Researched-Based Writing Strategies

Contents

Strategy 1: Admit Slips

Purpose

Write to reflect on learning; summarize content concepts and ideas; use explanatory and expository writing to reflect and summarize.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.

Standard W.3: Produce clear, coherent writing.

Overview

Admit slips are a type of writing that many teachers use regularly. Students are expected to bring a short piece of writing to class with them for the start of the next day's class. This piece of writing is their "ticket to get in the door" or what they must complete to be admitted to class. The teacher has the option of collecting these admit slips as students enter the room. They can be written on a note card, a regular piece of paper, or a handout. Some teachers will print a piece of paper that looks like an admission ticket. For example, I printed a form that states, "Admit One to Dr. Berry's First Period Class." Usually, admit slips require students to write a reflection on their learning from the previous class day or a review of a reading or homework assignment students are to complete.

Procedure

1. Write a prompt or topic based on the current day's lesson, which students will be given for their admit slips. Here are some example questions for different content areas that come from Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007):
    a. Math: Find some examples of math or numerical evidence being used in the media and explain it.
    b. Social Studies: How would the United States have been different if FDR lost the election in 1932?
    c. Social Studies: Of the three main causes of the Civil War, which one do you think is most important and why?
    d. English: After reading the poem aloud a few times, comment on the poem's rhythm and rhyme patterns.
    e. Science: Explain the advantages and disadvantages of indicators versus meters.

   f. Science: On page x, the textbook says that global warming may be caused by human activity or may be part of a natural, random cycle of variations. Which theory do you believe and why?

2. As students enter the classroom, collect an admit slip from each student.
3. Use the admit slips as an introduction to the lesson or current day's activity.
4. You have many choices and options in terms of how admit slips can be used. Here are some suggestions from Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007):
   a. Collect them at the door, quickly skim as you gather them, and read a few out loud to prompt discussion.
   b. Find two opposing sides or opinions on a particular topic and read each one to spark discussion.
   c. Don't collect them but ask for volunteers or call on students to read theirs aloud.
   d. Shuffle the admit slips, pass them out to students randomly (you should have the same number of admit slips as you have students) and have students read them aloud without identifying the author.
   e. Have students keep their own admit slips and pass them to the person behind them. Write a response to the other student's comments and then pass them back again for another round of comments. Have volunteers read all three sets of comments on their papers.

Here are some of my additional suggestions for using admit slips:

- Have students pass their admit slip to a partner, read each other's comments, and then discuss briefly. Call upon random pairs to share their comments and discussion.
- Have each student post the admit slips around the room; then have the class do a gallery walk to read other students' comments and ideas.
- Place students in groups of four and have each student read his admit slip aloud to the group. Group members should compare ideas and have some discussion.

Strategy 2: Learning Logs

Purpose

Use writing to reflect on learning; use writing as a tool for learning, remembering, and reflecting on content learning; summarize and clarify information.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear, coherent writing.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames.

Overview

Learning logs are an excellent informal writing activity that can be used in any content area, core course, or elective. Learning logs encourage students to reflect on their learning in the subject area. Learning logs are not the same as personal journals in that they focus on content material being studied in class. They can be used as a part of any lesson and in any part of the lesson. Students can complete a brief journal entry at the beginning of class, in the middle of an activity, experiment, film, or reading assignment, or at the end of class as a review activity. They are simply an excellent way to make writing an active part of your teaching of the content material. Students will learn more and experience a higher level of retention. The journals can also be used as way to help students organize and collect information and to assess their own learning.

Procedure

If you decide to use learning logs for a particular class, unit, or grading period, build in regular time, frequently or even daily, for students to write learning log entries and reflect on their learning. They can be easily graded by simply skimming through the journals every few weeks or at the end of the grading period. The figure below includes some sample learning log prompts for social studies that come from Doty, Cameron, and Barton (2003).

Learning Log Prompts

- Which of the textbook chapters we have read so far this year has been the most difficult for you to understand? Analyze what it was about that particular chapter that made it hard to comprehend.
- Which historical character from this unit did you find the most interesting? Explain your answer.
- Art has been a major topic during this unit on Italy. Why do you think this topic has been the focus of so much of our text?
- The idea of mental maps is often confusing to students when they first hear it. Do you find this concept difficult to understand? What could you do to gain a better understanding of this idea? How could you teach this concept to others?
- Summarize the text material we read in class today. How does it connect and build on what we studied earlier this week?
- Write a letter to the editor of the school paper, or to another local paper, in which you argue for or against a controversial issue we have studied in class.
- Write about an upcoming test. List the questions you might be asked and develop answers for each.
- Consider how your perspective has changed as a result of what we have studied during this unit. How has learning about how others perceive things influenced the way you think about this topic?
- Summarize what you have learned about how industrialization impacts cities.
- Explain in your own words how a bill becomes a law.

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Strategy 3: Carousel Brainstorming

Purpose

Engage in collaborative writing; use writing to summarize, clarify and review content information; brainstorm to generate ideas; engage in collaborative discussion.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Standard SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

Overview

Carousel brainstorming involves students in a process of brainstorming and writing about several different topics at once. This strategy comes from Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007). It can be used for introducing a new topic, or as a review activity for a unit, topic of study, or reading assignment.

Procedure

1. Begin with three or more different prompts for a particular unit, topic, or reading assignment. Place each of the prompts on a separate sheet of poster board or chart paper.
2. Place students in groups of three to five students, and have each group use a different colored marker. It works best to have the same number of prompts as you have groups of students. Each group should also appoint a recorder who will do the writing for the group. (Groups can switch to a different recorder at each new station.)
3. Place each prompt a station, assign each group to a station, and have groups rotate from one station to another.
4. At each new station, they read the prompt, discuss it, and add their own contribution, which will be identified by the color of their markers. Remind students that it is a brainstorming activity and encourage them to write down everything they can think of quickly. Give students a few minutes at each station before rotating.
5. When students get to a new station, they should first read through what all the other groups have written and then, add whatever new information and ideas they can. This makes the

task increasingly harder as students proceed through it. As students think and talk about the responses already written on the paper, they will come up with new things to add.

Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007) suggest the following ways to use this strategy:

- Have each group present the items on their chart to the class and emphasize those they think are most important.
- Have each group do a second gallery walk to read all the responses. Then use whole group discussion to focus on the highlights.
- Have each student do a quick write or nonstop write about what he or she has read following the gallery walk. Ask students to share their quick writes in small groups or with the whole class.

Strategy 4: Cubing

Purpose

Engage in higher level critical thinking; examine a topic or idea from various perspectives; use writing to demonstrate comprehension of a topic; use writing to describe, analyze, compare, and argue.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Overview

The use of the "cubing" technique is a great higher order thinking strategy that asks students to look at a topic from several different sides. It helps students develop their conceptual understanding of a topic and work on writing skills.

Procedure

1. Choose a topic in your content area or from a particular unit of study that could be examined from multiple perspectives. Some examples might be genetics, global warming, or heredity from science; the American Revolution in US history; the concept of realism or romanticism from English or art; a piece of literature in English; the Fibonacci sequence in math; or use of nutritional supplements in physical education.
2. Use the graphic organizer in the figure below to have students quickly examine and jot down notes about the subject from each different perspective, each one being a side of the "cube":
    a. Describe it
    b. Compare it with something else
    c. Associate it with something else
    d. Analyze it
    e. Discuss its applications
    f. Argue for or against it
3. When students have finished jotting down ideas for each perspective, ask them to write a paragraph about the topic.
4. Have students reread their paragraphs and make any necessary changes or corrections.

5. Have students share their paragraphs by reading them out loud to a partner or small group.

6. **Cubing Template or Planning Guide**

CUBING: AN EXERCISE IN PERSPECTIVE

Topic: _____

Describe It: Examine the subject closely and describe what you see.	Compare It: What is it similar to? Different from?
Associate it: What does the subject make you think of?	Analyze It: Break the subject into parts; tell how it is made.
Apply It: Describe the subject's uses.	Argue for Or Against It: Use any kind of reasoning to take a stand for or against the subject.

Strategy 5: Double Entry Journal

Purpose

Use writing to reflect on content information; use writing regularly over an extended time; use writing to summarize and respond to content information; use writing as the basis for collaborative discussion; use writing to extend and deepen comprehension.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames.

Standard SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

Overview

This strategy is also sometimes called the summary response notebook. It is a strategy that can be used in the classroom long term, throughout a unit, or for a whole semester or year. For any given reading assignments, ask students to write a page in a journal or notebook.

Procedure

1. Draw a line down the middle of the page.
2. In the left-hand column write a summary of the section of reading you have just completed.
3. In the righthand column, write your personal responses and thoughts.
4. Use the journal to share ideas during class discussion and to share with a partner.
5. Review your entries in the journal to review for tests.

This strategy gives students practice in writing summaries, helps them connect their prior knowledge to what they are reading about, and increases the time students spend thinking about the reading material. You might consider giving students a guideline sheet that explains the purpose of this assignment and specifies this procedure. It should also include your specific requirements for the summary and response, length requirements, information about how it is graded, and due dates. Collect the journals periodically, more frequently during the first period of use. If you would rather not have students use a journal or notebook, but might like to use

this strategy periodically, you can have them turn in each summary response assignment separately. When grading, all you need to do is skim through the entries and holistically evaluate the summary and response. Use plus signs, minus signs, or checkmarks. Give detailed feedback only for students who have trouble responding. It is also helpful to show the class examples of good summaries and responses. The double entry journal entries can be used at the beginning of class to jumpstart the discussion.

Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007) note that the double entry journals can also be used to deepen understanding of the text, show the thinking behind solving a problem, or compare ideas. They offer a few variations (see figure below) on use of the two-column structure.

Two Column Variations

Column 1:	Column 2:
Computations	Explanation of thinking for each step
Problem	Solution
Reasons for	Reasons against
Opinion	Proof
Quote from Text	Explanation of importance
Quote from text	Personal connections
Quote from text	Relationship to previous unit
Quote from text	discussion questions
Agreements	Disagreements
Notes	Interpretations
Observations	Inferences
Advantages	Disadvantages
Words	Images
Facts	Feelings

Strategy 6: Quick Questions

Purpose

Use writing to summarize key information; write to analyze and apply content information; use writing to reflect on learning.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts.

Overview

Quick questions is a strategy that forces students to go beyond simple note taking and summarizing and into analysis and engagement with the content.

Procedure

Following viewing of a film or doing a reading assignment, ask students to write responses to any or all of the following items:

- After reading, I would like to know more about . . . because . . .
- After reading, I know . . .
- The main question raised by the author is . . .
- The author assumes that everyone knows/believes that . . .
- The central idea is . . .
- People are likely to agree with the author if . . .
- People are likely to disagree with the author if . . .

You can also use quick questions as an exit activity during the last five minutes of class:

- One thing I learned today is . . .
- thing I hope we cover next class is . . . because . . .
- One question I have from class today is . . .

An alternative activity is to assign different quick questions to each student, have him respond and then share his ideas with the class or in small groups. Student answers can be graded or ungraded. As teachers, they also can help us to understand what concepts students are struggling with and help us to identify what topics might require reteaching.

Strategy 7: Microthemes

Purpose

Use prewriting to generate ideas and prepare for writing; use the planning phases of the writing process to identify thesis and support for an essay; understand and apply essay structure; use outlining to organize and review content material.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Overview

The microtheme is a **prewriting organizer** or outline form used to help students prepare for writing a paper or essay (Brozo & Simpson, 2003). However, the microtheme can also be used as an assignment for students to identify key ideas in a reading assignment, demonstration, experiment, lecture, or film.

Procedure

The microtheme requires students to think about three different ways they might begin the paper. Then they state the thesis, main body points, and support for each point. They also identify how they will conclude the paper with a dominant feeling, impression, or message. This strategy not only helps students review content material but also helps those students who struggle with organizing a paper prior to writing it. Students find it more understandable and useful than a traditional outline.

Some teachers have students write microthemes for a quick review on index cards. They are easy to check and allow you to give quick feedback. Microthemes can be used in any content area. For example, students in English might use it to analyze the role of a particular character in a piece of literature. Students in science might use it to write a short report on a particular scientific principle. Use the Template or Planning Guide format in the figure below.

Microtheme Template or Planning Guide

MICROTHEME

Introduction: I could begin my paper one of the following three ways . . .

- _____
  _____
- _____
  _____
- _____
  _____

Thesis: The claim I want to make and support in my essay is:

_____
_____
_____

Body:

Main points I want to make:	Specific references or examples to support:
• _____	_____
• _____	_____
• _____	_____
• _____	_____
• _____	_____

Conclusion: A feeling, impression, message, or idea I want to leave my reader with is:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Strategy 8: Exit Slips

Purpose

Write freely in response to a given prompt; summarize and clarify key learning from content material; generate questions and use writing as a tool to clarify points of confusion; evaluate and assess one's own learning.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames.

Overview

Many teachers like to use exit slips as a way of incorporating writing into their classes. They can be done quickly and easily during the last five minutes or so of class, time that is often wasted in many classrooms as students have already mentally checked out and are packing up to leave.

Procedure

Exit slips are very simple. Just save the last five minutes of class and ask students to write about a particular prompt to review the lesson presented that period. It can be worded as simply as "Summarize what you have learned during this period" or "What points of confusion do you have about today's lesson?" Require students to keep writing for the entire five minutes.

You can tailor the exit slip prompt to cover a range of specific topics or just ask for a general summary of what the student has learned during that lesson. Most teachers will stand near the door as the bell rings and collect an exit slip from each student. (I watch for students who try to hand in a blank note card or piece of paper and make them stay until they have written a response.) In addition, you can begin the next day's class by reading some of the exit slips from the previous day aloud.

One of the biggest benefits of exit slips is that they can show you what students are not understanding or are struggling with. You will get much more honest answers in exit slips than students will give you orally. They also do not have to be graded. You can just read them quickly to get a sense of what the class or specific students might need to review or what you would like to emphasize the next day.

Strategy 9: Timed and On Demand Writing

Purpose

Generate writing in response to a given prompt; practice and prepare for timed and on-demand writing for high stakes tests; build fluency by generating a coherent piece of writing set time frame; analyze a writing prompt; generate ideas, brainstorm, organize, write, and edit a piece of writing in a limited time frame; build and use academic vocabulary.

CCSS Connection

Standards W.1, W.2: Write arguments/informative texts.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.10: Write routinely or extended time frames and shorter time frames.

Standard L.6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

Overview

In his book *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, Kelley Gallagher (2006) argues that on-demand writing, or timed writing, is one of the most important writing skills we should be helping students to develop. In secondary school, particularly high school, and on into college, students are often asked to write to a prompt for a given time, anywhere from thirty minutes to a couple of hours.

These forms of writing are often high-stakes writing as well. Students may be required to write for state and district assessments (which in some states are graduation requirements), for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams, for college admission tests (the SAT test now requires a written section), and in other classroom testing situations in high school and college. Many employers are now requiring a writing sample as a part of application materials or an interview. Students often face these types of high-stakes writing situations, yet spend only about 15 percent of their time in school writing, most of which is note taking or copying down information.

Students need to spend more time practicing writing in school settings, and they need practice with on-demand and timed writing to build fluency and prepare for the situations mentioned here. Teachers in all disciplines can require students to complete occasional timed writing tests or assignments.

Procedure

Here are some suggestions for implementing on-demand writing in your classroom:

- Have students frequently do quick writes, journaling, admit slips, exit slips, conversation logs, and other free response writing in the classroom so that they become comfortable with writing and build writing fluency.
- Use Gallagher's (2006) four-step process for approaching on-demand writing prompts. He calls it the ABCD method:
    - ***Attack*** the prompt by circling all the words that indicate what the writer is to do, drawing arrows from the circles to what the prompt specifically tells the writer to do, and then numbering or ordering the circled words. A frequent mistake that students make on these types of writing assignments or tests is misreading or misunderstanding what the prompt is asking them to do. Attacking the prompt in this manner will help prevent that.
    - ***Brainstorm*** possible answers and content for your response. This can be a quick list, map, web, or chart.
    - ***Choose*** the order of the responses. Using the numbered words from part one, outline what will be included in each part of the response. Students then write their response.
    - ***Detect*** errors by rereading the piece of writing during the last five minutes of time.
- Teach students the academic vocabulary they will need for various essay questions and topics found in on-demand writing, words commonly used in academic writing. We often assume that students understand what these words mean when they may not. Common academic vocabulary includes words such as the following: analyze, compare, critique, assess, consider, diagram, describe, define, discuss, cause/ effect, enumerate, explain, identify, evaluate, illustrate, interpret, list, justify, outline, prove, respond, relate, summarize, state, solve, support, synthesize.
- How should you score, grade, or assess the students' timed writings? Make a simple rubric or checklist, tell students ahead of time what you are specifically going to look for in their response (paragraphing, length, organization, content, etc.), score the essays holistically using a 1–5 scale, or simply give students credit for having written a sufficiently long piece in the given time.

Strategy 10: Freewriting/Quick writing

Purpose

Write freely in response to a given prompt; summarize and clarify key learning from content material; generate questions and use writing as a tool to clarify points of confusion; evaluate and assess one's own learning; build fluency through freewriting/quick writing practice.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames.

Overview

One of the simplest and easiest writing strategies to use is called by different names: freewriting, quick writing, nonstop writing, or fast writing most commonly. Like all writing assignments, it helps to improve students' learning and thinking, increases their engagement with the material, and can be used in any content area.

Consider the fact that in classrooms students do a lot of passive learning, in which teachers deliver information, students absorb it, and interaction is often minimal. Writing helps us get closer to active learning, in which students are thoughtfully engaging with the material and working collaboratively. Freewriting is also in some ways the opposite of formal writing. Whereas formal writing is planned, drafted, and revised, and usually graded or evaluated by the teacher, informal writing such as freewriting is composed quickly, not revised or edited, is not graded in any formal way, and serves only its primary purpose of stimulating thinking about the topic. The great thing about freewriting, much like most forms of writing, is that it encourages the student to explore his thoughts on a topic and becomes a process of discovery. When we engage in freewriting, we discover new ideas and connections.

Procedure

Freewriting sessions will typically last anywhere from five to fifteen minutes. I recommend shorter times of five minutes, and you can gradually work up to ten minutes or longer. Simply present students with a topic or prompt and then ask students to follow three rules:

- Start writing and try not to stop.
- Don't make corrections.

- Don't go back to reread or rewrite; just keep writing.
- Encourage students to try not to take their pen or pencil off the paper (or hands off the keyboard).

Since the goal of freewriting is to generate new ideas, students should be encouraged to keep ideas flowing and let one idea leads to another. Students are often uncomfortable with this type of writing at first, partly because the importance of correctness has been drilled into them through all their years of school. But with freewriting, no attention should be paid to spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and so on. The focus should be entirely on the ideas and content. *No correcting!*

Students can do occasional or daily freewriting on any given topic, but here is one possible application: You have reached the end of a particular unit and are expecting students to begin preparing for a test. Have them do a ten-minute free write to summarize or review everything they have learned during the unit or about the topic. As they are writing, they will remember additional information they were not consciously aware of. Another possible way in which freewriting could be used as an end-of-class activity is to ask students to complete a short free write to reflect on their learning during that class period. Obviously, if you have your students keep journals, freewriting can be included as part of the journal. As far as grading, simply skim through the free-writes and give students points based on completion.

Some other possible uses of freewriting: as a prelude to a discussion (to activate prior knowledge), as a post-discussion activity, as a postreading activity, as an icebreaker, as a beginning or end of class activity, as review for a test, as a way to share thoughts and personal opinions on a topic, as a way to reflect on what they have learned, as a way to extend and apply classroom learning. Also, many teachers often give students an opportunity to read or share their freewriting with the class or in small groups.

I recently asked my technical writing students, as the term was just beginning, to do some freewriting on the topic of technical writing, what it means, how it is used, and why it is important. These free writes functioned as a useful preassessment for me, to help me understand how much students already knew about the subject and what some of their misconceptions were.

Strategy 11: Praise-Question-Polish (PQP) or Questioning the Author

Purpose

Engage in active reading of text; evaluate and critique the writing techniques and content of a given text; generate questions about text; learn and use memo format; write clearly and coherently; write for a specific audience; revise and proofread one's own writing.

CCSS Connection

Standard R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly.

Standard R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text.

Standard R.8: Delineate and evaluate argument and specific claims of a text.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Overview

Praise-question-polish is both a reading and a writing strategy that provides a way to teach students to "talk back" to the author, and to also involve students in writing a memo to the author of the book or reading assignment. It asks students not only to read carefully and clarify understanding of text but also to critique and evaluate the author's techniques. The strategy comes from Larry Lewin (2003), who notes that it originated with Tom Cantwell, a middle school teacher from Eugene, Oregon. PQP teaches students to create a successful critique of an author's work. A similar strategy is called "questioning the author" (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997), in which the teacher poses questions about the reading material to students, such as the following: What are the authors trying to help you understand? Why is this information important? Did the authors explain the information clearly? Did the authors explain why it is important to understand the topic discussed?

Procedure

1. When students begin reading the article, chapter, or passage, provide them with three different colors of sticky notes. One color is for the P comments, one for the Qs, and one for the Ps. Teach students the three parts of PQP (shown in the following section). As

students read the selection, they should be thinking about what the author is doing and recording feedback on the sticky notes.

2. Teach students the three parts of the critique:
   a. P = Praise for what you like about the author's writing style and ideas.
   b. Q = Questions for the author about what aspects of the reading were confusing, not explained well, or hard to understand. Questions may also be directed to why the author chose to include (or not include) certain elements.
   c. P = Polishing ideas recommended to the author, or rather, suggestions for improvement in his or her writing, book, chapter, or article.
3. When students have completed a unit or a particular reading assignment, tell them that they are going to be writing a critique of the work. Explain that critique doesn't mean only what one doesn't like, but also what one likes as well as suggestions for improvement.
4. Provide students with the memo format. Have them use the three colors of sticky notes and write a memo to the author to provide feedback in all three areas. Some alternatives to memo format might be a formal letter, a postcard, an email, or a blog.
5. Have students share their completed memos with a small group or the whole class. Have students check each other's memos for evidence of each of the three parts: PQP.

Strategy 12: Genres

Purpose

Identify and recognize various genres of writing; write in a specific chosen genre; write in a disciplinary genre appropriate for particular content area; compose clear and coherent writing following the conventions of a specific genre; revise and proofread one's own writing; write for a particular audience.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Overview

The word "genre" refers to type or form of something. Writing, painting, music, and other forms of art can be produced in many different genres when specific examples share a particular content, purpose, format, or style. One excellent writing strategy is to have students practice writing on content topics in different genres. This lends itself naturally to various content areas because the content areas themselves focus on disciplinary forms of writing in particular genres.

Genres are a key concept in academic writing because people use the forms to share knowledge and conduct research within the field. They are germane to artistic and cultural expression in forms such as storytelling, song, or poetry. If students are given exposure and practice with writing various genres, they can better understand content knowledge. One time, when teaching a novel to an English class, instead of having students complete a traditional study guide, I had students create their own version of CliffsNotes (e.g., Justin Notes or Olivia Notes!). This required helping them identify the features and sections typical of CliffsNotes for works of literature (list of characters, character analysis, discussion of style, discussion of themes, chapter summaries, critical response, review questions).

Procedure

Below are several different common genres for academic text as well as a list of possible purposes. Try choosing two or three of the following genres and having students write one of their own choosing as an alternative to a more traditional essay or report. (Another option, of

course, is to assign students to learn about a particular genre that is an important form of disciplinary writing in the field.) Doing this activity does require teaching students about the features of the genres and providing several examples from the real world.

Genres

argumentative essay	email message
Article	Ethnography
Editorial	Poem
Review	abstract/summary
business letter	Recommendation
Memo	reflective journal
case study	Outline
lab report	research paper/essay
annotated bibliography	technical report/analytical report
essay exam	personal essay
multimedia essay	Interview
Webpage	Facebook page
multimedia presentation	Blog
Narrative	Twitter posting (tweet)
news article	other possibilities?

Purposes of genres are to amuse, beguile, delight, entertain, introduce, organize, celebrate, convince, announce, cajole, demonstrate learning, gratify, persuade, lead, teach, argue, charm, discourage, guide, change policy, plan, test, assure, convert, dissuade, impress, notify, please, and request.

Provide students with many of examples of each genre from the real world. You may also need to teach students that genres may have many different purposes and subtypes and that there are certain assumptions about an individual genre. For example, a narrative essay about a personal experience suggests that sharing experiences can teach us something of value. A letter focuses on a specific issue or problem and is written for a specific audience. A scientific research report conveys knowledge that is verifiable. An analytical essay divides the subject into parts and relates each one to the whole. Some genres, such as a review, seek to

evaluate or test the quality of something. In short, help students to identify the features of various genres and how different genres function in particular subject areas (e.g., a lab report in science), and try having students write in a genre that may be unusual for your subject areas (e.g., a poem or interview about or with a historical figure). After students have written initial drafts, spend some time having them revise, edit, and proofread and then create a polished final copy.

Strategy 13: Journalist's Questions

Purpose

Generate questions to gather information; use brainstorming as a way to generate ideas about a given topic; review and summarize content knowledge on a given topic; use writing as a way to clarify concepts and generate new ideas.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Overview

Journalists traditionally ask six questions when they are assigned to write a news story; they are sometimes referred to as the five Ws and an H: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Have students approach a particular concept or topic they are studying by using these six questions to explore the topic in a writing assignment. For example, if you are studying the rise and fall of the Puget Sound tides and their effects on salmon spawning, the "Who" may be not people, but rather the salmon, or perhaps the people dependent on the salmon population.

Procedure

1. Try assigning students to write about a particular topic using the following generic questions for each category. A template for reproducing is included below.

- **Who**? Who are the participants? Who is affected? Who are the primary actors, characters or people? Who are the secondary actors, characters, or people?
- **What**? What is the topic? What is the significance of the topic? What is the basic problem? What are the issues?
- **Where**? Where does the activity take place? Where does the problem or issue have its source? At what place is the cause or effect of the problem most visible?
- **When**? When is the issue most apparent or relevant—past, present, or future? When did the issue or problem develop? What historical forces helped shape the problem or issue? At what point in time will the problem or issue culminate in a crisis? When is action needed to address the issue?
- **Why**? Why did the issue or problem arise? Why is it an issue or problem at all? Why did the issue develop in the way that it did?
- **How**? How is the issue or problem significant? How can it be addressed? How does it affect the participants? How can the issue or problem be resolved?

The journalist's questions are a great way to generate lots of information about a topic very quickly. Guide students in the process of asking appropriate and relevant questions. This strategy is also a particularly good brainstorming technique for generating ideas in preparation for writing an essay. Here are some possible applications for specific subject areas:

- **English**: An event in a story, novel, or play
- **Social studies:** Any historical event such as the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or a geographical region
- **Science**: An environmental problem or issue, a chemical reaction, an alternative to a lab report
- **Math**: A story problem and how to solve it
- **Art**: Any painting or work of art

Journalist's Questions template or planning guide:

- **Who**? Who are the participants? Who is affected? Who are the primary actors, characters or people? Who are the secondary actors, characters, or people?

- **What**? What is the topic? What is the significance of the topic? What is the basic problem? What are the issues?

- **Where**? Where does the activity take place? Where does the problem or issue have its source? At what place is the cause or effect of the problem most visible?

- **When**? When is the issue most apparent or relevant—past, present, or future? When did the issue or problem develop? What historical forces helped shape the problem or issue? At what point in time will the problem or issue culminate in a crisis? When is action needed to address the issue?

- **Why**? Why did the issue or problem arise? Why is it an issue or problem at all? Why did the issue develop in the way that it did?

- **How**? How is the issue or problem significant? How can it be addressed? How does it affect the participants? How can the issue or problem be resolved?

Strategy 14: Proposal Arguments

Purpose

Use techniques of argument and persuasion; conduct research as necessary to write about a real-world topic, issue or problem; identify and apply the conventions of proposal writing; write clearly and coherently; use specific detail to support one's ideas; use the writing process; generate a claim or thesis statement; create an organizational plan and outline for one's writing; write for a specific audience; revise, proofread, and edit one's own writing.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.1: Write arguments to support claim.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed.

Standard W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Standard L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts.

Overview

This writing activity can be used in many content areas and with a variety of topics. It is easily adapted to various content situations, lends itself to real-world writing, and helps teach civic responsibility. It is an excellent way to show students how writing works in any situation in the school, community, or subject area that involves a problem, issue, or dilemma in need of a solution is an appropriate topic for this activity.

Procedure

1. Teach students that in a proposal argument, they will be asked to identify a problem, propose a solution, and justify the solution with reasons and evidence. This may require doing some research and incorporating some source material in the writing.
2. Have students choose a topic. They might look for possible solutions to problems at school, such as problems in the neighborhood, parking, overcrowding, noise, inappropriate behavior, or student activities. The problem might also be one that applies to the neighborhood, community, town, or even on a larger scale, a national issue such as energy resources, the deficit, global warming, inequitable taxation, funding of

elections, voting laws, poverty, racism, and so on. The content area you teach will determine the type of topic students can choose.

3. Begin by considering the general problem and have students do some brainstorming about the nature and extent of the problem. Students should explore various possible alternatives to solving the problem. Assure them that most problems have more than one solution. Use some type of brainstorming such as the following to help students think through the problem:
    a. Write down the problem statement in the center of a piece of paper and draw a circle around it.
    b. Draw lines out from the center and write down several possible solutions for the problem at the end of each line.
    c. Add details to each solution by adding additional lines and circles.
4. Have students spend some time doing research into the nature of the problem. They should try to identify some of the solutions others have thought of and tried. If it is a school issue, they may need to interview some school officials. Have them think about why some solutions were tried and failed.
5. After doing some research, students should choose the solution they think is the best one possible. Have them brainstorm a list of reasons why this solution is better than others. Then have them write out a thesis statement that states the problem, solution, and the overall reason for choosing that solution. For example: "The problem of poverty, one that is widespread today, can be solved through _____. This is the best way to solve the problem for three major reasons: first, _____; second, _____; and third _____." Providing students with a sentence frame such as this one may assist them in preparing a good thesis statement.
6. Students should next create an outline of their proposal, followed by a first draft. Scaffold this process as much as necessary, depending on the level of writing ability of the group. Tell students that their draft should show how the solution addresses all the different aspects of the problem, explain why the solution is better than others that have been tried or recommended, and address any strong arguments against your solution.

7. Have students think about the potential audience for the proposal, and once the project is completed, encourage them to send a copy of the proposal to the intended audience. Possible audiences may include, depending upon the topic, the principal or school district officials, community officials or leaders, legislators or other elected officials, local newspapers, online forums, and so on.
8. Finally have students edit and proofread carefully, check to be sure they have addressed all the possible concerns people may have and have correctly cited sources, and then prepare a final copy to go to the audience and to turn in for a grade.

Strategy 15: Writing a Summary

Purpose

Identify main ideas and supporting details; write a summary; use information from text or other sources to generate a concise piece of writing on a given topic; take notes to prepare for writing; revise and edit one's own writing.

CCSS Connection

Standard R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly.

Standard R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text.

Standard R.7: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Overview

Summary writing is a very important part of postreading, and it is a type of writing that students need to learn to do well and practice. College students are often assigned to write summaries of articles and other textual materials. It is also a common form of workplace writing. Students can gain practice writing summaries in any content area in the curriculum. They can be written for an article, book, chapter, website, or any other text. You can also have students write summaries of a discussion or film on a particular topic. The goal of a summary is to accurately provide a full sense of the original text, but in a more condensed form. It should restate the author's main points, purpose, intent, and supporting details in your own words.

Procedure

1. Ask students to review the original text and, if possible, skim through it again. Identify and write down the main idea or ideas and refer to any headings or graphics. Also read the conclusion of the text.
2. Ask students to go through the text and pull out all the major ideas and main supporting points. Either highlight them or jot them down on a piece of paper. You may want to make a brief outline to follow while writing the summary.
3. Have students write out the summary, making sure to state the title and author's name in the first sentence. For example: "In the essay 'Race by the Numbers,' Orlando Patterson argues that . . ." Give several suggestions: Be sure to include all the main

ideas followed by all the supporting points. Avoid including too many of the author's ideas or examples. Focus on how the author supports, defines, and or illustrates the main idea. *Do not* copy the exact words from the original. Rewrite the ideas in your own words. Your summary will be approximately one paragraph to one full page in length. For an article or textbook chapter, no more than one page is recommended.

4. Remind students that a summary should summarize only; that is, it should be completely objective and not include one's own personal opinions, ideas, or reactions.
5. As students revise and edit their summaries, have them compare it to the original and ask themselves if they have rephrased the author's words without changing the meaning. Also, have they restated the main idea and supporting points accurately.
6. Have students share summaries with each other and identify similarities and differences.

For assessment, you can quickly skim through student summaries and use a holistic method such as a score from 1 to 5. It's very easy to determine with a quick reading how accurately students understood the material.

Strategy 16: Framed Paragraphs

Purpose

Use a template for writing; develop and use appropriate academic language for writing; learn conventions and skills necessary for writing in various disciplinary modes.

CCSS Connection

Standard L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different context.

Standard L.6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

Overview

Summary writing can be challenging and overwhelming for many students. Framed paragraphs provide students with more guidance and structure. They are excellent scaffolding to help students build more sophisticated skills in writing of various types of text. Brozo and Simpson (2003) call them "skeletal paragraphs with strategically placed transitions or cue words that signal to students a particular way to think about and write about a concept" (p. 272).

Procedure

Following a particular reading assignment, lecture, film, or activity, have students use the framed structure to complete their piece of writing. This helps to gradually move students into the academic language needed to write about the concepts in a particular content area. You can quickly and easily write paragraph frames for different types and modes of writing, such as cause and effect or comparison contrast. The first figure below shows an example of a paragraph frame I created for analyzing plot development in a piece of literature. The AVID college readiness curriculum also includes frame templates in their critical reading materials. The second figure below is the AVID template for analyzing and summarizing evidence (LeMaster, 2009, p. 140).

AVID Paragraph Frame

The plot of the story begins when _____

_____. The main conflict is _____.

The first major event is _____

followed by _____ and _____

_____. The main character,

_____, responds by _____ which results in

_____.

The climax occurs when _____.

The resolution of the story is when _____.

At the end _____.

AVID Template for Analyzing and Summarizing Evidence.

_____ in the article _____
(author's full name) (article title)

_____s that _____
(verb) (what is the author's claim?)

_____

_____.

In his/her article, _____ _____
(author's last name)

_____ _____
(verb that describes how the author collects evidence) (discuss the type of evidence the author

_____
uses and explain why the author uses it)

_____

in order to_____ _____ _____

_____.

For example, _____ _____(s) _____
(author's last name) (verb)

_____
(list or describe the evidence)

_____
(describe specific evidentiary details)

_____.

This evidence suggests that _____

_____
(analyze the evidence and discuss its significance to the author's claim)

_____

_____

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Strategy 17: Reflective Writing

Purpose

Write freely in response to a given prompt; summarize and clarify key learning from content material; generate questions and use writing as a tool to clarify points of confusion; evaluate and assess one's own learning; build fluency through reflective writing practice; reflect on one's own learning.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames.

Overview

One way to use writing in your classroom is to have students frequently engage in writing for reflective purposes. This strategy, which is similar to a free write or nonstop write, comes from Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007). Reflective writing involves students in thinking about their learning following the completion of an assignment or project. Students can reflect on the activity itself and on what they learned from doing it. Whether it is a discussion, a test, a field trip, a group project, or a major term project, you can have students complete a reflective write afterward, either a short, informal piece of writing or a longer piece.

What is the purpose of having students reflect on their learning? First, students often complete projects or assignments and then quickly forget about them. But having them reflect on their learning requires them to evaluate the level of their work, the amount of effort they put into it, and their level of success. It better cements the learning in students' minds through the metacognitive process. Students can also use it to set goals for themselves in terms of what they can do to improve their future work. Another benefit of reflective writing is that it gives you, the teacher, lots of information and awareness about how much students have learned and how successful you have been as a teacher. We can see what was easy for students, what was challenging, and what the long-term impact of the learning may be.

Procedure

Some suggestions for using reflective writing:

- Model the process for students by writing a sample reflection on the computer or overhead projector. Also, save some copies of good student reflective writes to show students some examples.
- The reflective write generally works best if you have students complete it during class, where you can ensure that everyone spends some thoughtful time on their reflection.
- Another suggestion is to have students do reflective writes following a reading assignment; thus, it helps students and you become more aware of what the general level of understanding is, where there may be areas of confusion, what you might need to focus on in discussion, or where some review and reteaching may be necessary.

Strategy 18: Writing and Question Starters

Purpose

Learn and practice multiple ways to begin sentences; use questioning to generate ideas; develop critical thinking skills; respond to questions at the knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels; write clearly and coherently on a given topic; use writing to summarize learning; apply content learning to multiple situations and contexts; think and write critically and creatively.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.8: Gather evidence from multiple print and digital sources.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational text.

Overview

One way to get students writing is to provide them with options for sentence starters. The following are question starters and potential writing topics that are arranged according to the levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

Procedure

The questions below can obviously be used for discussion questions and for designing study guide questions or test questions; they can also be used for providing students with a way to approach writing about a particular topic. You could print these writing and question starters on a card or sheet of paper and make them available to students to use during discussion and writing. Another possible application is to have them choose one starter from each level and use it to write about a particular topic as a postreading assignment or in preparation for a test.

Leveled Writing Prompts and Question Starters

1. Level One: Knowledge
    a. What is the definition for . . . ?
    b. What happened after . . . ?
    c. Recall the facts about . . .
    d. What were the characteristics of . . . ?
    e. Which is true or false?
    f. How many . . . ?
    g. Who was the . . . ?
    h. Tell in your own words . . .
2. Level Two: Comprehension
    a. Why are these ideas similar?
    b. Retell the story of . . .
    c. What do you think could happen?
    d. How are these ideas different?
    e. Explain what happened after?
    f. What are some examples of . . . ?
    g. Who was the key character?
3. Level Three: Application What is another instance of . . . ?
    a. Demonstrate the way to . . .
    b. Which one is most like . . . ?
    c. What questions would you ask?
    d. Which factors could you change?
    e. Could this have happened in . . . ?
    f. How would you organize these ideas?
4. Level Four: Analysis
    a. What are the component parts of . . . ?
    b. What steps are important in the process of . . . ?
    c. If . . . then . . .
    d. What other conclusions can you reach about . . . ?
    e. The solution would be to . . .

f. What is the relationship between . . . ?

5. Level Five: Synthesis Design a . . .
   a. Compose a song about . . .
   b. Devise your own way to . . .
   c. Develop a proposal for . . .
   d. How would you deal with . . .
   e. Invent a scheme that would . . .
   f. Level Six: Evaluation
   g. In your opinion . . .
   h. Evaluate the chances for . . .
   i. Grade or rank the . . .
   j. What do you think should be the outcome of . . . ?
   k. What solutions do you favor and why?
   l. Which systems are best? Worst?
   m. Rate the relative value of these ideas to . . . Which is the better bargain?

Strategy 19: Write Around

Purpose

Use writing to reflect on content information; use writing regularly over an extended time; use writing to summarize and respond to content information; use writing as the basis for collaborative discussion; write in response to others' writing; use writing to extend and deepen comprehension; engage in critical thinking on a given topic.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames.

Standard SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

Overview

The write around strategy comes from Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke's book *Content-Area Writing* (2007). They describe it as one of the most powerful informal writing activities and note that it may be used to replace whole class discussions. The strategy is similar to others such as the dialectic notebook and written conversation. The write around involves a group of three to five students who write about a given topic and then pass their papers to the next student. Each page then becomes a string of conversation on the topic.

Procedure

1. Identify a topic or create a prompt for the write around, preferably a complex topic that calls for students to raise questions, make interpretations, and express disagreements.
2. Have students form groups of about four students, moving chairs so as to face each other.
3. Each student must start with a piece of paper, placing his or her name on the heading of the paper.
4. Instruct students that they are to use all the given time for writing, and not to talk when passing the papers.
5. Students begin by writing for one minute on the topic. They may include thoughts, reactions, questions, and reflections about the prompt. The time can be extended to more than one minute if you desire.

6. Next, students pass their papers, deciding which way papers will be rotated. Then each student reads what the first student has written on the paper, and, just underneath it, he or she writes for one more minute. Stress the importance of keeping the conversation going and the need for all students to respond to what has been written on the paper.
7. Students pass their papers again and repeat until the papers come back to the original writer.
8. When each student's own paper is returned, he or she should read through the conversation that was started with the original comments.
9. At this point in the strategy, you have several options:
    a. Students could have a whole group discussion on the topic within their group and continue any threads that developed in the written discussions.
    b. You can also assign students a new prompt and begin the write around process again, or you might have each group share one of their conversation threads with the whole class.
    c. Finally, debrief with the whole class. Ask students what worked and did not work.

Strategy 20: Written Conversation

Purpose

Use writing to reflect on content information; use writing regularly over an extended time; use writing to summarize and respond to content information; use writing as the basis for collaborative discussion; write in response to others' writing; use writing to extend and deepen comprehension; engage in critical thinking on a given topic.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames.

Standard SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

Overview

Written conversations (Daniels, Zemelman, & Steineke, 2007) are also called dialogue journals. They are a conversation on a topic that takes place in writing. Students enjoy this strategy because of their love of texting and one-on-one correspondence. It is also a good way to get everyone involved, since all students participate in the discussion of the given topic, as opposed to class discussion, in which often a handful of students tend to dominate.

Procedure

The strategy is so simple that it does not require a list of procedures. Simply have students sit next to a partner. Each one begins writing on the topic and then they exchange papers, writing back and forth to each other on the topic or prompt. Have students switch papers every three minutes or so. You might want to model this process with your own short piece of writing, partnering with a student volunteer to introduce the process to the whole class. You can also have students share their conversations with the whole class. The following is a short hypothetical excerpt of a written conversation that followed reading about the building of the Panama Canal. It was written in response to the prompt, "What were the benefits of the Panama Canal?"

Juan: The biggest benefit of building the Panama Canal was that ships no longer had to sail all the way around South America to get from the East Coast to the West Coast. The canal connects the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean.

Jessica: Yes, so if I wanted to sail from New York to San Francisco, I bet the ship would go through the Panama Canal. But I was confused about how the ship gets through the canal because it has to go through a set of locks that lift the ships higher until it is in the middle of a big lake.

Juan: Because the land is at a higher elevation, the ship has to be lifted up by the locks until it is floating at the same level as the lake that is part of the canal. When the gates of the last lock are opened, the ship sails across the lake.

Jessica: Then it has to go through another channel and through more locks. This time the locks lower the ship back to the same level as the ocean on the other side. I bet there are a lot of ships that go through the canal every day, so it must be really busy.

Juan: There is a lot of goods and supplies that pass through the canal by ship, so things that are produced in one part of the country are taken to another part, or to another country and they have to go through the canal.

Jessica: I think they have expanded the canal a few times since it was built. Did you know that there are other famous canals also, like the Suez Canal? It is in the Mediterranean Sea. It is even longer than the Panama Canal.

Strategy 21: Writing Memos

Purpose

Write for a specific audience and purpose; write to articulate and support a claim or argument; identify and apply the characteristics and conventions of memoranda; use writing for technical purposes; write to inform or recommend; write for a specific audience; use the writing process; revise, edit, and proofread one's own writing.

CCSS Connection

Standards W.1, W.2: Write arguments to support claims/informative or explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Overview

Memoranda, or memos, are technical pieces of writing used in various vocational settings and organizations. The purpose of a memo is to convey information or provide a report on a particular topic. They may also ask recipients to take some form of action (recommendation memos). They are important documents in workplace communications and provide a written archive of the activities of an organization and its people. For this reason, it is important that students learn the correct format and conventions for memos.

Procedure

Although memos are most common in business and organizational settings, they can be used in the classroom as class assignments. You can easily teach students the correct format of a memo, and they can write memos to you (the teacher), to other students, to historical figures, to scientists, to politicians, to community members, or to school administrators. There are numerous possibilities for real-world audiences for memos that students write. Here are some suggestions:

- Have students write memos that make a recommendation for solving a problem in the community or the nation.
- Have students write a memo to you to report on their progress on a term project or discuss their learning during a particular grading period or unit.
  Ask them to specify what grade they should receive.

- Have students write memos to you to attach to a late assignment, explaining the reason for the lateness and asking you to accept it.
- Have students write memos to other members of the class about the topic being studied.
- Have students write memos to the author of the textbook or class novel.
- Have students write memos to announce class projects or school events.
- Have students write memos to each other in the second language they are learning.
- Have students write a memo about a given topic to an imaginary figure or to themselves.
- Have students write memos to summarize class activities and learning for distribution to students who were absent.
- Have students write memos to school officials or members of the community to address problems or issues directly related to a current topic of study.
- Have students send you an electronic copy of their memo in the form of an email attachment.

You can also provide students with a blank memo template such as the second figure below. Have them handwrite memos during class. When teaching students about the memo, stress that the purpose of memos is to convey information or request action in a concise way. Since readers in the real world tend to read through memos quickly, they need to get important information across quickly and directly. Teach students the following parts of the memo:

"To" line

"From" line

"Date" line

"Subject" line

Body of the memo (introduction, body, and conclusion) Optional parts:

"Enc." (at the bottom followed by a list of enclosed documents)

"CC" (also at the bottom to indicate recipients of the memo in addition to the author).

The first figure below presents the correct memo format with explanation of each part. Make a display copy of this to use in teaching students how to write memos.

Be sure to spend some time having students revise, edit, and proofread their final memos. It is best to require the final copies to be typed, since real-world, workplace memos are always in typed form.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lists all the primary recipients with full names, each separated by a comma

FROM: Author of the memo (should also initial next to the typed name)

DATE: Indicates the date the memo was written

SUBJECT: Concise description of the topic of the memo (Is sometimes replaced with "RE" for "regarding")

Body of the memo:

Memoranda use a top-down structure, with the most important information listed first. In the introduction of the memo, state clearly what the memo is about. If you are writing an informative memo, give the most important information first. If you expect readers to respond in some way, let them know what they need to do and, if relevant, the deadline they need to meet, or state your recommendations and the reasons for them.

In the body paragraphs, provide further information or details regarding the subject of the memo, starting with the most important first. If you include dates, locations or other information, you can use a bulleted list.

You may have additional body paragraphs, but memos should generally be kept short so that readers can scan them quickly and access important information.

Close the memo with a short statement about how readers can request further information if any questions arise. DON'T sign the memo at the bottom. Memos do not have a signature line like letters do. However, identify any attached documents in an "enclosure" note. If you are copying the memo to secondary recipients, you should identify them also.

Enc: Planning Calendar

CC: Robert Stephens, Melissa Alberts

Memo Format with Discussion.

MEMORANDUM

TO:
FROM:
DATE:
SUBJECT:

Strategy 22: Social Action Paper

Purpose

Use techniques of argument and persuasion; conduct research as necessary to write about a real-world topic, issue or problem; identify and apply the conventions of proposal writing; write clearly and coherently; conduct research on a given topic; use specific detail to support one's ideas; use the writing process; generate a claim or thesis statement; apply learning to the local community and the real world; create an organizational plan and outline for one's writing; write for a specific audience; revise, proofread, and edit one's own writing.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.1: Write arguments to support claim.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed.

Standard W.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing.

Standard W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects.

Standard W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources.

Standards L.1, L.2: Demonstrate command of conventions.

Standard L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts.

Overview

When teaching writing courses, I have often tried to engage students in an authentic writing activity, often asking them to produce a document, paper, report, or editorial that will be sent or delivered to someone in the real world, outside of the academic setting of school. My students have completed great workplace, community, and school-related issues. This type of project is a refreshing change for students who have become so accustomed to school writing or "writing for the teacher." We don't give students enough opportunities to discover authentic writing and how writing works in the real world. When it is a topic that they are personally invested in and care about, they are more engaged and passionate and, consequently, learn more from the experience.

In their book *Content-Area Writing: Every Teacher's Guide*, Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007) include a section on "public writing projects." One of the activities in this section is the "social action paper." They define this project as an activity in which students apply classroom content to real community, group, or organizational issues. These could be

local, neighborhood, school, or family problems. This project also helps prepare students for future roles as active citizens in a democracy.

An example presented is a group of middle school students who were studying the Vietnam War and discovered that there was no official memorial to the 612 residents who had died in the war.

> The students spent months researching the soldiers, finding public records, using the Internet, and having conversations with soldiers' friends and family members, even tracking down relatives of the soldiers for interviews. The students completed a project that involved writing biographies of all 612 soldiers and organizing a traveling memorial (Daniels, Zemelman, & Steineke, 2007).

Procedure

The possibilities for a real-world writing project are wide ranging. Students don't have to be required to undertake controversial or political issues; the projects can be more oriented toward community service activities. For example, an environmental science class creating a project to reduce electricity consumption or to save a local area waterway from pollution. These types of projects are also useful because they often include both informative and persuasive writing.

The form the writing takes may depend upon the nature of the project and topic itself, and as the teacher, you will want to assist students with structure and format. As Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007) note, the project is a powerful tool for engaging students in responsible social action and energizes them with real purpose, real audiences, and real-world feedback. While there are many possible ways to conduct a social action project, here are a few key ideas:

- Provide a structure for students to brainstorm ideas for possible real-world activities (or school-related activities) that are related to course content. Their brainstorming should include thinking about the resources needed to carry out the project and time available.
- Use some writing lessons or activities to help students master the kinds of written communication they will be using in the project (such as letter or report formats).

- Establish clear guidelines for how and when certain steps in the project must be completed, when students will be assigned to present the project, and when they will turn in a final project to you.
- Provide students with adequate time to complete the project, and function as a facilitator to help them make decisions, determine possible courses of action, and solve problems encountered.
- Have students complete a reflection on their learning during the project in which they explain, in writing, the connections they made between their projects and the material they have learned in class. They should also think about what they've learned overall, what challenges they faced, what strategies they used, and what they would do differently next time.
- Have students spend some time reading and responding to each other's papers. You may want to consider creating a simple rubric to be used to evaluate the final product. Have students use the rubric to revise and rewrite their papers, in addition to final editing and proofreading.

Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007) present a good example of a social action project completed at a Chicago high school based upon the book *Fast Food Nation*. The project proved to be very interdisciplinary, incorporating biology, health, economics, and political science. Students first completed a series of activities during their reading and thinking about the book, and then carried out projects to change people's attitudes about food. They prepared pamphlets, posters on diets and animal rights, and wrote letters to food service companies and to public officials. The students also drew upon other texts and nonfiction materials to supplement their learning and explore a variety of related issues.

Strategy 23: Writing Dialogue

Purpose

Use writing to reflect on content information; use writing regularly over an extended time; use writing to summarize and respond to content information; use writing as the basis for collaborative discussion; recognize and acknowledge multiple perspectives on an issue; write in response to others' writing; use writing to extend and deepen comprehension; engage in critical thinking on a given topic.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Standard W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts.

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames.

Standard SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

Overview

This strategy involves students in writing dialogue to represent multiple perspectives. It can be used with any controversial topic, where people may disagree, or where there is a topic to debate. Dialogue writing can be used in science, history, economics, literature, the arts, math, or other areas. Students in world language can also write dialogues in the second language. The strategy is a great way for students to demonstrate that they understand different sides of complex issues. They are also practicing the rhetorical technique of exploring different sides of an issue.

Procedure

1. Choose a content issue that may be open ended or a question that lends itself to various viewpoints or possible outcomes. For example: Should Juliet have gone to Friar Lawrence for help in *Romeo and Juliet*? Did the United States make the right decision in invading and liberating Iraq? Is global warming caused by human activity and pollution?
2. Assign students to create a written dialogue or conversation between two people (or characters in a piece of literature). Each voice in the dialogue will take a different viewpoint or perspective on the issue.

3. Have students write a full description of each character or voice at the beginning of the dialogue, one that explains the character's position on the issue or conveys important biographical information.
4. Tell students that each character should speak at least twice for a total of at least one hundred words. Also, they should not include phrases like "I agree" or "Sounds good to me."
5. Tell students that the object is not to debate but to discuss different perspectives. Neither voice should "win" the argument.
6. Ask for volunteers or have all students share their dialogues with the class.

Strategy 24: Writing Break

Purpose

Reflect on one's learning of content material; engage in writing to summarize and clarify ideas and thinking; think critically and evaluate information.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames.

Overview

This strategy comes from Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007), who note that students recall between 10 and 30 percent of what they read, hear, and see, but when we include writing at regular intervals, retention rate is between 70 and 90 percent. Writing breaks allow students to stop and reflect in writing on the information being presented and what they remember. This activity can be used during a lecture, film, activity, or in-class reading.

Procedure

1. In planning your lesson, decide when students are going to stop and write. For a lecture or large group discussion, every ten to fifteen minutes is suggested. For films and reading activities, take a writing break every fifteen to twenty minutes.
2. Once you have determined where the breaks will be, generate prompts for students to use for the writing breaks. Some examples are:
    a. What information stands out/seems really important?
    b. What does this remind you of?
    c. What questions do you still have?
    d. What will you need to remember for a test?
    e. What makes sense and what is confusing?
3. You can also make the prompts more content focused:
    a. Which character's actions surprised you the most?
    b. What would you do if you faced this problem?
    c. What would have happened if the Panama Canal had not been built?
    d. What is the relationship between genetics and heredity?
4. Begin the activity taking writing breaks of three to five minutes at planned intervals.

5. Before the lesson ends, have students evaluate their writing, asking whether they wrote the entire time, how well they supported their ideas with specific details, and how well their writing created interesting discussion of the material.

Another possibility for this strategy is to use some of the end-of-textbook chapter questions, those that are higher-order thinking questions for your writing break prompts. They can, of course, be modified if necessary to ensure that students are responding to the major concepts as they read or participate in the activity. They can also take writing breaks after being asked to study visual materials such as charts, graphs, tables, or pictures in the text (which often get overlooked as students are reading).

Strategy 25: Biopoem

Purpose

Write creatively to share content-area learning; identify and summarize key ideas and aspects of a character, topic, place, event or concept; reflect on one's learning.

CCSS Connection

Standard W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing.

Overview

I decided to end this section with one of the more creative and fun writing strategies, the biopoem. The biopoem is a formula poem designed by Gere (1985) that engages students in sharing what they know or have learned about a particular character, topic, place, event, or concept. Biopoems have typically been written to describe a person or character, but there are other possible applications for the strategy. The following is Vacca and Vacca's (1993) outline formula for the biopoem. Students can write a biopoem for themselves, something I have often had my classes do as an introductory activity at the beginning of the school year. In a literature class, students might describe a character in a book or story, but the poem can also be used in other content areas to describe concepts, events, historical characters, or even scientific or mathematical elements or principles.

Procedure

1. Present students with the biopoem's eleven-line formula. A template for reproducing is included below.
   a. Line 1: First name
   b. Line 2: Four traits that describe the character
   c. Line 3: Relative of (brother, sister, daughter, etc.) . . .
   d. Line 4: Lover of _____ (three things or people)
   e. Line 5: Who feels _____ (three things)
   f. Line 6: Who needs _____ (three things)
   g. Line 7: Who fears _____ (three things)
   h. Line 8: Who gives _____ (three things)
   i. Line 9: Who would like to see _____ (three things)

   j. Line 10: Resident of _____
   k. Line 11: Last name, nickname, or repeated name
2. Explain to students that it is important that they include information from the text or reading assignment to incorporate into the poem. Also encourage them to be creative.
3. After a particular unit of study or reading assignment, assign or have students choose a character, historical figure, or concept on which to write a biopoem.
4. It might be good to have some sample biopoems for students to use as models (such as the one included here). You might also create a sample biopoem together as a class, and model for students how to include both literal information and interpretive and inferential material in the poem.
5. After students have had time to write and polish their biopoems, ask them to volunteer to post them for a gallery walk or share them with the class by reading them aloud.

Here is a sample biopoem written about President Abraham Lincoln:

Abraham
Independent, determined, courageous, liberator
Son of Illinois, husband of Mary Todd
Lover of freedom, equality, and unity
Who feels compassion for the enslaved and downtrodden
Who needs to defend and protect the Union
Who fears rebellion, war, failure, and loss
Who gives his life in service to his country as president
Who would like to see the Union restored, to oversee Reconstruction
Resident of the White House, and forever holding a place in history
Lincoln

Biopoem's eleven-line formula and planning page:

Line 1: First name_____

Line 2: Four traits that describe the character _____,

_____ ,_____, _____

Line 3: Relative of (brother, sister, daughter, etc.) . . ._____

Line 4: Lover of _____ (three things or people) _____,

_____,_____

Line 5: Who feels _____ (three things) _____,

_____,_____

Line 6: Who needs _____ (three things) _____ ,

_____,_____

Line 7: Who fears _____ (three things) _____

_____,_____

Line 8: Who gives _____ (three things) _____,

_____,_____

Line 9: Who would like to see _____ (three things) _____,

_____,_____

Line 10: Resident of _____

Line 11: Last name, nickname, or repeated name _____