WRITING ACROSS CARROLL

Smile More, Talk Less:
Assigning Writing
as a Pedagogical
Alternative to Lecture

MONDAY
FEBRUARY 3
12:00 PM
O'MALLEY 47



USING REFLECTIVE WRITING IN SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning courses allow students to connect their academic and civic lives. Writing—because it can be a structured, reflective process—helps students make that connection and begin to understand important social issues that face us today. At the

same time, thoughtful writing offers students an opportunity to reflect on and integrate their placement experiences into their academic lives. The writing tasks should reinforce your specific teaching goals for the course. These tasks can range from a simple low-stakes assignment, such as a guided journal, to a high-stakes, formal assignment, such as an analysis of the placement. Additionally—working individually or in groups—students can develop progress reports, organizational documents, oral presentations, or brochures for their agency, thus creating professional samples for their portfolios.

Finally, and just as importantly, as you read their writing or listen to their presentations, you can monitor your students' experiences and provide essential feedback.

FAQ: LOW-STAKES, EXPLORATORY WRITING

What are low-stakes, exploratory assignments? These assignments are short and require little or no grading. Often written in journal format, they are designed to get students thinking more deeply about their service learning experiences by exploring various aspects of an issue or considering several sides of a topic. They can be used to stimulate class discussions, get started on more formal assignments, or determine what the students have learned in a specific lecture.

Exploratory writing is messy in terms of grammar, organization, and spelling because thinking itself is a messy process. John Bean of Seattle University compares exploratory writing to "a musician's early practice sessions on a complex new piece. . ." (101). Here, the goal is to develop good ideas, not polished writing.

What is the student payoff? Students get involved in both your course and their placement. They can safely explore various points of view, refine insights, try out new ideas, and test their own thinking skills, all without worrying about being graded on the quality of the writing. As an added benefit, low stakes assignments can form the kernel of longer, more formal assignments you may wish to make.

How should I grade such assignments? Because most students need an incentive, the writing should count. You can use something as simple as a check or limited points to recognize a completed assignment. In your syllabus, you announce how much each assignment counts toward the final grade.

- The points can be based on the amount of writing or the quality of content or both. *Inadequate effort does not have to earn points*.
- Many students seem satisfied with a check-plus for outstanding work, a check for a satisfactory entry,
 or a check-minus for an inadequate entry or one not turned in. Thus, credit generally reflects the
 extent to which the writing meets or exceeds your expectations.
- The good news is that you needn't spend time on issues like grammar, transitions, or style, *unless* you spot serious issues. Then you might make a general comment or indicate that the student should seek Writing Center support for a specific class of error. While the grading can be simple, you do need to comment on at least a few of the entries. When students know you read their journals, they put more effort into them.

Should exploratory writing be done in or out of class? It can be done either place. One advantage of inclass writing is that you can model good responses for your students. This type of modeling done early in the semester shows students the value of such writing.



How frequently should students do exploratory writing? Once a week is the absolute minimum, but two or three times a week is more likely to produce content that will deepen critical thinking.

How much time should students spend on this writing? Some faculty require a certain number of words per assignment (for example, 250 words or one double-spaced, typed page); others require that a certain amount of time (15 or 20 minutes) be allotted to each entry.

How will I manage carrying all that paper? Students can turn in their writing on loose-leaf paper (or in folders), notebooks (if your class isn't too large), or they can email the assignments as attachments.

How will I handle reading all that writing? You can collect 1/3 of the journals each week, or you can ask students to mark the three or four pieces they want you to read, or you can read a certain number of randomly selected entries from each student. As an added benefit, exploratory writing helps you monitor individual students and see what issues might be common. For the most part, a quick reading is all that is required.

How much commenting/responding should I do? While you don't want to wear out your hand, thoughtful comments or questions help students understand how the placement connects to your course and the readings. Remember, your comments may help the student work through a problem or look at an issue differently.

When you see common issues or problems—instead of responding to each student individually—you can address the class. Or if it is appropriate, you can ask students to address the problem in another exploratory writing assignment.

LOW-STAKES EXPLORATORY ASSIGNMENTS

JOURNALS

- **Guided journal**—students respond to specific prompts, such as a question or problem that you pose or a reading that you have assigned. (This ensures that students have done the reading.) Often these are assigned two or three times a week. In addition, you might ask students to consider various issues dealing with services, people, organizational structure, resources, etc.
- **Team journal**—students assigned to the same service learning placement take turns recording shared and individual experiences, and they can respond to one another's entries. Such journals can promote interaction within the team and expose students to several viewpoints. They can also interact using Track Changes on Microsoft Word, or they can use an electronic platform such as WebCT. To prevent coasting, make sure each author gets credit for his or her entries.
- **Critical incidents journal**—students describe and react to a critical incident each week. This journal allows students to write about specific issues and problems that they face in their placement. Critical incidents are defined at www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/fact/activities.html
- **Double-entry journal**—using two sheets of paper side by side or a single sheet of paper with a vertical line in the middle, students write about the course material or their service placement, and later they reflect on their initial writing. Students write their initial comments, questions, confusion, or insights on the left. Then, several days later they reread their entries and make comments on what they wrote. Such reflective journals show students how their thinking and attitudes are evolving. In addition, double-entry journals can help students distinguish between facts and analysis/interpretation. By looking at the amount written on each side (lots of writing left side, little writing on the right, or the reverse), students see where they need to do more problem-solving or fact-finding.
- **Contemporary issues journal**—students read articles in current newspapers and respond to them, showing how their course and service learning relates to the articles and life outside college.



OTHER LOW-STAKES ASSIGNMENTS

- **Electronic discussions**—students respond to prompts provided by the instructor and then respond to other students' responses. This works well on WebCT or on student blogs (xanga.com is a good site).
- **Thought letters**—somewhat longer than a journal entry, these are addressed to a friendly audience (such as parents) and encourage students to discuss problematic issues. Such assignments help students see the importance of choosing specific information for a specific audience.
- **Focused freewrites**—at the beginning or end of class, students spend 5 minutes freewriting (no stopping, analyzing, or editing) on a specific question (chosen by you) dealing with their placement.
- **Study questions for short answer or essay exams**—students develop potential questions for an exam. As an incentive, you pick one or two to appear on the exam.
- **Speculation memos**—students write this at the very beginning of the term, speculating about their placement. At the end of the semester, they reread this memo and respond to it.

HIGH-STAKES FORMAL WRITING AND PRESENTATIONS

Low-stakes reflective writing can be an important end to itself. However, you can scaffold longer formal assignments upon earlier exploratory writing. As you would expect, formal assignments are graded on everything from content and style to format and grammar. Below are some nontraditional formal assignments—written individually or groups—that work well with service learning courses.

- Formal progress reports about the placement
- A history of the agency
- Internal or external documents that conduct the business of the agency
- Letter to director of the agency describing what the student learned
- Letter to a student who will be placed in this agency in the following semester
- A supported recommendation to future students undertaking the same project
- An article for the agency newsletter
- Press release
- Brochure, poster, or report to the funding agency

In addition, students can make individual or group oral presentations to the class about the agency or to the agency about their work, a public service announcement, or a PowerPoint presentation for a campus event.

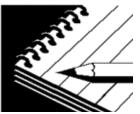
USEFUL SOURCES

Bean, John C. Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Very useful in the compilation of this tipsheet:

http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection





USING WRITING IN LARGE CLASSES

Students develop disciplinary knowledge and become better critical thinkers by engaging in a rich variety of writing and speaking activities throughout their undergraduate experience. Using writing in your classes encourages students to become more active and engaged learners while increasing their learning and

retention. Reviewing their writing keeps you in closer touch with the learning of your students. For many who teach large classes, however, the idea of adding writing to their courses is daunting: writing takes time in courses where there is already too much content to cover. And many faculty feel they have too little expertise in grammar or in teaching and grading writing. So, the question arises: How difficult are these obstacles to overcome?

Not terribly difficult. Twenty years of Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing In the Disciplines have created multiple ways to weave writing into large enrollment courses. You can use short, informal in-class assignments such as minute-writes, 5-minute microthemes, or group work to evaluate writing. You can encourage out-of-class writing using email, bulletin boards, chat, or other technology tools. You can tie assignments to teamwork and problem-based learning to take advantage of the power of collaborative learning and writing. All of these can add significant amounts of writing efficiently while not imposing a huge burden on you. If you regularly employ frequent, short writing assignments, your students will see that that writing is important and expected, even in large classes.

WRITING TO LEARN, NOT LEARNING TO WRITE

When you think of adding writing to your class, what comes to mind? Probably research reports, essays, reviews of the literature, term papers or position papers. These formal assignments offer students an opportunity to develop and communicate information and ideas in a traditional high-stakes way that demands a lot of your time in grading. It may be a better use of your time, however, to use and easy-to-implement low-stakes writing activities that also engage students in thinking and writing. As Eric Hobson and Kenneth Schafermeyer remind us in the *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, "After all, the educational objective . . . is not for the students to learn to write, but for them to learn to use writing as a tool to enhance their learning and their thinking" (424). (In the second half of this tipsheet, we suggest a number of ways you can efficiently employ these kinds of longer assignments.)

At The St. Louis College of Pharmacy, Hobson and Schafermeyer developed a number of low-stakes writing activities for a class of 182 students, based on six criteria. (These criteria also work for oral assignments.)

- 1. Writing should be easily integrated.
- 2. Writing should be an efficient learning tool, serving multiple goals concurrently.
- 3. Writing should be woven into the coursework.
- 4. Writing should build designated higher-order critical thinking skills.
- 5. Writing should enhance students' problem-solving abilities.
- 6. Writing should not become a burden to evaluate.

LOW-STAKES ASSIGNMENTS

These varied mini-papers can bring considerable writing into the classroom. While writing might typically receive credit, it need not all be graded. Students can use writing to learn content without your grading everything. (See Bean for fuller discussion.)



• Minute-writes —On 3x5 note cards, students write a quick response to a question you pose at some point during class. The question might be on the previous night's reading, or it might ask students to link two recent lecture topics. You might post the question on the board for students who arrive early and want an extra few minutes to consider and write. A minute might seem too short, but with practice, students learn to be concise and on topic. As an added benefit, students are primed and ready to go when you begin your lecture or class discussion. After collecting the cards, you can quickly review a few before launching the day's lecture or activities to see how well students understand. Additionally, these cards replace the calling of roll.

At the end of the class, pose a minute-write question about the day's material. If students seem to be confused, you know immediately and can send a clarifying email or begin the next class addressing the issue.

Students, aware that you will be looking over these minute-writes, usually come to class prepared to settle down and focus immediately. They begin think of writing as a crucial form of learning. Finally, knowing that they may be asked to comment on a reading assignment, students are encouraged to keep up with the homework.

- **Microthemes** If the topic or question is important, you can begin class with something longer—a microtheme of five minutes or so. Used mid-class, a micro-theme serves as a break between activities. After students write, usually on both sides of a large note card (5x8), they turn their responses in, or trade them with a classmate in a think-pair-share activity. You can adapt microthemes to include any of the following:
 - Quote Responses Students write for five minutes about one or two key quotations you post from previous night's reading. Thus, they focus on the important or difficult parts of the reading. You may ask them to share their responses in pairs or small groups, reporting out the issues that still remain after discussion. This reporting can come as a brief oral activity or the group can create one new note card for you (or your GTAs) to read.
 - **Lecture Summaries** A bit longer than a 5-minute microtheme, these are assigned at the end of class and turned in the next day. They encourage better listening by making your students accountable for what you've raised in lecture. In addition, they become more active in their own learning process—not simply taking notes for a future test, but trying to understand key concepts behind your lecture.
 - Mid-lecture Feedback These work well mid-lecture or near the end of class, especially if the lecture is complex. Students write questions about the lecture or about questions posed during a lecture. This activity helps them zero in on what they may not understand. You can ask a few students to read their comments and allow for some questions and answers or discussion—perhaps by students who might not normally raise their hands in class. Students who have questions or ideas that don't get aired have nonetheless gained by focusing on the material at hand and writing their questions or comments.
- **Doubting/Believing Game** Engaging in Peter Elbow's Doubting/Believing game, students explore two sides of an issue. First, students earnestly doubt a proposition and then summarize their conclusions in writing. Next, they earnestly believe the same position, again summarizing their best reasons or evidence. Doubts and beliefs are then shared in pairs or small groups.
- **Guided Journals or Learning Logs** –In ongoing journals, students write summaries of concepts raised in class. Log entries may be metacognitive (where students reflect on their own learning process). In these, students respond to your prompts such as *What's been difficult to understand? What problems are most interesting? What areas do you need to review?* The idea is not for students to write sparkling prose, but for them to probe for ideas and reflect productively.

Have students keep their journals in a three-ring binder on loose-leaf paper, then, they turn in only the paper. You can also invite email submissions. You can't read all the journals, but you can collect pages periodically or from a random number of students each time. Silvia and Hom at UC Davis suggest *Journal Roulette*. Students are assigned to one of 12 groups. On a given day, the instructor rolls the dice and collects journals from the group whose number has been rolled.

Grading journals can be simple – use a checkmark system and write one or two comments prompted by what the student has written: *I think your ideas on wind dynamics are a bit unusual, but actually they are supported by some research. You might look at Hartley and Korach.* Such response show your students that you have read the entries and are engaged, even if briefly, with them. Such personal responses are important and valued by students in large classes.

• Reading Journals – You can require reading journal entries as homework, assigning two or three responses a week to the textbook or other readings. You need not collect all of them weekly, but do collect them regularly and give credit for effort. Students know you are reading their work and become more current with the out-of-class reading. Reading journals work best when you generate questions for students. Your prompts should help students go beyond summary early in the semester to higher-order thinking skills such as analysis or synthesis later in the semester.

Summarize the three main points of each of this week's readings, focusing on data embedded in graphs and tables. Does some data weaken the authors' main points?

Our readings argue two sides of globalization. Can you argue a third position?

• Question/Comment Box - Keep a shoebox where students can anonymously put note cards with questions at the end of class. Questions can be about lecture content, concerns about how material is covered in class, or outside reading. While their comments are extremely short, students learn that their written comments or questions must be clear in order to be understood.

LONGER HIGH-STAKES ASSIGNMENTS

If you are considering longer research papers or analyses, you can reduce the time you spend grading final drafts and increase the quality of student thinking and writing by applying some of the following principles.

- Invest Your Time Earlier When It Counts Most.
 - Limit post-mortem grading: Why spend the bulk of your time writing extensive comments justifying grades on papers that will not be revised? When students get papers back, they generally look at the grade, period. If it's the end of the semester, many do not pick up their final papers. Hours of your time sit on the floor outside your office. Sadly, you have wasted time that you could have spent commenting on early drafts or holding conferences. When students can take your timely suggestions and apply them to required revisions of their papers, they learn more and their papers improve.
 - **Provide good models of the completed paper**: Students see the target. Even better, you can annotate the models, highlighting typical strengths and weaknesses.
 - **Develop and use rubrics** (evaluative guidelines) to guide students in their writing, and you make your job of grading more efficient.
 - Introduce self-editing techniques Provide checklists and teach students to create *after-the-fact outlines* of drafts so they can see their organization more clearly, determine whether paragraphs contain more than one topic, or spot gaps in thesis support. (Also, if they come to office hours with these, you can spot problems without reading the entire paper.)
- Sequence or Scaffold Longer Assignments: Break down the assignment into smaller, manageable tasks with deadlines throughout the semester or tasks that build on each other. Students write throughout the semester instead of just at the end, and they get your feedback early, when it counts.



- **Assign More--but Shorter--Papers:** Assign 2 or 3 short papers rather than one long paper. Students get more comments from you on the first paper and are better able to make improvements later.
- Use Peer Groups: Create small groups to read and critique each other's drafts in class or electronically using WebCT, for example. Train students what criteria to use and how to respond. You can also develop Problem-Based Learning (PBL) assignments to engage your students collaboratively in discipline-specific problems. Because students share grades for group papers and presentations, there is tremendous incentive to share knowledge and build on each other's best work.
- Consider Publishing: Develop ways students can "publish" their work. Having a public forum motivates students to produce stronger work because they see their writing as connected to more than the professor. Students can publish to WebCT, a class book, a bulletin board, or a web log (*blog*). You could also stage a poster session for students with members of your department participating. Beyond having a real audience for their work, students can see the current or previous students' work.
- **Employ Technology Tools:** In addition to WebCT and email, there are sophisticated systems using computers to organize peer review or that give students feedback before the instructor sees the work.
- Work With Your Writing Center: Writing Center staff wants to work with faculty. Writing Center instructors could visit you class at the beginning of the term to talk about the Center and effective writing and rewriting practices. Or they could collaborate on handouts tailored to your needs. Or you could arrange group review sessions under the guidance of a Writing tutor.

USEFUL SOURCES:

- Bean, J.C. Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Hobson, E. Schafermeyer, K. "Writing and Critical Thinking: Writing to Learn in Large Classes. *American Journal of Pharmacological Education*. 58 pp. 423-7. 1994.
- Oswai, S. "Group Oral Presentations as Support for Writing in Large Classes." *Business Communication Quarterly* 65.1. pp. 71-79. 2002.
- Towns, M. et al., "Interinstitutional Peer Review on the Internet: Crossing Boundaries Electronically in a Student-Refereed Assignment," *Journal of College Science Teaching* 30.4. pp. 256-260. 1999. (1999 NSTA Gustav Ohaus Award for Innovation in College Science Teaching)

Writing Across the Curriculum: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/WAC/

Writing to learn in large classes and ideas for minute writes, and journals:

http://www.psu.edu/dept/cew/faculty/informal.htm

http://www.writing.ku.edu/instructors/docs/large_class.shtml

Tips on grading, using rubrics, breaking down assignments:

http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/grading.html managing grading

One-minute paper

Time requirements: 3-5 minutes

Special features: The one-minute paper is an example of a written, in-class activity. It is a flexible way to acquire feedback on the course material and how students are responding to that material. The one-minute paper can be done especially quickly and it shows students that they can write quickly and spontaneously, and enhances general writing ability.

Procedure:

- 1. Give a prompt for the paper such as "what was the most important concept of this lecture?" or "what was the muddiest point of this lecture?"
- 2. Give students one or two minutes to think about the topic without writing anything.
- 3. Give students a short period of time (1 minute?) to write as much as they can.
- 4. Collect papers (depending on the class atmosphere and the types of questions used, you may ask students to put their names on them but generally these ungraded assignments are left anonymous to encourage open responses to the questions.)

Function in the class: Assign one-minute papers at the end of a class to gauge comprehension, provide general writing practice, and give students an incentive to absorb and comprehend course material. Consider using the content of one-minute papers to plan content of upcoming classes: when students see that the instructor responds to their concerns, confusions, and questions in future classes, they will be motivated to participate.

HS278/SC259
"Cuba: Past and Present"
Dr. Marsilli/Dr. Vaquera
Spring 20

HEURISTIC WRITING

Reflect about the following statement:

"All historians seek in their narratives an appropriate balance between change and continuity." (Davidson and Lytle, After the Fact. The Art of Historical Detection, p.: 28)

What do you think it means? Can you think of examples not presented in the text?

Context:

Davidson and Lytle discuss the role of historians as detectives. Historians need to put together a puzzle borrowing information from other disciplines and then weave it in a coherent narrative about historical events and their effects upon human society and nature. In so doing, historians must pay attention to processes (which are traceable via notions of change and continuity). Students are hence prompted to think about the significance of "change" and "continuity" to trace historical processes. In addition, they need to think about how historians can track and communicate that "balance". Ultimately, students are to think of history writing as the construction of "narratives".

Gloria and I used this activity early in the semester to invite student to think about the differences and synergies between history and sociology. We think the activity produced a fruitful class discussion.

Assignment #2: 6 Word Memoir

Length: 6 words

Points: 10

This assignment asks you to "take a snapshot" of yourself right now using only 6 carefully chosen words. This means that you must choose your words precisely and carefully, so that you can squeeze all of who you or think you are at this moment in those few words. (Think of it as a selfie without the visual.) Also, it's important to remember that this isn't just coming up with a clever sentence or personal motto {Live life to the fullest, or Take time to smell the roses}. It is 6 words that show who you are at this moment in your life—here at JCU, a "new", yet seasoned, second semester college student. It must be 6 words that hint at a much larger, more intricate story of who you are {or hope to be}.

You may draft on your computer. You may handwrite this assignment. You can use crayons, markers—whatever it takes to help describe yourself right now using 6 words. If you simply use 6 adjectives that show no logical connection, you will receive 7 points. It MUST be on a page of paper.

For example:

One of the most famous once attributed to Hemingway: "For Sale: baby shoes,

never worn."

Wordy girl: "Waiting indefinitely for life to begin."

Me, 8 years ago: School-age Son: Love my Car

Me, today: College Son: Hate Doing His Chores

Any questions? Ask now. Answers given!

Working with Toulmin:

Generate a list of **four (4)** reasons for and **four (4)** reasons against the following yes/no claims. State your reasons as "because" clauses. Brainstorm as many as possible.

Example:

Cocaine and heroin should be legalized:

- Because it will keep government out of people's private lives.
- Because it will cut down on muggings and robberies.
- Because it will cut down on prison overpopulation.
- Because it will change the economic structure of the underclass. and provide for socially productive jobs.

Cocaine and heroin should NOT be legalized:

- Because it will lead to an increase of drug users
- Because they have been proven to cause serious physiological and psychological damage to human brain and body.
- Because doing so will send the message that it's OK to use hard drugs.
- Because doing so will make them more accessible to children.

SO:

- 1. Kim Kardashian and other reality stars (or other iconoclastic entertainers) serve a valuable social function.
- 2. Medical insurance should cover alternative medicine (massage therapy, acupuncture, herbal treatments, etc.).
- 3. Attendance should be mandatory for every single college class.

Then: identify the unstated assumptions (warrants) {these are the biases/beliefs/values that possibly connect the writer/audience} for the following claims:

- 1. Cocaine and heroin should be legalized because it will keep the government out of people's private lives.
- 2. After school jobs are bad for high school students because they use up valuable study time.
- 3. We should strengthen the Endangered Species Act because doing so will preserve genetic diversity in the planet.

English 125 Library Session 2

In the previous session, you found and evaluated articles to use as possible topics for your research project. This second session will focus on developing working theses and creating search strategies to find relevant information for your topic(s) in the third session.

Similar to writing, successful research involves preparation. Research is a process and it requires planning and critical thinking. Write down your topic(s) below; you will be using your topic(s) to complete these exercises.

Write down a working thesis, antithesis and synthesis for the topic or topics you are considering in the space provided below. This is part of the research process, you are preparing to research your topic(s) and at this juncture all elements will be in a state of plasticity; they are not finished but in the state of becoming. As you proceed to develop these ideas, they may morph, taking unanticipated twists and turns as you gather resources to support them. At this stage everything is fluid.

Thesis:			
Antithesis:			
Synthesis:			

Keywords are one way to create search strategies to locate relevant information to support your research. Circle the keywords in each example from the preceding section and write them down in the space below. You will be drawing from your working thesis, antithesis and synthesis you developed in the previous exercise. Keywords can be synonyms, broader or narrower terms related to the main concepts of your topic(s).

How to Build a Strong Search:

Quotation Marks/Phrase Searching

Use quotation marks to search for a specific phrase.

Example: "hydraulic fracturing"

Boolean Operators: AND, OR, NOT.

Or—expands a search.

Example: "hydraulic fracturing" or fracking will retrieve sources containing either term, expanding your pool of resources.

And—narrows a search by inclusion.

Example: "hydraulic fracturing" and "environmental contamination" retrieves only sources that include both search terms, which limits the number of results.

Not—narrows a search by exclusion.

Example: "hydraulic fracturing" not "vertical boring" retrieves only sources that contain the first keyword, eliminating sources for keywords that follow **not**.

Truncation

Truncation: usually using an **asterisk***, increases the number of results you'll retrieve by searching for variant endings of a word root.

Example: tech* retrieves technology, technical, technique

Your Search

Using the keywords you generated earlier in this session and the search techniques introduced above, create a minimum of **5 search strategies** below that will help you find resources to support your research. Write your searches in the space provided below. You will use the searches you create to find sources for your topic using Lakeland library resources in the next session.

Example: fracking and waste water and pollution

2.
 3.

4.

5.