

Writing Activities

Writing facilitates and enhances learning because ...

- It forces students to be “actively engaged” (in part, because it is multi-sensory).
- It improves memory function.
- It is both analytic and creative.
- It allows for immediate or long-term feedback (excellent for engaging in a conversation).
- It is physical, visible, personal.

WTL

- Exercises are often designed as learning tools rather than assessment tools
- Learning through writing can take place even if you don't grade or sometimes even read the writing
- Exercises are often not assessed, can involve multiple revisions, and/or can be completed as group work
- Exercises are often short (between one and five minutes long)
- Can be done in class or out of class

Have you used WTL exercises in tutorial? If so, how did they go?

Activities

Free Writes

- Students write about a predetermined topic for a brief, specified number of minutes (1-5 minutes) as fast as they can put words on paper.
- Objective: to activate prior knowledge or generate ideas by free association
- This works as a good warm-up at the beginning of class, or can be used during the middle of a class to restore focus or touch base, or can function as a good closure to a class.

Sample prompts

Social Sciences

In your opinion, is overpopulation the cause of poverty, hunger, and ecological degradation?

Sciences

In your opinion, should scientists feed polar bears to save them from starvation?

- What learning objectives might you have for assigning the above questions as free writes?
- What would be a good free write prompt for your course, say in your first or second tutorial?

A two minute Free Write prompt: In your opinion, what are the best ways to help students develop as writers?

Paragraph Writing

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

Note: It is common practice to get students to share their paragraphs.

Sample prompts

Social Sciences

According to the Williams (2009), is overpopulation the cause of poverty, hunger, and ecological degradation?

Sciences

What do Molnar, Derocher, Thiemann, & Lewis (2010) suggest is absolutely necessary for the survival, reproduction, and abundance of polar bears?

A paragraph prompt: In a paragraph, outline the way that the WDI supports writing instruction at UTM.

One-Sentence Summaries

These are great for ensuring that students understand concepts—and/or for helping you realize what they might not have gotten. They also train students in summarizing and paraphrasing, which are very useful skills. They are great at the start and end of tutorials, or used as “time outs” or ways to change the subject.

Writing Exercise

Write a 1-sentence summary of the reading assignment.

Or

Write a 1-sentence summary of the lecture this week.

Questions

Sample writing exercise: “Jot down 2 or 3 questions you have concerning the main ideas or concepts in this week’s reading.”

Why is it useful for students to write down questions?

Please write down 2 or 3 questions you have concerning the WAC/WID material that we have discussed today.

The One-Minute Paper

Students summarize or ask questions about the most important or most useful point(s) from the lecture, reading assignment, or discussion.

Sample exercise: Which is more important to have as a focus for your tutorial, write to learn or learn to write? Why?