

## Writing Activities for large classes

### Get students to write early and often

- Students improve writing by...writing.
- Frequent, low-stakes, short activities (especially in class) get students in the habit of writing to
  - organize their experience (writing to learn);
  - explain, clarify, and explore, rather than just persuade (transactional) or record what they already thought;
  - generate ideas for discussion;
  - begin more formal writing projects.

### Students can benefit from ungraded and minimally graded assignments

- These activities do not require grading, or even intense review. Students can benefit from writing that instructors do not read.
- You may choose to review only a subset of students' responses and still get a sense for trends and themes.
- If you do want to grade shorter activities, focus on one or two things that you can review quickly. Be sure students know what you will be looking for.
- These activities can be tied to participation grade, or used as a way of taking attendance.
- Alternatively, you can ask students to not put their names on their responses. They may feel less pressure this way, which may be beneficial for sensitive or very challenging material. But they may also feel that there is less value for them. Try it both ways and see how students respond.
- Encourage student buy-in concerning ungraded work:
  - Explain to students what you think grades are for, and why you are/are not giving grades on a particular assignment.
  - Relate ungraded work clearly to graded work.
  - Help students see how ungraded work is useful to them.

### Consider other forms of writing

- Consider the variety of writing formats, audiences, and purposes. How might you use some of these to stimulate a plurality of perspectives, or encourage students to speak in different voices, or take a variety of positions on an issue?
  - Letter to the Editor
  - Research proposal
  - TED Talk script
  - Flash fiction or fictional dialogue

- Advertisement
- Speech to a town hall meeting, or before the U.N.

### **Help students expand their thinking related to writing projects**

- In small group discussion, students can create arguments to support or debunk a given interpretation.
- In paired interviews, pairs or trios of students interview one another about their work in progress. Students reformulate their written ideas in a verbal context, without referring to their drafts or notes.
- Peer Review often has at least as much value for the reviewer as for the person whose work is reviewed. But students may not know what you are asking them to do, and why, so be clear.
  - Provide very clear instructions for the reviewer. Consider using a short-answer test format. In other words, provide a short set of specific questions to which the reviewer must provide one- or two-sentence answers. (For example: “In your own words, write out what you think is the main point this paper is trying to make.” “
  - Ask the reviewer to focus on the positives in their peer’s written work, and to think carefully about what things work well and why.
  - Instead of asking the reviewer to use overly critical language, provide a prompt such as the following. “Identify one aspect of this paper that could use a little help. What suggestions would you make for a second draft?”

#### Sources:

Bean, John C. (2011) *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. Second edition. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Walvoord, Barbara E. and Virginia Johnson Anderson (2010) *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College*. Second edition. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.