Using Assessment Memos to Encourage Reflection
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What is an assessment memo?

This type of writing is called by a variety of names (cover letter, writer’s memo, reflective writing, etc.) It is usually addressed to the instructor of the course and answers a series of questions related to an individual project or a portfolio of writing. It asks students to reflect on their writing, research, and revision process and the actual product they produced.

How do students benefit from writing assessment memos?

It asks students to think about the choices they made in a piece of writing and can be especially useful if students have revised their work. It provides an opportunity for students to reflect on and assess their learning pertaining to the piece of writing and the strategies they have used.

Students also benefit by having to justify the choices they have made in their writing to address the rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, context).

How could you use assessment memos in your classroom?

“Transfer research ... suggest[s] that meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies ... may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate” (Wardle 82)

Assessment memos help students develop metacognitive awareness. You can use an assessment memo with any type of writing, assignment, or project, and they are especially useful when a product goes through lots of revisions. Students should be given prompts (see examples) for what you want them to focus on within their assessment. Students can also address evaluation/ grading criteria or rubric in their assessment memos. This helps with your own grading and evaluation if they have already done some of this (to a certain extent) for you.

Reference

MEMORANDUM

To: English 3040 Students
From: Dr. Michelle F. Eble
Date: Tuesday, October 12
Subject: Project Assessment Memo Directions

What is a Project Assessment Memo?
For your major projects this semester, you will be expected to include a project assessment memo. The memo you are reading right now explains the purpose and audience, the format and requirements, and the information that should be included in this memo. This assessment will allow you to discuss and evaluate your work and the decisions you (or your group) made that influenced the final product. One way to think about the assessment memo includes answering the question: With all the many choices you have as a writer, why did you do what you did?

Purpose and Audience
The assessment memo is designed to provide information about the context and situation of your individual work/project. The memo should be addressed to me, the instructor of the course. In it, you should discuss any information the instructor needs to know in order to evaluate your work. You might also discuss the process you used to complete the project. You can discuss the invention or pre-writing activities, research and drafting practices as well as peer review comments that helped as you revised your project. The more you discuss your process and the reasons for your choices, the more insight I have to evaluate your work and your learning.

Format and Requirements
The assessment memo is required with each of your major projects. The memo should be about one page single-spaced in length and follow the conventions of a memo. It should include an introduction, body, and conclusion. It should not be done in the five minutes before class.

Assessment Memo Content
The assessment memo should include information about your writing/designing process and the rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, and context) for the document you produced. Use the following questions to guide your writing. Any project turned in without an assessment memo cannot be graded.

Writing/Design/Research Process
Discuss what you learned about yourself as a writer, researcher, or professional.
Explain what you would do differently if you had more time, or if you were able to do the project again.
Address any additional questions or concerns that you have.
Discuss what you found difficult about the project.

Document
Explain the choices you made for the design and organization of the text, particularly those that differ from general principles discussed in class.
Explain your reasons for including or omitting certain information.
Discuss the problems you encountered while doing the project or the research and the decisions you made to solve those problems.
Identify and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the final product.
Portfolio and Cover Letter (15%)

What to do. You will select two of your graded projects from this course to significantly revise. In your portfolio, you will include your previous work with the revisions along with a cover letter addressing the changes you have made.

How to do it.
1. **REVISIONS (5% each)**
   Select two of your graded projects from the course and, based on feedback from your peers and from me, revise these two assignments **significantly**. In other words, your revisions should involve more than simply editing or moving a few things around. You may revise your assignments to be made more effective for their original intended audience(s) and/or purpose(s). Or, you may revise one or more of your assignments by addressing a new audience and/or purpose. Keep in mind, as you change any element of your rhetorical situation, the others may change with it.

2. **PORTFOLIO**
   Compile a portfolio that includes these two revised assignments, along with **all drafts of and feedback on those assignments**. This material should be gathered neatly in a folder or slim binder, and all components of the portfolio should be **clearly labeled**. Please remove all supplemental material (i.e., all handouts, copies of sources, etc. should not be in your portfolio).

3. **COVER LETTER (5%)**
   Compose one cover letter to turn in with the portfolio. This 2-3 page professional letter should:
   - explain and justify the changes you have made to the two pieces of writing you have revised;
   - identify and explain what you believe is effective in these two writing projects and what you believe could yet be improved;
   - explain what you have discovered about writing and research in your potential career/major;
   - explain what questions or concerns you still have about research and writing in that potential career/major.

   *I will be paying particular attention to how well your letter reflects an awareness of the rhetorical situations and strategies that are present in your writing.*