## Write to Learn Strategies to Combat Passivity, Deepen Knowledge, and Increase Recall

##### General Strategies

* Don’t mark-up & grade: Assigning writing ≠ assigned grading
* Instead, light evaluation:
	+ explain the light evaluation approach to students: that it improves learning, that you’re not reading, marking, and grading traditionally
	+ give credit for number of words, frequency of writing
	+ grade simply: complete/incomplete
* Assign peer feedback: students write, students read, students comment
	+ be directive in peer feedback. For example, “Read peers’ feedback and 1) Summarize in two sentence; 2) Offer a countering perspective, and 3) Offer a suggestion
* Vary the writing to learn activities, modalities, formats, etc.
	+ e.g., On index cards by hand vs on a live google doc;
	+ e.g., Instructo to write freely or write to a specific question, etc.
* Convert discussion questions to write-at-your seat questions: Take a standard question that you ask the class, anticipating taking 4-5 respondents’ answers, and turn that into a question you ask every student to respond to in writing at their seat.

##### Some Uses of Discussion Board on Canvas

1. To Have Students Reflect on their Understanding of a Topic
2. To Have Students Reflect on their Past Experiences with a Process (Math, Writing, Science)
3. To Collect Initial Thoughts on An Assigned Reading and as a Text to Start an In-Class Discussion

##### Suggestions from Bean’s Engaging Ideas:

1. Writing at the Beginning of Class to Probe a Subject
2. Writing During Class to Refocus a Lagging Discussion or Cool Off A Heated One
3. Writing During Class to Ask Questions or Express Confusion
4. Writing at the End of Class to Sum Up a Lecture or Discussion

##### Beginning of Class Activities:

* Focused Summaries: write out a paragraph for assigned reading, with specific directions; i.e., what is the argument & what are 3 supporting examples.
* Annotations: write out key ideas of assigned reading and briefly evaluate strengths & weaknesses of article’s argument or research.
* Counter-argument: Argue against the author’s position (strategy helps writer to better understand author’s position)

##### Middle-of-Class Activities:

Sometimes a class goes off the rails. The room becomes dead, students seem distracted or confused, but questions don’t elicit useful responses or liven the room. Or, alternatively, sometimes a class becomes emotionally charged, stressful for instructor and students. People are not expressing themselves well, and learning is in jeopardy.

Writing in class can break these logjams.

* Quote response. When students are struggling with a reading, point them to specific passage(s) and ask them to summarize and respond. (Perhaps then share with a peer.)
* What is happening to you right now as a learner? Craft a question that you can pose to the class to help you become more engaged, more clear on the material, better able to learn.
* Describe the discussion that just occured from your perspective. If you observed disagreement, can you find a middle ground? That is, do you think the disagreeing parties share any common perspectives, concerns, or beliefs? What are those?
* What do you still not understand about the concept/lecture/lesson that was introduced?
* Summarize what just happened in class to a classmate who is not in attendance today.

##### End-of-Class Activities

* Teach others: at the conclusion of unit, write out to an imaginary absent classmate the major themes, discoveries, and questions of the unit.
* What did I learn? A focused quick detailing to self what one has learned, with expectation of identifying a specific number of independent points.
* Identifying the conflicts: Review the major issues discussed during this class/unit, and identify conflicting opinions, stating the opinion of each side.

##### Pre-Writing Activities -- during the weeks before paper is due

* Problem statement and problem solving: students draft two statements in relationship to the essay they intend to write -- a problem statement, and a statement explaining the proposed solution
* Outlining. Students seldom outline, but if asked to outline in-class, and then share that outline, they often will not only write an outline, but use it to guide their drafting
* Fast-draft -- in class, give students a set amount of time -- 25 minutes -- to draft their entire essay. Explain that they can leave blocks of text out -- quotations, examples, details -- but they simply must get from introduction to conclusion in the time allotted. The purpose of the fast draft is it forces writers to get all the way to the end, which is often the point at which writers actually figure out what they want to say. The instruction then is to re-write the essay from the vantage point gained at the conclusion of the fast-draft.
* Writing calendar/plan -- Ask students to chart out a specific strategy for completing an upcoming assignment. List all the specific aspects of preparing the assignment, and for each aspect, students should provide a day and time frame. For example: Feb 4: Research in library from 3-5:3; Feb 6: Research in library from 3-5; Feb 8: Write outline from 10-11, etc.

For more ideas and research sources, ses the WAC Clearinghouse, “Writing-to-Learn Activities”: <https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/wac/intro/wtl/wtlactivities/#wtl_c>

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