



FREEDOM, CHOICE, AND POWER: SELF-EVALUATIONS AS EMPOWERMENT TOOLS AND A HANDY WRITING GUIDE

ANDREW OLMSTED

Self-evaluations are empowerment tools. Becoming empowered to control your own education and life supports writing evaluations, and writing self-evaluations contributes to your empowerment. The self-evaluation triangle (described in this article) sets up entry points into how your experiences and ideas are and were powerful so you can: write better selfevaluations, develop more agency over the way that you learn, and choose the direction of your own life path.

You can use your Evergreen transcript to show that you care about learning not only official academic concepts and processes, but also your own learning and your own life. This article goes through why writing and having your own evaluations of your personal achievements make your college education personally meaningful. This article also introduces a big how with regard to constructing your self-evaluation: the self-evaluation triangle (or “tryangle,” because, give it a try!). I want you to know that *how to write evaluations* and *the reason for writing them* are closely connected, having to do with coming to own your learning and your life. The tryangle emphasizes this connection. But before I unpack the triangle, which is a useful how-to model, I must address a central, overarching question: Why self-evaluations?

I care about the self-evaluations of Evergreen students because I am interested in your development as a scholar and a learner. I love learning Evergreen-style, and I want to share my love with you. From my experiences as an Evergreen undergraduate, an Evergreen Writing Tutor, and a candidate in Evergreen’s Master in Teaching program, I have learned that written self-assessments are essential for developing awareness of what one knows and what one’s next learning steps are. Part of the Evergreen educational philosophy is that students take ownership over their learning processes. The configuration of our self-evaluation system reflects a political stance on the format and use for evaluation and assessment *for* student learning, rather than judging and ranking students based on assessments of student learning. Writing self-evaluations informs a student’s learning process. We write self-evaluations to set ourselves up to further our learning. Self-evaluations are not grades, and they are not summative until the final one you write after graduation. The fact that your voice

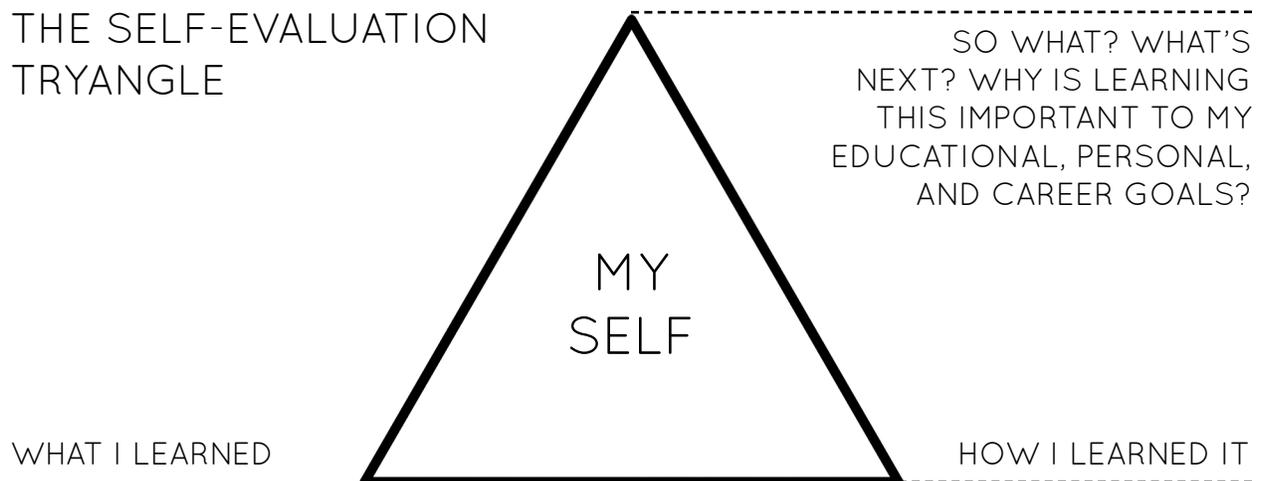
gets into your transcript means that the self-evaluation process facilitates your creating an identity as a political act.

Writing any self-evaluation should be conceived of as a crucial port of call along your life-learning journey. The practice of reflecting on how new understandings, new skills, and new experiences contribute to your development is an essential component of being able to set and meet learning goals. The self-evaluation tryangle is a model to assist you in setting and checking in with your own goals. At many schools, education becomes synonymous with degree attained. Evergreen's self-evaluation process is designed so you can conceive of education as a coherent series of learning experiences that make up your life. You develop a framework, a process, a set of questions or goals to pursue based on new and emerging awareness about yourself and the world. Following your experiences with complex and thoughtful reflection about what you learned from the experiences will ensure that your time in college will be a continuity of educative experiences. In constructing a narrative college transcript full of self-evaluations:

- You name how your experiences are and have been continuous, considering your own goals.
- You decide the degree to which your experiences have been educative.
- You see the connections between experiences over time.
- You decide how to continue from where you are.

I learned this conceptual diagram, the self-evaluation triangle, during a presentation by Evergreen alumnus and Writing Tutor Grant Miller. The diagram is a tool for connecting the idea behind the self-evaluation process—reflecting on, taking ownership over, and articulating your learning—with the practice of writing self-evaluations.

THE SELF-EVALUATION TRYANGLE



The lines of the self-evaluation tryangle represent the words of your self-evaluation. The three points on the self-evaluation tryangle represent different pieces of your learning process. The fundamental, foundational elements of your learning process relate to how you have developed over the course or program. These elements can be labeled, “What I learned” and “How I learned it.” The important distinction here is between what you *did* and what you *learned*. Notice that the entire tryangle is about *you*; the tryangle can facilitate your synthesizing your learning, your experiences, and your goals in your evaluation. A self-evaluation is about your learning achievements. A self-evaluation is not about what you did during a program or course.

The key to writing an excellent self-evaluation is to emphasize your learning whenever you discuss what you did or experienced. Connect, connect, connect. You only need to include in your self-evaluation the things you did that were central to your changing and learning. And if some of the things you learned from fell outside the activities listed in the program description, your selfevaluation is a perfect place to tie that learning into the story of your Evergreen education. For example, let’s say you learned important things through volunteer work. Spell out what you learned, and use the tryangle to contextualize your learning in your evaluation just as you would for things you learned through your in-program activities and projects.

The self-evaluation tryangle has many applications for brainstorming, drafting, and revising. First, you can use the tryangle to structure your evaluation around your overall learning and growth over the time you were enrolled in a particular program or course. Ask yourself the following questions and use the tryangle model to connect the answers in sentences. **Why did you take the program? What could you do when you enrolled in the program? What can you do now? What will you do now? How do your next steps relate to your educational, personal, and career goals?** The answers to these questions usually fit nicely in the introduction or conclusion of your self-evaluation.

You can also use the self-evaluation tryangle to construct the sentences and paragraphs of your selfevaluation. Ask yourself, **What did you do in the program? What did you learn through what you did?** List some of *the most important projects* you did or *texts* you read. Within the sentences and paragraphs of your evaluation, you can *describe how your participation in these projects led to your areas of new learning*—your changes, new skills, and new understandings.

A powerful potential of the self-evaluation tryangle is applying it to contextualize your feelings and decisions. This is particularly useful if you feel overwhelmed or if you cannot easily name what you learned in a program or a course. One common reason students consider this framework is if their experiences in the program were not what they hoped for. **Ask yourself what you learned about yourself after processing your feelings.** For example, if your group project upset you, then when did you learn about how you work best in groups? What did you learn about your learning needs? **Also ask yourself what led you to choose to spend your time how you did.** For every choice you made over the term, recognize that something instigated your decision and that you changed directions. Spell out your experience of decision and change, and contextualize it as active learning. For example, if you decide to leave the program after one quarter, you can say that you learned that you wanted to explore the particular ideas in the program you are transferring into. **Finally, ask yourself what choices you can or will make now that you have done particular things and**

learned particular concepts. As you plan and draft your self-evaluation, explore the answers to these questions with an eye toward recognizing and explaining what you learned in your final draft.

I always find it complicated to name what I have learned, but by considering what you did and how it relates to your goals, you may find it easier. Easier does not mean simpler—you are still dealing with your complicated, dynamic, personal changes. By writing self-evaluations, you can scaffold more conceptual and practical points of entry into your experiences.

The intention of Evergreen's self-evaluation system is to support your learning and writing processes. By using the self-evaluation tryangle to write self-evaluations, you can make and articulate vital connections between your collegiate learning activities, your new knowledge and skills, and the goals you have for your education, your career, and your personal life.

Give it a try! And, of course, the Writing Tutors at the Writing Center are available to assist you.