

Some ways of using writing to encourage thinking

Students can be asked to:

1. Address questions related to their immediate experience of learning – at the beginning, middle and end of class

What do I most want to find out in tomorrow's class?

What was the main point I learnt today?

What was the main point left unanswered in today's session

Summarise the main points of my lecturer so far in your own words. Is anything puzzling or muddy for you?

Some of these responses could usefully be submitted to the teacher or the teacher could take oral feedback from them.

2. Address questions that link with personal/professional experience

Do you have any phobias that might be explained by classical conditioning? (Psychology)

What effect is this course/ these readings having on your beliefs, values, previous understanding?

3. Freewrite for several minutes in the middle of a class discussion (especially one which is flagging or overheated)

4. Write a couple of paragraphs made entirely of questions on a topic or issue.

Who, What, When, Where, How and Why.

Note that whilst who, what, when and where are important, they generally ask about facts. How and why can take thinking further by asking for reasons, evaluations and significance. Try to have some of both in your writing.

5. Apply course concepts and materials to problem scenarios

Suppose you are a parent who goes to a child psychologist for advice on how to get your ten year old child to practice the piano. The child rushes out of the

room screaming every time you insist that he practice. What different advice would you get if the child psychologist were a behaviourist, a psychoanalyst or a humanist psychologist?

Explain the concept of X to your 13 year old brother

6. Develop existing thought by working first on one side of a double page and then using the other to raise questions, doubts, make connections, add examples, counterexamples etc.. This is a bit like writing in the margins of their own work, deliberately setting up a dialogue with themselves.

In empirical work, use one side of the book to write down what you observed and the other to write down what you thought.

On one side write in a declarative, certain style; on the other start with the phrase 'But something bothers me...'

7. Summarise and respond to reading (in a Reading Journal)

Take two pages. The first page will be a restatement of the text's argument in your own words. You can write a summary, make an outline, draw a flowchart or a diagram of the reading or simply take careful notes. The purpose of this page is to help you understand as fully as possible the structure and detail of the author's argument. This page should help you recall the reading in some detail several weeks later.

Your next page is to be your own personal reflections on or reactions to the article. Analyse it, illustrate it through your own experience, refute it, get mad at it, question it, believe it, go beyond it. I (the teacher) will skim your note books looking for evidence of serious effort and engaged thought.

Most examples taken from John C. Bean (1996) *Engaging Ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass