

How writing can aid thinking: some ideas

1. Have students keep a writer's/thinker's notebook into which they jot ideas, define terms, start rough drafts, answer spontaneous questions, and otherwise use writing to encourage thought.
2. Ask students to write alternative endings to poems or short stories (with or without having seen the actual endings), letters from historical or fictional characters, mathematics problems, scientific articles for a children's magazine, or what-if historical accounts (what if Montcalm had defeated Wolfe in 1759, or Europeans had never come to North America?).
3. Have students write exam or quiz questions; at the end of a class period, get students to write and hand in questions about a lecture, lab, demonstration, or reading; stop mid-class and have students write a question, explanation, elaboration, or definition.
4. Ask students to produce intermediate texts between the blank page and the finished assignment: a proposal, an oral progress report (informal, in small groups), a draft that could be shared with classmates for feedback (collected and noted but not necessarily read by the teacher).
5. Design paired writing assignments that require students to write from different perspectives on the same issue, or consider the same phenomena in different historical periods, or otherwise divide a more complex topic into sub-topics. The talk required in preparation is a bonus learning activity.
6. Ask students to help you prepare instructional materials for next year's students so that writing is being used for readers in need and not just for evaluation.
7. Alter the purpose of and audience for writing tasks often. Write to persuade, amuse, explain, argue, propose, consider, explore; write for parents, younger/older students, each other, the newspaper.
8. Assign writing within a larger project and break tasks into smaller, integrated parts (jigsaw); make an assignment a whole-class project (e.g., a newspaper or magazine or website).
9. Allow students to create web sites, blogs, wikis. Draw on their writing strengths and experiences. Assign something that requires text-messaging.
10. Break the essay habit; get students to create poems, plays, short stories: letters, diaries, journals; lab reports, field notes, reviews; news reports, editorials, documentaries; posters, photos, collages; radio, YV, film, music; blogs, wikis.

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Some References and Web Resources

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