

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 writing is not graded. They will have practice in the sort of single-draft writing expected of them in exam situations. 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:
4. **Focused journals:** Students keep notebooks containing specific assignments. For example, students could:
 - do lab write-ups,
 - record relevant current events,
 - answer study questions (from a text or teacher handout), or
 - record difficulties they experience with the class material and how they overcome those difficulties.
5. **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.
6. **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, or
 - progress reports.