



EVALUATIONS: A HOW-TO GUIDE

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One of the nice things about Evergreen is that you, not just your faculty, get to contribute to your transcript. You do this through self-evaluations in which you submit a narrative of your experience that quarter in writing. Unfortunately, one of the difficult things about Evergreen is that the self-evaluation is a whole new category of academic writing with which you probably have no experience. Writing an evaluation isn't just writing whatever comes to mind about your program; there's an art to it, and it's actually a pretty important art. The evaluation is the opportunity to tell your story of your Evergreen education. This article will help you tell that story.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SELF-EVALUATION?

Let's just get some things clear about Evergreen's transcript system and where exactly your self-evaluation fits. Your transcript consists of three major parts:

1. The **Cover Sheet** which lists all of the programs and contracts you took in chronological order.
2. Your **Summative Self-Evaluation** (optional), which you may choose to write at the end of your time at Evergreen. It sums up your accomplishments, growth, and impressions about your education as a whole.
3. **Program Information**, beginning with your most recent, also consists of three parts:
 - a. The **Course Description** is provided by the faculty and explains what students were required to do in the program and how they were expected to grow and learn. Since this precedes your self-evaluation, don't repeat information like the book list or class activities
 - b. The **Faculty Evaluation** is an evaluation of your learning by the faculty.
 - c. The **Self-Evaluation** is your evaluation of your learning and how it fits into your education and life as a whole.

Self-evaluations are the most important part of your transcript. By providing the inside view of your learning, a self-evaluation can do things that the other parts of your transcript can't. First, a self-evaluation gives the reader a firsthand account, saying not just what you did and learned, but giving them a guided tour of what learning *means* to you. Second, a self-evaluation can tailor the information to a particular audience, whether it be graduate schools, future employers, or

simply yourself. Depending on who your audience is, everything from the tone to the content might change. Third, even though a faculty member can say a lot about you in their evaluations, only your self-evaluation shows what kind of a student you are. If your faculty says that you are articulate, interested, and enthusiastic, that's all well and good, but you are the one who can show it by composing a self-evaluation that is well written, with passion for the subject and the excitement of learning. This synthesis of saying and showing what you have learned and what it means to you is the key to writing a strong evaluation.

SOME STARTING POINTS

Where do you begin? One of the best ways to brainstorm for your evaluation is to go to the Writing Center. A big misconception about the Center is that you have to have a piece of writing with you. Many of the best sessions simply involve talking about writing and using the tutor to bounce ideas off of to sort out what you valued about the quarter, what you learned, and what is interesting to your chosen audience. In a session, you can come up with brainstorming idea maps, outlines, or maybe even a rough draft. In the session the tutor will tell you about some points they usually made in a typical evaluation, like:

- Your reasons for taking your program
- What you learned in the program
- What you did well
- What you needed to improve on
- What the next step in your education is

The Writing Center can help you express your thoughts and start to sort them out. A tutor can help you discern the bad from the good, the useless from the useful. Many times people will have a great experience and do not know how to convey it, or they'll have a negative experience and they'll need to talk about it beforehand to see how much of it they ought to put into their evaluation.

If you are writing your first evaluation, you can spend some of the space therein explaining why you came to Evergreen. This might include simply talking about what you want to do with your education. Since your transcript will form a narrative of your entire college career, you can use your first evaluation as a way of setting the stage for future evaluations. And of course all of this should be written with your chosen audience in mind. The question now is how to work all of those points into an evaluation that says and shows what was meaningful in the work that you did.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Whatever it is you are learning, that learning is presumably helping you achieve your goals, whatever they may be. In your self-evaluation, you will reflect on what wisdom you have learned, meaning how your learning helps you achieve your goals. This is less intimidating than it sounds. Wisdom simply means talking about what your goals were, what you learned, how your learning applied to

you goals, and what you goals are now. Even if your quarter was hectic and disorganized and you felt stretched in a million different directions, that itself is something you can write about. *Why did you feel disorganized? What would you do differently? How does this affect future classes? And so on.*

Given what I've been saying about showing the wisdom you have learned, it seems as if I'm suggesting that the evaluation needs a thesis. This isn't exactly right, but a good evaluation does need the unity that a thesis usually provides. Not every part of your evaluation needs to go toward proving a given idea, but it does need to provide a single picture of who you are as a student. Remember, there's no single foolproof way of organizing an evaluation; as always, the content determines the organization, and at Evergreen the different kinds of learning experiences are too diverse to all be explained the same way.

TURNING IT IN

You don't have to submit a self-evaluation right away. Often your faculty will require that you turn in a draft of your self-evaluation, but that is just so that she will be more able to evaluate you. If this is the case, your transcript will be held until you submit your self-evaluation. The College will not release your transcript to you or any other schools or employers until your self-evaluation is submitted.

When you do submit a self-evaluation for your transcript, you must use the official form. Go to www.evergreen.edu/evaluations and when you have read the information there, click on the MyEvals link in the corner. Once you print out your self-evaluation, you must sign your name and submit it to Registration and Records.

HOW THE WRITING CENTER CAN SERVE YOU

Evaluations are pretty strange and unfamiliar. I've only given you a few bits of advice on what and how to write. Like most writing-related issues, practice is the best strategy. That's why seeing a writing tutor can be extraordinarily helpful. You can drop in for a session, and if you like your tutor, you can see him or her regularly.

Tutors have experience writing, reading, and critiquing evaluations, and most importantly, a tutor can see your writing with fresh eyes. The more you work on a piece of writing, the more difficult it is to see it from where your audience is coming from - a place without knowledge of your situation. Tutors are able to provide the beginner's point of view along with a lot of experience in talking about writing and recognizing what works and what doesn't. This is especially valuable for the evaluation writer because they can have a test audience that will know just as much about them as the audience for their transcript. Finding a strong, clear voice in which to say what you want to say is not an easy task. Writing tutors will help you find that voice; everything we do is tailored completely to the writer's desires and concerns. But writing tutors know above all that your evaluation is your opportunity to tell your story.