Final Self-Assessment

The Engineering Method of Technical Writing

Your learning and plan

Due Monday, May 1, 2017, at 11:59PM.

The purpose of this assignment is to establish that you have met the big-picture learning goals outlined in the course syllabus:

• You can show evidence from your own work that you have mastered a few basic writing principles, which you have applied to texts you have written.

• You have developed or identified a set of practices that enable you to write productively, comfortably, and fluently.

• You can accurately assess your own learning, and you can make a realistic plan for your future development as a writer.

To understand the theory and practice of this kind of assessment, I recommend a short position paper by John Zubizarreta on a technique called the “learning portfolio”. (This is a little different from the writer’s portfolio that you will have accumulated in class, but they have points in common.)

You can hand any part of this assessment in early and ask me to evaluate it.

What to submit

Prepare and submit a final self-assessment. The document should be in PDF, with numbered pages, and with sections labeled A, B, and so on as detailed below.

A. Write a summary statement about your mastery of Principles 0 through 9, as listed on page 8 of the course handbook. Your statement should assign to each principle one of these three levels of mastery:

• No mastery

• Partial mastery

• Full mastery

Your statement should also say how your mastery has changed since the start of the course.

Please organize your statement by current level of mastery and by degree of change, not principle by principle.

B. To support your statement, include one self-assessment packet for each writing principle or editing skill for which you have demonstrated mastery through peer review and instructor review. Principles 3 (Who did What to Whom) and 5 (Information Flow) must be reviewed at this level. Thorough reviews of other principles are optional.

C. If you claim partial or full mastery of a principle that has not been through peer review and instructor review, please support your statement as follows.

For each such principle, present up to one page of supporting material:

1. Repeat whether you claim full mastery or partial mastery.

2. Include one or two work samples that support your claim. Ideally, include two samples: one of your early work, which might not show any mastery, and one of later work, which shows mastery at the level you claim. It is also fine to include an early sample and a revised version of that sample.

If you can’t include two samples, present just one, and make sure that it demonstrates mastery.

3. Explain briefly, in writing, why you believe your samples support your claim.

Be sure that all material appears on a single page. I need to mark up the text of your samples, so a reference to work that appears elsewhere is not acceptable.

D. Summarize and analyze your ability to work in brief, daily sessions. Consult the short handout on this topic.

E. Show the results of your experiments with two or more techniques of prewriting. Exactly what you show will depend both on your results and on how comprehensive your records are. In an ideal demonstration I am looking for two properties:

• You are demonstrating a technique you actually use.

• You can show not just the prewriting but also two drafts (first draft and edited draft) that came from the prewriting.

Please choose your two techniques according to these guidelines:
• The best sort of technique to present is one that works for you, that you intend to use in the future, and that you have carried through from prewriting to a draft, and hopefully have also edited that draft. All of you report having at least one method of prewriting that works for you.

• The second best sort of technique to present is one that has worked for you, but that you don’t plan to use in the future. Again, if a technique “works” that means that at some point you were able to prewrite and then move on to a draft.

• If necessary, you may have to compromise and present results with a technique that did not work for you.

Once you’ve chosen your techniques, an ideal presentation has four parts:

• Show your prewriting. Unless you prewrite on the computer, it’s best to use a photograph or a scan.

• Show the shitty first draft of a part of a text you made from the prewriting. You needn’t show an entire draft; a good size is anywhere from a couple of paragraphs up to a page.

• Show the current version of the draft, after whatever editing you have done.

• Explain how well the prewriting technique worked for you, whether you plan to use it again in the future, and why.

All the materials you need should be in your class portfolio. But if you have not kept old versions of everything you will need, don’t panic. Rely instead on your lab notebook, and instead of showing the work, describe it. Not as good, but better than nothing.

F. Summarize how your writing practices have changed, what they are now, and how effective they are. This summary should be drawn from the two letters to your future self which you have already written, as informed by my feedback on that work. You may also, if you think it valuable, add information from your lab notebook.

G. Write, in one-half to two pages, a plan for your future development as a successful, independent writer. A convincing plan has these elements:

• The goals of the plan are based on identifiable weaknesses that you wish to remedy or on identifiable strengths you wish to develop. Therefore, your plan should refer specifically to data or observations presented earlier in your self-assessment, and your plan should name any weaknesses you plan to remedy and strengths you plan to build on.

• The plan proposes decidable actions. Here are some examples of actions that are decidable or not decidable:

  – I will keep better track of progress. (Not decidable)
  – I will create a chart that will show me at a glance how much effort I am investing on each of my projects over a six-week period. (Decidable)
  – I will master coherent subjects. (Not decidable)
  – I will write three paragraphs and then edit them using the principle of coherent subjects. I will then show a supervisor or a peer the three before/after pairs and ask for confirmation of mastery. (Decidable)

• The plan says when and where actions will be taken, and on what projects. Examples:

  – In the week after the July POPL deadline, I will go to Tisch library and edit my statement of research interests so that it uses coherent subjects throughout.
  – Seven days before my next paper is due to be submitted, I will analyze the introduction and conclusion for agents, actions, and objects, and I will rewrite these sections accordingly.

• The scope of the plan should be informed by your progress since September. In particular, your planned improvements for the future should be consistent in scope and magnitude with the improvements you have already made.

To summarize, a good plan has goals grounded in observation of strengths and weaknesses, actions that work toward the goals, and a time, place, and materials for each action. And a good plan makes realistic assumptions about your potential for future progress.

How your work will be evaluated

Here is how I expect to evaluate your work:

• If you accurately assess that you have learned something of value and your present a realistic plan for the future, you will earn a high grade.

• If you accurately assess that you have learned something of value but are unable to present a realistic plan for the future, you will earn a lower grade.

• If you accurately assess your learning but have learned very little of value, you will earn a passing grade, but not one that you will be happy with.

• If you cannot assess your own learning, you will earn a failing grade.

I will not evaluate your work by comparing your learning to anybody else’s learning. Not everybody is starting from the same
position, and not everybody speaks English natively. I expect that you have achieved some learning that is significant for you, and that you can continue to learn and improve going forward. Whether your progress is greater or lesser than the progress of any other student is not relevant and has no bearing on your grade.