

Informal Writing-to-Learn Exercises	Description
Exam and quiz question creation	Students write sample open-ended exam and quiz questions related to the course content and then respond to each as they would in the actual exam or quiz. Students may also be asked to exchange questions and respond to one another's. Particularly strong questions may be included in future exams and quizzes.
Quick Writes	Used at any point during a class, students are asked to write briefly about such things as the most confusing points from the previous class session, the main points of readings in preparation for class, a key concept or term, or questions or observations about the day's lecture, discussion, film, or activity.
Write and Pass	Students record their response to a certain question. The response is then passed to the next person, who revises, critiques, or responds in some specified way to what the first student wrote. The responses are then passed to a third student, who responds. Eventually the first student gets her paper back with all the responses or revisions. The teacher may or may not collect the sheets. This exercise is ungraded.
Looping	In this directed freewriting activity, students are asked to write for 2 minutes on a topic or a question selected by the teacher. Then directed to stop, review what they wrote and underline the most interesting or surprising word, thought, or sentence. Next students are asked to copy what they underlined and start their next 2 minute freewrite with the selected word, thought, or sentence and write from there. This can be repeated four or five times.
Cubing	Cubing is a form of directed freewriting in which students consider a topic from six different aspects or perspectives, each representing one face of a cube. Students write for a minute or so on each perspective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe X. • Analyze X. What are its parts? Where did it come from? What is its purpose? • Compare X to something else. What is it similar to or different from? • Associate X with other things. What does it make you think of? • Apply X. What are its uses? • Argue for or against X.
Microthemes	A microtheme is an essay so short it can be typed on a 5"x8" note card. Microthemes may be graded (quickly!) for individual credit or used as a step in the process toward a larger project and thus are adaptable to large classes. Examples may include a 100-200 word summary of an article, a brief position paper with supporting evidence, an analysis of new data, or an essay intended to communicate complex concepts to the general public.

<p>Journals</p>	<p>Students are asked to respond to assigned readings, class discussions, or clinical experiences in a journal or blog format. The teacher identifies the goals of the assignment, the appropriate way of approaching the entries (how often, how long, what format), and the criteria for evaluation. Journal entries are often minimally graded during the term (check, check plus, check minus), and then at the end of the term, the student writes a cover letter assessing the journal according to the specified criteria. Students may be asked to suggest a grade for their own journals and identify their best entries.</p>
<p>General informal writing prompts</p>	<p><i>Note: Virtually all of these standalone examples lend themselves to brief, in-class writing, as well as to longer discussions written out of class.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on your reading or on this lecture, write one thing (notion, concept, idea, or part) which you are sure about right now. Continuation: Talk about what makes you sure of this one thing. • Write one question that you still have. Continuation: Write one way/process/procedure that you could follow to try and answer this question. • Write all the questions you have at this point. Continuation: Talk about which one(s) you should answer first. • Write the story of your thinking on this particular concept or idea or paradox. What did you first think when exposed to this notion? Then what did you think? Then what? Try to get everything down here— your confusions as well as your understandings. • Draw some visual picture or representation (a graph or diagram or flow chart or?) of this concept or notion or process. Continuation: Explain how the pictorial representation should be “read.” • Predict what a reading might say based on its title and on your previous experience. • Predict the results of a process or procedure. Explain what goes into your educated guess. Continuation: Explain what could throw off your educated guess. • Explain concept A to a student who missed class or couldn’t do the reading due to illness. Write as you’d talk, and try not to be long-winded.

Adapted from Tolar Burton, V., Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum annual faculty seminar materials