



## A SAMPLING OF INFORMAL WRITING ACTIVITIES

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Informal writing assignments offer many moments where students discover, explore, synthesize, and reflect on course materials and their learning processes. Since informal writings require little response, they can be useful even in large classes.

**Writing to Generate Ideas.** Free-writing refers to writing informally for a set amount of time, often just a few minutes. The aim is to keep writing to explore thoughts without concern for grammar, spelling, or sentence boundaries. A focused free-write might ask students to gather their thoughts in response to a specific question as a way to prepare for a full-class discussion.

**Checking-in Writing.** Teachers and students can communicate briefly and informally with one another about class concepts and/or class business. To check whether or not students understand the course material before moving forward, teachers may pause mid-class to ask students to explain a process, define a term, or give an example. Alternatively, teachers may ask for this type of brief check-in before or after class through email, a listserv, or an online bulletin board. A minute paper is another popular form of checking in. Students take a minute at the end of a class period to:

1. Explain the most significant thing learned from the day's class
2. Ask any remaining question related to the day's class

The instructor can then address questions at the start of the next class or make adjustments to the pace of the next class based on whether students are understanding key concepts or getting confused.

**Informal Reading Responses.** Asking students to write a page or two in response to course readings gives students opportunities to think more critically about what they've read. Reading responses may be written in class or for homework. These kinds of responses may ask students to answer a specific question, summarize key points, analyze content, explore structure, critique ideas, or make connections. Instructors may collect a random sampling for response, gradually rotating through the class so that every student receives a response once or twice.

**Journals.** Journals offer students a forum for exploratory writing in reaction to readings, classroom activities or projects, and related personal or academic experiences. Journals offer students an avenue for considering course-related concepts in an informal but regular way. Journals tend to range from 1-2 pages long. They can be quickly marked with minimal comments if the major criterion is engagement.

**Reflection.** Asking students to reflect on their work with course concepts offers them a chance to consider their work on a particular assignment or their progress throughout the semester. This kind of writing asks students to describe and analyze their process of doing an activity or learning an aspect of the course. Many instructors ask for brief reflections as students turn in a major assignment. This type of writing can also ask students to establish personal goals at the start of the semester, track their own progress toward those goals at the midterm point, and then look back at the end of the semester to gauge their achievements and consider how they will carry their knowledge forward.

**Genre Writings.** Asking students to write in different genres (memos, letters, poems, dialogues, posters, etc.) can allow new perspectives on course material.