



Self-Evaluate

Bridge The Gap Between Your Understanding And Theirs

How **You** See Their Writing Versus How **They** See Their Writing

Asking students to fill out a self-evaluation form can clarify where their understanding of their writing differs from yours.

Sample Self-Evaluation Questions

You could ask students all of them, just one or two, or something in between:

1. *What is your thesis?*
2. *What do you like about this thesis?*
3. *Do you believe the thesis could be improved and, if so, how?*
4. *What are your main supporting points?*
5. *Do you believe that these points support the thesis sufficiently?*
6. *Do you have an interesting conclusion that does not merely restate the introduction or the body paragraphs? If so, what is it? If not, can you think of an idea now?*
7. *Have you read through your essay, preferably aloud, to identify sentence-level problems with phrasing, diction, or grammar? If so, what kinds of errors did you locate? What changes did you make?*
8. *Please copy one sentence from your essay that feels poorly phrased to you or that might benefit from rewriting. Can you rewrite it? If so, do. If not, can you explain what aspect(s) of the sentence you don't like?*
9. *Please write one sentence here that you think is especially strong or clear. What do you like about it?*
10. *Imagine you have a couple of extra days to work on your essay. What would you do with that time?*

You could ask hundreds of other questions on a self-evaluation, and I change mine regularly. I might ask them:

- *What prewriting process did you choose? Would you choose it again?*
- *Did you have anyone peer edit with you? Was it helpful? Why?*
- *More generally, are you pleased with the work? What pleases you about it?*
- *If you are dissatisfied with the work, what about it feels insufficient?*

The more specific their answers, the more helpful the self-evaluation.



The Key Question: “If You Had More Time...”

In each case, though, I include question #10 (“If you had more time to work on this essay, what would you do?”) because it pushes students to think about their own space for improvement and prompts them, on future assignments, to realize that I will ask it again.

- *“I wish I had just one more day to work on my introduction”*
- *“I would have proofread more carefully”*
- *“I would play around more with the organization, which I know isn’t right, but I ran out of time to fix it”*

Recalling their frustrations, they are more likely to address those issues next time.

Inviting Self-Reflection Means Inviting Altered Behavior

I often remind them that they can “create” extra days by starting to brainstorm or free-write shortly after receiving the assignment rather than postponing the early process stages. By the end of the year, multiple students answered that question by saying, “I don’t need a couple of extra days,” illustrating that the question served a dual purpose: allowing them to self-reflect on their process and using that self-reflection to alter behavior.

Surprise! Grant The Extra Time And Watch The Revelations Unfold

On occasion, I have said, “Now that you’ve answered this question, I’m actually giving you two more days to turn in the essay.” Having students say what they’d do with more time and then giving them more time – followed, of course, by another reflection question to see how that extra time served them – teaches students about their writing process, time management, and pacing. You can only use this trick once or twice before they expect more time for every assignment, but, even used just once, that extra time can be revelatory: students recognize that they can shift their process to create extra time and consequently feel much better about the final product.