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Self-Evaluation Checklist

It helps to intermittently take a step back and to evaluate one's performance. To do so, one needs a suitable checklist, which I describe below. The first 8 items are originally from Shockley (1957) while the remaining items are my additions.[1]

1. **Ability to think of a good problem.** The financial media (WSJ, FT) is a good place to start, but what's of interest to practitioners may not necessarily be of interest to academics. Thus it is important to understand what our current state of knowledge is and how the topic can help improve upon this existing state.

2. **Ability to work on the problem.** Typically, what is required is the dedication and willingness to dig through data, work through derivations of a model, or revise the prose to achieve better clarity. Working hard seems to bring good results, on average.

3. **Ability to recognize a worthwhile result.** This is the part that requires learning by doing and iterating based on feedback from more senior researchers.

4. **Ability to make a decision as to when to stop and write up the results.** Writing up the results after creating each figure or each table provides a good mix of analysis and writing. It turns out that describing the regression specification or what each item in a graph represents takes time to do properly.

5. **Ability to write adequately.** Every researcher has his or her own style of writing (especially the introduction). It helps to identify papers with good prose and keep track of them. Typically, well written papers have their strengths coming from good structure rather than smooth prose.

6. **Ability to profit constructively from criticism.** When presenting in reading groups and working groups to peers or faculty, make sure to keep track of all the comments and questions raised. It is also useful to cater the nature of the presentation to the expertise of the audience.

7. **Determination to submit the paper to a journal.** Submitting and receiving referee reports is a key first step of what always turns out to be a long process.

8. **Persistence in making changes (if necessary as a result of journal action).** Facing the review comments is no fun, and it's always good to keep in mind that not all comments deserve equal attention.

9. **Ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously.** Each hour of the day is precious, and among many productivity tips designed to make the most of 24 hours, I've found the most helpful solution is to plan out the next day so that when we wake up, we can spend the hours with intention without thinking about what to do next. This habit seems key for making meaningful progress on multiple projects within a day.

10. **Ability to communicate intermediate results to collaborators.** Making sure your collaborators are on board with the current state of the analysis is key for a productive discussion. Using platforms like Notion or Powerpoint (as opposed to formatted Latex) to quickly communicate intermediate results is an important skill to have.

[1] In a paper titled "On the statistics of individual variations of productivity in research laboratories" that studies the drivers of the lognormal distribution in productivity, William Shockley suggested that productivity, measured by the rate of producing scientific articles, is the product of a set of factors.