

Write Now!

Chair & Dean
Retreat

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Write-to-Learn assignments

- Deepen understanding of theories
- Promote creativity
- Foster classroom community
- Initiate students into specific academic communities
- Help students gain writing fluency
- Focus students' thinking

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Write-to-Learn

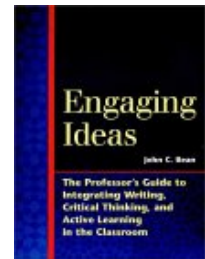
Teachers and students agree: writing deepens the learning process. Writing makes learning more engaging and meaningful. Writing is a process of discovery as much as a means of communication.

For example, Richard J. Light in *Students Speak Their Minds* illustrates: "Sixty graduating seniors [at Harvard] were asked to reflect on these questions: "Think of all the courses you have taken at college. Which courses, or couple of courses, had the most profound impact on you? On the way you think. About learning. About life. About the world. And how were these especially valuable courses organized?"

"The major finding is not one

I would have guessed. Students identified the courses that had the most profound impact on them as courses in which they were required to write papers, not just for the professor as usual, but for their fellow students as well."

John C. Bean suggests some rewards for incorporating writing into the classroom may include "watching students come to class better prepared, more vested in and motivated by the problems or questions the course investigates, more apt to study rigorously, and more likely to submit high-quality work."



John C. Bean. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.

But I Don't Teach English!

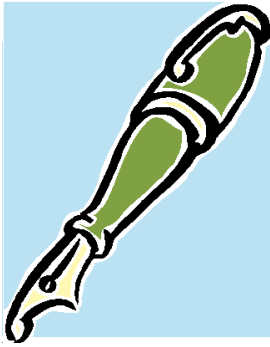
John C. Bean claims that writing can be incorporated into any course without taking away from the course curriculum—rather writing enhances courses by encouraging students to make connections and to think for themselves.

Bean adds, "Emphasizing writing and critical thinking in a course increased the amount of subject matter that students actually learn and in many cases can actually *increase total coverage* of content."

Bean also reminds teachers

that the best teachers' commentaries focus on students' ideas and development and not on mechanics. Teachers can respond to an unclear passage by simply writing, "I'm not sure I understand what you mean; please give me another example."

Formal Writing Assignments



Formal writing assignments traditionally suggest a term paper requiring some outside research and report on findings. However, John C. Bean suggests alternative formal assignments:

1. A psychology professor asks students to write a poem from the perspective of a schizophrenic.
2. A religion teacher asks students to write a dialogue.
3. A literature teacher has students rewrite the ending to short story or from a different perspective.
4. A social psychologist requires students to interview someone who has a job, lifestyle, or worldview very different from the student's and write a "profile" of the person interviewed.
5. A mathematics professor asks students to write their own "math autobiography."
6. A gender studies professor asks students to create myths or parables to express their personal understanding of a concept.
7. A history teacher asks students to do an ethnographic paper on another culture.
8. A mathematics teacher has students write their own story problems relating concepts to real-world con-

"What is heard is forgotten; what is seen is remembered; but what is written is understood."
anonymous

Formal Research Reports

John C. Bean encourages teachers to prepare students for the formal research project. He claims that teachers "must not only motivate students to become question askers but also guide them toward asking discipline-appropriate questions that are interesting, significant, and pursuable at the undergraduate level" (202). Teachers should

help students develop skills in the following research areas:

1. How to ask research questions.
2. How to find sources.
3. Why to find sources.
4. How to work sources into the paper.
5. How to manage sources.
6. How to cite sources using discipline-appropriate documentation styles (MLA, APA, CM, CBE).
7. How to establish a rhetorical context, a role, an audience, and a purpose.
8. How to follow the scientific report format.

Thesis Statements

Lynn Troyka in *Quick Access* describes basic requirements for a thesis statement. (23).

1. It states the essay's subject, but it does not repeat the title of the essay.
2. It indicates the essay's purpose.
3. It conveys the writer's point of view toward the subject.
4. It makes a general statement that leads to a set of main ideas and supporting details; it is not merely a statement of fact that leads nowhere.
5. It uses specific language and avoids vague words.
6. It may give the major subdivisions of the topic.

In-Class Writing

John C. Bean provides suggestions for incorporating exploratory writing into a course. “In-class writing gives students a chance to gather and focus their thoughts, and, when shared, gives the teacher an opportunity to see students’ thinking processes” (105).

Writing to Probe a Subject. Give students a question that reviews previous material or stimulates interest in what’s coming.

Writing to Refocus a Lagging Discussion. When students run out of things to say or when the discussion gets so heated that everyone wants to talk at once, suspend the discussion and ask for several minutes of writing.

Writing to Ask Questions or Express Confusion. When lecturing on tough material, stop for a few minutes and ask students to respond to a writing prompt like this: “If you have

understood my lecture so far, summarize my main points in your own words. If you are currently confused, please explain what is puzzling you.”

Writing to Sum Up a Class. Give students several minutes at the end of class to sum up the day’s lecture or discussion and to prepare questions to ask at the beginning of the next class period.

Exploratory Journals

John C. Bean explains to students the purpose of guided exploratory journal.

“The purpose of the journal is not to improve your writing skills (at least directly) but to stimulate thinking about issues, questions, and problems raised by your study [of your course]. For the most part, you will be

rewarded for the process of thinking, rather than for the end product you produce. The kind of writing you will be doing is called ‘exploratory’ or ‘expressive’ writing—that is, writing that lets you ‘think out loud on paper’ without having to worry whether your writing is effective for readers. There-

fore, such features of formal writing as organization, correct sentence structure, neatness, and spelling won’t matter in your journal. This is writing primarily for yourself; it is not writing intended to be read by others” (101-102).

“I am never as clear about any matter as when I have just finished writing about it.”

James Van Allen

Open-Ended Journals

John C. Bean recommends “asking students to write a certain number of pages per week or a certain length of time per week about any aspect of the course. Sometimes called ‘learning logs,’ such journals leave students free to write about the course in any number

of ways. Students might choose to summarize lectures, to explain why a textbook is difficult to understand, to disagree with a point made by someone in class, to raise questions, to apply some aspect of the course to personal experience, to make connections be-

tween different strands of the course, to express excitement at seeing new ideas, or for any other purpose. The journal becomes a kind of record of the student’s intellectual journey through the course” (106).




Writing Center
MCK 288 –x 1189

Write-to-learn assignments

- *Engage both brain hemispheres*
- *Promote active learning*
- *Encourage student-centered teaching*
- *Deepen student understanding*
- *Encourage discussion*
- *Help students connect ideas*
- *Allow students to personalize learning*
- *Encourage students to take responsibility for their learning*
- *Develop habits of inquiry*

Helping Students Read Difficult Texts



John C. Bean insists that “teachers can use exploratory or formal writing assignments to help students become more active and thoughtful readers. When assigned as homework, brief write-to-learn tasks can have a powerful effect on the quality of students’ reading” (143).

Marginal Notes. Discourage highlighters. Instead insist on marginal notations on the borders of the text where students write out and summarize what they want to underline.

Focused Reading Notes. Have students take reading

notes on sheets of paper divided into columns. Give students a key word identifying a concept you want them to be aware of as they read. Students enter reading notes in appropriate columns.

Reading Logs. Students can summarize the text, connect it to personal experience, argue with it, imitate it, analyze it, or evaluate it.

Summary/Response Notes.

A summary/response requires students to make two opposing responses to a text: first to represent the text to themselves in

their own words and then to respond to it.

Imagined Interview with Authors. Write dialogues in which students interview the author or engage the author in arguments with several antagonists.

Summary Writing. Summary writing requires that the reader separate main ideas from supporting details.

Writing “Translations.” Ask students to “translate” a difficult passage into their own words.