

Strategy: Student Writing Activities

Student writing can help reinforce content and lets students see things differently and think critically.

Origin

Cohen, C. (2003). The 50-word assignment. *Time to Write*, 8 (1). Retrieved from <http://faculty.history.wisc.edu/cohen/The%2050-Word%20Assignment.pdf>.

Flash, P. *Informal, in-class writing activities*. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/teaching/fullitem.cfm?itemID=43>.

Young, R. (2011). *Toward a taxonomy of "small" genres and writing techniques for writing across the curriculum*. Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse.

Application

50-word Assignment

This short assignment encourages students to think and write critically to organize and summarize main thoughts into a manageable, easy-to-assess format—a single 50-word sentence. This assignment can assist students in improving their longer compositions and essays through an opportunity to practice word choice and content clarity. Additionally, instructors can provide feedback on the grammar and content of a single sentence as a model for longer format assignments. This can also be used to integrate writing instruction into larger classes. Requiring students to summarize a reading assignment into a single sentence is a powerful intellectual exercise that is manageable for instructors and students.

Here is an example from Professor Cohen:

"Let me summarize my own argument: 'Instructors should consider assigning their classes fifty-word sentences regularly because these exercises are an extremely effective way to make students focus on the material, shape up their writing, and improve their critical skills while simultaneously requiring minimal amounts of time to both compose and evaluate.' Forty-five words—ten percent under the requirement—and I spent only about five minutes on the exercise. Of course, it does help to know one's own mind."

Bumper Sticker

Create a bumper sticker that would summarize yesterday's lecture without referring to the text.

Pictures Without Stories/Captions

Use pictures, posters, cartoons, etc. and have students write stories and/or captions related to the photo.

Radio Show

Have students write a radio show about the concept. You may wish to assign a specific time period (past, present, or future). Students may need to consider: who is the host? Who are the call-in guests? What are the questions? What are the advertisements?

Stock Quote/Analysis

Have students write real/hypothetical stock quotes/analysis based on people, events, organizations, industry trends, etc.

Writing Out Of the Day (WOOD)

Students and the instructor write individual summaries at the end of the class period about what they learned that day. Students share these summaries with peers and make note of information that may have been overlooked. Students refine the summaries as a homework assignment.

Annotations

Students complete seven types of annotation (1-4 sentences) to support their understanding of a text:

- Heuristic: hints at the main idea of a piece and evokes a response; a quotation that states the main point of a text in a provocative way
- Summary: brief, clear, and concise synopsis of the main ideas and their relationship in the text
- Thesis: answers the question “What one main idea or point is the author trying to convey to the reader?”
- Question: answers the question “What question(s) is the author answering with this piece of writing?”
- Critical: responds to the author’s thesis, critiquing or supporting the author’s main point
- Intention: finds the source of the author’s belief system and underlying assumptions

Reflection

- How does this support what you are already doing?
- How could you utilize these activities in your course?
- What would you add to this list?