**Memo**

**To**: Terry Heagney, Blanche Barco

**From**: Michael Plasmeier

**Date**:

**Re**: 15.279 Baseline Self-Assessment

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about where I see myself as a writer.

### 1. Writer

I believe that my skills as a writer have improved recently. Last year, on the Freshmen Essay Evaluation (FEE), the grader stated that I had poor organization. As a result, I was required to take 21W.732. I believe that my organization skills have improved significantly as a result of that class. I am now a lot more aware of structure. In addition, I now try to focus and to leave out extraneous details.

I believe that my more recent writing has improved since the FEE. I recently wrote a letter to the administration complaining about proposed changes to REX. I received feedback from the administration, our faculty housemasters, as well as two students praising me for the well written message.

### 2. Speaker

In general, I believe my skills as a speaker to be strong. However, I realize that there is still room for improvement. As I talked about today in class, I was a member of the school theater group in middle school. I also took classes with a professional theater company in early high school. These classes established my confidence to speak in front of a group and the ability to improvise quickly. For example, I was the first to volunteer to present in class today. However, because of my confidence to improvise, I often do not practice for presentations. In most cases this works out, but certain presentations require a certain level of polish, where I would benefit to practice first.

When I present, I prefer to have relatively little information on each slide and to go through slides relatively quickly. I use Adam Savage’s presentation on Desire as my guide.[[1]](#footnote-1) I recognize that some people have different presentation styles. In particular, I have found that Germans like to cram as much information onto a slide as possible – often to have the slides just for reading. Others, in the United States, follow a rule that they like to have 1 slide per minute minimum. For some presentations I prefer to spend no more than 15 seconds per slide. I also prefer to maintain a high level of energy in my presentation and have a high information density.

One thing that I can improve on is pulling my talks together better. Although I despise “Agenda” slides I believe that I should try to tell a story with my presentation. However, pulling a presentation together into a story is only possible when one really knows the material. This is difficult in some cases, but it would lead me to understand things better, as well as to give better presentations.

Another thing I can work on is having a conclusion. I dislike using “does anyone have any questions.” I suppose that this is connected with my desire to tell a story.

### 3. Team

In general, I believe that I work well in a team. In the past, I have gravitated towards being the team leader. For example, in 15.567, I pushed the MBAs to assign sections and set deadlines. However, I have found that leading a group requires a significant time investment to stay on top of what everybody is up to. When I do not have the time to stay on top of things, I do not naturally gravitate towards a leadership position.

Hopefully, convincing your team members to do something does not take longer than simply doing it yourself. Working in a team is frustrating when the rest of your team is not as motivated as you to finish a project. I don’t feel right when I do not spend enough time on a group project; for example, coming to a group meeting unprepared.

I can see myself working as a software project manager.

### 4. Goals

Besides the items listed above, a good place to start looking for goals would be the negative feedback from my presentation today. I already mentioned the need for a conclusion, which I believe is linked to doing more practice, as well as telling a cohesive story.

Another item was the use of my hands. I had generally though that I made good use of my hands while speaking, although today’s comment has caused me to reconsider. I do not remember what I did with my hands during the presentation today. I am interested in learning more about what your preferred use of hands is, and how I believe that fits into my presentation style.

Another item which I wish I had today was a countdown clock. I was unsure about how much detail I should include because I did not know if I was under or over time. In most situations real life, I do not believe that this is as important as an issue because one rarely has to think of more content to fill the minimum time requirements.

Now that I have resolved the previous high-level issues with my writing, I need more feedback on areas for further improvement.

### 5. Goal Plan

For timed speeches a countdown clock should be provided. That way I can dynamically add or subtract information to reach the mandated time restrictions.

In regards to the use of my hands, I should think about them during my future presentations. Alternatively, I could watch recorded video of my presentation.

For the other items I have outlined, I believe that further vigilance is required as I go through the class. Feedback on those items by you would be helpful.

1. http://www.hulu.com/watch/97865/foratv-technology-mythbusters-adam-savage-on-dodos-maltese-falcons-and-the-art-of-obsession [↑](#footnote-ref-1)