
Enhance Your Teaching Using Writing Assignments

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ENHANCE Your Teaching

My goals in today's workshop are to

- Add to the number of writing assignments you know about and use in the classroom
 - Improve upon the teaching strategies you already use
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Enhance Your **TEACHING**

Ways of teaching

- Tell – Listen
 - Show – Observe
 - Ask – Perform/Do
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“As you enter a classroom ask yourself this question: *If there were no students in the room, could I do what I am planning to do? If your answer to the question is yes, don't do it.*”

Gen. Ruben Cubero, Dean of the Faculty, United States Air Force Academy

[from <http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/justintime/index.html>]

Your turn . . .

Cubero: “If there were no students in the room, could I do what I am planning to do? If your answer to the question is yes, don't do it”

Freewrite for 5 minutes (write without stopping, censoring, or correcting):

If you followed General Cubero's advice, what would class sessions be like?

Teacher- Versus Student-Centered

The teacher . . .

- Tells students what they should know

- Finds out what students know
- Regularly monitors student understanding
- Gives students opportunities to “own” the course content

. . . Using **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

- To help students finish homework before class
 - To encourage student participation in class discussions
 - To help students become involved and engaged
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Freewriting

- Writing without stopping, censoring, re-reading, or revising
 - “Thinking on paper”
 - Gives students opportunities to
 - Uncover previous knowledge
 - Make connections
 - Explore their thinking and ideas
 - Generate ideas
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Freewriting

- Ask students to write for a certain amount of time (3-10 minutes) on a particular topic, question, or issue
 - Assign before, during, or after a class discussion
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Knowledge Checks

- Students write answers to questions or complete a short activity
- Reveals students' prior knowledge & misconceptions
- Stimulates students' thinking; makes them aware of their current beliefs & knowledge
- Assign before presenting new material or giving a reading assignment

Knowledge Check: Sample Questions

Ethnic Studies Class on Hawai'i

1. How many people currently live in Hawai'i?
2. How many people lived in Hawai'i in the year 1700?
3. How many people lived in Hawai'i in the year 1000?

Global & Environmental Science

1. What factors contribute to the depletion of the ozone layer?
2. For each factor, give a brief explanation of why it depletes the ozone.

Knowledge Check: Sample Activities

Statistics/Economics/Psychology

- Interpret the data points on the scatter plot. Explain your reasoning in a couple sentences.

Literature

- Identify different types of poems (haiku, sonnet, etc.). For each, explain how you know in 1-2 sentences.

Your turn . . . knowledge check

On an index card,
define CASE-METHOD TEACHING.

Case Method / Problem-Based Learning

- Teacher provides students with a problem/issue
 - Current in field, complex, meaningful
 - Can be an individual or group activity
 - Amount of structure may vary: guiding questions, resources
- Helps students make course-to-profession connections
- Examples
 - Newspaper story about the decline of native fish in Hawaiian waters. Students tackle: What/How? Why? Solutions?
 - Business memo requesting advice on which financing method the Orange Grove company should use.

Case Method: Writing Assignments

- Short essay
- “Dear Abby” or “Dr. Science” response
- Micro presentation
- Case study (full report plus executive summary)

When Twins Marry Twins

Sally meets Harry in her junior year at college. It's love at first sight. They are married the following June. At their wedding rehearsal dinner, Sally's identical twin sister, Emma, meets Harry's identical twin brother Ken for the first time. It's another case of love at first sight. Emma and Ken get married the following year.

Three years later, both Sally and Emma are pregnant. But Sally is not sure she's delighted about the prospect of motherhood. She worries: Will our baby be exactly the same as Emma and Ken's baby?

Based on the case from <http://www.udel.edu/pbl/curric/biology-prob.html> by from Deborah E. Allen

When Twins Marry Twins

Guiding Questions for a Short Essay

1. Will their child look just like his or her "double cousin"? Why or why not?
2. Assuming that Sally is right and the children will look identical, will they also have similar personalities, behavior, and attitudes? Why or why not?
3. What is the maximum percent of the two children's genetic composition that could consist of identical genes (allelic versions)? The minimum percentage?

Based on the case from <http://www.udel.edu/pbl/curric/biology-prob.html> by from Deborah E. Allen.

"Dear Abby" or "Dr. Science" response

- Write the case as a letter from Sally asking for advice from Abby or Dr. Science
- Students write a response (fewer than 300 words)
- Jargon or technical terms must be explained in everyday language

3-Slide 5-Minute Micro Presentation

- Oral presentation accompanied by 3 slides:
 1. Problem in the field
 2. Innovation in field
 3. Consequences, issues, and/or future study
- Students present throughout the semester
- Start class with a student's micro presentation & then briefly discuss

Micro Presentation

- Example: next 3 slides

Land Mines Kill & Injure Long After War Ends



Civilians, many children, are killed or injured

UNICEF estimates

- 110 million land mines in 64 countries
- 800 deaths or injuries each month

Land mine warning sign in farmer's field



<http://www.unicef.org/sowc96pk/hidekill.htm>

Genetically-Altered Plant Detects Underground Mines



- Land mines leak **nitrogen dioxide**
- **Thale cress** [*Arabidopsis thaliana*]; fast growing, found world wide
- A gene added to the plant's DNA causes **green leaves to turn red** when the roots sense nitrogen dioxide in the soil (Aresa Biodetection, Danish company)

<http://www.mindfully.org/GE/2006/Arabidopsis-Thaliana-Explosives1mar06.htm>

Issues

- Land mines cased in plastic do not leak
- Clearing fields and planting
- Arid climates and water requirements
- "Escape" of genetically altered plants

Your turn . . . knowledge check

Flip the index card over.

1. Define CASE-METHOD TEACHING.
2. State one reason why a teacher might use it.

Admit Ticket

- A summary of an assigned reading is required to be admitted to class
 - Option: Ask for summary plus response
- Set the standard: define and discuss a model summary
- In-class activities
 - Use the summary as a jumping off point for discussion
 - Ask groups to share and decide on main points

Minute Paper, Quick Questions, Muddiest Point

- Students write answers to questions (usually in class)
- Assign after students finish a reading assignment or after class session, lecture/discussion, or group work.
- Encourages reflection and/or active listening
- Reinforces concepts covered in reading and/or class

Minute Paper: Examples

- After discussing/reading/seeing [Berliner's article],
 1. I know . . .
 2. I don't know . . . And I'd like to know because . . .
- After reading [Berliner's article],
 1. The main question raised by the author is . . .
 2. The author assumes that everyone knows/believes that . . .
 3. The central idea raised is . . .
 4. People are likely to agree with the author if . . .
 5. People are likely to disagree with the author if . . .

Quick Questions: Examples

After today's class meeting:

1. One thing I got from class today (that I didn't get earlier is) . . .
2. One question that I have is . . .
3. My question is important because . . .
4. One thing I hope we cover next class is . . . because . . .

Quick Questions: Examples

1. What was the most important thing you learned in class [discussion/group work] today?
2. What question is uppermost in your mind at the conclusion of this class session?

Muddiest Point: Example

- In the middle or after class/discussion/group work, students answer this question:

What was the muddiest point in today's lecture?

Grading Options

- Minus/Check/Plus Method (“—” “✓” “+”)
- Not graded, but required to pass course with “C” or better
- Tip: Explain the rationale behind the writing assignments
 - “I assign ‘knowledge checks’ because I care about what you already know. These help me be a better teacher”
 - “I ask you to freewrite to give you time to collect your thoughts before you are asked to speak in front of the class.”

Your turn . . .

1. Given what you’ve heard and seen this session, what was the most significant thing you learned?
2. What might you try in your course?

Thank You!

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