

## Writing Assignments – Informal Writing

FOCUSED FREEWRITING	
<p>Focused freewriting allows students to write continuously for a determined period of time on a specific subject/topic. The goal of this exercise is to develop critical thinking and to increase the students' comfort with writing. Moreover, focused freewriting at different stages of the writing process can help students develop their argument, topic, or organization as necessary.</p>	<p>You can use focused freewriting in at least two ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Have your students freewrite on an assignment topic in order to flesh out all of their preliminary questions and ideas. This step will help prevent students from freewriting on their actual drafts by showing them that writing down their ideas is just a step in the writing process.</li><li>○ Have your students freewrite on topics related to a text before they start reading it. By making sure that they jot down all their ideas and questions, you will be helping to make their encounter with the text more engaging. For example, you could ask them to freewrite on their expectations about a text and then compare their opinions after the reading.</li></ul> <p>You can also narrow down the focus of the freewrite by using Peter Elbow's "believing and doubting" strategy. Have students do a freewrite in which they support all of an author's ideas and another in which they provide reasons to doubt everything the author has said. Your students will then be practicing their critical skills and argumentation in a less formal structure.</p>
METACOGNITIVE WRITING	
<p>Metacognitive writing forces students to analyze their own thinking and writing processes, thereby encouraging critical thinking with regards to areas for improvement and change. Use questions (as in focused-freewriting) to guide students towards the thinking you want them to do.</p>	<p>Use cover sheets to ensure that students are being metacognitive about their writing. Students should attach their cover sheet to the draft they are handing in. Here are some examples of questions you might ask them to answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ What are you hoping to gain from today's revision workshop?</li><li>○ What were the challenges of drafting this paper?</li><li>○ What have you learned from writing this paper?</li><li>○ Trace your writing process from the moment you received the assignment: what steps did you take to complete your work?</li><li>○ If you could write this assignment again, what would you do differently?</li></ul>

## ANNOTATION/NOTE-TAKING

Effective reading strategies are essential to successful writing. You should encourage your students to approach writing in three stages:

- On the first reading, they should move through the text relatively quickly to get a broad picture of what the text is about and how it is organized.
- On the second reading, they should slow down and examine the inner workings of the text (i.e., argument, style, structure, context, key terms and phrases, etc.)
- On the third reading, they should speed up again and record their interpretation of the text, as well as any questions that they might have for class discussion or their response papers.

Teach your students how to read for the purpose of writing and ask them to turn in their reading notes. You will then be able to detect analytical weakness from the beginning and teach them how to correct it at an early stage.

## QUOTATION, PARAPHRASE, SUMMARY

- Quotation: tell students to assume that they will be writing a paper with the text they have just read. Which lines would they quote directly? Why? Try to get them thinking about the contrast between quotes and paraphrasing.
- Paraphrase: assign paraphrases in class to prepare students for research papers. Choose a representative line in the text and have students paraphrase it three times (Paraphrase x3) to achieve a significantly different line that captures the key message of the original.
- Summarizing: assign summaries to get students thinking about main ideas within a text and how they are structured. Emphasize the need for a synthetic approach: how are the writer's ideas working together as a system?

After explaining what quotation, paraphrase, and summary are, as well as their purposes in academic papers, practice them in class through the following steps:

- Select a portion of the text for the students to read.
- Ask them to summarize the author's main idea within that passage.
- Find a significant idea and ask them to paraphrase it.
- Come up with a topic and ask them to find a section they would cite if they had to provide evidence for it.