

Encouraging Writing in Large Classes Without Being Overwhelmed by Grading

Why?

Frequent in-class writing can help

- clarify and reinforce students' understanding of terms, definitions, concepts.
- show you how students are progressing.
- serve as a basis for discussion.
- raise questions and foster students' critical analysis of course content.

How?

- Assign one-minute papers related to specific class concepts (for a review of this topic, visit <http://alh.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/6/2/118.pdf>).
- Pose a thought-provoking question and give students five minutes to respond in writing. Discuss their answers.
- Divide the class into groups. Distribute an envelope with a question written on it to each group; students add written responses to the envelopes. The envelopes can be exchanged or the responses read aloud for discussion.
- Present key terms and ask students to organize them according to their interrelationships. Have students define at least one of the terms. Post the results or exchange them for discussion.
- Assign a reading for homework and have students develop written questions in the following class that highlight salient aspects of the reading. Discuss the questions and answers.
- Provide a series of terms or questions to the class. Have each student write both a correct and an incorrect definition / answer for one term or question. Exchange the answers and have students identify the correct definition/answer and improve on the incorrect one.

Not all writing needs to be graded

- **Strategy 1:** Assign short tasks that are checked for completion, not correctness.
Rationale: These "low-stakes" assignments encourage students to keep up with assigned readings, use technical terminology, show their understanding of concepts, or analyze/learn actual applications.
Examples: Journal entries, class content summaries, submissions to online discussion groups
- **Strategy 2:** Have students evaluate part of their own work.
Rationale: Self-evaluation can help students develop critical thinking and reflective skills.
Example:
Create awareness of typical grammar and organizational errors by correcting a portion of a written piece of work and ask the students to complete the corrections in the remaining portion.