

In-class Writing

Providing class time for informal, **low-stakes** writing builds students' critical thinking skills, structures instructional time, supports active learning, and encourages students to build connections between homework and contact time. The pedagogical benefits of brief (3 – 10 minute) in-class writing activities will be most significant if you identify a specific goal for each activity. The goal most appropriate to the moment will of course vary widely, but in all disciplines, strategic implementation of in-class writing is an efficient way to foster deep learning—and you need not grade, respond to, or even read it all.

Some ways to integrate in-class writing:

“Focused freewriting” assigns students a specific objective to complete in a few minutes. The nature of these prompts is virtually limitless, but common goals include:

- **To review or summarize** (e.g., “Summarize the main idea of the reading for today,” “Define the three terms I’ve written on the board in your own words”)
- **To ground discussion** (e.g., “Describe something that confused you in the reading for today,” “Identify the most convincing evidence the writer uses to support their claim in this article”)
- **To practice disciplinary skills** (e.g., “What do you think the central threat to this firm is?,” “In a few sentences, analyze the syntax of this passage”)
- **To generate ideas** (e.g., “List as many potential applications of this concept as you can,” “Brainstorm responses the management team could have to this problem”)
- **To prepare for next steps** (e.g., “Name one thing from today’s class you should review before the exam,” “Document two takeaways that could apply to your upcoming papers”)

Beyond focused freewriting, you might consider:

- **Index Card Temperature Taking.** Distributing an index card to each student and collecting them is a simple way to assess learning in progress, particularly in large classes. For instance, you might prompt students to write a single question they have at the close of a lecture. A quick flip through the cards then offers a broad assessment of the class.
- **Coding and Seeking.** Students can be directed to purposefully extract salient material from a text with coding and seeking activities. For example, you might ask them to highlight all the debatable claims, the evidence, or the applications of a course concept in either a course reading or another student’s writing.

“Translanguaging” allows multilingual students to utilize their languages as resources in learning. Consider inviting students to translanguage in preparation for higher-stakes communications. For instance, you might encourage writing in any language to brainstorm, or to reflect in advance of whole-class discussion.

References

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- Horner, Bruce, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, John Trimbur. “Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach.” *Faculty Scholarship*, 2011, pp. 303-321.
- Young, Vershawn Ashanti, Edward Barrett, Y’Shanda Young Rivera, Kim Brian Lovejoy. *Other People’s English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2014.

See also

High-stakes and Low-stakes Assignments