

Write to Learn
 reWrite to Learn
 Read to Learn
 reRead to Learn
 Research to Learn
 reResearch to Learn
 Question to Learn
 reQuestion to Learn

Celebrating Writing for Learning in All Subjects: How to Integrate More Writing into Your Classroom

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Making Connections Through Writing: The San Antonio Writing Project's 2010 February Teacher Conference

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Write-to-Learn

Learning is the quintessential human activity. Language is the most powerful learning tool we have. All students have a right to discover--or, perhaps, rediscover--the joys of learning and we should all recognize that writing-to-learn is one of the best means of helping them to do so.

-John Mayher, et. al.

It's more difficult to convince teachers that writing is a learning process than it is to convince them that talk is, because so often teachers use writing as a way of testing. They use it to find out what students already know, rather than as a way of encouraging them to find out. The process of making the material their own--the process of writing--is demonstrably a process of learning.

-James Britton

Principles of Write-to-Learn

The sort of writing that most facilitates learning is informal, relatively unstructured, and has an emphasis more on *what* is said (the new ideas and concepts being struggled with) than *how* it is said (correct spelling, grammar and usage). These things are important, but to what extent depends on the purpose of the writing. When students are writing to learn their attention should be on ideas more than on "correctness." If they later seek to convey this information to others, then correctness becomes important.

- ❑ Writing is an important tool for learning and discovery as well as for conveying what has been learned and discovered
- ❑ Students gain proficiency as writers when they have frequent opportunities to write in courses across the curriculum, addressing a range of audiences and practicing the genres typical of their majors and the workplaces they will enter.

Effective Write-to-Learn Assignments

- Are short (3-15 minutes)
- Ask students to write a word, a sentence, question, or a paragraph or two (though it could be more)
- Are integrated (explicitly) into class content, objectives, and activity, and, are, utilized in subsequent writing projects
- Elicit multiple responses
- Where appropriate, receive some content-focused (versus mechanics-focused) response
- Aren't formally graded, but count toward a portion of grade



Particular Write-to-Learn Activity: Process (or Learning) Journals

Features of Process Journals

- Writing about writing(writing about learning)
--the goal of these journals is to get them writing about their writing/learning experience
 - It is one kind of journal writing in the class
--mixed with freewriting journals
 - Weekly
--turned in each week
 - Purpose—abstract conceptualization, constructed learning
--although they are grounded in specific experience, their goal is to help formulate larger understandings (not specific problem-solving for specific writing contexts)
 - Length
--I push for more extended length. 250 words minimum.
 - Evaluation
--graded only on addressing the topic and meeting the minimum length requirement
 - Make them Public
--sharing these reflections opens the possibility for students to learn from each other (reflecting upon reflections)
 - Ah Hah! Response
--a place for students to share when they come across new realizations and connections
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Two Example Process Journals on Invention:

Getting started on a writing project is hard. What do you do to prepare to write? What sorts of “invention” activities seem to work for you? Did you find the invention exercise I prepared for you helpful? How? Why? Look again at the section in our handbook on prewriting. Do you find it easier to “just write” and then plot out your ideas? Or does it work best for you to plot out a game plan (like an outline) which you use to write from? Share some of the things you do as you get ready to write.

Read Trimble’s chapter 2 called “Getting Launched,” and pick one quote from that chapter to include in this journal. Why did you pick this quote? You have just finished (or are about to finish) our first essay. Talk about your own “getting launched” process for this essay. What did you do to get started with writing your essay? How did it compare to Trimble’s discussion about getting launched? What can you take from this experience and perhaps apply to another situation where you have to start a writing assignment?

References on Write-to-Learn (and Writing Across the Curriculum)

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Write to Learn Activities, University of Richmond. <http://writing2.richmond.edu/wac/wtl.html>

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