

Writing to Learn Strategies

By using writing-to-learn strategies in your course, you can help your students realize the idea-generating potential of writing and its value even when it is not graded. They will have practice in the sort of single-draft writing expected of them in exam situations. And these writing strategies help students focus their ideas as they prepare to write more formal communication.

1. **Focused timed writings:** Students write for five or 10 minutes in class on a topic that will help them focus on the subject to be discussed that day. Topics for such timed writings can include
 - a question to answer on the assigned reading or the previous day's lecture,
 - a term to define from the reading,
 - an issue to respond to,
 - or a concept to explain.
2. **Out-of-class writings:** To help students understand the material, they can be asked to write summaries of lecture or textbook material or to write 1-2 page papers on topics similar to those suggested above for the timed writings.
3. **Journals:** While teachers can use the free journal (in which students write about anything they want to, with entries a certain length and frequency), two other kinds can help students to think about the subject matter:
 - **Focused journals:** Students keep notebooks containing specific assignments. For example:
 1. they could do lab write-ups
 2. record relevant current events
 3. answer study questions (from a text or teacher handout)
 4. record difficulties they experience with the class material and how they overcome those difficulties.
 - **Double-entry journals:** Students keep notes from readings and lectures on one page of their notebooks and, on the facing page, respond to and analyze those notes. For more information, consult our [Teaching with Journals](#) Page.
4. **Preparatory writings:** If term papers or projects are assigned in a class, students can do assignments that get them started early and that help them clarify their ideas. (The teacher can also help students before grading the final paper.) For example:
 - Students can write proposals for their term paper or project,
 - summaries of their research,
 - annotated bibliographies,
 - even progress reports.