

Jeff Anderson's Mid-Term Learning Self-Evaluation Activity

Many of my previous students have told me that our class is like nothing they have ever experienced. Perhaps they are responding to one or more of the following features of this class:

1. [Flipped learning](#) using [YouTube videos](#).
2. Active learning via [in-class projects](#) and [small group work](#).
3. UNgrading processes that focus on all feedback and no grades while giving students high levels of autonomy over their own learning experience.
4. Heavy focus on learning how to learn with research-based learning support via [The Learning Code](#), [Conquering College exercises](#), daily journal entries, and these learning self-assessment activities.
5. Bi-weekly one-on-one conferences with me (the teacher), your learning partner(s), and your learning groups.

I have made all these design decisions based on deep research on how learning works and the types of environments that are conducive to putting you into the driver's seat of your learning journey. However, just because I have spent thousands of hours planning and creating resources for you in this class doesn't mean that my work is effective in guiding you to create significant learning experiences in this class.

Let's use an analogy to describe what I mean here. Compare the work of a teacher (me) to the work of a brain surgeon. To create classrooms in which great teaching happens is, in some ways, much harder than creating hospitals that enable great surgery. First, a surgeon only operates on one patient at a time. Second, a surgeon can, with lots of skill, training, resources, and luck, physically alter the body of another human being to produce desired medical results. However, as a teacher, I do not have the power to open your brain and physically manipulate neurons, neural pathways, or brain chemistry to produce a specific set of desired learning outcomes.

The only person who controls your learning is you. In other words, what matters most is not what I say or the decisions I make as your teacher. The most important part of this class is what you do to create learning experiences in our class. This reality is best summed up in one of my favorite quotes about learning:

“Learning results from what the student does and thinks and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student does to learn.” –[Herbert A. Simon](#)

My task is to empower you to create your own learning experiences. Central to such a task, I believe, is your visions for your world. My hope is that the experience we create together will accelerate your ability to make meaningful progress on problems your care most about.

One of the challenges I've noticed over the years I've been doing this work is that for many of my students, our class is unique in that I explicitly task you to track, monitor, and reflect on your own learning. These tasks are quite difficult and involve a lot of mental energy. It turns out that grades are a convenient way to shift the focus away from learning and towards performance. The use of letter grades outsources your need to track your own progress to your teacher. Grades also let you off the hook in the most important part of learning: self-evaluation and reflection. Letter grades shift control over learning away from your efforts and, instead, inappropriately center the judgements of your teacher.

Our work together is to re-center you as the most important person in your learning journey. Together, we put you in the driver's seat to track your own learning and assess your progress in this class. This Mid-Term Learning Self-Evaluation Activity 1 is designed to help you reflect on our first six weeks together. Remember that this activity is one of only two “required” assignments in the class. In other words, if you choose not to complete this activity, I reserve the right to drop you from this class. I also expect that the work you do in responding to these questions represents your best effort attempt to engage with this activity. I reserve the right to ask you to revisit some of your responses and revise your work in the case that I don't see that you've authentically engaged with the tasks I've created for you in this activity. If you have questions about this policy or about what this means for your learning, please ask me about this during class or make an appointment to meet with me during office hours.

Track your participation during in-class meeting times

In this class, I challenge each of my students to engage in deep, purposeful learning to develop content expertise as a fundamental strategy towards creating a life you love and a career that makes you happy. To do this, I encourage you to center a principle of deep learning that can be summed up in four words: “deep learning takes time.”

How have you been using your time in class so far? What do you do during our in-class meeting times?

How do you feel about your use of in-class time? What changes would you like to make for how you use your time during class? Remember that our in-class time is the best time to meet with Jeff, to get feedback on your work, and to engage in dialog with your group mates. When you are in-class with us, you make our learning community stronger. And every time you are absent, we miss you.

I invite you to reflect on your commitment to and participation in your own learning process. How often do you show up to class? How often do you arrive on time? How often do you stay until the end of class? How engaged are you in our course work during our in-class meetings? What are you accomplishing during each day of class? Please fill out the table below to track your own attendance and participation during in-class meetings. Do your best to fill this out as accurately as you can.

Track your participation during in-class meeting times, continued...

Week Number	Class Number	Day of week	Date	Present	Absent	Arrival Time	Departure Time	Please write notes about your work that day. If you arrived later or left class early, please explain why you did so. If you were absent on a particular day, please document what happened. Also, explain what you did to make up for your absence.
1	1							
	2							
2	3							
	4							
3	5							
	6							
4	7							
	8							

Week Number	Class Number	Day of week	Date	Present	Absent	Arrival Time	Departure Time	Please write notes about your work that day. If you arrived later or left class early, please explain why you did so. If you were absent on a particular day, please document what happened. Also, explain what you did to make up for your absence.
5	9							
	10							
6	11							
	12							
7	13							
	14							
8	15							
	16							

Week Number	Class Number	Day of week	Date	Present	Absent	Arrival Time	Departure Time	Please write notes about your work that day. If you arrived later or left class early, please explain why you did so. If you were absent on a particular day, please document what happened. Also, explain what you did to make up for your absence.
9	17							
	18							
10	19							
	20							
11	21							
	22							
12	23							<u>Regularly-scheduled “final exam” meeting time:</u> in person in room 5611 (see Foothill Final Exam Schedule website or our tentative calendars for exact times)

Track your help-seeking behavior with your instructor

This page is designed to help you track your help-seeking behaviors. Do your best to fill this out as accurately as you can.

EVALUATE YOUR HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR			
<p>1. How many times (approximately) has Jeff actively reached out to speak to for a face-to-face conversation? In other words, how many times have you spoken with Jeff face-to-face so that you and he are engaged in authentic dialog where you felt you can speak and are being listened to?</p>			
<p>2. How many times (approximately) have you actively reached out to Jeff during a face-to-face conversation outside of his attempts to speak with you? In other words, how many times have you reached out to ask Jeff questions about your learning? These could be before class, during class, after class, during office hours, etc.</p>			
<p>3. How many different office hour appointments (approximately) did you schedule and/or attend with Jeff? Usually when you make an office hours appointment, Jeff will write you an office hour appointment form with your scheduled date and time.</p>			
<p>4. Write the dates and times of all your office hour visits? Do your best to remember as accurately as you can but remember, these can be estimates. The point is to help you start tracking your participation.</p>	Appt #	Date	Duration
	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
	6		
7			
<p>5. How many times did the following scenario arise: you tried to set a time to meet with Jeff in-person and he failed to make an appointment with you or to accommodate your request.</p>			

6. What have you learned from your office hour visits so far this quarter? If you haven't yet visited office hours, why have you not attended?

7. One of the most powerful habits you can develop to increase your effectiveness as a learner and to counteract the harmful policies that make up our current college education system is to customize your learning experiences in each class via individual dialog with your teachers.
 - a. One way to do this is through the habit of attending office hours at least once each week.
 - b. Another way to do this is by bringing questions directly to your teachers right before or right after class. For a great discussion of how to do this, please watch my YouTube interview with Mark Asmar between the time stamps [09:01](#) to [11:31](#). Mark trained himself to become very skilled at engaging his college teachers in conversation right before and immediately after class. Through this technique, he was able to achieve consistently higher grades with a lot less stress.

By engaging your college teachers in individual dialog, you can gently force your instructor(s) to help you customize your learning experience in each class. You can also get answers to your technical questions. If you attend office hours, you'll also be able to build rapport with other dedicated students. Moreover, you can invite each of professors to coach you on what you need to do to improve your learning habits to meet your goals in each class you take. As you think about that habit, feel free to read Jeff's [How to Make the Most of Office Hours](#) handout. When you do make an office hour appointment with Jeff, he will ask you to read this before your first meeting together. For students who feel nervous about attending office hours, check out the following two books:

- [How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less](#) by [Nicholas Boothman](#) – Office hours can be very intimidating spaces. College professors hold significant power over your future and are often very busy people. Moreover, when students don't show up to office hours, the lives of college professors get a lot easier. In fact, if all students attended office hours, the entire system would collapse. Because we underfund public education, college teachers are tasked to teach way too many students. This high student-to-teacher is a major disincentive for teachers who might otherwise create a welcoming environment in office hours. While some teachers might be friendly, many professors will treat students dispassionately by giving you just enough attention to answer your questions. If you show up as a professional and use good communication skills, you can turn even the most unfriendly professors into advocates and coaches. To do this well requires a tremendous amount of skill. This book helps with the process of learning how to navigate conversations with professors (and with other folks too).
- [The Seven Powers of Questions](#) by [Dorothy Leeds](#) – One very powerful skill you can use in your meetings with your professors is the ability to ask good questions. When you ask thoughtful, targeted questions about course content and course structure, you put yourself in a position to get information from the teacher that is customized to your own learning needs and your individual learning processes. This book provides a bunch of good ideas to help you learn to improve your ability to ask good questions.

In this class, Jeff does a lot of work for you to get to know you individually. However, most of your college teachers won't do this for you. Instead, if you want to get custom feedback and develop personal relationships with your college teachers, you'll have to show up and make each professor work for you.

What would you need to do to develop the habit of visiting office hours for every one of your professors at least once a week? What could you do to use these office hour appointments to become a more effective and efficient learner and to achieve the goals you set for yourself in your education?

Track your help-seeking behavior with your learning partner and group

8. What are you learning as you work with your learning partner and your learning group? How has your time working in small groups affected your learning experience in this class?

9. What do you struggle with when trying to work with your learning partners and learning group mates? How might you change the way you engage in this class to address these challenges that you've identified?

Learning self-reflections

10. Please read the five learning objectives I create for this course at the URL below:

<https://jeffandersonmath.wordpress.com/2023/03/15/five-research-based-learner-centered-learning-objectives-for-college-students/>

What do these learning objectives mean to you? Which one(s) resonate with you most deeply? As you think about those objectives, please explain more about your goals for this course?

11. What are your goals for college in general?

12. Have you given your best effort to your learning for this class in the first half of this course? In other words, have you dedicated yourself to engaging as deeply as you can for this course so far?

If so, what makes you feel motivated to learn in this course? Why do you feel this way? Where does this motivation come from? How do you generate, recharge, and strengthen your sources of motivation?

If not, what challenges do you face when you think about pushing yourself to give your best effort? What do we need to do (both you and I) to help you strive to engage in deep learning and give your best effort in this course? Remember: rule number 1 is that you prioritize your health and rule 2 is that you prioritize deep learning over shallow learning.

13. What books are you reading outside of class during your “free time” that relate to your academic, career, professional, and life goals? What are you learning from those books? How would you feel about making that log available in public format (like [this](#) or [that](#))? I have found that tracking my reading list is a great way to keep me motivated and to start conversations with other folks.

If you are not yet reading books, what do you struggle with as you try to build your reading habits? What can we do (both you and I) to make reading easier for you so that you can read about subjects that interest you (specifically related to your career, professional, and life goals)?

14. What do you want to learn for the remainder of this quarter? What do you hope to get out of this class?

15. What do you want to do in this class that you expect to carry with you after the quarter ends?
Why do you feel this way?

Reflect on the course design and on your learning needs

16. What is challenging about this course? What suggestions do you have for your instructor to help you address your challenges?

17. What are the aspects of this class that you appreciate? What in this class is helping you learn? What suggestions do you have for your instructor for things that he should continue to do to help you learn in this class?

Your learning portfolio and your progress in this course

18. Make sure that you meet with Jeff at least once every two weeks in this course to communicate the progress you're making in your portfolio. Make sure you have at least three separate portfolio check in conferences with Jeff in which you present your work, Jeff looks at what you've produced, and together you decide on some new learning skills you'd like to demonstrate in future iterations of your portfolio. Here is a rough outline for when these portfolio meeting should happen:

Conference 1: Sometime between weeks 3 – 6

Conference 2: Sometime between weeks 7 – 10

Conference 3: Sometime between weeks 11 - 12

During your learning conferences, show evidence of the work you've done since your last portfolio check in. This might include, but is not limited to, any of the following:

- A. Your responses to the journal entry prompts
- B. Any reading you've done to improve your learning systems. This could be reading Jeff's blog post, reading Jeff's Conquering College articles, or from any other sources you use. This doesn't need to be an extensive review of all reading or work you do. Instead, share the work you've directly related to this course that is helping you become a more effective learner.
- C. The work you've done to finish Conquering College labs 1, 2, and 3.
- D. Any work you've done to document your learning on the individual videos, lessons, practice problems or applied projects in this course.

Do your best to organize your portfolio so it is easy to read, easy-to-navigate, and highlights all the work you've done so far to thrive in this class. Pay special attention to setting up this portfolio so that you can continue to build on your work in the coming weeks, months, years, and perhaps decades.

As you build your learning portfolio, imagine/pretend that you might want to use your work for months, years, or decades into your future. Think about your work in this class as providing a potential foundation for part of your future career. I am not claiming you must continue to work on this material after you finish our course. What I'm asking you to do is to be thoughtful about how you spend your time. Here are two different scenarios that are worth considering as you create your portfolio in this class.

Scenario 0: You treat your work in this class as "required" and expend a bare minimum of effort to learn in this class. You do not think deeply about your learning and put together a portfolio that is teacher-centered (focused on doing what you think the teacher wants). At the end of the class, you give yourself an A in the class and then go on in your education. You don't improve your learning skills, nor do you take the time to engage with this content for your own benefit. A few years after you finish this class, perhaps when you've transferred to your next or maybe in graduate school or working professionally, you realize that you have a deep intellectual need for the work we did in this class this quarter. When you go back to your work from our class, everything you've produced this quarter is useless to your future self because you did not take ownership over your learning this quarter.

Scenario 1: You begin to imagine that the work you do in this course is for your own learning. You work to create an experience that you feel is valuable. Although you do not have an exact vision for how your future self might use this knowledge, you remain open and hopeful that you can transform the 12 weeks we spend together into future learning and growth. As you build your portfolio, you spend extra time making that portfolio valuable for yourself so that you can return to your work for years to come. You keep an eye on creating learning skills that you can transfer to the next stage of your education. You also do work in this class with the hope of building your resume. You dedicate energy towards growing your career capital so that you can create a career that you love while doing work that makes you happy. You don't worry about having answers to all these difficult questions about your future. Instead, you treat your portfolio as part of the process of learning. A few years after you finish this class, you realize that you need the work we did in this class this quarter. At this moment, you go back to your portfolio, and you can easily access everything you produced. It's as if no time has passed and you dive right back into your work. You can do this because of how thoughtful you were during our class.