

METACOGNITION – CULTIVATING REFLECTION TO HELP STUDENTS

SUPPLEMENT 1: INSERTING SELF-REFLECTIVE COMMENTS

Inserting Self-Reflective Comments in Essay Drafts

Adapted from a handout created by Danielle LaVaque-Manty, Sweetland Center for Writing

Asking students to comment on their own writing-in-progress and identify bottlenecks and areas that are working well promotes the kind of metacognitive self-assessment that supports writing development. Responding directly to student comments promotes focused dialogue about writing and aids overall writing assessment. This handout is adapted from a study of successful writing strategies being conducted by the Sweetland Center for Writing and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. The study is funded by the Spencer and Teagle Foundations.

Instructions

Once you've written your draft, take a step back and think about any questions or comments you have about what you've achieved in your writing. Use the "comment" function in Word to insert 3 to 5 questions or comments in the margins of the paper. This is your opportunity to communicate with me "backstage" about the choices you've made. You might note places where:

- you've tried to draw on key concepts from the readings or course materials,
- you think you've expressed an idea or posed an argument particularly well,
- you feel uncertain about whether you've gotten your point across,
- you are struggling with or confused about a particular concept,
- you've incorporated suggestions for revision from me or your peers,
- you'd like me to respond to any other issues.

Make sure your questions and comments offer enough information to allow the reader to know how to respond to you—e.g., explain *why* you're confused (not just that you're confused), or why you've used the concepts you've chosen; refer to specific ways you think you've expressed something well; and so on.

Here are two examples – one of an appropriately specific question for this activity and one of an overly broad question:

Specific Question

Here's an example of an appropriately specific question: "I'm struggling a bit with this second body paragraph. At first I thought I could talk about Eichmann's appeal to Kant and how he was not acting as a free agent, but I think it is better to talk about the second requirement of "guilt" that I mention in my intro. Is my second body paragraph clear enough?"

Overly Broad Question

Here's one that is too broad: "Is this a well-phrased summary of why there is tension between religion and science?"

Note: To use the "comment" function in Word, use your mouse to select the portion of your text you want to comment on. Then select "insert" from the menu at the top of your screen. This will open a drop-down menu; select "comment" from the list of options you find there.

AN EXAMPLE OF SELF-REFLECTIVE COMMENTING

(a) Excerpt from first draft: With comments from Peer Reviewer 1

[Furthermore], Walzer's model requires that a political actor who breaks the moral code understands his guilt [and is perceived as guilty]. Although Eichmann does not appeal to the guilt requirement of Walzer's argument, Ardent claims when, "for whatever reasons, even reasons of moral insanity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed" (Ardent 277). This guilt requirement of dirty hands creates a problem when dealing with people like Eichmann who are not truly achieving a greater good for all, but who could either feign guilt under Walzer's model to escape punishment or claim they are only doing what they believe is truly correct. Eichmann could have argued he did not need to feel guilt because dirty hands classify his actions as simply duties of his job.

Sarah: I'm struggling a bit with this second body paragraph. At first I thought I could talk about Eichmann's appeal to Kant and how he was not acting as a free agent, but I think it is better to talk about the second requirement of "guilt" that I mention in my intro. Is my second body paragraph clear enough?

Reviewer 1: I do agree that it is a good idea to talk about the guilt factor because I think it is a very sound argument and is an interesting one at the same time. However, this paragraph's quote is not entirely linked with the argument of guilt, more so with the belief that one's actions are correct. The two are connected but I believe that there does exist a difference between the two. I think both points are valuable and it is hard to say that one is clearly stronger than the other. As a reader, the argument about guilt drives home a stronger point for me.

Reviewer 1: This phrase is a little vague – perceived by who? Are you talking about public perception or more of self-perception?

(b) Excerpt from first draft: With comments from Peer Reviewer 2

[Furthermore], Walzer's model requires that a political actor who breaks the moral code understands his guilt and is perceived as guilty. Although Eichmann does not appeal to the guilt requirement of Walzer's argument, Ardent claims when, "for whatever reasons, even reasons of moral insanity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed" (Ardent 277). This guilt requirement of dirty hands creates a problem when dealing with people like Eichmann who are not truly achieving a greater good for all, but who could either feign guilt under Walzer's model to escape punishment or claim they are only doing what they believe is truly correct. Eichmann could have argued he did not need to feel guilt because dirty hands classify his actions as simply duties of his [job].

Sarah: I'm struggling a bit with this second body paragraph. At first I thought I could talk about Eichmann's appeal to Kant and how he was not acting as a free agent, but I think it is better to talk about the second requirement of "guilt" that I mention in my intro. Is my second body paragraph clear enough?

Reviewer 2: If I understand your purpose here correctly I think you would be best served by talking about how the 'greatest good' required by Walzer is subjective, and therefore allows for too much. I think saying something like this more explicitly would help this paragraph.

Danielle D Lavaque-M..., 8/26/13 9:27 AM

Comment [1]: Once you've selected "comment," Word will place a bubble like this one in your margin. Type your comment or question there. When you've finished, use your mouse to click anywhere in your main document; this will allow you to exit the bubble.

(c) Excerpt from revised draft: With writer's additional reflection

Furthermore, Walzer argues it is necessary to have dirty hands to succeed in politics, but "We don't want to be ruled by men who have lost their souls" (Walzer 177), so a moral politician must demonstrate guilt for their immoral actions. Although Eichmann shows little remorse for his deeds, the guilt requirement of dirty hands is so ambiguous that even a man who committed as many wrongs as Eichmann could feign guilt and meet Walzer's requirements for dirty hands. There is no way to distinguish between a truly moral man who feels guilty and one who uses their position as a politician to commit unnecessary [crimes].

Sarah: This paragraph was a huge struggle for me, but I found Reviewer 1's comments extremely helpful. I basically rewrote it and removed the quote he suggested taking out. I'm still not sure if it is perfect, but I can't think of any other way to say that Eichmann could have pretended he felt guilty and appealed to this aspect of dirty hands to feign innocence.