

Writer-to-Learn Activities

Freewriting/Focused Freewriting

In free writing, students write continuously for 10 minutes (or perhaps less) without worrying about correctness in spelling, content, or form. The object is to openly get one's thoughts down on the page, and usually students write on any topic they wish. Focused free writing means a particular topic is written on in the same manner.

<http://www.alamo.edu/sac/english/lirvin/wguides/freew.htm>

Entry Slip/Exit Slips

Entry slips and exit slips are written responses from students to questions you pose either at the beginning (entry) or the end (exit) of class. They usually take no more than five minutes and you can tell very quickly from these responses whether students are with you and are understanding the material.

E.g. What do questions do you have from the reading for today?

What are the three important things you learned this class period?

Sentence/Passage Springboard

Ask students to note a particular sentence or short passage from their class reading that has captured their attention and to write that sentence or passage across the top of the page. They then spend whatever time you allot to exploring in writing their thoughts about the sentence or passage.

Writing Definitions

Ask students to write their understanding on the meaning of a word or concept. This activity often works well as an anticipatory activity before starting any reading or particular assignment because it taps into their previous knowledge and attitudes towards the topics that they will study.

Student-Formulated Questions

Have students write down questions they have about the subject matter or activities of the class. Then use these questions to guide a class discussion.

Short Summary

Ask students to summarize in no more than 50 words the main points of their reading assignment. They might do this on regular notebook paper or index cards. The activity encourages them to read the assignment and helps them to remember what they have read. And its brief format is not threatening to them. (Summaries could be longer or pressed to become shorter.)

Group Writing

Put students in groups and have them work together to complete a short writing assignment together (such as writing a short summary, writing a definition, engaging in planning, or creating a response).

Dialectical/Double Entry Notebook

Unlike the customary journal or notebook, dialectical/double entry notebooks are named for the vertical line drawn down the page, dividing the functions. Actually, these notebooks have a variety of uses and involve attitudinal writing, questioning, summarizing, and process writing. One use has students summarize a reading on the left side and write questions on the right. Another use has one student write impressions and interpretations on a topic on the right, and then write deeper re-interpretations and insights on the right. The sides could be divided also with one student writing on one side and a peer writing on the left. One side for thinking; the other side for rethinking.

<http://writing2.richmond.edu/wac/2entrynb.html>

Journals/Learning Logs/Thinkbooks

Journals are extremely flexible. The common feature is that students are asked to record their thoughts in them regularly. In them, students could ...

- summarize or comment on readings or lectures or films or experiments ...
- think about what was learned, seemed interesting or confusing
- make connections (between what read or heard in class + previous material/experience or opinions, beliefs, prior understanding, etc.)
- write at home to assigned prompts
- write notes-while-working or reading
- write during class (before/during/at the end) for 5>7 minutes

For a very well established and interesting example of a classroom learning log, see The Learning Record <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~syverson/olr/olr.html>

Process Journals

Ask students to write about the content and the learning occurring in the course. For writing course, students would write about writing. For a biology course, students would write about learning biology. The object is to help students formulate abstract concepts and constructed learning out of the particular experiences of the class.

Discussion Boards

Once a week has students respond to a prompt related to the course learning objectives. This works best on an electronic discussion board because then students can be asked to read and respond to each other's posts.

Anticipatory Writing

This writing activity could take many different shapes, but its purpose is to tap into students' thinking and attitudes about a subject before they began an assignment or project based upon it. It helps to prepare students for the subject matter and helps them relate to it personally.

Quick Writes/Stop and Writes

Anywhere, anytime, almost for any purpose you can stop and ask students to write for one minute. These quick responses can then be shared and be the springboard for class discussion.

One-Minute Papers

One-minute papers are usually written in class on an index card or scrap of paper, or out-of-class via email. The limited space of the card forces students to focus and also presents such a small amount of writing space that it usually lowers levels of writing anxiety. On their cards, students may be asked to summarize, to question, to reiterate, to support or counter a thesis or argument, or to apply new information to new circumstances. Such writing helps students to digest, apply, and challenge their thinking, achieving enough confidence to contribute fruitfully to class discussions. These short writing assignments also deliver quick, valuable feedback to instructors on what students are learning.

The following are examples of prompts:

- *Any discipline:*
Create a bumper sticker that would summarize yesterday's lecture.
Without referring to the text, jot down one or two points that surprised you.

Scenarios/Role Playing

Scenarios are short, imaginative writing activities that allow students to broach a topic or apply content to new contexts. Examples of scenario activities include writing letters, editorials, memos, and persona pieces such as dialogues or role play.

Examples:

- Create a hypothetical dialogue between 3-5 individuals who have different perspectives on, but definite stakes in, your argument.
- Write a short letter to the author of this novel in which you pose unresolved question(s).