The Road to Autonomous Learning

I don’t know where I’m going, but I’m making good time.

As 21st-century citizens, we are experiencing an increasingly complex and challenging world. Each year millions choose higher education as a way to prepare for the ever-changing future. Yet many have conflicting emotions about that decision.

“Is it all about grades? I have to do well because my family has such high aspirations for me.”

“I try so hard, but then I blow it on the test.”

“I do really well in a class if the teacher is interesting.”

“How can I juggle all my responsibilities and all these assignments?”

“I know my future is on the line, but I just can’t get motivated.”

This text shows you how to become the collegiate student you wish to become—how to academically transform yourself. If you are not quite the student you wish to be, or not nearly the student you wish to become, then open your mind and your heart to the messages here. We are learners, too, both as students and as teachers, and we have walked these roads before. Come with us, and we will show you what college learning is all about, and how you can master it.

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Jesse, a scholarship athlete beginning his junior year in college, is struggling to make a potentially life-changing decision. Find out more about Jesse and the decision he ultimately makes as you read this chapter.

QUESTIONS TO FOCUS ON AS YOU EXPLORE THIS CHAPTER:

• What are the most important components of your quality world?

• How can you use the academic transformation process to become a successful student?

• What characteristics of autonomous learners do you share?

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INTRODUCTION

What a joy to be human! We have harnessed the physical world; we can reflect on our feelings. We can understand important aspects of this world, including ourselves. We can change what we do and how we feel. We can achieve what we wish. Conversely, our humanness can be a burden—we can be ignorant of the world and ourselves; we can stay stuck in old ways of being and feeling; we can fail ourselves and fail others.

Exercise 1.1

SELF-ASSESSMENT: My Willingness to Become a Successful Student

The first step in becoming a successful student is to assess your openness to the changes college demands. With 5 being “Almost Always” and 1 being “Almost Never,” assess your readiness for changes you expect this term. Rate each of the following statements honestly by circling the appropriate number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am confident about my abilities to succeed in college.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am ready to change some of my academic behaviors and study habits.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3. I get personal satisfaction from completing goals.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I routinely initiate studying when assignments are made.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I engage in difficult academic tasks without giving up too easily.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I enjoy learning something new.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. My grades are a good indicator of my abilities.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I try to think openly about issues, even if they conflict with my ideas.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I use different learning strategies for different subjects.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am hopeful about my success in college.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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Add up the numbers you circled. Your total score will be between 10 and 50. The higher your score, the more likely you are to be open to necessary changes. For a score below 30, reflect on the items for which you have concerns and consider talking with a trusted friend, family member, teacher, counselor, or advisor.
What makes the difference between these possibilities? It is our basic nature to survive, to invent, to achieve, and to change. As humans, our nature is to learn, but fear, greed, and laziness get in the way. Although learning is a basic skill, it must also be developed.

For tens of thousands of years, the learning process has been a hidden mystery, but now technology is opening a vision of brain functioning. Each day we are discovering more about how humans learn and change. We know we have learned something when we experience a change in our thoughts, feelings, or actions. Those changes are evidence that we have learned from experiencing new information or circumstances (Lefrançois, 2000). Thus, learning happens continually as we interact with all that is our environment.

One fact about being human is not a mystery—we can direct our thoughts and feelings and choose our actions. In other words, we have free will. We exercise that will within a societal framework of laws and cultural expectations. You may not feel very free at all, but in a real sense, you are. As authors and teachers, we believe your ability to choose goals and behaviors is foundational to becoming a successful student. In every class, you choose to learn or not. You choose what receives your attention and effort. You choose what you value.

As teachers, we help students set priorities in their lives. Your first priority is to determine the life you want to have and the person you want to be.

**A QUALITY WORLD**

Humans are the only creatures who can imagine perfection. Media in all its forms illustrates our yearning for perfection and for the control to attain it, but we are inherently imperfect. Are we ever smart enough, beautiful enough, good enough, fast enough, lovable enough, successful enough? “Perfectionism is not about healthy achievement and growth . . . [it is] about trying to earn approval and acceptance” (Brown, 2010, p. 56). The no-man’s-land we can inhabit is between our concept of perfection and our own state of imperfection. Although “trying to be perfect is the most tragic human mistake” (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1992, p. 5), we are loath to relinquish that fantasy. Finding your path to your true goals is the purpose of this chapter.

As humans, we dream of the lives we want—relationships, possessions, accomplishments, values. That vision is one we begin to create from birth. William Glasser (1998), a noted American psychiatrist and developer of two important concepts—reality therapy and choice theory—calls it our **quality world**. Each of us has mental pictures of “(1) the **people** we most want to be with, (2) the **things** we most want to own or experience, and (3) the **ideas** or systems of **belief** that govern much of our behavior” (p. 45). Our quality world holds our deepest values and feelings. It holds our hopes for the way we would like to live. Our quality world holds the best ways to satisfy one or more of our basic psychological needs—love/belonging, power, freedom, fun. It is the place where we would feel completely loved and protected. We care passionately about these concepts. We look on each new experience—person, thing, or idea—from the perspective of whether it contributes or detracts from our quality world. Does it move us closer to that world, or farther away?

Even though we move back and forth between the everyday external world and our quality world numerous times each day, it is rare when we conceptualize, or imagine, our quality world as a **world**, a place that holds the summation of our hopes and beliefs. Every time we think about the perfect mate, the grades we want, the job we desire, or any one of the dozens of attractive images that come to mind, we are thinking about our quality world. When we experience hope about a relationship, excitement about an idea, or longing for a possession, we are shaping and reshaping our quality world.
Elements of Our Quality World

Our deepest values and feelings. Hope for the way we would like to live.

| The people we most want to be with | The things we most want to own or experience | The ideas or systems of belief that govern much of our behavior |

Are our quality worlds healthy and good? Not always. An addict yearns for the next rush; the power hungry fantasize about exerting their control over others; the selfish long for love without having to love in return; the lazy look for accomplishment without effort; the greedy want more than their share; the cruel enjoy the pain of others. As we mature, self-reflection can help us ascertain how healthy and ethical our quality worlds are. However, self-reflection in isolation rarely works. We desperately need feedback from the people and systems we respect and trust. We should use that feedback, not simply accept it unconditionally. Our parents cannot design our quality world; neither can our teachers, peers, preachers, or politicians. It is our job, our responsibility, to build our quality world; it is, according to Glasser (1998), the core of our life, no one else’s.

The generation of Americans born since the 1970’s has a name in the world of social science; that name is Generation Me (Twenge, 2006, p. 3).

Generation Me has the highest self-esteem of any generation, but also the most depression. We are more free and equal, but also more cynical. We expect to follow our dreams, but are anxious about making that happen. In a recent poll, 53% of high school seniors said that growing up is harder now than it was for their parents (Twenge, 2006, p. 212).

Most, but not all, Generation Me Americans have received powerfully optimistic messages: You can be anything you want to be. Follow your dreams. Be yourself. You may have heard such messages in the media; at the same time, you may have heard about the current economic struggles and the intense competition in the job market. You may have already begun to question how all these messages can fit together.

One good method of sorting out your own feelings and thoughts, the messages from your family and friends, and the reality of the world is to build your own quality world thoughtfully. Asking yourself what you expect from this college experience can help you get started. College can be an exhilarating experience if it matches your quality world; it can be a brutal nightmare if it does not.

Because your quality world drives so many of your fantasies, dreams, goals, and actions, a crucial decision is whether you will ground it with a value system that is ethical, balanced, and wise. In this postmodern age in which diverse traditions and systems are honored, such a decision is complicated and difficult. One example is to know where your rights end and the rights of others begin. For some people, that boundary of self-esteem is treacherous. You either take advantage of others or allow them to take advantage of you. You may do too much for others and not expect them to do much for you.

Balance is a concept we will return to again and again in this text. To make wise choices and then live them is an opportunity that collegiate life provides on a daily basis. Closely evaluating those daily choices against your deepest values is the greatest guarantee that you have to build a good life.

CASE STUDY

JESSE earned a football scholarship, an accomplishment that fulfilled his parents’ dreams. They were excited that he was going to college, but even more thrilled that he would play football at the collegiate level. He accepted their vision without question and dreamed of athletic success. However, reality was shocking. He was no longer the star. As a freshman, he was not even a starter. Classes were more difficult than in high school,
and he felt he had no time for himself. Academics were forced to a backseat as he strived to succeed on the team. Jesse grudgingly kept the vision of athletic success through two seasons, but he grew to understand that the quality world he wanted included academic as well as athletic achievement. Finally, at the end of his sophomore year, Jesse told his parents the truth. He was uncomfortable in the conflict between athletics and academics and ashamed of his grades. Jesse withdrew into himself the next summer and painfully pondered what he wanted in his life, now and in the future. Gradually, he came to the conclusion that he wanted a sense of freedom to explore new ideas and different types of people. His competitive spirit was still alive, but now it turned to the classroom. He chose to leave athletics and his scholarship, knowing that he would have to find a part-time job for financial support and take student loans to finish school. However, that choice gave him more study time and more energy to focus on academics.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion
Considering his circumstances, did Jesse make the right choice to leave athletics and give up his scholarship? What would you have done if you were Jesse?

Improving Our Quality World
As teachers for many years, we believe an important life skill is our ability to discern and improve our quality worlds. How does such discernment occur? A crucial aspect of any such system is reflection, our ability to think deeply and carefully about important issues and their relationship to one another. What follows is one method for discernment, a series of reflective questions in four major arenas of life—relationships, work, belief, and service (see Figure 1.1). As you read these questions, remember that effective reflection requires openness (being receptive to whatever comes into your awareness), observation (being able to step outside yourself as you look at your behaviors and
thoughts), and objectivity (the constant awareness that your thoughts and feelings are temporary and do not represent the totality of who you are) (Siegel, 2010).

**Relationships.** As humans, we are social creatures. Most of us place relationships at the core of our lives. A significant other, family members, friends, colleagues, roommates—these are the people with whom we share our lives. We laugh with them, fight with them, cry with them, celebrate with them, dream with them. There is a tie, a bond, among us. These are the people who know the truth about us, and they love and care for us. We know and do the same for them. Trust and safety are at the center of our quality relationships.

Have you ever asked yourself what are the quality relationships in your life? How closely does the reality meet the dreams and hopes you have for relationships? Where are the differences? Are your visions of quality relationships healthy and hopeful? How do relationships give meaning and purpose to your life?

**Work.** Across all cultures and all times, people work most of their lives. Work is a major avenue of deriving feelings of productiveness, a basic requirement of a healthy self-view. As a young child, you began working by going to school and learning. That was your job in your family, although you probably had chores to do as well. School may still be your primary work, even if now you work at a job that earns you a paycheck. On the other hand, school may take second or third place after family and your job.

At this time in your life, you probably have several visions of work in your quality world. One is the vision of how you wish to be as a college student—in other words, what collegiate experiences do you wish to have? How will you perform collegiate work and what feelings will ensue from your efforts? What subsidiary role does other work play? Another vision is the one you hold of the work you are currently doing. A vision most of you carry is the work you will do after graduation. What is your vision of your working career? Where will it occur? What responsibilities will you have? What do you wish to achieve? How does work give meaning and purpose to your life?

Your collegiate work is probably your primary job now. It is important to maintain your professional attitude and work habits at school as well as at work. Show up on time ready to learn with the necessary materials, do not leave early, and put forth your best efforts on homework and exams. The work ethic you create as a student will follow you into your career.

**Belief.** All of us believe in something. Whether we believe in the sacred or the secular, order or chaos, atheism or religion, we all believe. It is human nature to try to make sense of our existence. We rely on our families and our culture to help us find those explanations that fill our quality world. As we move from stage to stage in life, it is healthy to question those explanations. What are your beliefs? What values do you think are important? What beliefs give meaning and purpose to your life?

**Service.** A basic tenet of human behavior is that we rely on others as they rely on us. We are individuals, but we are also part of larger groups. Thus some people are willing to work for the common good by participating in service activities. Obviously, volunteer work is a service activity, but there are many others as well. Voting, paying taxes, helping a neighbor or a stranger, contributing to a charity, showing patriotism, obeying community laws—all are service behaviors. Circumstances at particular times in our lives dictate how much or how often we are willing to serve. However, service is one of the core components of a healthy life, so determining a variety of service behaviors gives us many more opportunities. What role does service play in your quality world? How does service give meaning and purpose to your life?
The concept of a quality world may be new to you. We hope you will give it careful consideration, for we believe that if you carefully and thoughtfully adjust the images and feelings that constitute your quality world to a greater congruence with the life you realistically desire to lead, then your motivation to achieve that life will become greater. Such consideration can encompass difficult choices and sacrifices, as Jesse’s choices did. However, the reward will be your increased confidence and comfort with the life you are building.

The purpose and strategies of this text rest on your ability to choose (and to control) your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to reach carefully selected goals. We will share how you can increase your ability to evaluate your individual academic situation and plan and execute appropriate action. Becoming a competent student is an individual journey; you are a unique learner. Our term for your journey is academic transformation.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION

Often humans contemplate what it would be like to be different. Fantasy lives are filled with images of success and acclaim, attractiveness and competence, pleasure and joy—all without effort or cost. The no-man’s-land between fantasy and reality is a hard, barren place, but we want to share with you an oasis in that desert. It is possible for humans to transform themselves, in their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. It is possible for you to transform yourself, and you can choose carefully exactly how you want to change and what you want to become. One enormous advantage you have is the power of habit. Habits are “the choices that all of us deliberately make at some point, and stop thinking about but continue doing” (Duhigg, 2012, p. xvii). If we create constructive habits, then the unconscious force of habit makes the chosen behavior easier.

This text focuses on academic transformation—the process by which you become a more successful student. However, the principles and strategies are easily transferable to other areas of life. Our conviction is that truly successful college students are those who do more than make a good GPA—they also have fulfilling personal and social lives, have a clear view of their future professions, develop their physical and spiritual lives, and participate in their communities. Those standards are challenging for any student, and they are accomplished within the academic framework of their lives.

This text focuses on your work as a student. Academic transformation is the process whereby you will carefully assess your current situation as a student, determine specific short- and long-term academic goals based on your values, chart changes necessary to reach those goals, and then make those changes. Along the way, you must continually evaluate your progress and make the appropriate adjustments. Even your long-term goals may change.

Following are some of the reflective questions for each of the six steps of academic transformation:

Assess your current academic situation. Consider such things as your academic standing (honor, good, marginal, probation, probationary entrance); scholarship/financial aid requirements; extracurricular activities (athletics, social or professional organizations); residence (on-campus, commuting). Are your learning skills (reading, writing, mathematics, thinking) strong, average, or weak? What is your level of self-confidence? Of stress or anxiety?

Set short- and long-term academic goals based on your values. What are the external forces (finances, family, academic requirements) that affect your academic goals? What are the internal forces—your personal definition of success, your desires for personal and social activities, your search for the best career—that affect
your academic goals? Goals should be specific so that you will know when you have reached them. Examples could be a GPA for the term, specific grades in each course, or acceptance into a particular major or program.

Create a list of immediate objectives and an action plan to meet them. Examples of immediate objectives can include reading assignments before class, attending class regularly, and so on. Action plans may include getting enough sleep, going to the library to read and study, and using an academic planner to set specific study times.

Work to accomplish your objectives. This step is the hardest step. You have to do what you have determined is important. So, use a to-do list every day and mark what you accomplish; encourage yourself to follow your plan; ask friends and family to support your efforts.

Evaluate your progress. At the end of each day, evaluate what you have done and create the to-do list for the next day. Check completed items in your planner and circle any items that were not finished; move them to the next day. What, if anything, is blocking your progress? How can you resolve it?

Make adjustments as needed, and repeat. At the beginning of the next week, take a step back and review. Are your goals and objectives still the same? What challenges have emerged for this coming week? Do you need to seek help from your instructors, study labs or groups, classmates? This time is best used to confirm your accomplishments and chart your tasks for the next week. It is also a good time to reflect on your personal and social goals.

In this text we introduce you to the research, theories, and practices that form the foundation for the steps of academic transformation, and the process will become habitual because you will do it again and again. You may already have strengths in certain areas, such as goal setting, and may want to improve your ability to create action plans. Conversely, you may have the motivation to work hard but have difficulty knowing the best methods of working to meet your goals. The questions at the end of this chapter will help you begin to master this process.

**BECOMING AN AUTONOMOUS LEARNER**

An excellent example of academic transformation is a student’s gradual movement from a teacher-directed learner to an autonomous learner. Early educational experiences are teacher directed. Teachers expect students to learn by following the teacher’s assignments and directions. Students are rarely required to set their own learning goals or deviate from given guidelines. They view the teacher as the source of the right answers—the authority (Weinstein, 1988). These students write down what the teacher presents, usually word for word. They read the text assignment, and they often use rote memory to answer test questions. They depend on the teacher to make connections. The result is that procrastination and boredom are frequent companions.

Although this attitude and these behaviors are frequently sufficient for high school, they can be deadly in college. Beginning college students often exert real effort in their courses, but when they try hard and use the behaviors that have worked well in the past, they can become confused when the results are disappointing. It is common to hear students say, “I studied harder for that test than I have ever studied before, and I failed it! I don’t know what to do.” They are being called to become autonomous learners, but no professor uses that term. It is a secret password to college success.
From our experience as teachers, we have come to believe deeply in the concept of the **autonomous learner** as a person independently competent in a wide variety of academic tasks, able to actively achieve goals based on values, and skilled in self-reflection. We have identified seven important characteristics of students who are consistently successful in a collegiate environment. As you read the following explanations of the seven characteristics, evaluate how much of each you have already acquired.

**1. Autonomous learners have a realistic view of themselves and their academic abilities.** Can you separate fact from fantasy and reality from wishful thinking about yourself? Such clear thinking is a major psychological goal as you move from adolescence to adulthood. An emotionally healthy and realistic self-concept is foundational to the effort of reflection, evaluation, and acceptance of your academic abilities.

**Where would you place your academic self-concept?**

Fantasy-based → Reality-based

**2. Autonomous learners are ethical.** A healthy self-awareness leads to a clear understanding of your own values and ethics. Simply believing in a principle is insufficient; living by your values and beliefs is essential to a healthy self-concept. When you are a student, academics is your work. Academic honesty and integrity are important components of your successful college career, and they are the method by which you develop your system of professional ethics. If you cheat on college tests or papers, then you are likely to cheat in relationships or at work.

**Where would you place your academic behavior?**

Unethical → Ethical

**3. Autonomous learners set realistic and appropriate goals for academic achievement.** Few abilities are as crucial as that of setting realistic and appropriate goals for any endeavor, and academics is no exception to that premise. A goal can be as large as graduation or a term GPA, or it can be as immediate as planning to study history for one hour tonight. To set realistic academic goals when there are other legitimate goals in your personal, family, social, work, and physical life may be a difficult skill for you to master. Balance is the elusive goal for which we strive; the closer we get to balance, the closer we will come to the good life.

**Where would you place your ability to set realistic and appropriate academic goals?**

Poor → Good

**4. Autonomous learners understand their own learning strengths and weaknesses.** To set realistic and effective academic goals, you must know your own learning strengths and weaknesses. For example, if you are a slow reader, then you will have to allocate more uninterrupted time to your assignments than your roommate who is a skilled reader. Through accurate academic self-assessment, you can choose the best major, the best term schedule, and the best learning strategies.

**How would you rate your awareness of your learning strengths and weaknesses?**

Poor → Good

**5. Autonomous learners manage their behaviors to reach their goals.** Having appropriate goals and knowing the best strategies are meaningless unless you do the behaviors to learn. In other words, you have to work at being a student in a timely way. Procrastination and avoidance can destroy academic achievement, so you must...
learn how to control your own actions. Good work habits will make the entire process so much easier.

**How well do you manage your academic behaviors?**

Unproductive ————————————> Productive

6. **Autonomous learners use effective learning strategies and adapt those strategies to new situations.** Hundreds of learning strategies are available for use, but choosing the most effective way to study a particular subject at a particular time is a skill acquired by reflection and practice. The common metaphor for this skill is a *toolbox*—a reference to the idea that a competent student creates a collection of strategies that you use appropriately in different situations, depending on your goals, situation, and abilities. You can enhance and expand your current collection of strategies through the various ideas and examples in this text.

**How would you rate your ability to appropriately vary your learning strategies?**

Poor ————————————> Good

7. **Autonomous learners use appropriate resources in a timely way.** Teachers, study groups, tutoring programs, websites, databases, library resources, other students, and many other resources exist for any course, and successful students use them promptly and efficiently. Do you know when you need academic help? Do you seek it out quickly? Do you persist until you have learned what you need to learn? College is so much harder than high school, so it is wise to get help before falling too far behind. An autonomous learner is also successful in collaborative processes. Modern professional life relies on the abilities of people to work together to solve problems and create effective solutions; thus, learning to participate in learning groups and teams during college will provide effective tools for later success.

**How effectively do you use resources?**

Rarely ————————————> Often

**SUMMARY**

Dreams, accomplishments, values, beliefs, and relationships shape your quality world, and you use the process of reflection to examine and make it uniquely yours. Academic transformation is your opportunity to re-create your academic quality world and enhance your chances of academic success in college. Ultimately, you can become an autonomous learner. We hope that you will engage in a serious reflection of these concepts as they apply to you through your completion of the Thinking Critically sections following the Key Concepts sections. Simply reading an idea has little or no effect on us unless we make the effort to relate that idea to our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Here is your chance to make these concepts meaningful.

As teachers and students, we have come to understand that competency as a college student can be learned. The learning skills in this text grow from what we now understand about our brains—how we learn, know, think, and feel. We invite you to journey with us as we explore cognitive and behavioral psychology, personality theory, and concepts from philosophy and business.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

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<th>Academic transformation</th>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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<td>Autonomous learner</td>
<td>Quality World</td>
<td>Teacher-directed learner</td>
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The Road to Autonomous Learning

Each chapter in this text will give you the opportunity to practice your thinking skills. This first Thinking Critically section focuses on sharpening your skills in personal reflection, the skill of thinking deeply and carefully about yourself. Reflection rests on three attitudes: openness, observation, and objectivity.

- Openness is the willingness to receive any information or insight about yourself without denial or rejection. To do this, you must temporarily put aside your feelings of how you want something to be and accept what comes, whether you agree or not. Being open means that you can sense things clearly.
- Observation is the ability to perceive yourself in the moment—in other words, you are aware of yourself as you are doing/experiencing something. Observation can allow you to disengage from habitual behaviors that impede your growth.
- Objectivity is the ability to stand outside a thought or feeling—to be aware of what your mind is doing and realize that those thoughts and feelings are temporary. They represent a part of who you are, but not the totality of you (Siegel, 2010).

The following questions give you the opportunity to practice reflection. Our recommendation is to carefully choose one and create a response. At the collegiate level, such responses should be at least 250 words. Read, think, write, and then edit your work. Your instructor will look for the demonstration of reflection in your response.

1. Describe your academic strengths and weaknesses as a learner, particularly in relation to reading, writing, mathematics, and critical thinking. Be as specific as possible by citing previous experiences, courses, and grades. What concerns do you have about beginning this term?

2. Choose one of the four arenas—relationships, work, belief, service. Describe an example that illustrates a positive aspect you are happy to have in your world. Then describe an example that you believe is not how you want to live. What changes can you make in the second example?

3. An excellent example of academic transformation is a student’s gradual movement from a teacher-directed learner to an autonomous learner. Now that you have read this chapter, define “academic transformation” in your own words. What types of transformation would you consider important for yourself during this period in your academic pursuits? Why?

4. Review the list of seven characteristics of an autonomous learner. Which characteristics have you successfully achieved? Which are you willing to work toward achieving? Explain.

5. What preparations did you make before you came to college that assist you in being a successful student? What do you wish you had done differently to prepare yourself? Why?

The Last Word

This text began 40 years ago when I walked into a classroom of 20 unsuspecting freshmen who wanted to be successful in college. I had always been a successful student, but at that moment I realized I didn’t know how to teach anyone how to do it. Thanks to all those students who went with me down paths of discovery as I figured things out.

—De Sellers