

The Value of Student Self-assessment

Successful students learn to self-assess. Part of that process is evaluating the work of others (peer evaluation) and comparing their work with yours. You will all receive some individual feedback on discussions early in the semester. During the latter half of the semester you will rely more on self-assessment than comments from the grader or instructor. We want you to move from being dependent learners, always requiring external prompts and guidance, to independent thinkers who can honestly and critically evaluate their own work against explicit standards. In HI 216 you are not just getting some facts about Latin American history, you are practicing essential cognitive skills to become mature, higher-level thinkers--essential for academic and career success.

Richard Paul & Linda Elder, Foundation for Critical Thinking, remind instructors *"don't be a mother robin—chewing up the text for the students and putting it into their beaks through lecture. Teach them instead how to read the text for themselves, actively and analytically. Focus, in other words, on how to read the text not on "reading the text for them."* That's something else you do in this course. Ditto for assessment-

As the semester progresses, you must become your own assessor as you should come to understand the rubric standards. If you still need additional individual feedback on your discussions, conduct your own self-assessment. Honestly and thoughtfully examine and describe what you did well and what you failed to do. Annotate a copy of the discussion or essay, writing (in CAPS or another color font). Indicate what you perceive as its strengths and weaknesses, paragraph by paragraph.

Email the document to Dr. Slatta who will review your work and add his suggestions. Three-fourths of students over the past decade have answered their own questions about how to improve by following this procedure. They become independent critical thinkers, not dependent on merely copying what the instructor indicates. The other 25% receive helpful feedback from Prof. Slatta that can be applied to future assignments.

What is the benefit to students using this procedure? First, YOU need to learn to conduct a critical evaluation of your own academic work--it's called metacognition--a key skill of successful students. Second, longstanding NCSU general education requirements mandate that courses should *"encourage students to take personal responsibility for their education, including the ability to find, evaluate and communicate new information, setting the stage for life-long learning."* [<http://oucc.ncsu.edu/general-education-requirements-prior-2009>]

Finally, there is a strong, healthy interaction between peer assessment and self assessment, and you should practice both. Becoming more self-aware and self-critical will improve your performance in any course. *"The ability to self-assess accurately and constructively judge the work of peers is an essential learning skill that teachers have the responsibility to develop during their students' college years."* Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching* (2002, p. xix)

Read critically the essays posted by other students [peer assessment]. Compare each paragraph with one of your own. You'll likely see ways to improve. Study other essays carefully, looking for best practices.

Then emulate those practices in your future essays. Prof. Slatta also posts model paragraphs linked from the class news page for your critical review.

In sum, *"critical Thinking is the art of taking control of one's thinking. As such it means continually bringing thinking to the conscious level, followed by assessing it for quality, identifying its flaws, and then reconstructing it. Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use."* [Taken from Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*, Foundation for Critical Thinking Press, 2008].

More evidence of the importance of student self-assessment

Practice at self-assessment encourages us to become self-correcting learners, not passive ciphers awaiting orders on *"what hoop do I jump through next?"* You're already skilled at hoop-jumping, or you would not have been admitted to NCSU. So let's move beyond high-school skills and activities. Otherwise what are you paying for?

"Self-assessment refers to the involvement of learners in making judgments about their own learning, particularly about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning. Self-assessment is formative in that it contributes to the learning process and assists learners to direct their energies to areas for improvement. The term is used to encompass the two key elements in any assessment decision: the identification of criteria or standards to be applied to one's work, and the making of judgments about the extent to which work meets these criteria." (Boud and Falchikov 1989) Like any skill, it takes practice, hence my course requirement.

Self-assessment *"encourages students to become self-conscious about their own development and progress rather than receivers of preordained judgments from external sources. We are convinced that the quality of the written work has improved in previous years and that this can be attributed in large part to the process of self-assessment."* (Denscombe and Robins 1980) In this sense, self-assessment promotes student empowerment and self-actualization.

Research at the high-school level has identified strong link between self-assessment and student empowerment. Teachers *"promoted social empowerment, through ongoing reflection, integrated throughout school life. In Socratic seminars time was allotted for reflecting on the experience. Faculty members solicited feedback on service placements and built self-assessment into a social studies project. Through such efforts, teachers not only supported students' development but assessed whether these efforts at empowerment had the intended effects."* (Quillan 2005) Thus self-assessment is akin to becoming an excellent editor with the skills to improve writing and thinking (your own and others).

Self-assessment encourages the process of intellectual maturation. *"Recent years have seen an increase in interest in the ways in which students may be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning. Life-long learning requires that individuals be able not only to work independently, but also to assess their own performance and progress. Self-assessment may be regarded as a skill and, as such, needs to be developed."* (Falchikov and Boud 1989)

Research over the past three decades points to a correlation between increasing student abilities at self-assessment and improving performance across a wide range of disciplines. A class that merely asks you to jump through hoops teaches you little and certainly cannot enhance critical thinking skills. So use this opportunity not only to learn about history but to develop important, useful lifelong learning skills.

"Student self-assessment provided a significant new dimension to the predictability of actual performance independent of and supplemental to traditional data sources." (Trepagnier 2004)