will not let me see your handwriting or cute purple ink or doodles of your cat :[

Time for me to be a hard-ass: I will not accept late self evaluations after this time, and I will not award credit for the Fall 2013 quarter after this day. So please be on time and get started early. I am happy to give you early feedback at any time via e-mail or in office hours.

Only you and we, your program faculty, will ever see your self-evaluation, unless you decide to make it public. Reflection is an important part of the learning process, which is why I make you do all this writing and why I am requiring a self-evaluation instead of a final exam. However, this is meant to be a low-stress piece of writing that is useful for you to consolidate your own learning experience and also communicate with us (Sherri, Neal, and I) before we write *our* evaluation of your performance.

One important way you may wish to make it public is to include it in your transcript. Then the bar is a little higher than just a private document between CSF faculty and you. Like any other piece of important writing that you let wander into public with your name on it, you should proofread it. You may wish to get help from the Writing Center or other people you trust. Here are the dates of Writing Center self-evaluation workshops this fall, which I highly encourage you to attend:

- Wednesday, December 11th, 12:00 p.m., Library 2302D, Library 2nd floor classroom, next to AT Lab  
Thursday, December 12th, 4:30 p.m. Library 2302D, Library 2nd floor classroom, next to AT Lab

Another way you can make your self-evaluation public as part of your transcript is using it as inspiration for your academic statement (or including it verbatim as your academic statement). If this is your first year at Evergreen, and CSF is your first program, then your self-evaluation will probably be very relevant to your future plans and your academic statement right now. You are required to submit an informal “snapshot” of your academic statement online every spring quarter in order to register for the following fall quarter. get feedback from Writing Center tutors or faculty or someone you trust.

Read here for more questions about your self-evaluations for CSF versus your academic statement.

<http://www.evergreen.edu/academicstatement/faq.htm#selfevaluations>

- What is the self-evaluation?
- How is my self-evaluation different from my academic statement?

## Inspiration and Preparation

To prepare you for this momentous occasion, I'll remind you of the activities we've done this quarter:

- A journal entry in the first week about the connection between the three threads: digital logic, discrete math, programming. You can still access this on Moodle.
- Freewriting during workshop #2
- Peer review of your past academic statement / self evaluation / entrance essay during workshop #6
- Brainstorming in pairs during workshop #8

Hopefully you still have some of the paper artifacts (index cards, notes taken by your group members, etc.) that you can use for inspiration. In the future, I will ask that you keep all paper that you create during the quarter together in a portfolio to document your work and help with the self-evaluation at the end.

## Myths & Rumors

**Myth:** Self-evaluations aren't important. Don't waste your time.

**Truth:** Self-evaluations are the most important part of your transcript. The self-evaluation often has the only hard information on your own work. It is often the only part of your transcript which has serious content, the only portion of the transcript from which someone can actually learn what you have done at Evergreen, what you have studied, and what you have learned. The other parts of the transcript simply say what everyone in your program did (the program description), or provide faculty comment on your work (the faculty evaluation), comment that can often be misleadingly partial. The self-evaluation is your only chance to tell your story in your way. You throw away this chance at your own risk. Sometimes you will be risking quite a lot. After all, if an inadequate faculty evaluation is the only readable and usable part of your transcript, then you are stuck with what that inadequate evaluation says about you. If you write a shoddy evaluation yourself, you are really stuck with it, because a transcript that has been sent to anyone cannot be changed later; and there is only a limited length of time in which any changes can be made even if the transcript has never been sent out. The Registrar's Office regularly receives desperate requests to change a self-evaluation, when it is already too late to do anything about it.

**Myth:** No one ever reads Evergreen transcripts. Certainly *no* one ever reads those self-evaluations!

**Truth:** Some people do read the transcripts. Some future employers and graduate schools read them all the way through, carefully. Of course, it is also true that some future employers and graduate schools will not read them, or read only the last ones, or read only the first paragraphs of the faculty evaluations. However, you don't know right now whether the people you send your transcript will read it or not. The chances that someone you want very much to impress will indeed read it, and will read your self-evaluations all the way through, is easily in the 50/50 range. If you write sloppy or negative or self-degrading self-evaluations, they can do enormous damage to yourself, for years to come.

**Myth:** No one wants to know what you think of what you have done. All the important information is in the faculty evaluations.

**Truth:** Those people who read evaluations want to get answers to questions that are important to them. If these questions were not important, they would not bother to wade through all that paperwork. They want to know "Who is this person? What is she really like? What are her interests? What are her accomplishments? What has she really studied? What has she actually learned? What is she capable of doing? What sort of life does she want to make for herself? How well will she be able to work here? Does she have the capacities we are looking for?" Anyone who takes the trouble to actually read a long Evergreen narrative transcript has such questions in mind, and expects to get answers to them. After all, if you can't find answers to such questions plowing through 40 single-spaced pages of autobiographical narrative, where can you get them? If your self-evaluation fails to answer those questions, or (consciously or inadvertently) gives negative answers to them, then you have ruined your chances with such a reader. You have ruined them, perhaps, even if the faculty evaluations are positive. But the plain fact is time after time it is only the student self-evaluations that supply any serious answers to those questions. Why? Because only the student really knows the answers to those questions. Most faculty don't have the information, and/or if they have it, don't care to put it into their evaluations. Faculty can only show the behavior you showed them, and thus they simply cannot know what was actually most important to you, or how this experience changed something you thought two years ago, or how it will affect your future. Even more important, your faculty cannot know your progress through Evergreen, cannot know where you started, all the changes you went through, or where you have ended. Only you know such things. Only you can construct the running commentary on your progress that the set of self-evaluations in fact is. You should not fool yourself: whether you plan them as a running commentary or not, your self-evaluations when read through from start to finish constitute a running commentary. What story are you telling about yourself if those self-evaluations show someone who never thought back over any previous learning? Who never had any perceivable goals? Whose experience at Evergreen for four years was nothing but one disconnected activity after another?

**Myth:** The faculty evaluation is so important that it will always over-ride anything I have to say.

**Truth:** The faculty evaluation is important, but a student self-evaluation can always over-ride it. If the faculty evaluation is negative, but the student self-evaluation is well-written, self-assured, positive, and convincing, the student account will cast serious doubt on the faculty

account. If the faculty evaluation is positive, even enthusiastic, but the student self-evaluation is inept, sloppy, cursory, and maladroit, the student account will utterly undercut anything good the faculty has to say. If both accounts are positive, they very powerfully reinforce each other, the student account providing concrete information to fill out faculty generalities. If both evaluations are (alas) negative, then the student account can nevertheless rescue something from the shambles, point to bright spots, explain the situation, point ahead to future accomplishments.

## How To Write Self-Evaluations

Based on the arguments above, you may wish to include your self-evaluation in your transcript. If so, here's some advice to consider.

1. You are literally writing your transcript! So the evaluation must be clean, neat, well-typed, and free from spelling, punctuation, and syntax blunders. Really bad copies probably won't be accepted by the Registrar's Office, but some persistent students have managed to get sloppy evaluations accepted. They pay for that later when they discover to their horror that the transcript cannot be changed! Take no chances. The evaluations must be typed directly on to the Student Self-Evaluation form. Program secretaries will not type them for you.
2. The self-evaluations taken as a whole should provide a running account of your ACADEMIC PROGRESS through Evergreen. Readers who start with the first evaluation and read through to the final one, should be given the autobiographical story of your work here. Why did you choose to come to Evergreen? What were you prepared to do? What did you want to do? Why did you want to do it? Why did you choose this program at this time? What did you learn? How have you changed? grown? developed? Are your goals still the same? What do you plan to do next? and why? The first evaluation in the set should always provide all the preliminary information: "I came to Evergreen from a Community College in Arkansas, where I had concentrated on secretarial skills and accounting. After working in the Florist business for 10 years, and saving a modest amount of money, I decided to move to Centralia, Washington, where I had family. I enrolled in Evergreen largely to round out my education and to study all those things I had been forced to ignore back in Arkansas... I joined the Multi-cultural Fractions program because I had no past experience with mathematics, but I hoped to learn how to..." Every evaluation thereafter should start with a similar statement of your reasons for taking this particular program. Each should end with a statement about what you plan to do next: "Now that I have satisfied all my curiosity about Inca mathematics, and have decided to do studio art next, because I hope that all that work on mathematics will help me to..." The final evaluation should sum up the entire Evergreen experience, not just comment on that final program. What has your work at Evergreen meant to you? What have you accomplished? What have you yet to do? Do you want to get a job? go to graduate school? Take a long vacation? Sell surfing equipment in Hawaii?
3. Thing to leave *OUT* of evaluations, unless they are absolutely necessary:
  - A) Negative comments about yourself, your own work, your own abilities. You can acknowledge poor work, but should let the faculty evaluation describe it. *You* should concentrate on what is positive.
  - B) Negative comments about the program, its format, its faculty, your fellow students... Save this stuff for the evaluation you write of the faculty! Your future

employer or graduate school doesn't need to hear this, and it can do you great damage in their eyes. It makes you sound like a sore-head.

- C) Emotional statements, "feeling comments," and excessive information about your personal life, unless such information is absolutely needed to explain why something went wrong, or why you did something different from the other students. You can, of course, say that you were pleased with something or not pleased... but be brief, and rather vague.

4. Things you should definitely put IN to the evaluations:

- A) Explain what you hoped to accomplish, why you wanted to accomplish it, and to what degree you met or surpassed your expectations.
- B) Describe accomplishments you did not expect but nevertheless turned out to be very important to you. Why were they important?
- C) Concentrate at least 1/3 of the evaluation on anything in the program that would be important to your future plans, a future employer, or future graduate school. If you know what that future employment or graduate school is, then tailor your self-evaluations accordingly. After all, it is stupid to write evaluations that ignore any connections with journalism if you know you are going to try the newspaper game. (On the other hand, all future employers want to hire people who have more than mere narrow competence and narrow experience, so, once you have made sure your evaluation says what your employer would need to know, you should freely discuss other matters.) Don't worry that you might change your career goals in the future. Of course you might. But an evaluation tailored to the goals you have now—if you make those goals explicit in the evaluation—will read better and make you seem a better student no matter how your goals change. If your goals change while you are still a student, simply acknowledge that fact in the self-evaluations: "Last year I imagined I would become a fashion model, but now I plan to go to medical school."
- D) D) You should concentrate on things that
- a) pertain to your future goals
  - b) connect to past work, or point to future work
  - c) were vital to the work of the program, and your relative accomplishment in it
  - d) explain why you deserve the amount of credit you are earning in your "credit equivalencies "
  - e) personally affected YOU whether or not they were important to the program or your future work.

This would involve a *lot* of writing if you tried to cover everything that happened. Since you can't cover everything you must make a careful selection. Here's what you can leave out:

- Anything the program description says, you don't need to repeat; simply assume it is already described.
- Anything the faculty can and does say adequately, you don't need to repeat. You can acknowledge what the faculty says, but you don't need to go over the same ground again.
- Mere lists of your activities and accomplishments are never convincing: ANYONE can write a list, even someone who never read the books and who slept through every seminar can make a list of books he supposedly read.

Here's what you *should* put in:

- Choose the two or three (no more than three!) specific items which were most important during the quarter, for whatever reasons, and discuss these items in detail.
- If you make convincing statements about these things, showing that you really do understand them fully and well, then lists of other items, and general claims of accomplishment will be convincing.
- It is important to be *convincing*, to make the reader see that you really do know what you are talking about. Raise substantive issues and make substantive statements. This will NOT be boring. The usual bland list of things done is intensely boring.
- While it is important to be positive, to blow your own horn, you want to avoid arrogance and boasting. Admitting deficiencies and/or failures can actually strengthen a positive evaluation. Don't go on and on about these deficits at length - just admit them, explain why they were important, explain what you hope to do about them in the future.
- Make the self-evaluation as stylish and as uniquely yours as you can. You want to write an evaluation that no other student in the program could possibly write. You want to present a recognizable portrait of yourself. You want to write something no one could mistake for the evaluation of any other student.

Good luck! And let me know if you have any questions.

Best,  
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## Change History

[2013-12-02] Initial version updated from Richard Alexander.