20 Writing Activities to Enhance Learning

1.) Teach It to Know It

Students “teach” someone about a current topic through writing about a concept, idea, or theory. **Variation:** Develop a metaphor to “teach” something.

2.) Debate on Propositions

Students examine a proposition related to the unit of study and then pick a side to support or refute through writing.

3.) Voices

Develop a list of “voices” or quotations from the reading. Then have students examine their meanings and write brief reactions.

4.) The Double-Entry Notebook

Students divide their paper into two columns. On the left side they record important, confusing, interesting, or controversial statements, and on the right side they reflect.

5.) Paraphrase

Students, as a group or individually, take the key ideas from a reading or discussion and paraphrase. **Variation:** Students write a short summary of the topic for the day/week and respond to the main ideas. They can then compare with peers.

6.) Blogging

Establish a blog for students to post and respond to classmates’ thoughts and ideas.

7.) Critique

Through writing, have students critique a reading, discussion, or presented idea.

8.) Solving Real Problems

Students examine a real problem related to the topic of study and record a short synopsis of the problem and a solution. **Variation:** Set up a case within your discipline for students to role-play and collaborate on the proper steps or actions to take in order to find a conclusion.

9.) Visual Representation

Students produce a visual of a certain topic, issue, or conflict and provide a brief written explanation of its components.

10.) Exam Preparation

Students work in pairs or small groups to find the answers to challenging questions they have devised themselves. **Variation:** Students create their own discussion question for the topic being covered during the week. As a follow up activity, their questions can be collected and circulated throughout the class.
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11.) Microthemes
After reading or discussing the content, students write a brief essay limited to the space of an index card.

12.) Plans
Students write out a plan for something they will complete later on: an experiment, a computer program, a paper, an interview, study for a test, etc.

13.) Exit Slips
For one minute, at the end of class, students write about the topic: their confusions, problems, or insights. Variation: Have students answer a question or write about the content as an Admit Slip at the beginning of class.

14.) Translation
After examining a text, students translate the writing from a technical explanation to one intended for non-experts or vice versa.

15.) Texts into Contexts
Students find an article or other form of text related to the topic of study. They then create a brief reflection discussing how it relates. Variation: Assign students “lenses” or different viewpoints through which to interpret an article.

16.) Explain a Difficult Sentence
Have students choose a sentence from their reading that may be difficult to comprehend. Then have them write to develop an understanding of what is really being said.

17.) Word Maps
Have students write the central idea of the topic in the middle of their paper. They then work to create a web, recording everything they remember about that topic. Variation: Have students work together in groups on this and circulate through the room adding on to each others’ maps.

18.) Creative Writing
Allow students to be creative, composing a written piece that is unique and imaginative to explain the ideas being studied.

19.) Guiding Questions
To start class, post a guiding question on the board and ask students to write a response. Variation: Give students several answers to the same question and ask them to determine which is the best or to write a better one.

20.) Annotations
Students note the key ideas, strengths, and weaknesses in an article or chapter. Follow Up Variation: Students synthesize ideas and concepts from multiple readings to decipher commonalities.