### ‘WRITE TO LEARN’ ACTIVITIES – SOCIAL SCIENCES

#### IN-CLASS WRITING (Five Common Activities)

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<th>Type of Activity</th>
<th>Objective</th>
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<th>Examples</th>
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| Free Writes            | To activate prior knowledge or generate ideas by free association. Students write about a predetermined topic for a brief, specified number of minutes (1-5 minutes) as fast as they can and put words on paper. | • works as a good warm-up at the beginning of class  
• instructors can pose an opening/introduction question related to the day’s topic  
• can be used to wrap up the day’s topic or lecture or to help connect ideas  
• can be used to supplement reading content  
• can be used to moderate discussion activities  
• instructors can also use exam review questions as free writes to help students prepare for a test. | “What do you know about X?”  
“In your opinion, is overpopulation the cause of poverty, hunger, and ecological degradation? Take 3 minutes to write out your ideas. Then read and share your ideas with a partner.”  
“What did you learn today about X?”  
“What questions are left unanswered in regards to X?”  
“Summarize concept X or concepts XYZ that we’ve been discussing in class today.”  
“What part of this concept/these concepts confuse(s) you?”  
“Explain what we learned today in your own words.”  
“What is the relationship between last day’s topic and today’s?”  
“What part of this concept/these concepts confuse(s) you?”  
What questions do you have about the last reading?”  
“What were the most important points in the last reading?” |
| Paragraph Writing      | Students write, read and share their paragraphs. Can be used to:  
• Define a concept you’ve presented  
• Apply a principle to the students’ experience  
• Make connections with previous learning  
• Summarize or synthesize important points from a lecture or assigned reading  
• Translate a principle into a word problem | Sample Paragraph Writing Prompt Based on Assigned Reading:  
A. Read or skim the two sections, ”Neo-Malthusianism with a Green Tinge” and “Conclusion” of the Williams (2009) article.  
B. In a free writing paragraph, answer: “According to Williams (2009), is overpopulation the cause of poverty, hunger, and ecological degradation? Take 5 minutes to write your paragraph. Then read and share your paragraph with your group.” |
| One-Sentence Summaries | Have students write one-sentence summaries of a lecture, reading assignment, or discussion. | Topic Prompt:  
“Using the same text source for our last activity on “Paragraph Writing,” write a 1-sentence summary of the reading assignment. Then share your ideas with someone from another discipline (outside of your area of Social Sciences, Humanities, or Science).” |
| Writing Questions      | Have students write 2 or 3 questions concerning the main ideas or concepts in a reading | Topic Prompt:  
“Using the same text source as above, jot down 2 or 3 questions you have concerning the main ideas or concepts in the reading. Then share your ideas with another new person from another discipline (outside of your area of Social Sciences, Humanities, or Science).” |
| The One-Minute Paper   | Students summarize the most important or most useful point(s) from the lecture, reading assignment, or discussion; Students can write questions that remain as well. | Sample One-Minute Writing Prompt from Today’s Presentation:  
“What are the basic ideas behind the concept “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC) that we learned today?” |
**OTHER IN-CLASS WRITING ACTIVITIES**

- **Writing Assignment Idea Generation:**
  - Use class time for students to brainstorm & generate ideas for a writing assignment.

- **Anonymous Question Box:**
  - Make a question box for students to place things they would find useful to review before an exam. This could also be done by anonymous submissions of sheets of paper in class or online.

- **Mock Test Creation:**
  - Use class time for students to brainstorm & review ideas before exams.

- **"First Day" Writing Activities:**
  - **Some Ideas for short writing prompts:**
    1. Give students a general question to introduce them to the general material on the first day.
    2. Ask them to write a short response to submit to you; you can return it to the students at the end of term as a reflective exercise.
    3. Toss out a "playground" question for them to answer in groups, or for you to put answers on the board. Ease them into contributing with a friendly assignment.
    4. Have students jot down any fears or anxieties they have as they enter your course.

- **In-Class Stop & Write:**
  - This can be used when you feel students may need a moment to focus attention, assimilate information or articulate a question. It can help to refocus a class discussion or attention (including yours! 😊).

- **Short Answer Writing:**
  - The instructor poses a question. Students write & share answers with partners or the class.

- **Exam Prep:**
  - Mock Test Creation: Use class time for students to brainstorm & review ideas before exams.

- **Group Work:**
  - **Group Paragraph Writing:**
    - Student groups join to write a collaborative response to a topic.
  - **Buzz Groups:**
    - Students work as a group to write down issues or specific topics or concepts from a reading. To diversify, students can write on note paper, poster board, etc.
  - **Snowballing:**
    - This involves expanding groups. Students prepare a question or response alone. Then they join a partner, pair, etc. to compare and discuss.

- **Writing:**
  - **Visual Representation:**
    - Instructors can lead brainstorming of main themes through visual representation or drawing. This works very well as an introduction to dispelling myths, stereotypes, and stigma.
    - **Example:** "Take a minute to draw some pictures of the first few things that come to mind when you think of X."
    - Sample topics: poverty, sex worker, disability, etc.

- **Visual:**

- **Other:**
  - **In-Class Stop & Write:**
    - This can be used when you feel students may need a moment to focus attention, assimilate information or articulate a question. It can help to refocus a class discussion or attention (including yours! 😊).

- **Alternative Views:**
  - Have students write alternative points of view to a different topic relative to your course.
  - **Psychology Class Example:** "How would the various viewpoints of Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner, and Carl Rogers differ on the causes of teen pregnancy?"
  - **Women's Studies Example:** "What were the primary concerns for women in 1) the first, 2) second, 3) third waves of feminist activism?"
  - **Social Science Class Example:** "How would poverty be explained from three different perspectives: Liberalism, Marxism, and Third Wave Feminism?"

- **Group Paragraph Writing:**
  - Student groups join to write a collaborative response to a topic.
**OUT-OF-CLASS WRITING ACTIVITIES**

- **Journals:**
  - This can include logs based on reading (combined with SQRRRW - Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review, Write skills/SPAR skills), writing logs, lecture logs, or thinking logs; journals can be ongoing; prompts can remain constant or vary.

- **Free Writes as Homework:**
  - Students can write about what they read & what they don’t understand; this can include notes & reflection; Instructors can change prompts.

- **Abstract Paragraph Summaries of Readings:**
  - Students can practice writing abstract-style paragraphs for chapters or readings as a summary of the main points.

- **Response Papers:**
  - Students can respond to particular features of a reading or the effectiveness of logical argument; evidence provided.

- **Short Synthesis Papers:**
  - Students can work through commonalities across several readings in their writing.

- **Exploratory Writing Assignments:**
  - Ask students to compare two concepts from a reading, connect a concept from the reading to some experience in their lives, or work out a definition in writing.

- **Annotation Paragraph of Readings:**
  - Students can practice writing annotation paragraphs that include key ideas, strengths, & weaknesses geared toward a particular class project or assignment.

- **Class Discussion Questions:**
  - Have students generate questions for discussion activities.

- **Famous Person Question Period:**
  - Students can generate a list of questions they would pose to the author of a reading or a famous figure in the field.

- **Collaborative Team Reports or Writing:**
  - Students join together for collaborative writing.

- **Compact Essays:**
  - Have students write a 2 or 3 page essay on a key course concept or topic. It’s good to assign different groups different topics. Then they have to condense their own essay to 1 page & share it with classmates. The other students read & comment on it. Finally, they can write a group paper that combines the best of their ideas in 1 page.

- **Record Challenges:**
  - Students can jot down notes concerning where they are stuck or confused about certain points.

- **Out-of-Class Activities**
  - Based on Readings
  - Other
  - Based on Course Concepts
  - Assignments/Presentations

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**Debate Note Preparation**

Have students prepare written notes for debate format.

Roles:
- First Affirmative – defines main terms & outlines the affirmative case
- First Negative – contests any badly defined terms & outlines the negative case
- Second Affirmative and Second Negative – complete the case, especially with evidence.
- Rebuttals – show weaknesses in the most important arguments of the opposing case
- Question period

Have student observers of the debate follow up in written form and make a judgment in written form with reasons & evidence.

**Writer’s Log Submissions**

Have students submit a writer's log for submission of assignment drafts. Ask the students about their main point, how the writing went, which parts seem strong, weak, what questions they have for their readers, etc. This works like a reflection when students submit a draft assignment.

❖ **ONLINE WRITE-TO-LEARN OPTIONS**

Many of the activities can be tailored to online formats:

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<th>Discussion boards</th>
<th>Puzzlemaker</th>
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<td>• Students can respond to certain topics or prompts in these forums and instructors can highlight interesting or relevant posts.</td>
<td>• Students can post provocative questions, queries, or summary/analysis of labs or lectures on an electronic bulletin board or Web forum for class comment.</td>
<td>• This is a fun tool for students or instructors to create crosswords, word searches, etc. for key concepts and ideas.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Link: <a href="http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/?CFID=3208214&amp;CFTOKEN=18370909">http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/?CFID=3208214&amp;CFTOKEN=18370909</a></td>
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