



THE SIX EXPECTATIONS OF AN EVERGREEN GRADUATE: HOW THE EVERGREEN WRITING CENTER CAN HELP YOU MEET THEM

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Beginning in 1998, the Evergreen faculty went through two years of arduous and contentious deliberations on General Education, which at its philosophical core, defied the founding premise of The Four No's: no departments, no faculty ranks, no (specific graduation) requirements, no (letter) grades. The outcome was the establishment of General Education Expectations.

By this time in the College's history, a number of external factors and forces were at work, not the least of which was accreditation. However unique Evergreen had been at its founding and remained nearly thirty years later, however marvelous its track record in terms of successful alumni and a growing national reputation as a model learning community, it had to be like every other college in the country that wants credibility: it had to explain itself in order to be granted official legitimacy as a higher education institution. Likewise, as students were pursuing their studies in preparation for graduate school or careers in the work force, there was a perceived, practical need to build a bridge between those goals and their Evergreen undergraduate degree. As well, it was decided that there was the need to establish a set of guidelines that weren't exactly standards in the traditional sense, but clearly articulated, reasonable outcomes that could be assessed, and that had something to do with what alumni would do in the "real" world after graduation.

To make the story short enough to fit in this article, let it suffice to say that one significant outcome of the "GenEd" deliberations was the Six Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate.

So what's the connection between these expectations and the act of writing? More pointedly, how can the Writing Center help you to meet or fulfill them? In answering those questions, let's also consider how and why a good writing process is essential in order for students to fulfill the Six Expectations, as well as succeed as individuals.

1. ARTICULATE AND ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN WORK

The Writing Center encourages students to achieve an understanding of their own writing through conversation, questioning, active listening, and by writing author's notes. This negation of authority (or assumption of responsibility) allows students to begin looking inward, at their own thinking and writing processes, and demands knowledge of their own abilities and interests in making the most of their education. This Expectation is covered from a slightly different angle in number six below. For now, I'll just say that this is in part about simple authorship, and the responsibility that comes with that package. Most of the writing we do is not intended for an audience. It's often called "low-stakes" writing. When I teach writing, particularly the narrative memoir or documented essay, I have students submit a Process Portfolio. It's a compilation of everything they've put on paper leading up to and including the final draft. In most cases, well over 90% of that writing is never intended to be read by an audience. Still, along the way to that final version, the author is in charge of what's produced, and should have done practically all of it alone.

The author's notes mentioned above are a great way to apply some useful objectivity to your work. You may also discover the power of writing as a vehicle for self-awareness in general. Simply put, writing can take you places that you can't begin to reach by simply thinking or talking, even at length, about any topic, including your own writing process and products. This is something of a digression, I admit, but is closely enough tied to the notions of articulation and responsibility to belong in this section. You can learn about a number of "low-stakes," self-reflection exercises by working with your tutor. Likewise for what it means to eagerly take charge of your writing, rather than being intimidated by the prospect of doing it. The former, that is this positive attitude, is an essential aspect of a successful writing process that's transferable beyond college writing.

2. PARTICIPATE COLLABORATIVELY AND RESPONSIBLY IN OUR DIVERSE SOCIETY

Just as they are for the College as a whole, collaborative learning and thinking are Writing Center staples. Working with a peer, instead of, say, a professor, facilitates trust developing between two individuals that may not have otherwise become acquainted, and perhaps across significant differences. Similarly, responsibility is key in the Writing Center. Students are encouraged to look more thoughtfully, broadly, and deeply at their writing to discern if it may be offensive in some way, or if it addresses an issue without regard for how others could possibly perceive and be negatively affected by it.

In a slightly broader sense, this Expectation is about one of the key elements in any intentional communication: audience. For whom are the writer's words intended...? If it's a broad audience, the proverbial hypothetical audience that's established for most undergraduate academic writing, then it's all the more important to presume that as a group your readers will typify diversity in every conceivable (or inconceivable) way.

As we revise for our audience, we must consider how our world view windows not just affect, but in many instances determine how we see ourselves and others, and in turn communicate and

respond to them. That doesn't mean tiptoeing around important issues, or mincing our words to avoid offending others. But rather, to practice some proactive empathy and simple civility when we consider who might be reading our well-chosen words. More generally, being educated adults gives us privilege and its cousin, responsibility, which we must use unselfishly. That is, we must ultimately write for our audience, and do so with the intention of sharing our insights, observations and opinions in a way that puts others first. Especially if those "others" may very well be seeing the world through significantly different lenses than our own.

3. COMMUNICATE CREATIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY

Need I say more? Okay, I will. Among other qualifications, Writing Center staff are expected to be not only adept at writing, but also equally or more importantly, accomplished at facilitating the refinement of that skill in others. The planet is teeming with examples of individuals who are among the world's best at doing something, but not even respectably ranked in their ability to teach it to others. Let's put what "creatively" means in realm of the no-brainer, even though there are lots of things that term could mean. It is the term "effectively" that needs some defining and clarifying.

At the Writing Center, the staff is consistently striving to help writers to see how language can empower both themselves and others. For example, the typical, classic expository essay is commonly considered or defined as an attempt to make a point in an interesting way. Being successful at accomplishing this objective can most certainly be empowering. Sharing a thoughtful, articulate, compelling opinion with a receptive audience can and should have that impact for a writer. If the piece is well-written, and deals with something that's important or critical to know, that empowerment will likely be transferred to the reading audience via the knowledge, inspiration, or direction that they receive as readers and potential agents of change, whether it be as a citizen, consumer, voter, parent, suitor, or any of the many roles we assume as adults. Time and again, a well-written letter of application, solicitation, a love letter, or essay has had a momentous impact on its audience, and in turn, its author. Indeed, creative, effective communication is far more than an academic expectation. It is an invaluable life skill.

4. DEMONSTRATE INTEGRATIVE, INDEPENDENT, AND CRITICAL THINKING

The Writing Center, which operates to diffuse authority, strives to instill the writers who come in with the confidence and ability to think independently outside the Center. Through one-on-one sessions and workshops, student writers are introduced to and taken through an array of low-stakes writing exercises, such as free writing, brainstorming, so in turn, these process steps can be practiced and integrated with their own strategies to round out the writing process. In these instances, the role of the peer tutor takes shape in the most significant and powerful ways.

Another type of integration has to do with the interdisciplinary nature of the typical Evergreen education. For example, writing about how and to what extent an academic discipline may mirror, contradict, or interconnect with others. Likewise, how does what one studies in an academic

program reflect, relate to, or contrast with what we see or know about the world around us? First-year programs such as *The Art and Science of Light* and *Visualizing Ecology* exemplify this type of interdisciplinarity, and the kinds of writing that requires similar types of integration.

That said, although no writing process, particularly in academics, is complete without some sort of peer review, it is common knowledge that writing is most often a solitary process. As writers, we must ultimately be our own worst (and best) critics, and at the end of the day, are responsible for what we produce and make available for an audience. We must delve into and wade through the three, in my view inseparable, aspects of textual literacy: reading, thinking, and writing. With the guidance of Writing Center tutors, these dynamic elements can be examined, explored, and articulated via students' writing projects—in their own words, and based on their own thought processes and intellectual conclusions. There are already far too many people who cannot or simply don't think for themselves.

5. APPLY QUALITATIVE, QUANTITATIVE, AND CREATIVE MODES OF INQUIRY APPROPRIATELY TO PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL PROBLEMS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

This is a natural and closely related follow-up to the previous Expectation. Programs such as *Calculated Fiction* and *Money, Meds and Molecules* demonstrate how different modes of inquiry are applied to interdisciplinary problem solving—via writing. Likewise, there's something called symbolic reasoning that's nearly synonymous with what we usually think of as purely number-based actions. The same procedures used in arithmetic calculation often apply, but are called names such as compilation, reduction, deduction, and analysis, and expressed verbally for a reading audience. Some specific examples are the lab reports and field notes prepared by students studying ecology or biology, and as implied above, fiction, particularly novels. All of which are supported by your friendly neighborhood Writing Center.

6. AS A CULMINATION OF YOUR EDUCATION, DEMONSTRATE DEPTH, BREADTH, AND SYNTHESIS OF LEARNING AND THE ABILITY TO REFLECT ON THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT LEARNING

Evergreen students are expected to write several types of evaluations, some quarterly. Perhaps the most important of these pieces of written self-reflection is the self-evaluation. The final, overarching version of this self-reflection is the Summative Self-Evaluation [discontinued in 2012 and re-envisioned as the Academic Statement]. Once finalized and submitted, these documents become a permanent part of the transcript. So of course, the quality of this piece of writing should be as high as possible. To help make this possible, the Writing Center holds individual tutoring sessions, workshops, and provides printed guidelines and strategies for writing evaluations. It's a time, place and opportunity for students to bring to bear all the textual literacy skills they have acquired and enhanced during their time at Evergreen. No pressure intended, but once on record, they cannot be removed or exchanged. This is an historical document, one for the ages, and intended for a wide range

of potential readers. It's also a chance to go on record about your learning experience—academic, personal, and pre-professional. Of course, personal information is most often that, consequently irrelevant, and potentially damaging. But things like improved ability in time management, work ethic, collaboration, and cultural awareness are fair game. Your evaluations by faculty may address your engagement, participation, quality and quantity of work completed, etc., but only the student can articulate a first-hand account and assessment of his or her learning experience and related growth and development, not to mention preparedness for the next academic term, or, of course, life after graduation...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eddy D. Brown is Evergreen's Dean of First-Year Programs and Student Academic Development. He is also an author, Member of the Faculty in writing and humanities, and has administrative oversight of the Evergreen Writing Center. He has a vested interest not only in students' intellectual and academic development, but also their overall wellness. Nothing would please him more than for them to become informed, engaged, responsible individuals, citizens, professionals in their chosen fields, and members of their respective communities.